PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE STUDY OF CHILDREN’S INTERESTS: 
THE USE OF COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY AND DOCUMENTATION PROTOCOL 
AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS 

BY 
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DISSERTATION 
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Abstract

This dissertation investigated how a group of early childhood teachers and I, as a facilitator, collaboratively studied the interests of children enrolled in a government supported childcare facility. In this study, we explored the use of documentation protocol for incorporating children’s interests in early childhood curriculum planning. In addition, the documentation protocol strategies were used to enhance our professional growth as teachers and facilitator.

While there is extensive writings on different forms of curriculum that focus on children’s interests (Beane, 1997; Cremin, 1961; Dewey, 1900; Katz, 1999), there is little research on the processes teachers might use to study these interests (Birbili & Tsitouridou, 2008; Gestwicki, 2010). Two documentation protocols influenced our approach towards studying children’s interests, descriptive review and the documentation practices of the Reggio Emilia preschools. Both of these approaches employ educational inquiry methodologies that involve studying children’s learning capabilities, growth, and interests.

Self-study and action research methodologies were employed to investigate our praxis of studying children’s interests. I used self-study to examine my own practices and reflections as the facilitator of collaborative weekly team meetings. I used action research to investigate how the teachers and I, as facilitator, collaboratively studied documentation collected from classrooms that represented children’s interests. The findings from this study suggest that collaborative projects that deal with collection of documentation, reflection on real classroom experiences, and joint curriculum planning allow for genuine problem solving in a socially constructed format.
This dissertation is dedicated to children and their interests
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

To abide with something is to make visible its dwelling place – that is, all of the objects multiple points or relatedness to other things and to the passage of time. Therefore, observing locates the thing in the vicinity of other things and makes visible both its continuities and transforms through time. (Carini, 1979, p. 18)

This dissertation investigated how a group of early childhood teachers and I, as a facilitator, collaboratively studied the interests of children enrolled in a government supported childcare facility. In this study, we explored the use of documentation protocol for incorporating children’s interests in early childhood curriculum planning. In addition, the documentation protocol strategies were used to enhance our professional growth as teachers and facilitator.

Carini’s (1979) quote above describes the simultaneous experiences of teachers and myself as facilitator during our collaborative discussion of children’s interests in weekly team meetings. This research focused on the context of weekly meetings and makes visible our praxis for understanding children’s interests. Two documentation protocols influenced our approach, descriptive review and the documentation practices of the Reggio Emilia preschools. Both of these approaches employ educational inquiry methodologies that involve studying children’s learning capabilities, growth, and interests.

In this study, teachers and I used documentation collected from classrooms as a catalyst for discussing children’s interests. These discussions led to collaborative plans for classroom activities. Embedded in these discussions, were professional development strategies for the teachers and myself. This resulted in an inclusive view of curriculum planning and a collaborative form of professional development. The ideas of teachers, children and me as the facilitator were implemented within our practices. This approach is in contrast to many
government-supported programs, such as Head Start, state pre-kindergarten, and subsidized childcare programs that advocate for prescribed curricula with easily measured results.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the praxis of teachers and myself as facilitator while we studied children’s interests using documentation protocol. In this study, the teachers and I attempted to move beyond the study of children’s interests as simply a catch phrase that is often found in literature (Birbili & Tsitouridou, 2008; Gestwicki, 2010). A related aim was to examine our professional growth in this process. Self-study and action research methodologies were employed to investigate our praxis of studying children’s interests.

I used self-study to examine my own practices and reflections as the facilitator of the weekly meetings. I used action research to investigate how the teachers and I, as facilitator, collaboratively studied documentation collected from classrooms that represented children’s interests. Action research (Burnaford, Fischer, & Hobson, 2001) was chosen for this study because it is a process in which participants systematically examine their own educational practices. The linking of the terms action and research highlights the essential features of this method which enabled the teachers and me to try out ideas in our practice as a means of increasing knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

**Research Questions**

The first three questions address the action research approach and the process of collaboration between teachers and myself as facilitator while studying documentation in weekly team meetings. Using action research methodology, I studied how the teachers and I co-constructed an understanding of children’s interests. This investigation included how documentation in weekly team meetings enabled the teachers and me to construct curriculum
that was based on our observations of children’s interests. These questions reflect the recent emphasis on social constructivist and emergent-orientated approaches to teaching, learning, and professional development in early childhood education (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009).

1. How does the collaborative viewing of documentation of classroom activities influence the facilitator and teachers’ understanding of children’s interests?

2. How does studying documentation in weekly team meetings enable teachers and facilitator to collaboratively construct curriculum based on children’s interests?

3. How does studying documentation of children's interests at weekly team meetings provide professional growth for teachers?

A self-study approach allowed me to study myself as facilitator within the collaborative meetings with teachers. The first question focused on an investigation of my practice while working with the teachers in weekly meetings. The next question addressed my role as facilitator in the collaborative study of children’s interests.

4. How does the collaborative study of documentation of children's interests with teachers change my practice as a facilitator?

5. What was my role as a facilitator in the collaborative study of children's interests?

**Current Issues in Early Childhood Education**

This study was concerned with current issues that relate to early childhood teachers’ curriculum planning and their professional growth. Educators working in programs with children from birth through age eight are increasingly concerned about the national trend toward standards and testing (Bredekamp, 2003). Within the past decade, K-12 education systems have increasingly been held accountable for making sure that students achieve at high levels. As part of this accountability movement, standards have been written to articulate exactly what students
are expected to learn. The field of early childhood education has not been exempt from the accountability pressures of current reforms, and policy makers are increasingly focused on these programs.

Calls for reform has resulted in many discussions about the type of instruction that is most appropriate for young children. Despite the advice of some early childhood professionals (Bredekamp, 2003) to focus on social skills and emotional development, the emphasis in government-supported classrooms has moved strongly toward increasing instruction in academic areas. Classroom curriculum is often includes prepackaged activities that can be easily measured.

Teachers struggle to understand how this emphasis on academics can be maintained along with relating the lessons to children’s interests. As a result, teachers in these programs often lack opportunities to experiment with creating activities that reflect children’s unique ideas. As a result, classroom activities are often irrelevant to the lives of the students who dwell within its walls. In addition, teachers lack support for collecting and studying documentation in ways that might influence classroom activities in a positive manner for children.

**Studying Children’s Interests**

My study was concerned with the inclusion of interests in early childhood curriculum planning. One of my concerns as a facilitator was how to create inquiry-based learning that focused on the interests of children with teachers. Early childhood professional literature often suggests using children’s interests as a basis for organizing learning. While there was extensive writings on different forms of curriculum that focus on children’s interests (Beane, 1997; Cremin, 1961; Dewey, 1938; Katz, 1999), there was little research on the processes teachers might use to study these interests. The processes for studying children’s interests were not
discussed in practical terms to help teachers apply this to their practice. According to Birbili and Tsitouridou (2008), “given the importance of organizing learning around children’s interests, it is surprising to find that teachers learn practically nothing about this issue in their studies” (p. 152). They suggested that teachers need to learn how to observe and document children’s actions and words in order to identify their interests.

Descriptive review and documentation practices influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach are two methodologies that were used for this purpose during my investigation. Both provided possible methods for studying children in the classroom setting in addition to providing teachers with professional development opportunities.

**Descriptive review protocol.** Descriptive review is a process for observing and describing children’s actions and interests in the classroom and it grew out of the work of Carini and others at the Prospect School in Vermont (Carini, 2007). Within the Descriptive review approach teachers collaboratively study children’s personalities, capabilities, and interests in order to enhance and create effective classroom practices. Documentation is collected from the classrooms in the forms of observational notes, photographs, graphic drawings, artwork, and written work much like an art historian studies the progression of an artist’s work over time (Carini, 1979).

The goal of descriptive review is to “create opportunities in the classroom for building on the child’s strengths–at the same time, the recommendations support the strength of the teacher and the realities of the classroom” (Kanesvsky, 2002). Descriptive review not only focuses on the work of children, but also it brings to light the teacher’s instructional strategies. In my research study, the use of descriptive review in collaborative meetings provided opportunities for reflective discussions about individual children’s learning styles for the teachers and myself.
**Reggio Emilia documentation protocol.** The participants in my study were also influenced by the documentation practices of the Reggio Emilia preschools of northern Italy. This was the orientation chosen by the executive director and board members at the school prior to my arrival. Documentation in the Reggio Emilia preschools included photographs, teacher observational notes, children’s graphic drawings, recorded conversations, and video recordings that were collected continuously by teachers, parents, and, sometimes, the children themselves (Malaguzzi, 1998). Similar to descriptive review, Reggio inspired documentation reflects children’s interests, experiences, memories, thoughts, and ideas in the course of their lives at school and outside of school. Reggio Emilia inspired documentation differs in that it also focuses on the collaborative inquiry and learning that takes place among children, rather than looking at them in isolation.

In my research study, the teachers and I followed an inquiry based and emergent curriculum similar to the project studies conducted in Reggio Emilia, Italy classrooms (Rinaldi, 2000). In Reggio Emilia, Italy, children undertake complex small group collaborative tasks over a period of several days or weeks. Documentation helps teachers hypothesize what direction to take when planning the classroom activities (Katz, 1998). Similarly, the teachers and I collaboratively discussed documentation from the classrooms and planned activities. The activities were conducted with small groups of children in the classrooms. In my research study, I investigated how documentation can be used as an ongoing reflection of children’s interests and capabilities rather than as a final assessment strategy.

Collaboration is essential to a teacher’s professional development within the Reggio Emilia approach. Teachers’ work in collaboration with one another and a resource person or pedagogista to study documentation of children’s learning in order to improve their teaching
practices (Filippini, 2008). Regular meetings occur between teachers and a pedagogista to discuss the on-going project work or curriculum of the classroom. This collaborative discussion of documentation reflects what Reggio Emilia educators believed to be the most effective and long-lasting means to increased professionalism because it allows teachers to become researchers and creators of knowledge (Filippini, 2008). Inquiry and dialogue are key elements of building strong, trusting, and reciprocal relationships within their professional development environment.

The Setting

The participants in this study included nine teachers and one education coordinator from an early childhood learning center in a large southwestern city. Established in 1919, the center’s (pseudonym CK) mission is to provide low-cost childcare and education and nutrition services to the children of low-income working families. Administrators at CK, like many other early childhood facilities, struggled with what type of curriculum is most beneficial for children and what types of teacher professional development should be provided for teachers. In the spring of 2009, the center’s director and its governing board began investigating the possibility of implementing the Reggio Emilia approach for young children.

I found CK an excellent choice for this study because of their initial interest in studying the Reggio Emilia approach and job embedded professional development practices. They were especially interested in studying children’s interests as a way to build classroom activities and plan curriculum. I was introduced to the staff as a doctoral candidate who had experience in a Reggio Emilia influenced program. After that introduction, the seed was planted for this study.

Personal Experience

My qualifications to facilitate the meetings were my previous experience as a facilitator in a Reggio Emilia influenced program between the years 2000 and 2004. During this time, I
facilitated meetings with teams of teachers where we used a documentation protocol influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach. I also investigated the use of descriptive review, during my work as a facilitator. In addition, I brought to this study my own experiences as an art historian, classroom art specialist, and instructor for a university teacher education program. I was also the parent of a four-year old preschooler during this study. All of these experiences influenced my role as facilitator.

The study of art and documentation rely on attention to details. In my research study, I saw commonalities between studying a piece of artwork and studying children and their work. Both employ the study of context, details, and nuances that create a deeper understanding of the subject studied. Children, like a work of art, are studied within the context of their world in order to better understand their development. When studying a work of art, each time a person looks at the art again, he or she notices something different. The details are sometimes hard to see at first, but through careful, fastidious examination, the context and meaning of the work is revealed. The same may be true of studying children’s interests within learning environments. The purpose of documentation was to reveal, in a very similar way, the learning environment of teachers, children, and myself.

**Significance of Study**

Teachers play a major role in providing quality experiences for young children in early education programs. In the past, early childhood educators did not have clearly established professional standards (Spodek, Peters, & Saracho, 1988). Individuals working with young children have sought professional recognition and to be known as something more than babysitters. Often, society’s image of early childhood educators is of someone lacking in education and training. This is, therefore, reflected in the wages and prestige of their profession.
Variations among philosophies, programs, and institutions are seen as inconsistent with limited
guidelines for professionalism. Professionalizing the early childhood education field is a recent
initiative. (Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009).

There is also a clear lack of consensus as to what kinds of professional development
opportunities are the most effective for early childhood educators. Teacher-training programs,
particularly in early childhood education, have consisted of attempts to pour ideas into teachers
so that they could, in return, pour ideas into children (Rinaldi & Kaminsky, 2000). In this way,
everything appears clear-cut and consistent, with the goal of having guaranteed results. This
method places little faith in the teachers’ ideas or the children’s interests. The teachers are often
perceived as being incapable of making instructional and curricular decisions.

My research study developed potential explanations for how embedded professional
development opportunities supported early childhood teachers’ use of documentation and
reflection to enhance their instructional practices while consistently and collaboratively studying
the interests of children. The findings from this study are significant because of the possibility of
creating professional development practices that support early childhood teachers in developing
an inquiry stance towards children’s interests when planning curriculum. Beyond early
childhood education, this study has implications for understanding the effects of collaborative
teacher professional development and how that may translate into improved learning experiences
for children of all ages.

Our Image of Children: Our Image of Ourselves

More attention is being given to children's test scores and status in educational contexts
in the United States. This attention has a profound effect on curriculum approaches in early
childhood classrooms. In particular, many governmental supported programs recommend an
academic approach towards early childhood curriculum approaches. Preplanned or prepackaged approaches to teaching often view teachers and children as incompetent, and activities are preset or predetermined (Freier, 1998). In contrast, curriculum approaches that include the interests of children require educators to become curious about the way children are constructing learning. Children are seen as capable and their interests are seen as valuable tools for extending learning in the classroom.

Constructivist and social constructivist approaches to teaching come from a belief that children are strong, powerful, and rich in potential (Rinaldi & Kaminsky, 2000). In order to participate in curriculum planning built upon children’s interests, teachers must confront their own image of children. Researchers suggested that beliefs about young children’s capabilities have profound effects on teacher decisions and classroom practices (Parajes, 1992; Raymond, 1993; Renzagalia, Hutchinson, & Lee, 1997; Richardson, 1996).

The task of the teacher is to create a context in which children’s theories are respected and in order to do this, the teacher must possess a certain amount of trust in her abilities to constantly hypothesize the development of projects. At the same time, teachers consistently must possess what Rinaldi (2006) referred to as a “faith in themselves” (p. 128) and confidence in their ideas, while presenting an authentic image of adult life and real world experiences. Professional development is an ongoing reflection of oneself and one’s relationship with children, intertwined with the learning process. The teachers’ image of themselves and children is important to not only address the process by which teachers study and plan curriculum built on children’s interests but also the perceptions that teachers construct of children’s interests. Teachers engage in many forms of co-action with children—observing, modeling, nurturing, interpreting, facilitating, and provoking. Teachers create meaning with children.
Carini (1979) described that meaning-making arises through relationships. In Carini’s words, “Meaning arises through the relationship among things or persons: that mutual reciprocity that occurs in the act of truly ‘seeing’ something” (p. 15). This principle, that meaning making is relationship, puts great priority on establishing a learning community composed of collaboration between educators and children, based on sharing of perspectives and resources, and with expectations of learning from one another. In order to learn from one another there needs to be a context for listening. Rinaldi (2006) described listening that should be open to differences, recognizing the value of the other’s point of view and interpretation. This type of listening legitimizes the importance of hearing each other’s ideas.

In my research study, the participants, including myself were collaboratively confronted with our images of children through the use of documentation protocol and our co-construction of curriculum. In our collaborative discussions we analyzed our perceptions of children’s interests and capabilities.

The results of this study provide benefits to the fields of early childhood education, teacher education, self-study, and action research. The findings suggest collaborative projects that deal with collection of documentation, reflection on real classroom experiences, and joint curriculum planning allow for genuine problem solving in a socially constructed format. As a result of this study, I suggest how ideas and knowledge can be socially constructed among teachers and professional development providers. In addition, teachers can develop professionally through inquiry based learning when given opportunities to teach, reflect, and plan as members of teaching and research partnerships (Moran, 2007).
The Role of Facilitator

Previous studies suggest the need for more research on the role of facilitators in early childhood education collaborative inquiry groups (Carr, 2004; Haigh, 2007; Moran, 2007; Riley & Roach, 2006; Wong, 2010). The results of my self-study research contribute to and expand upon the findings from previous studies about the practices of a facilitator in collaborative inquiry and documentation protocol. The findings from this research study contribute to improving my practice as a facilitator of collaborative teacher professional development approaches. The results from this research are also significant because they indicate the need for the role of a facilitator in collaborative inquiry and documentation protocol with teachers.

Organization of Chapters

In Chapter 2, I present the literature and underlying theoretical frameworks of this study. This includes a discussion of the principles and practices in the areas of interest based learning, documentation and the study of children’s interests, and socio-cultural professional development strategies.

Chapter 3 introduces action research and self-study as methods of qualitative inquiry in this study. The research setting, participants, and the process of the study are also introduced in this chapter. I discuss the methods of data collection and analysis used for this study.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 represent the data and findings from this study. The data were organized using three categories: organization, documentation, and collaboration. These chapters report on the data that represents the experiences of the teachers and me from the collaborative team meetings.

Chapter 7 examines the significance of the research findings. I address the implications of this study and provide suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2.

Literature Review

This chapter is an analysis of the research and literature that relates to current early childhood curriculum development and the issues and methods employed for teacher professional development. First is a discussion of the research central to interest based curriculum and the study of children’s interests. These sections include: (a) issues in present day early childhood curriculum development, (b) examples of interest-based curriculum, (c) interests and learning, and (d) documentation for studying children’s interests. Second is a focus on issues related to this study in regard to early childhood teacher professional development. These sections include: (a) issues relating to early childhood professional development, (b) social constructivism and early childhood professional development, and (c) the role of facilitators.

Issues in Present Day Early Childhood Curriculum Development

The following is a review of current perceptions regarding curriculum in early childhood classrooms. Early childhood educators are increasingly concerned about the trend toward national standards and national testing (Bredekamp, 2003). Current issues such as accountability, testing, and standards in education have sparked interest in curricula focused on academics, while some early childhood experts advocate for child-centered approaches. There appears to be a lack of consensus on what type of approach is best suited for teaching the academic subjects while respecting the interests of children. The following is an overview of the current educational and political issues that affect curriculum in early childhood classrooms.

Kindergarten readiness. Definitions of school readiness differ greatly in the academic literature. Some definitions of school readiness focus on the innate qualities of a child and socio-emotional aspects of learning (Bredekamp, 2003). Through this model, school success or failure
is based exclusively upon the child’s maturity and development and is commonly measured using developmental assessments. Another common definition of school readiness looks at the competencies children should have when they enter school (Kagan, 1991). This includes academic and cognitive skills, language and literacy abilities, and social-emotional functioning. These are all purported to be contributing to later school success (National Education Goals Panel [NEGP], 1992).

Many other early childhood programs are designed to emphasize academics and activities that can be measured. This is a response to accountability measures and alignment with the learning standards of later grades (Shepard et al., 1998). Demands on early childhood programs force individual children to be measured against a standard. Standards are based upon entire programs versus the unique needs of children (Shepard, 1997). Viewed in this light, kindergarten readiness is both a response to and a method of replicating the current system of accountability already present in the older grades in United States schools.

This is particularly true in governmentally supported early childhood programs (Haigh, 2007). Those in charge of such programs believe that formal academic instruction is essential for young children whose early environments may not provide sufficient experiences for learning the basics, such as the alphabet and the names of colors and shapes (Katz, 1999). Pressure exists for explicit articulation of what children should know and be able to do before kindergarten. This pressure contributes to a competition between governmentally supported programs for funds invested in early childhood care and education (Bredekamp, 2003).

In response to the current accountability movement, early childhood teachers are increasingly pressured to adopt practices that reflect academic skills. The term academic is often used to describe early childhood curriculum intended to help children master the basic skills
involved in verbal literacy and numeracy (Jacobson, 1996). Classroom activities are often borrowed from curriculum kits and typically revolve around a theme that focused on literacy and numerical development. In reaction to state standards and mandates, many programs rely heavily on prescribed curriculum kits developed by curriculum companies that claim to improve children’s literacy and numeracy skills (Brice-Heath, 1983; Scott-Little, Martella, & Milburn, 2003). At the same time, teachers are given little support in developing with children activities that reflect the teachers’ and children interests and ideas. Therefore, prescribed curriculum kits reflect the notion that children and teachers are not capable of creating their own learning experiences. Unfortunately, children are not engaged in choosing what they prefer to learn or how they prefer to learn in formal academic instruction. However, what they are required to do academically may not be sufficient to support their intellectual development. This is further described in the following research findings.

Contrasting Views Towards Curriculum

Despite the current focus on academics in early childhood curriculum, for years, many early childhood educators have advocated for approaches that are inquiry based and include the child’s interests as part of curriculum development. Proponents of the constructivist or social constructivist approach to curriculum development see young children as active constructors of knowledge (Katz, 1999). This type of curriculum uses observations made by teachers of children’s interests during their play or other activities to create classroom studies. Teachers and children co-construct activities derived from children’s original ideas.

Gardner (1942), head of the Department of Child Development in London, England, attempted to research the controversy between academic and constructivist based curriculum approaches in the 1940s. She conducted a comparative study of two nursery schools to discover
instructional methods used in early childhood classrooms. One school (a) in her study emphasized creativity, spontaneous play, and inquiry-based constructivist learning. Another school (b) emphasized formal teacher-directed activities that focused on academic subjects. Gardner’s results favored school A and revealed that children acquired longer lasting skills in a constructivist early childhood program in contrast to programs that focused on direct instruction of academic subjects (Katz, 1999).

Similar comparative studies have been reported in the past 20 years (Barnes, & Weikart, 1993; Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, 1983; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). The results of these studies have been somewhat mixed, though generally similar to Gardner's earlier findings. Children enrolled in preschools that focus on constructivist curriculum, emergent themes, and creativity fare better in the long run—especially the boys (Miller & Bizzell, 1983). Furthermore, longitudinal studies comparing academic and constructivist approaches suggest that the early gains of children in the academic preschool curricula do not last more than a year or two (Katz, 1999).

Marcon (1992) conducted a longitudinal study in an urban United States school district. She randomly selected 721 four-year-old children and assessed them in the following areas: (a) basic academic skills, (b) language skills, (c) self-help skills, (d) social skills, (e) motor skills, and (f) adaptive development skills.

A follow up study was conducted in 2002 to measure the long-term effects. The results concluded that by the end of their sixth school year, children whose preschool experiences had been academically directed earned significantly lower grades compared to children who had attended preschool classes that focused on the interests of children. Despite these findings, the perennial debate over early childhood curriculum has continued to today.
Examples of Interest Based Curriculum

My study was concerned with the inclusion of interests in early childhood curriculum planning. One of my concerns as a facilitator was how to create inquiry-based learning that focused on the interests of children with teachers. For years, many educators have advocated for curriculum approaches that build upon children’s interests and collaborative efforts towards learning. These approaches are supported by social constructivist theories (Beane, 1997; Katz, 1999). Proponents of social constructivism view learning as a process that is constructed and motivated by children’s interests and ideas. They also support an inquiry-based stance towards teaching and learning (Dewey, 1956; Vygotsky, 1978). The following are examples of historical and contemporary interest based curriculum that are supported by social constructivist theories.

Historical perspectives of interest based curriculum. Present day schools that focus on children’s interests for curriculum development in the United States and throughout the world are philosophically rooted in the work of educators and philosophers of the 18th and early 19th centuries. Romantic philosophers such as Rousseau, a Swiss philosopher, believed that the organization of curriculum around adult’s interests was deemed as unnatural and should more closely match the needs and interests of children (Cremin, 1961). In his book *Emile*, Rousseau described that education should be about nurturing children’s natural capabilities and not what the adult deemed as important (Rousseau, 1762).

Pestalozzi, a German scholar and disciple of Rousseau, established a school, Yverdon, which embodied these ideas in the late 18th century (Silber, 1960). Pestalozzi was a Romantic who felt that education should appeal to each learner's intuition. He emphasized that every aspect of the child's life contributed to the formation of personality, character, and reason. Pestalozzi's educational methods were child-centered and based on individual differences, sense
perception, and the student's self-activity (Silber, 1960). His schools Neuhof and Yverdon allowed him to try out these theories. The success of these schools attracted the interest of European and American educators (Schmid, 1997).

Froebel was influenced by the idea of children constructing their own learning and later became known as the originator of kindergarten. Activities in the first kindergarten class included singing, dancing, gardening, and self-directed play (Wollons, 2000). This began a movement of education that honored children’s individual interests and the importance of interest-based curriculum. Followers such as Parker in North America (Rippa, 1971), the McMillan sisters in England (Steedman, 1985), and Montessori in Italy (Montessori, 1949) recognized the importance of children’s individual needs and differences. Active learning was prescribed over rote memorization, and curriculum was developed that attempted to integrate subject matter. These approaches took into consideration the child’s social, physical, intellectual, and emotional development.

The progressive movement. Perhaps the most influential movement of interest-based curriculum was the progressive movement. Dewey (1900/1915) was closely related to the progressive education movement. As mentioned earlier, he believed that students’ interests could be used to develop curriculum and meaningful learning resulted when students worked together on tasks that were inquiry based and related to their interests. His theory suggested a balance between the child’s interests and the interests of the subject matter. This was illustrated in his work as director of the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago in 1896 where the curriculum was organized around areas of human activities. He described this process in *The School and Society*:

All studies grow out of relations in the one great common world. When the child lives in varied but concrete and active relationships to this common world, his studies are
naturally unified. It will no longer be a problem to correlate studies. The teacher will not have to resort to all sorts of devices to weave a little arithmetic into the history lesson, and the like. Relate the school to life and all studies of necessity correlated. (Dewey, 1900/1915, p. 32)

At the Dewey school, children’s interests were blended with the traditional disciplines. The acquisition of skills emerged from activities and inquiries related to a broad central theme, and were explored in the community of the classroom. Studies in subjects such as science, mathematics, cooking, art, or music were related to larger, more central issues related to children’s present life experiences (Dewey, 1902/1956). In addition to including children’s inquiries and interests, The Dewey school promoted discussion among all participants, including assistants, teachers, and, eventually, heads of departments in building curriculum (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936).

**Contemporary Examples of Interest Based Curriculum**

Numerous pedagogies have been implemented in early childhood classrooms across the United States and abroad that value the interests of children. Currently, social constructivist theory supports approaches such as the project approach, emergent curriculum, and the Reggio Emilia approach. According to Katz (1999), these approaches focus on children’s interests to guide classroom activities. Without sensitivity towards or knowledge of children’s interests and an incorporation of these interests into the classroom, these approaches would not be able to exist.

**Project approach.** The project approach is used in many early childhood classrooms across the United States and abroad and was developed by Katz and Chard (2000). It is a curriculum developed around ideas generated by children and teachers that results in projects. Projects are activities engaged in by groups of children and are connected by a topic or theme. The topic chosen, by children and teachers, generally reflects something relevant to children’s
lives or the school curriculum (Katz & Chard, 2000). Reflecting social constructivist theory, children have opportunities to demonstrate present knowledge and build upon it through processes of investigation and trial and error. The teacher should not attempt to correct mistakes or misconceptions about the project but should allow information to emerge (Katz & Chard, 2000).

The project approach has three distinct phases. Within each phase, children continuously make choices and express meaningful learning experiences. Teachers often begin a project by creating a web to brainstorm ideas and to collect information about what the children presently know about the topic. A web does not show everything that will be learned, but it, instead, allows teachers to see a bigger picture of the possibilities. Teachers choose an idea and brainstorm ways that children could experience the topic through hands-on activities or field trips, or by enhancing the environment. Putting all the activities on a web gives them a road map full of possible journeys. Proponents of the project approach believe it is important to use webbing as a tool for possibilities, not a set plan.

**Emergent curriculum.** Emergent curriculum is another curricular approach based on children’s interests. Examples of its implementation can be found in many early childhood classrooms across the United States and abroad (Jones, Evans, & Stritzel, 2001). These programs share common characteristics in terms of curricular goals including, an attention to observation, documentation, creative brainstorming, and flexibility in planning. Similar to the project approach, teachers start with the children’s interests. This is not to say that the teacher has no input; in fact, teachers may have a general topic they think is important for children to study. They may purposely include certain materials or experiences as jumping off points.
Teachers see an interest emerging and then brainstorm ways to study the topic in-depth.

According to Jones (1994):

People who hear the words emergent curriculum may wrongly assume that everything simply emerges from the children. The children’s ideas are an important source of curriculum but only one of many possible sources that reflect the complex ecology of their lives. (p. 5)

Cadwell (1997) described planning for emergent curriculum as complex and time consuming. It requires knowledge of child development principles and the ability to engage in ongoing studies with children. The College School in St. Louis, Missouri, where Cadwell was employed as an early childhood art specialist, focused on children’s conversations as a way for planning curriculum. Teachers engaged in recording and studying children’s conversations during play and classroom activities (Cadwell, 1997). The motivation for placing these conversations at the center of the curriculum was to allow children to develop critical and creative thinking abilities, and to investigate their natural curiosities and interests in the world. At the same time, teachers study children’s ability to negotiate and cooperate with each other (Cadwell, 1997).

**Reggio Emilia approach.** The interest-based learning model of the Reggio Emilia approach inspired the focus of my dissertation. The Reggio Emilia approach is noted as one of the most well-known examples of social constructivist theory as applied to classroom experiences that are based upon the interests of children. The municipal preprimary schools in the northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia have been attracting worldwide attention from educators for several years. Reggio Emilia is a town located in the northern part of Italy that has approximately 130,000 inhabitants. In the 1940s, after the end of World War II, a group of parents decided to use money from the sale of old tanks to create a quality preschool program for children in reaction to the previous fascist government (Malaguzzi, 1992). Several years later,
Malaguzzi, an educational leader in Italy, was impressed by the community’s dedication to their children and offered to help the town develop an approach to working with children that combined theories from Dewey, Bruner, and Vygotsky.

One of the main differences between the Reggio Emilia approach and other curriculum approaches that focus on children’s interests is that the basis of a Reggio Emilia inspired program is supported by a complex set of principles. Reggio Emilia educators formulated guiding principles with the image of children or the interests of children as the foundation. These principles are woven together and in order to understand the Reggio Emilia approach, it is important to discuss all these underlying principles. Gandini (2002) stated that they must be seen as tightly connected for a, “coherent philosophy in which each point influences, and is influenced by all the others” (p. 16). The six principles include: (a) the image of the child; (b) collaboration between children, parents, and teachers; (c) the teacher as researcher; (d) the environment as the third teacher; (e) organization as fundamental; and (f) project studies.

The image of the child. The foremost principle of the Reggio Emilia approach is the image of the child. Within the Reggio approach children are seen as powerful, curious, and ready to learn. Reggio Emilia educators believe that children have rights rather than needs and occupy a primary role in their education (Malaguzzi, 1998). Malaguzzi, the leading founder of the approach, claimed that, “things about children and for children are only learned from children” (p. 44). It is the role of teachers and parents to be aware of children’s potentials and to construct an environment that reflects their interests and curiosities (Gandini, 2004).

One way that the child’s voice is evident in their schools is shown through the use of documentation and documentation panels. Documentation panels are created using children’s work, photographs from projects, and examples of dialogue. These convey to the children that
their efforts, intentions, and ideas are taken seriously. These displays are not created to serve primarily as decoration or ways of showing off the children’s work. Rather, taking children’s work seriously in this way encourages them to approach their work responsibly and reinforces the idea that their work is considered important.

**Collaboration between parents, teachers, and children.** Parents, teachers, and children are seen as partners in education. Collaboration exists among all participants. The ideas that parents bring to the school are valued and exchanged with teachers and children. The parents’ voices are not perceived as a threat, but as important contributors to the dialogue concerning children (Spaggiari, 1993). Close working relationships exist among teachers; they rely on each other’s input and guidance during ongoing studies. Documentation creates a platform from which to develop open discussions among teachers and, as an added benefit, affords parents a look at not only the products of a project but also the ongoing learning processes that occurred.

**Teachers as researcher.** The teacher’s role is seen as partner, guide, and nurturer with the Reggio Emilia approach. The teacher’s role shifts from that of giving children direct instruction to allowing children’s thoughts and ideas to plan the direction of the activities (Gandini, 2004). Teachers act as researchers as they carefully observe and listen to children while they document children’s work.

Educators from Reggio Emilia often discuss education as self and social construction, referring to both children and teachers. Malaguzzi (1998) stressed the importance of teachers being open to change and reconstruction of themselves as teachers. Teachers are committed to their own professional growth and use documentation to reflect on their own practice. Rinaldi (1998) stated that when discussing the documentation of children’s work, teachers simultaneously begin to question themselves and each other. Teachers collaboratively discuss
their interactions with children and individually make changes to their practice based on their reflections. As a result, teachers are seen as researchers who investigate their own practice in addition to studying the work of children. This approach to teaching adopted by Reggio educators, is valued and supported within the schools’ organizational design (Rankin, 1993). Malaguzzi (1998) suggested that education without research “is education without interest” (p. 73).

**Environment as the third teacher.** The organization of the physical environment is crucial to the Reggio Emilia approach. The environment is designed to inform and engage children and visitors to the schools. Every aspect of the design of the schools reflects identity, purpose, engagement, and communication. Every detail is carefully thought through from the color of the walls, to the shape of the furniture, and arrangement of objects on shelves and tables. Objects and materials encourage exploration and investigation. Classrooms are well stocked with art materials such as several different types and colors of paints, wire constructions, drawing materials, and recyclable objects (Cadwell, 1997).

**Organization as fundamental.** The organization of the Reggio Emilia approach is complex. Haigh (2007) claimed that cooperation is needed at all levels. The organizational structure supports a cooperative system with members of a team of pedagogical coordinators, called *pedagogisti*, who also supports the relationships among all teachers, parents, and community and city administrators (Haigh, 2008). This complex system is difficult to define and replicate, particularly for schools in the United States. Gandini (2004) stressed that while others can learn from the Reggio Emilia schools, it is impossible to duplicate them.

**Project studies.** Rinaldi (2006) described the Reggio approach as a co-construction of knowledge between teachers, children, and parents as projects rather than a curriculum. She
used the term curriculum along with the corresponding terms curriculum planning or lesson planning as referring to learning that is preplanned or occurs in a linear way. In contrast project evokes the concept of a dynamic process that is sensitive to the timing of children’s investigations and research. This process allows for strategies that can be constructed and deconstructed. Rinaldi (2006) described,

> teaching and learning strategies benefit from adversity, chance, and error. Strategy involves the ability to take action into the realm of uncertainty, on the part of both protagonists of the process—adults and children—and requires listening, flexibility, and curiosity. (p. 132)

Documentation plays a crucial role in the planning of future activities. The teachers work with children while they conduct complex individual or small-group tasks over a period of several days or weeks. Intense reflections about conversations with children, children’s work, observations, videos, or pictures help teachers think about what directions to pursue with the activities. For example, in a study titled Shoe and Meter (Malaguzzi, Castagnetti, & Vecchi, 1997), children were confronted with the problem that the school needed a worktable. The children called on the aid of a carpenter to help them, and he challenged them with the task of finding the measurements for the table. Throughout the study, the children discovered the function and use of measurement.

**Criticisms of Interest Based Approaches**

Criticism of progressive education began after World War II. Critics saw a curriculum that lacked rigor and students who were academically unprepared to compete within a global economy. Specific criticism aimed at interest-based curriculum emerged in the school reform literature of the 1980s and 1990s. Supporters of a traditional curriculum, such as Hirsch (2001), viewed the progressive philosophy that Kilpatrick and other educators espoused as the principal cause for what, in their opinion, was a decline in the academic standards of American schools.
These criticisms are reflected in current discussions regarding learning standards and accountability in early childhood education.

Despite the current focus on academics in early childhood curriculum, many early childhood educators have advocated for approaches such as the project approach and emergent curriculum that are inquiry based and include the child’s interests as part of curriculum development. The next section is a more in-depth discussion on the relationship between interests and learning.

**Interests and Learning**

Children’s interests are at the heart of emergent curriculum, the project approach, and the Reggio Emilia philosophy. In addition, the role of interests in the learning processes of children, teachers, and facilitator all influence this research study. Therefore, it is essential to take a deeper look at the definition of interests and how they contribute to the learning processes.

Dewey (1887) regarded an interest as obtained when individuals consider their self-expression dependent upon the interaction between themselves and a particular object or idea. In other words, Dewey believed that individuals become interested in a particular object and that object becomes so important that if they cannot obtain it through physical, mental, or emotional interaction, individuals will not be able to be the person they desire to be. Interest is the interaction between the self and the object and is intended to bring about the self-expression of the individual. Dewey claimed that “interest marks the annihilation of the distance between the subject and object; it is the instrument which affects their organic union” (1897, p. 429). Interest acts as the bridge between the object and the individual. Their union creates the individual’s self-expression of the object. When there is a lack of interest, the person and object may interact,
but there is no connection between the person and object. If interest is absent, then the individuals do not identify with the object even though they are interacting with it.

**The role of the teacher.** In *My Pedagogic Creed*, Dewey (1887) described the need for teachers to carefully examine students’ interests in order to help shape their curricula. He also urged educators to locate children’s interests and build upon them with content and materials that support purposeful activities. DeVries and Zan (2005) discussed the teacher’s role in studying children’s interests in early childhood classrooms. DeVries and Zan (2005) stated, “teachers ask children what they want to know about and plan activities based on their suggestions, communicating to children that they can find out what they want to know in school” (p. 145). DeVries and Zan (2005) noted that teachers should pay attention to the child’s interest in developing curriculum so that activities can reflect purpose and reasoning skills.

Dewey in *The Child and Curriculum* (1902/1956), raised issues that have challenged public education throughout history in its struggle to develop the balance in curricula between the interests of the child and compartmentalized subjects. He suggested several ideas that are central to teacher professional development and curriculum planning that address today’s educational needs for developing students that are able to make connections within and across ways of learning. Dewey (1902/1956) believed children come to the classroom seeing the world as interconnected. Teachers should learn how to see the subjects as interconnected rather than compartmentalized in doing this they must re-teach themselves how to put the world back together. They must recall their own childhood when the world was not fractionalized. Dewey stated:

The child’s life is an integral, total one. He passes quickly and readily from one topic to another, but is not conscious of transition or break. There is no conscious isolation, hardly conscious distinction. The things that occupy him are held along. Whatever is uppermost in his mind constitutes to him, for the time being, the whole universe. That
universe is fluid and fluent; its contents dissolve and reform with amazing rapidity. But after all, it is the child’s world. It has the unity and completeness of his life. He goes to school, and various studies divide and fractionalize the world. (1902/1956, p. 23)

Birbili and Tsitouridou (2008) argued that planning with children’s interests is easier said than done. Early childhood professional literature often suggests using children’s interests as a basis for organizing learning. At the same time, implementation is never elaborated on or discussed in practical terms to help teachers integrate children’s interests into their practice (Birbili & Tsitouridou, 2008). They cite one major concern is that, “although teachers usually argue that curriculum decisions stem mainly from children’s interests, much of the anecdotal evidence points towards a situation where teachers are pursuing their own agenda” (Birbili & Tsitouridou, 2008, p. 150). Teachers from a non-profit center in Halifax, Nova Scotia found it challenging to not know what comes next when preparing their curriculum with children’s interests (Wien, 2002). Another issue relating to misjudging children’s interests is that teachers, often attempt to find ways of making curriculum more stimulating to children, which means either sugarcoating learning or misjudging what children’s interests are in the first place (Jonas, 2011). While wanting to use children’s perceived interests, as a guide for curricula is commendable, it can easily degenerate into bad pedagogy.

These challenges can be attributed to teachers misunderstanding their role in pursuing children’s interests. Dewey (1902/1956) suggested that it is not the teachers’ role to standby and wait for children to act upon their own ideas. Instead, the teacher needs to become involved by observing and interacting with the children and their interests. According to Dewey (1902/1956), the teacher should plan for opportunities that weave together traditional subject matter through the children’s interests. Walton (1971) suggested that if teachers do not select relatable questions and activities, the curriculum can become, “a hotch podge of unrelated experiences and ideas that lack meaning” (p. 29).
Research has also rarely considered the nature of children’s interests. One of the view examples was conducted in an early childhood program in Aoreara, New Zealand. Using participant observation, interviews and documentation, Hedges, Cullen, and Jordan (2011) examined children’s interests and teachers engagement with these in curriculum preparation. Evidence suggested that children’s interests were stimulated from family and community experiences and moved beyond traditional notions that interests stem from children’s play. This study provided an analytic framework for teachers to recognize children’s interests and to extend the curriculum.

According to Birbili and Tsitouridou (2008), “given the importance of organizing learning around children’s interests, it is surprising to find that teachers learn practically nothing about this issue in their studies” (p. 152). They suggested that teachers need to learn how to observe and document children’s actions and words in order to identify their interests. When teachers learn to observe and document children’s actions and conversations, children’s genuine conversations and interests are revealed (Birbili & Tsitouridou, 2008). In the next section, I discuss two documentation protocols that were used in this research study for the purpose of studying children’s interests. These approaches include descriptive review and the Reggio Emilia approach.

**Studying Children’s Interests: Documentation**

In this research study, descriptive review and the documentation practices of the Reggio Emilia approach were used to study children’s interests. Documentation was used for understanding children’s motives and unique thoughts as well as how they made decisions. In addition, documentation was used as a way to study teachers’ practices and instructional strategies. In this section, these documentation practices are discussed in order to more fully
understand how they were used to create a deeper understanding of children’s interests and how this understanding was used to develop classroom practices.

**Historical overview of documentation.** The following is a brief review of the history of documentary practices before discussing the ways that it currently supports teachers’ study of children’s interests. The documentation practices discussed in this chapter belong to a family of documentary practices that have a long history in Western education. Rousseau (1712-1778), Pestalozzi (1746-1827), and Froebel (1782-1852) studied and documented children and their work because of their belief that schools should be observant to children’s interests and responsive to their needs (Falk & Darling-Hammond, 2009).

Others, such as Parker and Montessori, followed in their footsteps. All of these educators based their teaching on what they learned from observing children’s thinking and work. They used their observations to inform their instructional practices and shape curricula (Falk & Darling Hammond, 2009). These examples provide insight into how documentation practices can enhance a teacher’s ability to learn about children from children. Documentary practices such as descriptive review and Reggio-inspired forms have been developed as a result of this prior work. Below is a description of these two practices.

**Descriptive review.** Descriptive review is a process for observing and describing children’s actions and interests in the classroom and grew out of the work of Carini and others at the Prospect School in Vermont (Carini, 2007). The overall purpose of descriptive review, is to create a deeper understanding or description of children and their strengths and interests (Kavensky, 2001). Using this approach, classroom teachers and parents keep written observations on children and pay close attention to their participation in the classroom. Children’s work is collected from various activities including their drawings and written work.
The collection of work is categorized for each child under the following headings: (a) physical presence and gesture, (b) disposition, (c) relationships with children and adults, (d) activities and interests, and (e) formal learning experiences.

Sometimes the headings overlap and inter-relate, but the overall purpose is to understand the children’s strengths, interests, and purposes (Kavensky, 2001). Teachers review the collected work to create classroom activities in collaborative meetings with other teachers, parents, and a facilitator (Carini, 2007). Collected work is discussed about one child at a time. The above categories serve as an outline for how a child is reviewed within the meetings. Carini (2007) believed that while only one child is being discussed, teachers can envision many children they have taught or will teach. Himley (1991) described this as deep talk. By focusing on something in depth, knowledge is constructed that represents many ways of learning including the spirit, will, imagination, intellect, and emotion. Teachers develop an “art of seeing” (Himley, 1991, p. 68).

**Reggio inspired documentation practices.** Several recent examples can be found of schools that use documentation practices to influence curriculum planning and teacher growth (Krechevsky & Moran, 2007, Rinaldi, 2006). In general, these programs use documentation, similar to Reggio Emilia, by regularly examining photographs, videos, and related artifacts collected from children to generate new ideas for classroom planning.

One such example can be found in the Reggio inspired programs at Chicago Commons (Haigh, 2007). This example is most familiar to me and has influenced my own perspectives on the use of documentation. In the Chicago Commons context, teachers document children’s actions, interactions, and representations through note taking, tape-recording, and collecting
children’s work, as well as photography. After reflecting on documentation, teachers and a facilitator interpret interests being expressed by children.

Once an interest has been interpreted and confirmed with the children, teachers invite children to participate in activities that relate to those interests (Scheinfeld, Haigh, & Scheinfeld, 2008). Children interact with each other and the teachers to co-construct their understanding about the topic or object of interest. Teachers continue to observe and document children’s engagement in the activities and interpreted the interests and ideas generated by them. The cycle continues as teachers, along with a facilitator, design and further activities (Scheinfeld et al., 2008). Documentation contributes to the ongoing cycle of activities, and new interests are continually observed and implemented. The following figure (Scheinfeld et al. 2008, p. 61) represents the continuous cycle of listening, observing, documentating, interpreting, and planning.

![Figure 1. Chicago Commons documentation cycle.](image)

**Making learning visible.** Making learning visible is based on collaborative research conducted by Project Zero researchers, along with teachers from the Municipal Preschools of
Reggio Emilia, Italy, and other preschools as well as high school teachers and teacher educators in Massachusetts (Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001). It began in 1997 as part of Harvard University’s Project Zero. Making learning visible draws attention to group learning environments for both teachers and children. Documentation is a way to see how and what children are learning. Twenty-six teachers of students from culturally and economically diverse backgrounds explore ways of creating group learning experiences for their students, using documentation to re-examine, reflect back, and further their students' and their own learning.

**Summary: Interest-Based Curriculum and the Study of Children’s Interests**

The first section of this chapter was a discussion of the research central to interest based curriculum and the study of children’s interests. Despite the current focus on academics in early childhood curriculum (Bredekamp, 2003; Shepard et al., 1998), for years, many early childhood educators have advocated for approaches that are inquiry based and include the child’s interests as part of curriculum development (Katz, 1999; Miller & Bizzell, 1983). Findings from research studies indicate that children enrolled in preschools that focus on constructivist curriculum, emergent themes, and creativity fare better (Gardner, 1942; Marcon, 1992; Miller & Bizzell, 1983). Still, the perennial debate between academics and constructivist approaches in early childhood curriculum has continued to today.

My study was concerned with the inclusion of interests in early childhood curriculum planning. One of my concerns as a facilitator was how to create inquiry-based learning that focused on the interests of children with teachers. While there are extensive writings on different forms of curricula that focus on children’s interests (Beane, 1997; Cremin, 1961; Dewey, 1902/1956; Katz, 1999), there is a lack of research regarding the processes teachers might use to study these interests.
The implementation of children’s interests is rarely elaborated on or discussed in practical terms (Birbili & Tsitouridou, 2008). Birbili and Tsitouridou (2008) suggested that teachers need to learn how to observe and document children’s actions and words in order to identify their interests. In my research study, descriptive review and the documentation practices of the Reggio Emilia approach were used to study children’s interests. Documentation was used for understanding children’s motives and unique thoughts as well as how they made decisions. This practice of studying children and learning from them may prove to be beneficial in creating teachers that are able to more effectively able to incorporate children’s interests in the classroom (Carini, 2007; Haigh, 2007).

The second focus of this chapter is on issues related to this study in regard to early childhood teacher professional development. These sections include: (a) issues relating to early childhood professional development, (b) social constructivism and early childhood professional development, and (c) the role of facilitators.

**Issues Relating to Early Childhood Professional Development**

Many researchers have recognized the wide variance in curriculum preferences in early childhood education amongst early childhood professionals (Kagan & Cohen, 1996). There appears to be a lack of consensus on what type of approach is best suited for teaching both the academics and respecting the interests of young children. The same sentiment also characterizes the field of early childhood professional development. Little interest has been shown in identifying and examining factors related to the development and activities of the early childhood educators themselves (Jorde-Bloom & Sheerer, 1992; Moran, 2002). In particular, there is little focus on preparation that focuses on how to prepare teachers to study the interests of children (Birbili & Tsitouridou, 2008). In this section, I explore current issues related to early
childhood job embedded professional development. In particular, I focus on different types of training that attempt to address the wide variant in teacher background experience found in early childhood settings.

My study was concerned with professional development experiences that are the most effective for early childhood teachers already working in the field. Pre-service training is an important part of teacher development, but it is also essential that teachers have continuing professional development while in teaching practice. Therefore, the focus within this literature review is early childhood teacher professional growth that occurs outside a formal educational system. In particular, I was interested in approaches to professional development that foster the study of children’s interests. I refer to opportunities such as in-services, workshops, trainings and other professional development experiences that help develop teachers’ skills after a teaching position is acquired.

Teachers play a major role in providing quality experiences for young children in early education programs. For this reason, it is essential that teachers have ongoing, professional development while teaching. If teachers are expected to provide quality care for children, it is necessary to provide ongoing support and professional growth for teachers. My review of literature found three possible areas to consider for early childhood teacher professional development. These areas include, short and long-term professional development strategies, a focus on teachers’ classroom practices, and collaborative interaction with other teachers.

**Short and long term professional development strategies.** The emphasis on professional development in many early childhood settings is often a stream of one-time workshops as a primary form of teacher professional growth. Winton and McCullum (2008) stated that traditional in-service training, usually consisting of one-time workshops, is an
inadequate way to affect teaching and intervention practices. In addition, these models tend to approach planning and executing professional development of teachers from a top-down perspective where the administration and outside sources are seen as the experts.

Teachers often miss out on receiving materials that are usable or resemble issues that are found in their classrooms because their concerns are left out of the professional development planning. Guskey (1996) reported that virtually every major study in the preceding 30 years emphasizes the lack of effectiveness of this approach for professional development. In addition, studies that looked at teacher experiences and perceptions of short-term training and in-services reveal that many see them as ineffective. In a recent survey, 50% of teachers who were polled reported that the professional development they received through workshops or in-services made little difference to them as teachers (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003). Yet workshops are still a common approach to early childhood teachers’ professional development.

In contrast, Notari-Syverson and Shuster (1995) specifically looked at the influence of long-term in-service programs in early childhood programs. The three-year study used the process model for professional development, which includes teachers discussing the implementation of a curriculum model and its difficulties and successes, as well as mentoring relationships and monthly coaching sessions that provided guidance and feedback. Notari-Syverson and Shuster (1995) reported, “long-term training, based on a process model of teacher change, can positively alter structural, administrative, and teacher aspects of the educational process” (p. 16).

**A focus on teachers’ classroom practices.** Training for early childhood teachers often focuses on pragmatic issues, such as safety and nutritional needs. Although these are important
issues, teachers often lack training that builds reflections of their teaching practice approaches or addresses the individual needs of children (Dunn, Beach, & Kontos, 2001).

Mangione (1992) explored the use of training that focused on teachers’ classroom practices in their evaluation of the High/Scope curriculum teacher-training project. During the trainings, teachers discussed issues in their classroom while using the High/Scope curriculum approach. These discussions involved creating visions for their practices and discussing how they might make changes. Mangione conducted interviews about the training as part of the evaluation process. Teachers discussed how the trainings had a direct effect on their classroom practices, and they were able to make changes in the classroom environment, schedule, and activities.

Katz (1996) stated that improvements to workshops could address present problems and successes with classroom practices or curricular implementation. She observed three typical problems with in-service training, (a) a lack of in-service training that focuses on teachers’ classroom settings, (b) in-service trainings that are sporadic, unrelated to the teacher’s current situation; and (c) enforcement of different program goals or philosophies from various persons or groups. In general, she found that workshops not relating to the realities of teachers’ classrooms had little long lasting effects on teachers’ professional development.

Reflective and collaborative. Davis (1993) determined that teachers did need in-service training or workshops, but they also needed time to reflect on their own teaching and learning. She based her findings on her study with school districts that were seeking to implement curricular changes. Davis’ recommendations include giving teachers time to work in teams and reflect on their work. Similarly, Makibbin and Sprague (1997) found that it was more beneficial for teachers to have collaborative discussions with other teachers than have workshops that
seemed unrelated to their classroom practices. In addition, Sunderman, Tracey, Kim, and Orfield (2004) conducted a survey of teachers in two urban school districts in Virginia and California. They reported that teachers favored additional time to collaborate more than workshops and in-service training as a way to learn to meet high standards and improve student performance.

Winton and McCullum (2008) found several examples of defined and published standards or guidelines for high-quality professional development that included reflection, collaboration, and a focus on the present realities of teachers’ classrooms. The National Education Association (www.nea.org/), the Public Education Network (www.publiceducation.org/), and the National Staff Development Council (www.nsdc.org/) were among such groups. These guidelines included common themes about what constitutes high-quality professional development, including (a) sustained over time, (b) grounded in practice, (c) linked to curriculum and student outcomes, (d) collaborative, and (e) interactive. The authors of the guidelines suggested that high quality results for professional development are experiences that are sustained over time and collaborative.

Despite these findings, Whitehurst, Director of the U.S. Department of Education, stated in 2002 that the recommendations are not based on quantitative research that compared these approaches with others. Whitehurst pointed out that many of the conclusions relied on anecdotal evidence. He concluded, “Although the literature on professional development is voluminous, there are only a few high quality studies” (Whitehurst, 2002, p. 5).

Schmoker (2006) in Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning, cited numerous studies that demonstrate that teaching in the United States lacks collaborative efforts and is still mainly an isolated practice. He stated:

Unlike other professionals and despite near-universal agreement on the importance of teaming, teachers do not work in teams. They do not prepare lessons and assessments
together, and they do not test and refine their lessons regularly on the basis of assessment results. (Schmoker, 2006, p. 18)

Fyfe (1998) recommended that in order for collaboration and reflection to become a part of teaching practices, the following is required:

1. That we make our observations visible so that together we can share them with colleagues;
2. That we consider each other’s perspectives as we dialogue, debate, and negotiate shared interpretations;
3. That together we formulate hypothesis, predictions and projections about future learning experiences that might propose to the children; and
4. That we organize, diversify, and coordinate our work in light of these agreements. (p. 21)

The goal of this dissertation was to study collaboration and reflective practices and to propose more effective methods of early childhood professional development. Research appears to be lacking in professional development methods that focus on collaborative efforts in the study of children’s interests. In addition, little attention has been given to teacher development that focuses on how to prepare teachers to study the interests of children. In the following section, I describe social constructivist approaches, such as job embedded professional development and approaches inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach that provide possibilities for addressing these concerns.

**Social constructivism and early childhood professional development.** The previous description of early childhood professional development indicated a need for more studies that focused on how teachers could incorporate reflection and collaboration in order to construct ideas regarding children’s growth and learning. Proponents of social constructivist curriculum approaches also advocate for approaches towards teacher professional development (Haigh, 2007; Katz, 1996). As social constructivist theories of learning have become a part of
educational studies that looked at children's learning, they also need to become important for exploring teacher education and professional development programs. Haigh (2007) suggested that programs that implement social constructivist approaches towards curriculum rather than prescribed or prepackaged curriculum, need professional development experiences that encourage reflective thinking about teaching and learning.

Social constructivist theory applied to teacher professional development draws attention to the importance of teachers learning through joint activities. Individual participants advance their knowledge and skills by adjusting to social constructed activity. Rogoff (1995) referred to this as participatory appropriation or the way individuals transform their understanding and responsibilities within an activity as a result of participation. From this perspective, teacher professional development is focused on how teachers begin to think and act differently as a result of participation in teacher meetings and how they began to show evidence of change in their classroom activities and orientation towards an inquiry based approach to teaching and learning.

This type of professional development is in direct contrast to what has traditionally been offered to early childhood teachers. Typically early childhood teachers’ professional development opportunities are conducted away from their sites and are not explicitly focused on teachers’ own classrooms and instructional practices. They also do not allow for collaborative reflection and experimentation (Cohen et al 1993; Little, 1993; Schmoker, 2006). These observations suggest that the field of early childhood education would benefit from a deeper understanding of how teachers’ study of their work experiences can support the development of their practice.

My dissertation aimed to reflect the practices of social constructivism. Sparks (1994) called for a paradigm shift in staff development. This shift would improve staff development
which is usually “educators sitting relatively passively while an “expert” “exposed’ them to new ideas or “trained” them in new practices” (Sparks, 1994, p. 26). In contrast, socially constructed professional development opportunities require teachers to become the experts of their own classrooms. The following examples of professional development approaches are inquiry-based and collaborative and reflect social constructivist theory.

**Job embedded professional development.** Job embedded professional development (JEPD) stems from research on social constructivist pedagogy. Activities such as action research, reflective practices, and conversations between teachers and their peers about beliefs and assumptions that guide teachers’ practices are all examples of job embedded professional development (Sparks, 1994). Teachers’ development is grounded in their day-to-day teaching practices and is designed to enhance instructional strategies with the intent of improving student learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). JEPD is social and collaborative in design and includes shared processes that are based on cooperative, inquiry-based work among teachers and a facilitator (Sparks, 1994). Camburn’s (2010) study provided an example of several schools that introduced embedded learning opportunities for teachers by encouraging various forms of teacher collaboration through comprehensive school reform programs. The results indicated that peer collaboration and working with instructional experts can lead to powerful teacher learning and development. Therefore, teachers were more likely to engage in reflective practice if they spent more time working on their teaching with peers and instructional experts. Professional development was noted when teachers were engaged in reflective practices, but the development was twice as great when teachers collaborated with peers and instructional experts.

In addition, the school’s professional culture significantly affects teachers’ opportunities for job embedded professional development. School leaders are instrumental in creating a
culture of continuous learning and teamwork through JEPD. This includes implementing professional norms among teachers such as consistent opportunities for reflections and discussions regarding classroom instructional strategies and open-door policies for observing each other’s classrooms (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2010).

Camburn’s (2010) study was a quantitative research study and suggests that a more detailed understanding of the depth of introspection and analysis that teachers engage in while participating in collaborative professional development experiences would be beneficial. Similarly, more detailed evidence about the particular kinds of situated experiences that were most effective beyond survey data is needed. Camburn (2010) suggested that in order to inform practitioners and policy makers, further research is needed in this area to directly investigate the impact of collaborative reflection on teaching and student learning. According to the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (2010), much of the research on professional development for teachers is descriptive without causal investigation, making it difficult to pinpoint what actually contributes to highly effective JEPD. My dissertation developed potential explanations for how embedded professional development opportunities supported teachers’ use of documentation and reflection to enhance their instructional practices while consistently and collaboratively studying the interests of children.

**Professional development in Reggio Emilia approach.** The professional development practices of the Reggio Emilia approach were inspirations for my dissertation research. Many early childhood educators in the United States, including the teachers in my research study, share similar educational backgrounds as the teachers in the Reggio Emilia, Italy preschools (Filippini, 2008). Many come to the teaching profession with a vocational degree or less and minimal
higher education experiences. In Reggio Emilia, embedded professional development opportunities are seen as equal in importance as a formal university education.

Professional development, as practiced by Reggio Emilia educators, is an example of social constructivist theory and job embedded professional development. Filippini (2008), a pedagogista within the Reggio Emilia school system, stated that social constructivism provides the theoretical framework that guides teacher professional development. Reggio educators believe that the highest level of teaching is achieved through real work experience that involves continuous group reflection rather than workshops, in-service training, or other isolated professional development experiences (Filippini, 2008).

In addition, similar to job embedded professional development strategies, collaboration is essential to a teacher’s professional development in the Reggio Emilia approach. Teachers work in collaboration with one another and a resource person or pedagogista to study documentation of children’s learning in order to improve their teaching practices (Filippini, 2008). The teachers and pedagogista meet weekly for blocks of time to discuss success or challenges in their classrooms. Reggio Emilia educators describe the process as an opportunity for comparison of ideas. Discussions revolve around new theories that are interpreted, and then a hypothesis is generated (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). The pedagogista works to promote among the teachers what Dewey (1938) referred to as a collaborative process. This collaborative process reflects what Reggio Emilia educators believe to be the most effective and long-lasting means to increased professionalism because it allows teachers to become researchers and creators of knowledge (Filippini, 2008).

In my dissertation, the interaction between the child, teachers, and facilitator was essential in creating an understanding of the child’s world. Reggio Emilia educators support this
concept and other social constructivists (Rogoff, 1995, Bruner, 1961, Vygotsky, 1978) that believe interaction and context is essential in learning. In the Reggio Emilia schools, the teacher’s focus is on the child and the interactions that occur between the child and other children. Teachers reflect on how children engage in their interests through interactions with the environment and social situations. In this same process, teachers reflect on their role in relationship to the child. The interests of children become the interests of the teachers. By focusing on teachers’ perceptions of children’s interests, teachers become connected to their own internal image of children. From this perspective, children-and-teachers are a joint unit and one is reliant on the other for growth and learning.

Reggio inspired documentation and teacher professional development. There are recent research examples that can be found that focus on the Reggio inspired documentation and teacher professional development (Given et al., 2010; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Haigh, 2007; Moran, 2007). Recent research examples represent formal research studies on the use of documentation practices for professional development with early childhood teachers. In addition, there were several articles written about programs that had implemented Reggio inspired programs.

Moran (2007) conducted a case study research project with two pre-service teaching teams and their use of documentation and collaborative planning in early childhood classrooms. Through participation in Reggio-inspired documentation protocol, pre-service teachers demonstrated change in the ways they participated in and developed inquiry-oriented teaching. Moran’s (2007) research revealed teachers’ changes in (a) an increased awareness collaboration, (b) early attempts at reflecting and changing teaching practices, and (c) an appreciation for and
use of documentation in making visible the relationship between teacher practice and children’s learning.

Three further examples include Haigh (2007), Given, Kuh, Lee-Keenan, Mardell, Reditt, and Twombly (2010), and Goldhaber & Smith (1997). Haigh (2007) conducted a collaborative action research study with early childhood teachers at a large urban child development agency. Through this study, teachers learned more about the many challenges of learning and children’s understanding of and interests in learning through participation in inquiry groups that studied documentation. Documentation provided tools for the teachers to study children’s interests while deepening their understanding of children’s learning connected to their interests. The results revealed that by studying and discussing documentation, teachers could see how the children’s interests could be implemented into the curriculum. Documentation was seen as a key tool needed for teachers to think, reflect, interpret, and ask more questions for both themselves and children. The adults advanced their understanding of curriculum and children’s interests while developing more breadth and depth to their images of children.

Given et al. (2010) described how documentation was used as a professional development tool with three groups of early childhood educators at three different schools. In examining these three schools, they were interested in the following: (a) how did documentation as a professional development tool act as a tool, and (b) to what extent did collective engagement in the documentation process mediate the inherent tensions of working and learning in a group. Although the authors did not conduct a formal research study, they were able to provide some assumptions based on their examinations. They proposed that through collective discourse and inquiry, teachers were able to enhance their professional development. The teachers’ abilities to
observe, record, analyze, represent, and respond to the learners in their classrooms ultimately changed the culture of their learning communities.

A similar exploration could be found in a study conducted by Goldhaber and Smith (1997). Three early childhood teachers at a university affiliated childcare center attempted to incorporate documentation into their practice. Themes developed during their experiences reflected the use of documentation for professional development. For example, teachers found themselves observing with purpose. The expectations that observations would be shared with other teachers created a deeper need to understand in order to communicate their significance. Teachers also commented on how documentation provided an opportunity to share their discoveries, frustrations, and achievements. One of the staff felt that documentation “pulls us all together” (Goldhaber & Smith, 1997, p. 9). Goldhaber and Smith (1997) also discussed how teachers described documentation as an advocate for children. Teachers were able to see children as competent, presenting an image of the child as “working on a lot more than just being cute” (Goldhaber & Smith, 1997, p. 9). Staff felt documentation had become a strong voice of children.

**Challenges with implementing the Reggio inspired practices.** After working with Reggio educators for several years with a project at Harvard University, Gardner (2001) described the challenge of articulating the Reggio Emilia approach:

I have found it challenging to make sense of the Reggio experience. I thought I understood moderately well when we began this collaboration but I now have as many doubts and certitudes. Like many other smoothly operative but deeply introspective entities . . . it has a “feel” to it that is self-evident to residents but not easily caught by others. (p. 339)

My dissertation revealed some of the common struggles with applying Reggio Emilia inspired practices to early childhood programs in the United States. Kinney and Wharton (2008) discussed the need among Reggio-inspired educators for continuous support through professional
development. Few studies were found that explore the complex process of Reggio Emilia inspired professional development strategies (Haigh, 2007; Wong, 2010). Wong (2010) reported that the challenges experienced in adopting the approach were due to a lack of adequate professional and pedagogical support. Some teachers reported that their directors or principals were not supportive of this new approach to Reggio-inspired practices. Teachers were torn between trying to follow Reggio practices and also follow the plans of the school administration.

Wong (2010) suggested that enhanced levels of communication between management and front-line workers would improve misunderstandings and stress. In order to successfully implement Reggio inspired practice or other child-centered approaches, collaboration among teachers and administrators is essential for reinforcing and creating a new culture of practices (Wong, 2010). While there has been some discussion of the barriers Reggio-inspired educators may experience, previous studies have not made a link to the broader social structures that may constrain or impede their practice (Haigh, 2007). My dissertation builds upon previous literature. I have critically explored the experiences of early childhood educators attempting to explore professional development practices inspired by social constructivist approaches including the Reggio Emilia approach.

**Descriptive review and teacher professional development.** In my research study, the use of descriptive review in collaborative meetings provided opportunities for reflective discussions about individual children’s learning styles for the teachers and myself. Similar to Reggio inspired documentation; descriptive review reflects children’s interests, experiences, memories, thoughts, and ideas in the course of their lives at school and outside of school. Reggio Emilia inspired documentation differs in that it focuses on the collaborative inquiry and
learning that takes place among children, while descriptive review looks at the individual learning styles of children.

Descriptive review meetings are seen as a format for teacher professional development. The discussion of collected work allows teachers to more closely reflect on their own practices and beliefs. Kavensky (2001) stated that while the collaborative meetings “create opportunities in the classroom for building on the child’s strengths—at the same time the recommendations support the strengths of the teacher and the realities of the classroom” (p. 153). Descriptive review values the teacher’s role as observer. Also both the child’s work and the teachers’ work are valued. By sharing their observations, classroom experiences, and reflections, teachers see themselves and the children they work with in new ways.

Unfortunately, there is little research on the descriptive review process and how teachers benefit professionally from this process. However, after an extensive review of literature, I found several examples of anecdotal studies (Carini, 2001; Kanevsky, 1993). These studies suggest positive professional development outcomes for teachers who incorporated the descriptive review process within their practice.

One such study includes Weybright (2002), who conducted a participant/observer research study that documented the adaption of the descriptive review process for undergraduates in an online child development course at Montclair University. Weybright discovered that through examination of children’s work in a collaborative format, undergraduate students were able to extend their ideas about children and learning. One student concluded that by observing one child closely and then discussing the findings collaboratively, she was able to learn more about herself as a teacher in relationship to working with children.
In another study, Hanhan and Kulinski (1983) performed a case study that involved elementary teachers that examined the use of descriptive review for professional growth. Hanhan and Kulinski found that teachers’ collaboration with a chairperson led to a deeper understanding of their personal teaching strategies. Rodgers (2002) explored the use of descriptive review with teachers as a way to help them become sensitive and attentive to student learning. Rodgers argues that supportive and disciplined reflective studies with teachers can help them understand their students and improve their teaching.

**The Role of the Facilitator**

An important aspect of job embedded professional development strategies and documentation protocol is the role of the facilitator. In my research study, I represented the role of facilitator in my dissertation. As the facilitator I was inspired by the documentation protocol of Reggio Emilia and descriptive review. Both documentation protocols employ an individual that serves as a facilitator and plays an important role in documentation protocol. The facilitator’s role is to focus dialogue on documentation that represents children’s activities and classroom experiences.

There are a few recent studies that mention the practices of a facilitator (Moran, 2007; Riley & Roach, 2006), coordinator (Haigh, 2007, 2008), or pedagogista (Carr, 2004; Wong, 2010) in the collaborative study of documentation and children’s interests. These three names are titles for similar positions and practices in collaborative inquiry and the study of documentation protocol with teachers. These studies represent a broad, more general look at the use of documentation in a collaborative format rather than focusing on the role of facilitator in depth.
According to the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (2010), the quality of JEPD depends in significant part on the skills of JEPD facilitators. Some facilitators insiders who are typically teachers or administrators who take on the responsibility from within the organization, such as lead teachers or other administrators who work from within the organization. Other facilitators come from outside the school, but are still within the organization, such as a school coach or curriculum specialist from the district. Within the context of the Reggio Emilia schools, the facilitator is known as a pedagogista (Fillipini, 2008). The name for this individual is a coordinator within Chicago Commons, the Reggio Emilia inspired program in which I worked. Both of these roles exist within the organization, but outside the schools. The facilitator can also be an outsider to the school such as from a partner organization, or a local university. For this particular research project, I was characterized as an outsider facilitator role.

Inside and outside facilitators both play valuable roles in supporting collaboration and learning among teachers. According to Allen and Blythe (2004), each brings different advantages and faces different challenges. Insiders know the school context and the people well. They are more capable of monitoring the school’s progress closely and tailored the work to fit the needs of the school. On the other hand, it can be challenging particularly for teacher leaders to take on a leadership role among peers. Outsiders have the advantage of being able to take on a unique role within the group. They are often trained as facilitators and have defined skills. According to Andrews and Lewis (2002), outside facilitators can help the learning community to “build a non-threatening environment . . . keep the group together . . . and make people’s contributions feel valued” (p. 248). However, outside facilitators are often removed from the
day-to-day operations of the school therefore making it more difficult to keep the work alive in a sustained way (Allen & Blythe, 2004).

Both insiders and outsiders should possess the ability to ask questions and guide conversations. Allen and Blythe (2004) examined the role of facilitators within several different contexts and protocols such as elementary schools and university teacher education programs. In all contexts, questions were seen as the facilitator’s most important tool. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (2010) suggested that a facilitator should have expertise in instructional practices and also possess effective interpersonal and group-process skills. Moran (2007), in her work as a facilitator within teacher education programs, stressed the importance of knowing when to provide directive instruction such as procedural or practical information and when to wait for participants to discover things on their own. According to Moran (2007), teachers have limited opportunities to participate in cycles of inquiry and that it is a facilitator’s subjective call regarding when to provide direction. The aim is not to withhold information when providing it might “ensure a sense of their own possibilities” (Bruner, 1996, p. 76).

Allen and Blythe (2004) provided a different perspective and suggested that a facilitator should not provide special expertise about the content of the conversation, but his or her role is to guide the process and to help people use the protocol. However, all parties agreed the facilitator should support teacher inquiries and team collaboration while strengthening the connection between teachers’ learning and students’ learning. The facilitator must be able to take in and make sense of what is going on within the group discussion in order to determine what to do next, including the decision to just listen to support the group’s full learning potential.
Riley and Roach (2006) researched a model for emergent curriculum staff development. The model included a sequence of six kinds of interactions that the facilitator engaged in with teachers, from building trust to eliciting self-exploration. The teachers described the facilitators’ beneficial attributes as using objective observations and focusing on teacher strengths. The level of trust in the teacher-facilitator relationship was placed at risk by the facilitator’s assertion of her own advice. Although Riley and Roach (2006) suggested that depersonalizing the advice into an objective statements could minimize it. As a result, the teacher comments were positive regarding the relationship and interaction between facilitators and teachers.

Haigh (2007) proposed one major issue with the facilitator’s role. The issue of cost in time and finances for the ongoing use of a facilitator as part of professional development is often a struggle for most programs. The need for a facilitator to support teachers’ ongoing challenges with dialogue and reflection are not often seen as beneficial ways for programs to spend their money. According to Haigh (2007), “If time and finances for more reflective, contextual-based professional development were more readily available, I suspect the quality of teaching and learning would improve” (p. 61). In other words, programs would benefit by supporting teachers’ collaborative and reflective work, including the role of a facilitator, which would reflect in the quality of education for children.

Summary: Issues Relating to Early Childhood Professional Development

The purpose of my research study was to examine how early childhood educators studied and implemented children’s interests within the curriculum. In addition, I investigated how studying interests provided possible professional growth for both teachers and a facilitator. This chapter outlined some of the issues that were central to this study.
There is a clear lack of consensus as to what kinds of professional development opportunities are the most effective for early childhood educators. Typical early childhood teachers’ professional development opportunities are conducted away from their sites and are not explicitly focused on teachers’ own classrooms and instructional practices (Dunn et al., 2001). They also do not allow for collaborative reflection and experimentation (Cohen et al. 1993; Little, 1993; Schmoker, 2006). These observations suggest that the field of early childhood education would benefit from a deeper understanding of how teachers’ study of their work experiences can support the development of their practice. In particular, there is little focus on preparation that focuses on how to prepare teachers to study the interests of children (Birbili & Tsitouridou, 2008).

It is critical that early childhood professional development be researched and critiqued in order to evaluate current initiatives and to determine what improvements might be made. My research study focused on the implementation of a social constructivist approach to teacher professional development. Other studies (Haigh, 2007; Given et al., 2010; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Moran, 2007) have indicated that teachers advanced their understanding of their practices, curriculum, and children’s interests through social constructivist approaches that included the use of documentation protocol. My study contributed to these findings and sheds light on teachers’ professional development through consistent, long term, collaborative reflection within a collaborative group in contrast to short-term, top-down efforts.

Scant research focuses on the role of facilitator and the unique perspectives facilitators hold in collaborative groups that focus on studying children’s interests through documentation protocol. My study focused on my role as a facilitator using self-study methods. By studying my role as facilitator, I provided a better understanding of how to create teacher professional
development through the study of children’s interests using collaborative inquiry and documentation protocol. In this respect, this study has the potential to contribute to the fields of facilitator and early childhood teacher professional development.
Chapter 3.

Methodology

The main purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine through action research and self-study methods how the teachers at an early learning center and I, acting as facilitator, collaboratively created a praxis for the study of children’s interests using documentation protocol. In this research study, teachers attempted to collect documentation that revealed the interests of children in their classrooms. Collaboratively, we discussed and used the documentation in weekly team meetings to plan classroom experiences based upon our perceptions of children’s interests. At the same time, collaborative discussion of documentation provided opportunities for us to carefully examine our practices as teachers and facilitator. This research study aimed to record and convey the shared experiences and professional growth of participants and me in our collaborative study of children’s interests through documentation protocol.

An action research focus (Burnaford, Fischer, & Hobson, 2001) was chosen for this study because as participants, we inquired into issues related to our practice, engaged in cycles of research, and systematically collected and analyzed data to improve our practice. The action research methodology allowed me to study the implementation of documentation protocol with teachers and how we created practices for studying children’s interests. In addition, I used a self-study research approach to focus on my role as facilitator. My review of literature revealed a lack of studies that focus on the role of facilitator in documentation protocol used with teachers. I concentrated on my role in the collaborative meetings through my journal and field notes that related to my practice. I then analyzed them to determine how my practice changed as a teacher
educator and facilitator. Therefore, self-study refers to a focus on myself as facilitator and investigating this role more deeply.

**Methodological Overview**

As previously mentioned, this study utilized qualitative research methodology designed in the form of action research and self-study. A qualitative approach was particularly appropriate for the research design and follows what Creswell (1994) discussed as “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (p. 1). My research focused on the context of weekly meetings where teachers and I studied children’s interests through documentation collected from the classroom. My research study illustrates the implementation of documentation protocol with teachers and how we created practices for studying children’s interests.

Geertz (1973) described qualitative research as a thick description. A thick description was necessary in order to understand the experiences of the teachers and me and how we collaboratively studied our perceptions of children’s interests. Bogdan and Bilken (1992) stated that “by learning the perspectives of the participants, qualitative research illuminates the inner dynamics of situations-dynamics that are often invisible to the outsider” (p. 32). This description was created through analysis of recorded weekly meetings, interviews, feedback forms, and my facilitator’s journal. The varieties of data allowed a deeper understanding of the co-construction of knowledge that occurred between the teachers and me.

**Research Questions**

The original research questions I chose for this study focused on practices of studying children’s interests with teachers.
1. How does viewing documentation of classroom activities as a group socially mediate the researcher and teachers’ understanding of children’s interests?

2. How does studying documentation in weekly team meetings enable participants, the teachers and facilitator, to construct curriculum based on children’s interests?

3. How do weekly team meetings provide professional growth for both the teachers and facilitator?

4. How does the collaborative study of documentation with teachers change my practice as a facilitator?

5. How do group meetings change my perceptions of teacher professional development?

I decided to change the research questions after I reviewed and categorized the data because the questions did not clearly reflect what I found when I analyzed the data. As a result, I created the following questions to reflect the results more closely. The first three questions were used to investigate the action research study, the second two reflect my self-study. Only slight word changes were made in questions 1 and 4; more substantive changes occurred for the other three questions.

The first three questions address the process of collaboration between teachers and myself as facilitator and include the following. These questions also focus on the possible professional growth for the teachers.

1. How does the collaborative viewing of documentation of classroom activities influence the researcher and teachers’ understanding of children’s interests?

2. How does studying documentation in weekly team meetings enable teachers, and facilitator to collaboratively construct curriculum based on children’s interests?
3. How does studying documentation of children's interests at weekly team meetings provide professional growth for teachers?

These questions originated from a recent emphasis on social constructivist and emergent-orientated approaches to teaching, learning, and professional development in early childhood education (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). My review of literature in Chapter 2 discussed a lack of research on social constructivist approaches related to teacher professional development through the use of documentation protocol and the study of children’s interests. Therefore, my research questions are timely, and relevant to the issues in early childhood education today.

The next set of questions more specifically addressed my role as facilitator. These questions focused on the study of my practices while I worked with the teachers in weekly meetings. My review of literature in Chapter 2 revealed the lack of research on the role of facilitator in teacher professional development. In this respect, my self-study research questions have the potential to contribute to the field of teacher professional development.

4. How does the collaborative study of documentation of children's interests with teachers change my practice as a facilitator?

5. What was my role as a facilitator in the collaborative study of children's interests?

Action research and self-study approaches were chosen for methods of inquiry that allowed me to study the different perspectives of the teachers and myself as explained above. The two approaches overlapped but they had somewhat different foci. Below is a description of both methodologies and how they were used in this research.

**Interaction of Action Research and Self Study**

Johnston-Parsons (2006) described several similarities between action research design and self-study. She used the lamp as a metaphor for action research, i.e., shining a light on one’s
practices; she mirror is a metaphor for self-study that involves reflecting on one’s own learning and reflections. While there are differences in action research and self-study, there are also important similarities including the importance of collaboration, a focus on reflection, the influence of teacher orientations, and the influence of socio-cultural contexts of schools (Johnston-Parsons, 2006, p. 63). In both methodologies, the researcher inquires into problems situated in practice, engages in cycles of research, and systematically collects and analyzes data to improve practice. Nonetheless, self-study may incorporate other methods, such as personal history, narrative inquiry, reflective portfolios, memory work, or arts-based methods (LaBoskey, 2004; Samaras & Freese, 2006).

The use of action research, or the lamp, was a focus on our practices of studying children’s interests through documentation. On the other hand, self-study, the mirror, was a way for me to focus on my role as facilitator in order to more clearly understand my role in the collaborative weekly planning meetings. Feldman, Paugh, and Mills (2004) argued that a critical way to differentiate the two research approaches is to focus on the relationship between action and research, and self and study. The action and research in my study was the implementation of documentation protocol with teachers and how we created practices for studying children’s interests. The self and study refers to a focus on myself as facilitator who is investigating this role more deeply. The following diagram represents how the research questions are interrelated to the study and also describes these dual focuses.
Figure 2. Interaction of action research and self-study.

**Action Research**

The primary features of qualitative research were demonstrated in my use of action research methodology. Action research from its beginnings has been influenced by both Dewey’s idea of inquiry and Thorndike’s study of education (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). While there are many models of action research, most involve identifying an issue, collecting data, implementing a plan and documenting and reflecting on present actions in order to revise future actions. The element of change in practice or understanding is central to action research. Change can be small actions that enable growth. These changes may be slow and sustained,
often invisible (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). The value of action research is determined by whether findings lead to improvement in practices of the people engaged.

In this study, I, as facilitator, collected data systematically from weekly team meetings and interviews with teachers and observed the impact of collaboratively studying children’s interests through documentation. Based upon the teachers’ responses and experiences, I interpreted the data to determine the changes in our practice. In this study, action research shed light on the use of collaborative planning and documentation practices utilized by early childhood teachers and myself during weekly team meetings. It was used to see more clearly how the study of children’s interests through documentation influenced our practice and also to shed light on professional growth for those involved.

Action research was also chosen for this study because of its cyclical nature that also reflected the documentation protocol used in our collaborative weekly meetings. A commonly known cycle is that of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) where participants plan, act, observe, reflect; and then, in the light of this, plan for the next cycle. Our documentation practices followed a similar cycle and were influenced by the work I previously conducted as a facilitator with teachers at Chicago Commons. This cycle is represented in Figure 3.
Figure 3. Documentation and reflective planning cycle.

**Self-Study Focus**

The mirror, or self-study, is this study helped me to understand who I am as a teacher educator and as a facilitator. It allowed me to study myself and to gain insights into my role as facilitator. Cole and Knowles (1998) identified two main interactive purposes of self-study—self-understanding and professional development. The postmodernist assumption is that it is never possible to separate the self either from the research process or from educational practice (Loughran, 2002). Self-study was a methodology that offered me a framework to integrate a study of self in the context of my research. This focus on myself follows the lead of Schön (1983) in attempting to understand how practitioners learn their craft. For this study, I was committed to an investigation of my own practice in relationship to my work with the teachers.

Self-study researchers use their experiences as a resource for their research or to “problematize themselves in their practice situations with the goal of possibly reframing or re-envisioning their beliefs and practice” (Feldman, 2002, p. 971). For my research study, I was interested in creating a focused direction that allowed me to study my practice and to improve
my role as facilitator and teacher educator. The aim of this study was to present an account of my inquiry, in which I explored what it meant to live my values in practice. This inquiry was similar to what Whitehead (1991) referred to as a form of living education theory that includes one’s own educational experiences. He asks the questions, “How do I live my values more fully in my practice? How do I help my pupils improve the quality of their learning?” (Whitehead, 1991, p. 113). These questions guided the framework for my own inquiry.

The self-study method is similar to the critical reflection cycle used in action research (Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004). The descriptions and explanations of my practice created a layered and circulatory approach for this study. Similar to action research, my self-study involved a spiral of self-reflective cycles of planning, acting, and reflecting for change. It was collaborative and reflexive and aimed to transform my praxis (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). While teachers collected and analyzed classroom documentation, I also collected and analyzed data with the goal of better understanding my practice in relationship to the teachers’ inquiry. The cyclical nature of action research and self-study in my research was similar to the Chicago Commons model that teachers used for the study of documentation and planning of interest-based curriculum described in Chapter 2. My cyclical, self-study research was conducted in the following way:
Figure 4. Facilitator self-study cycle.

In this process, I negotiated my role in the collaborative team meetings and the interactions between the teachers and me through participation. In general, research about the self creates challenges and tensions. I believe that studying my role as facilitator was the most poignant way to achieve a better understanding of how teacher professional development through collaborative inquiry can be created.

Who Am I?

It is important in both action research and self-study to examine the role of self and how to negotiate “the space between self and the practice” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 74). Who am I in relationship to this study and how did I arrive here? Eisner (1998) argued that qualitative inquiry requires judgment and discernible discretion on the part of the researcher. This was particularly true in action research and self-study where the focus of the research is on the researcher’s practice. The researcher reveals details of his or her experience to draw attention to
them, while leaving out details that are not essential to the evolving themes. Researchers should have some expertise that allows them insight into the situation and provide a basis for interpreting the details. Researchers have the crucial role of interpreting the activities of the study. Because my views ultimately shaped the outcome of the narrative, some insight into the background of myself as the researcher is necessary.

The role of art educator. There are many professional self-narratives that contribute to this research. My experiences as an elementary art educator strongly influenced my study. My teacher training and career began in Tucson, Arizona. For several years I taught art in elementary school programs in a variety of settings, from poor inner city schools of Chicago, Illinois, and Tucson, Arizona, to more affluent communities in the northern suburbs of Chicago. As an arts educator, I was always interested in the role art played in children’s learning and how it could be used to extend classroom-learning experiences. I was involved with several projects in school settings that allowed me the opportunity to collaborate with classroom teachers. Within these experiences I began to explore ways to incorporate children’s art making with academic studies. The children’s art works provided another language to express their unique ideas and understandings.

My experiences as an art educator have enriched my role as a professional development facilitator. Within the context of my work with teachers, we analyzed children’s graphic representations as documentation of their interests and understanding of the world around them.

Role of coordinator. My interest in children’s works was further developed by my studies of the Reggio Emilia approach while working at Chicago Commons. I was one of four coordinators for Chicago Commons. We were responsible for conducting collaborative planning meetings with teams of teachers from seven different sites. The first major point of studying
Reggio Emilia for me was addressing my own images of children. Did I view them as weak and needing help or filled with strength and capabilities? Discovering this was a long process and required an attention to what children were actually doing in the classroom. This learning process for me was done in collaboration with the other coordinators and teams of teachers with whom I worked. By reflectively and communally discussing children’s work at weekly team meetings, teachers and coordinators created understandings of children’s expressive choices, interests, and ways of thinking. I acquired a new perspective on children’s capabilities and interests through the collaborative discussions of documentation. We then used this understanding to support children’s learning.

My role as coordinator at Chicago Commons allowed me the experience of examining classroom documentation with teachers in a group context. This role required a careful balance between listening, asking questions, and providing feedback with members of the group. A systematic protocol was observed in which teachers presented documentation collected from classroom events and then members listened and provided feedback and suggestions for continuing classroom projects. Finally, documentation was organized for display within the center as evidence of children’s interests and learning experiences within the context of classroom activities.

This role strongly influenced my present perceptions of the importance of documentation as a means for studying children’s interests and planning curriculum. My years of studying documentation practices and more recently descriptive review protocol are valuable experiences for the study. These experiences led to my present research focus with early childhood teachers and the use of documentation practices. I was interested in studying my role in collaboration
with teachers to discover how we created a context in which we studied the interests of children. In addition, I was interested in investigating my role as facilitator of teacher meetings.

**Studying children’s works as artifacts.** Before my teaching career began, my first career choice was the study of art history. One might ask how does someone interested in art history become an educator interested in education. My initial interest in art history was the development of artists and their work. I was intrigued with how artists’ work changed in relationship to where they were living or to current or personal events. My interest was in studying the culture and function in which art existed rather than to identify and relate meanings of style.

Years later, while working at Chicago Commons, I discovered descriptive review founded by Carini at the Prospect School. I was intrigued with how descriptive review fostered a view of children’s work as artifacts. Carini actually consulted with an art historian to discuss how to classify children’s work (Himley, 2001). Himley (2001) described this process: “Carini came to characterize the many projects and products that children make as ‘works,’ as artifacts attesting to—and profoundly expressive of—the fundamental human impulse to make meaning in our lives” (p. 17). An artifact in art history was an object that culturally represents the maker. Children’s works, according to Carini (1979), can be studied in a similar way. Children create visual images to define their surroundings, tell a story, or enact life experiences in unique ways.

Similarly, the Reggio Emilia approach challenges many assumptions about the previous accepted use of art in early childhood classrooms. Children’s visual interpretations are collected and studied as components of documentation that reveal growing understanding of a subject versus creating short-term art activities. By discussing a child's work, teachers and researchers can come to understand a child's expressive choices, interests, and ways of learning and thinking,
and then determine ways to support the child’s learning. My role as facilitator in this research study was to assist the discussion, study, and investigation of children’s works in weekly team meetings.

**The role of teacher educator.** Several years later, I became a teacher educator at a small private Midwestern university. While teaching a methods course for early childhood educators, I became interested in pre-service teachers’ perceptions of children’s interests. I was required to teach different early childhood curriculum approaches. In particular, we studied emergent curriculum practices that are currently being used in some preschools. I observed through our classroom conversations that one of the strongest areas of concern was how to begin and sustain a study with children. This related to how to keep children’s interest—and more specifically—what are children’s interests. I began to rethink how documentation protocol and the study of teachers’ interests might be transformed into teacher education practices.

For this research project, I found myself situated in the place where my teaching career began, the Southwest region of the United States. My prior experiences led to my current research interest. This research study examined how teachers at an early learning center and I, acting as facilitator, collaboratively created a praxis for the study of children’s interests using documentation protocol.

**The Research Site**

A childcare site in the downtown area of a large southwest city in the United States was chosen for this study. My preference for this site was not only because of the administration’s interest in becoming a Reggio Emilia inspired site, but also because it closely resembled the population of teachers and families with whom I became familiar with at Chicago Commons. The pseudonym CK was used to describe the early learning center for this study.
The early learning site, CK, is a private, non-profit childcare and educational program founded by a woman’s club in 1919. The mission is to provide the children of low-income working families with quality childcare, early education and nutritional services. The staff, children, and family members that attend CK experience common community problems such as high rates of unemployment, illiteracy, substance abuse, domestic and community violence, along with inadequate health care and housing. Currently, 90% of enrolled families meet the poverty guidelines and 55% are single parent families. Most of the parents work at least one job, while others may work two. Children arrived at CK as early as 8:00 am and stay as late 6:00 pm. Some children are there the entire time the center is open, while others come and go during this time frame.

CK provides childcare and educational services for 65 children ages 2 to 5 years. There are three classrooms at CK with approximately 20 to 24 children and four teachers in each classroom. The Crickets (pseudonym) classroom has 18 children ages 2 to 3 years old and four teachers. The Dragonflies (pseudonym) classroom has 23 children, four teachers and is for ages 3 to 4 years old. The Ants (pseudonym) classroom has 24 children, four teachers and is for ages 4 to 5 years old. CK implements looping, which means they move up to the next age level classroom with children after two years. The personalities of the classrooms are further described in Chapter 4.

There were three CK administrators. A full-time executive director who hires and supervises staff, oversees financial management, directs the program, and conducts day-to-day operations manages the site. The financial manager handles the record keeping, payroll, and assists with grant research and writing. The education coordinator is responsible for staff schedules and providing leadership for teachers in the classroom such as training and
implementing the use of children’s focus portfolios and maintaining staff educational portfolios. She is also responsible for ordering classroom supplies and enrollment of families in the program.

CK has a volunteer board of directors that governs the site. The board of directors oversees fundraising, grant writing, and seeking out funds to support the program. The board must approve the purchase or change of any major changes to the physical site. They are also responsible for approving any operational changes to the program such as the hiring of additional staff members or a new director. Lastly, the board of directors needs to approve any programmatic changes, such as the adoption of a new curriculum.

Below is a diagram that represents the organizational structure of CK. During my dissertation research in the spring of 2011, the executive director went on maternity leave and chose not to return. An interim executive director, a former board member, took over the responsibilities of the executive director during the time the board was in the process of recruiting and hiring a new director.
Figure 5. CK’s organizational structure.

Introduction to Reggio Emilia approach. CK’s executive director, board of directors, and education coordinator became interested in the Reggio Emilia approach in the spring of 2009. Prior to this, a thematic based curriculum was implemented in the classrooms. For example, teachers followed a prescribed curriculum kit with activities to create pumpkins and apples in the fall and flowers and butterflies in the spring. The executive director, education coordinator, and some of the board members became interested in Reggio Emilia. They were mostly interested in the learning environments, constructivist curriculum approach, and parental involvement after attending a presentation given by Karen Haigh, the former director of Chicago Commons, at a local early childhood conference.

CK’s administration began consulting with members of a family development program from a large southwestern university (pseudonym, SW). A few of the SW university staff attended a study tour in Reggio Emilia the year before and began studying how to implement the
approach. A SW university consultant was hired to work with the site’s teachers. This decision was not made with the teachers’ input. The consultants began to make changes in the classroom environment to reflect a more at home feeling. In addition, they met with teachers at monthly staff meetings and encouraged them to begin following children’s interests. Teachers were instructed in documentation processes, such as taking photographs in the classroom to record children’s work.

**My Initial Involvement with CK**

I was first introduced to the director, education coordinator, and SW consultant in the spring of 2010. My initial meeting purpose was to determine a possible site for my dissertation interests. We also discussed their interest in collaborating with someone who could facilitate teacher meetings. The CK staff was interested in creating professional development opportunities that reflected the Reggio Emilia approach and would fulfill the 24 hours of training required by the southwest state in which CK is located. I proposed creating job embedded professional development practices that focused on teachers’ classrooms practices. I was invited back to CK in the fall of 2010 as a consultant and began meeting weekly with teachers.

For four months prior to the data collection, meetings were conducted with each classroom team. Weekly, I held classroom team (CRT) weekly meetings, meaning the three to four teachers who worked together in their individual classrooms. The meetings took place during the children’s afternoon naptime and covered topics such as studying children’s interests, classroom behaviors, and implementing early childhood standards with an emergent curriculum.

All of the teachers in this study expressed their initial concerns regarding the implementation of Reggio Emilia practices, including implementing children’s interests in their curriculum planning in the meetings prior to my 16 weeks of data collection. They asked
questions such as: Are our children capable of doing this type of work? We have inner city problems, behavior issues in the classroom, and problems at home. What will the children take with them after they leave? Will they know their abc’s and numbers? Teachers also questioned their own preparedness for the journey asking whether they were capable of this kind of work and experienced enough. They were afraid that they might lose teachers along the way. There is a high turnover rate of teachers because of the low pay.

During this initial four-month time frame, teachers were introduced to the concept of small group work with children and began implementing their observations of children’s interests within their classroom activities. I decided to begin with the observation and study children’s interests because of my prior experiences as a facilitator at Chicago Commons. I found it beneficial to start teachers out slowly, examining the interactions and behaviors of children in their classroom. During this time we established our praxis of small group work with children and documentation of activities in the classroom. These meetings occurred prior to the Institutional Review Board approval and my preliminary exam.

**Establishment of Collaborative Weekly Team (CWT) Meetings**

The data collection for my dissertation study began after the initial four months of classroom teacher meetings. The education coordinator, Eleni, and I decided to mix the weekly teams to include a representative from each classroom. This decision was made because of coverage issues in the classrooms. Teachers met weekly during the children’s nap times. It was increasingly difficult to have all teachers out of the classroom at one time. Personally, I was also interested in how collaboration with the other classroom teachers would influence their practices in comparison to discussing individual classrooms at each meeting. I thought cross-classroom discussions might be productive because the classrooms were very different.
In this research study, I attempted to implement job embedded professional development (JEPD) strategies. I met consistently and weekly with teams of teachers. Each team was made up of one teacher from each classroom. I met with teams of teachers for approximately one to one and a half hours each week. We followed the documentation protocol influenced by my work as a facilitator at Chicago Commons that was described earlier in this chapter. Teachers brought documentation from the classroom that reflected what they observed as an interest of children. As a team, we collaboratively planned activities for each classroom that would build upon the children’s interests. Examples of documentation and our collaborative planning process are described in Chapter 4. Our meetings were social and collaborative in design and included shared processes that are based on cooperative, inquiry-based work among teachers and myself as a facilitator (Sparks, 1994).

![Timeline of events at CK](image)

**Figure 6.** Timeline of events at CK

**Participants**

There were 12 teachers at CK. Nine of the teachers had full time positions and took part in the collaborative team meetings. Three part time assistant teachers did not take part in the meetings. The teachers and education coordinator had diverse educational training and backgrounds. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
accrued the CK in 2004. Since 2006, NAEYC requires that at an accredited site, all lead
teachers must have a CDA, AA, or bachelor’s degree in working with young children. All
assistants must take a 45-hour training course. During my dissertation research at CK, one of the
three lead teachers completed her AA, while the other two were in the process of completing it.
Each year teachers are required by the southwest state in which this study took place to complete
24 hours of continuing education.

The teachers are from culturally diverse backgrounds. Six teachers were Mexican
American, three Navajo, two Caucasian, and one from the Philippines. All of the Mexican
American teachers and one Caucasian teacher were bilingual in Spanish and English. The three
Navajo teachers were bilingual in Navajo and English.

**Collaborative weekly team (CWT) meeting focal group.** After the teams of teachers
were established for CWT meetings, I chose one team of three teachers to represent a focus
group. I collected data from all of the meetings, but decided to focus on one team made up of
three teachers from three separate classrooms for a more in-depth study of our weekly meetings.
I decided that choosing three teachers would provide deeper insight into individual similarities
and differences as well as the dynamic of the group. I chose this particular group of teachers for
the focus group because they represented various positions in the classroom, had varied
educational experiences, and represented a varied cultural representation. These three teachers
included: Cristina, lead teacher from the Crickets, Doli, assistant teacher from the Dragonflies,
and Ana, assistant teacher from the Ants. The following is a description of each teacher.

**Cristina, Crickets’ lead teacher.** Cristina (focus teacher) was Mexican American and
represented the lead teacher of the Crickets Classroom. She worked with three assistant teachers
and 18 toddlers. The other three teachers included Colleen, Chenoa, and Carlina. Cristina had
been employed at CK for four years. She began as an assistant teacher and moved to lead
teacher role after her first year. Cristina was in the process of receiving her vocational degree in
early childhood. She took approximately one to two classes each semester.

**Doli, Dragonflies’ assistant teacher.** Doli (focus teacher) was the assistant teacher in the
Dragonfly classroom. Doli worked at CK for approximately one year prior to my study. She
was Navajo and in the process of receiving her degree in early childhood education from an
online Native American vocational school program. The other teachers in the classroom
included Dyani (lead teacher), Dulce, and Diana. Diana started as a part time assistant teacher
and moved to fulltime after Dyani left the program.

**Ana, Ants’ assistant teacher.** Ana (focus teacher) had worked as an assistant teacher for
the past year in the four and five year old room, the Ants. The classroom included four teachers
and a total of 24 children. The other teachers included Adriana, Abril, and Alana. Ana has a
bachelor’s degree in English and she was working on obtaining her teacher certification in
elementary education from a local community college’s alternative certification program.

![Collaborative weekly team meeting focus group.](image)

During the meetings, we discussed documentation collected by classroom teachers that
focused on the interests of children. The documentation served as a motivator for our
conversations and interactions. These meetings unfolded in different ways from week to week
but there were themes that emerged from the data analyses within the experiences of the weekly
meeting teams.
Data Collection and Sources

Data collection occurred during the spring of 2011. All data gathered from participants were collected with explicit permission from the participants and in full compliance with Institutional Review Board guidelines. The data sources of this study aimed to reflect the point of view of participants as well as the researcher. For this research, data were collected for four months and included interviews with three focus group teachers and the education coordinator, the researcher’s reflective journal, recorded weekly team meetings, classroom documentation, and feedback forms. Data were collected with a focus on the action research and self-study questions. I used prolonged engagement, triangulation, and participant debriefing to aid in the credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I used the data collected from the meetings to reflect on the experiences of the meetings. This reflection was dual purposed. First, I used the data to reflect on the events that took place in each of the meeting and then created questions or ideas to further explore with teachers in the following meeting. Second, the data were reviewed to determine the overarching themes present in this study for further analysis. The following is a description of the data collected for this research study.

Interviews action research focus. Semi-structured interviews were used to investigate the experiences, thoughts, and insights of three teachers and the education coordinator weekly team meetings. The interviews created a deeper understanding of how the meetings and documentation protocol influenced or changed the teachers’ practices.

I conducted the interviews three times during the four-month period. The teachers were invited to participate in the weekly team meetings and also in the interviews. My intent was for the interviews to enable me to, “collect and elicit native views of reality and the native ascription
of meaning to events, intentions, and consequences” (Spindler & Spindler, 1987, p. 4). In general, the interviews for this study were semi structured. This means that I created prearranged questions for each interview while I also allowed for other topics and questions that arose during the interview. The interviews flowed like conversations and questions or comments were added when helpful to conversations.

The interview questions attempted to pursue the following information which contributed to the action research approach: (a) to explore and determine what was significant to individuals involved in the collaborative study of documentation, (b) to determine how individuals perceived the collaborative study of children’s interests through documentation, and (c) to provide clues to the meaning and value placed on the collaborative use of documentation in weekly meetings.

**Interviews and self-study focus.** The interviews also allowed me to focus on the self-study focus of this study. I asked the education coordinator and teachers questions that related to the strategies I employed to facilitate meetings and the effectiveness of my facilitation. Their responses allowed me to reflect on my role as facilitator and the strategies that I attempted to create space for teachers to study the interests of children.

The interview questions were designed to investigate my role as facilitator and contributed to the self-study approach: (a) to explore what was significant to individuals about the role of facilitator, (b) to investigate how individuals perceived having a facilitator at teacher meetings, and (c) to explore the strategies the facilitator used in the team meetings.

Interview questions were selected prior to the initial interview (Appendix A). The following interviews included some questions from the initial interview (Appendix B). The last interview included some of the initial questions and others were added to address the participants
overall experiences with the weekly team meetings (Appendix C). These interviews were conducted at the end of the four-month research project.

**Data from Collaborative Weekly Team (CWT) Meetings**

The weekly meetings consisted of three teams of teachers representing the three classrooms at CK. Meetings took place on site at CK and lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. Teachers and the education coordinator met with me as the facilitator while the children were taking their afternoon naps. We followed meeting and documentation protocol developed at Chicago Commons and discussed in Chapter 2. I was familiar with this protocol because of my former position as studio coordinator and facilitator at Chicago Commons. This protocol was influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach for looking more closely and collectively at children’s work. It provided a framework to structure my facilitation of the meetings. In addition, the descriptive review process influenced our use of the observation and documentation protocol. Individual children were studied in order to understand his or her interests or how he or she contributed to a classroom project.

**Weekly meeting audio recordings.** I audio recorded all of the weekly meetings in order to document what happened and also as a reflection tool for my practice as facilitator. On occasion, I shared direct comments from the audio recordings with teachers for the purpose of discussing a topic in more depth or to create a deeper understanding of the teachers’ experiences. The audio recordings and transcriptions served as a reflective tool in the action research cycle of planning, discussing, reflecting, hypothesizing, and implementation.

**Audio recordings and self-study.** The audio recordings were also a major part of my self-study because they allowed me to reflect in more depth my role as facilitator. I was able to listen and reflect on the occurrences of the meetings. I made notes, questions, and comments
during my transcription and reflection of the audio recordings. The audio recordings allowed me to slow down and reflect on my interactions with teachers.

**Action research and weekly meeting feedback forms.** In order to receive consistent feedback on the experiences of all participants, a weekly meeting feedback form (Appendix D) was used. Feedback forms were filled out anonymously, meaning the teachers did not provide their names on the forms. The form asked participants to comment on what they would like to learn more about. For the last five minutes of the weekly meetings, I asked weekly meeting participants to fill out a form that answers these two questions: (a) What did you learn today? (b) What do you need from the facilitator or from these meetings to better help understand children’s interests and how to plan for classroom activities? These questions allowed me to understand their experiences of collaboratively studying documentation.

**Self-study and weekly meeting feedback forms.** The feedback forms also revealed information about my role as facilitator. I used this information within my cycle of reflection and as a tool for planning future meetings.

**Documentation from Classrooms**

The teachers and I collaboratively studied documentation that teachers collected from the classroom. Documentation included photographs, transcribed audio recordings, written observations, children’s drawings, and video recordings. Teachers attempted to bring at least one form of documentation to the meetings. The documentation was used to describe to the rest of the teachers and myself the prior classroom activities and also illustrated the interests of children in the activity. In addition, teachers collected and displayed documentation throughout their classroom studies. Teachers used the documentation to create a display panel that was displayed in the classroom, or other areas of the site.
Documentation served as data for this study, including both the action research and self-study focus. It provided a deeper understanding of what teachers perceived to be children’s interests. I also used documentation to facilitate our meeting discussions and interactions. The examples of documentation teachers brought to the meetings illustrated how they interpreted children’s interests. It was used as a tool for the co-construction of ideas about children’s growth and learning. Documentation serves as part of the cycle of planning, discussing, reflecting, hypothesizing and implementing.

**Research journal for action research.** My research journals served as a reflective tool in the action research cycle of planning, discussing, reflecting, hypothesizing, and implementation. My journals were used for both action research and self-study purposes. I kept three different formats of journals. I took handwritten notes in a journal during and following team meetings. I also kept a journal on the computer following the transcription of the audio recordings from the meetings. In addition, sometimes I audio recorded my thoughts, questions or ideas when I was driving in the car. These audio recordings were transcribed at the end of the week and kept on my computer according to the date that they were recorded. Similar to the audio recordings of team meetings, on occasion I shared my journal reflections with teachers for the purpose of discussing a topic in more depth or to create a deeper understanding of the teachers’ experiences.

**Research journal for self-study.** In addition, the research journals allowed me a place to reflect in more depth on my experiences as facilitator. I often asked myself questions about teachers’ interactions or about my role as facilitator. I also made comments and reflections on my experience during and after the meetings. I often shared my thoughts and struggles regarding my study with my graduate advisor, Marilyn Johnston-Parsons, through Skype conversations. I
wrote notes during and after these meetings that were also included in my research journal. The journals were a place for a narrative and reflective study of my role.

In order to discuss the initial experiences of teachers, I also used my research journal notes collected from weekly meetings, which began in the Fall of 2010. This was approved in my IRB application and indicated in the teacher consent letters.

**Prolonged Engagement**

The data contributed to my prolonged engagement and persistent observations. It was critical for me to remain attentive to the realities and biases that emerged during the study from my own experiences. Using multiple modes of data gathering helped me study my role as researcher and facilitator while maintaining a critical attitude toward my personal reality. In addition, the consistent and prolonged engagement that is required for job embedded professional development activities with participants enabled me to establish relationships of trust and the ability to gain greater access to insider knowledge rather than superficial or purposeful information (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). Therefore, meeting with the participants weekly, added to the credibility of this study by consistently participating and studying with teachers in weekly meetings.

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed consistently throughout the data collection. Data collected from weekly meeting audio recordings, meeting feedback forms, interviews, and my research journal were analyzed to identify emergent codes throughout the study. I created action research and self-study categories for organizing and analyzing the data. I found that because my work was so closely related to the experiences of the teachers in the meetings, many categories overlapped. I was not interested in simple answers or descriptions, but rather rich information about the
significance of weekly meetings for teachers involved in this study and also my own experiences (Geertz, 1973).

For this study, I used interpretive data analysis (Hatch, 2002) in an attempt to make meaning of the context of collaborative weekly team meetings and the social constructivist approach to early childhood education. Hatch (2002) stated that interpretive data analysis is the “researchers’ best effort to produce meaning that makes sense of the social phenomena they are studying” (p. 180). The social phenomenon in this study was the collaborative weekly team meetings I had with teachers.

Hatch (2002) outlined a template for interpretive analysis similar to Van Manen’s (1990) use of “thematic analysis” (p. 78). Both approaches begin with the researcher’s initial impressions being noted within the data, including my journal. These initial impressions were used to identify prominent or prevailing themes (Hatch, 2002; Van Manen, 1990). The end result of this process was a deeper understanding of my role as the researcher and my ability to assign meaning to the context of the meetings based upon my own and the participants’ perspectives.

For this study, Hatch’s (2002) template was used. I began the analysis by noting initial impressions and on-going impressions in my research journal and within the margins of the data as the study emerged. My journal, transcribed recordings from the weekly meetings and interviews, and the feedback forms were analyzed and color-coded to identify key words and prominent themes. This also allowed me to gain a sense of what the teachers and I were talking and thinking about in our meetings and how we were describing our experiences (Morse & Richards, 2002).
Over the course of multiple passes through the data, categories that reflected our practices or praxis began to emerge. When I discovered a pattern in our discussions of praxis, I assigned a corresponding color code. Afterwards, I re-analyzed the data to discover connections between sources. I recognized three distinct categories as significant themes within our praxis and the data: organization, documentation, and collaboration. I organized the data within these themes and created categories for elaboration. I determined self-study categories that also reflected the themes within my own praxis as facilitator. The following page is a diagram that describes the categories and subcategories that were established for organizing the data for the action research and self-study studies.
Figure 8. Data analysis categories.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation of the multiple data sources was built into data collection and analysis for the purpose of achieving trustworthiness. “Triangulation has been generally
considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon was being seen” (Stake, 1994, p. 50).

Triangulation in this study involved the use of multiple perspectives to corroborate, elaborate, or illuminate the research questions. I clarified meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon was being perceived through interviews, feedback forms, and my own research journal (Stake, 1994). Meaning was also clarified through the audio recordings of collaborative weekly team meetings where we discussed and co-constructed curriculum and activities. These multiple perspectives provided a rich resource for building adequate accounts and understandings of our collaborative experiences in the weekly team meetings. Multiple perspectives also contributed my study of my role as facilitator in teachers’ professional growth during the study of children’s interests at weekly team meetings.

Participant de-briefing. In addition, during and after data collection, individual accounts were shared with participants for member checks and clarification of perspectives. I regularly shared teachers’ comments and quotes at weekly meetings and during interviews throughout the data collection. The nature of action research and self-study approaches required that participants be given opportunities to review the data. This process of review provided credibility to the research and ensured that the research represents the perspectives and experiences of the teachers that contributed to data triangulation and participant de-briefing.

Challenges to the Study

This study was not without challenges. The first challenge, was working within the professional development philosophical differences between SW university consultants that were working with the teachers and myself. While I viewed professional development and my role as
facilitator as a collaborative process with teachers, the university consultants who were working with the teachers demonstrated a more top down model. This was observed in their prescribed implementation of the Reggio approach and directions to make changes in the classroom environments. However, challenges were also seen as opportunities. The consultants’ opposing philosophical approaches provided an opportunity for the teachers and myself to compare our work with a less collaborative approach. It was helpful for me to consider their perspective of professional development to understand my own.

The second challenge was a commitment towards weekly meetings. It was a necessity for the center administrator to ensure that teachers attend the weekly meetings in order to have consistency in data collection to fulfill their required professional development hours. However, this was often difficult in a small school where children attend on a full time basis. It was necessary to have proper teacher coverage in classrooms when teachers attended meetings. This sometimes presented a challenge. This challenge was also an opportunity to understand the complexities of implementing weekly teacher team meetings.

In addition, the teachers often felt unsure of who was in charge because the executive director was on maternity leave during my data collection. This also provided insight into the teachers’ perspectives on effective administration including their advocacy for continuing our professional development practices in the search for new leadership.

Organization of Chapters

This study provides a qualitative examination using action research and self-study methods. The goal of this study was to examine the professional development of the teachers and myself as facilitator during our collaborative study of children’s interests. The re-conceptualization of professional development described in this research is influenced by a
convergence of interpretations of teaching, learning, and professional development practices influenced by descriptive review developed by Carini (1977) at the Prospect School in Vermont and the Reggio Emilia approach to early education. The experiences and context of the study were studied within a time frame of sixteen weeks.

Central to this analysis is the description of experiences associated with a team of teachers who worked together with myself as facilitator during weekly team meetings. The data from these meetings focuses on the professional development that occurred through the study of children’s interests. Careful attention was made toward studying the practices of the teachers and myself as facilitator. I found that because my work was so closely related to the experiences of the teachers in the meetings, many categories overlapped. Three distinct categories were recognized as significant themes: organization, documentation, and collaboration. The next three chapters discuss these themes and the orchestration of activities within the meetings and the development of interpersonal and pedagogical relationships between the teachers and myself. For the self-study, I analyzed my attempts to create a responsive, systematic, and purposeful environment for job embedded professional development.
Chapter 4.

Data Analysis and Findings: Organization

Introduction: The Forest

All of this is a great forest. Inside the forest is the child. The forest is beautiful, fascinating, green and full of hopes; there are not paths. Although it isn’t easy, we have to make our own paths, as teachers and children and families, in the forest. Sometimes we find ourselves together within the forest, sometimes we may get lost from each other, sometimes we greet each other from far away across the forest; but it is living together in this forest that is important. And this living together is not easy. (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 53)

Malaguzzi (1993), founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, refers to the learning context as a forest in the above quote. In this study, CK represents the forest where teachers, parents, administrators, children, and myself as the facilitator work together. The purpose of this study is to examine this forest and the paths or processes that we used to navigate through the forest. We attempted to jointly construct perspectives of children’s interests while we simultaneously created opportunities for our own professional growth.

The following three chapters represent three unique paths or categories that were created as a result of my data analysis. In each of these chapters, I present the findings related to the action research and self-study research aspects of my study. From my analysis of the 16 weeks of data collection from collaborative meetings, interviews, journal writings, and feedback forms, I identified three overarching categories. The following three chapters I describe my analyses of these three categories—organization, documentation, and collaboration.

In Chapter 4, I provide the findings from the category organization. Organization refers to the complexities that existed in organizing classroom practices and policies during the study of children’s interests. The data were analyzed and organized using major sub-categories including the small groups and inquiry-based learning. In the self-study section, I provide the findings
from my analysis of the data from my self-study. In this section, I chose data that reflected the use of an inquiry approach in my practice.

In Chapter 5, I provide the findings from the data analysis within the category of documentation. In the action research section, I provide data that discusses the teachers’ use of documentation in the classroom and in our collaborative team meetings for the purpose of studying children’s interests. In the self-study section, I present the data that demonstrates my use of documentation for my own practice and in my role as facilitator.

In Chapter 6, I present the data that reflects the last category of collaboration. The action research section describes the teacher’s experiences with collaboration in the classroom and collaborative team meetings during the study of children’s interests. In this chapter, I describe the role of collaboration in the classrooms and our weekly team meetings within three categories including (a) shared learning, (b) a safe place, and (c) a place to create a collective voice. This was part of my action research study. In the self-study section, I discuss how collaboration influenced my role as facilitator.

**Organization**

This chapter reflects that category of organization. Organization was essential for providing structure in both the classrooms and team meetings. In this chapter, I describe the role of organization in our praxis. The first section describes the initial experiences with organization of classrooms and classroom weekly team meetings. The next section describes the organization of small group learning in the classrooms. Next, is a description of how small groups were organized using an inquiry approach. Afterwards, in the self-study section, I provide a deeper analysis of the role of organization for myself as facilitator of the team meetings.
My Initial Involvement with Classroom Teams (CRT)

I began as a consultant at CK in the fall of 2010. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I had IRB approval to use my journal notes from the initial four months of my engagement, but I was not recording meetings or conducting interviews. During this time, I met weekly with the three to four teachers who worked together in an individual classroom. At our initial meeting, teachers expressed their concerns with adopting the Reggio Emilia philosophy. As mentioned in Chapter 3, they were concerned with the children’s abilities to be self-motivated and conduct studies based on their interests. They were also concerned with issues that CK faced, such as inner city problems, behavior issues in the classroom, and problems at home. They asked questions about the effectiveness of an interest-based curriculum such as, what will the children take with them after they leave the center and will they know their abc’s and numbers? Teachers also questioned their own preparedness for the journey. The wondered if they were capable of this kind of work. They were afraid that they might lose teachers along the way. Prior to my involvement with CK there was a high turnover rate of teachers because of the low pay.

I had my own concerns. I felt alone and unsure of myself. I was very new to the large southwest city where CK was located. My family and I moved to this new location only three months prior. The lay of the land—both physically and politically—was new to me. I asked myself, would the teachers like me. Will they trust me? Where will I begin? I relied on my prior work as a coordinator at Chicago Commons. I recalled the importance of beginning slowly with teachers. I attempted to call teachers’ attention to what children were actually doing in the classroom. Teachers began by reflectively and collaboratively discussing children’s work at classroom team (CRT) meetings.
At our initial meetings, the teachers and I established an organizational approach for our meetings. We followed a documentation protocol that included observing children in the classroom, collecting documentation that reflected children’s interests, bringing the documentation to weekly meetings, planning activities based upon what we determined as children’s interests, implementing the plans in the classroom, and repeating the cycle. We covered topics such as how to observe children, classroom behavior, the environment, and children’s play. The teachers began to organize activities based upon what they observed as children’s interests.

In order to understand the classroom organization and dynamics it is important to include a conversation about the unique spaces of the three classrooms. Each of these classrooms constructed their own policies, practices, and processes for observing and organizing activities based upon children’s interests. I chose three different titles to describe the classrooms: communal, decentralized delegation, and authoritative. The following is a brief description of what I learned about each classroom during my preliminary four months at CK. As described in Chapter 3, I chose a focus group teacher from each classroom for my data collection. Included in this discussion is a description of the focal teacher’s role and also the role of the lead teacher.

**Communal Crickets classroom.** Cristina (focus teacher) was the lead teacher of the Communal Crickets Classroom. She worked with three teachers and 18 toddlers. The other three teachers included Colleen, Chenoa, and Carlina. Carlina was a part-time assistant and did not attend the team meetings. However, the teachers communicated with Carlina the results of our team meetings and involved her in the small group studies. Together the teachers worked with each other to decide what needs to be done and how to accomplish it. Cristina, as the
classroom’s communal leader, valued and trusted the interdependence of the teachers’ relationships.

According to my written interpretations of the meetings during my initial engagement at CK, the teachers in the Crickets classroom worked collaboratively on an in-depth study of trains with the children. This study lasted four months and took place prior to the sixteen weeks of data collection for my dissertation.

**Decentralized delegation Dragonflies classroom.** Doli (focus teacher) was the assistant teacher in the decentralized delegation classroom. The classroom was made up of four teachers and twenty-four children aged three to four. The other teachers in the classroom included, Dyani (lead teacher), Dulce, and Diana. Diana did not initially attend the meetings until she became a full time assistant. However, Dyani, the lead teacher, involved Diana in the interest studies with children.

The lead teacher, Dyani, allowed the teachers to make decisions about teaching. However, Dyani was still responsible for the decisions about classroom organization. Similar to an authoritative classroom, Dyani determined what needed to be done and how to do it, but considered the other teachers’ input. Midway through my research study, Dyani left the program and Dulce was promoted to lead teacher. Diana took her place as a full time assistant teacher. The classroom shifted from decentralized to centralized. This change in classroom organization is further explored in Chapter 6.

According to my interpretations written in my journal writings, the teachers in the Dragonflies classroom created two separate studies with the children. Dylani and Diana studied beauty and barbershops with children, while Dulce and Doli studied super heroes. These studies
lasted the full four months of my initial engagement and they took place prior to the 16 weeks of data collection for my dissertation.

**Authoritative Ants classroom.** I chose the word authoritative to describe the Ants’ classroom. Ana, the focal teacher, worked as an assistant teacher in the authoritative Ants classrooms for the past year. The classroom included four teachers and a total of 24 children. The other teachers included Adriana (lead teacher), Abril, and Alana. Abril was a part-time assistant and did not attend the team meetings. However, the teachers did involve her in the activities they created for children. The word authoritative is used to describe this classroom because the lead teacher, Adriana, dictated policies and procedures and directed activities with little input from the others. Ana, as a teacher assistant, relied on the lead teacher to institute how the classroom was organized.

The teachers in the Ants classroom did not engage in any in-depth studies during my initial four months engagement. They attempted several different studies including hot air balloons, where does food come from, and letters during my initial engagement at CK. They made several attempts, but they did not follow through with any of the activities that were planned in the initial classroom team meetings. They often instead carried out activities that Adriana created outside of the team meetings.

The following diagram describes organization of the classroom teams.
Collaborative weekly teams (CWT). After our initial CRT meetings prior to the start of my dissertation research, the education coordinator, Eleni and I decided to mix the weekly teams to include a representative from each classroom because of coverage issues in the classrooms. Teachers met weekly with me during the children’s nap times. It became increasingly difficult to have all teachers out of the classroom at one time. I also believed that the teachers had become accustomed to creating small group, inquiry based activities with their classroom teams and that they were ready for cross-classroom collaboration. I was also interested in the cross-classroom discussions because the organization of each classroom was very different. Below is a diagram that describes the CWT meetings.

Figure 9. Classroom organization.
Collaborative weekly team meetings lasted approximately one and a half hours. We used the organizational approach for our meetings that was developed at the prior classroom team meetings. We followed a documentation protocol that included observing children in the classroom, collecting documentation that reflected children’s interests, bringing the documentation to weekly meetings, planning activities based upon what we determined as children’s interests, implementing the plans in the classroom, and repeating the cycle. The following discussion describes the analysis of the data collected during the sixteen weeks of CWT meetings. Within these meetings, the teachers and I discussed how to organize the study of children’s interests using small group and inquiry based learning approaches.

**Organization: Small Group Learning**

The teachers attempted to organize activities with small groups of children, ranging in size from three to six at a time. Wasik (2008) stated that instruction of children in small groups allows the teachers invaluable and unique opportunities. This is particularly important for the
In contrast, during my involvement with CK both the lead and assistant teachers created studies with small groups of children.

Small group work shifted the paradigm in the classroom. The goal was for the assistant teachers’ plans to carry as much weight in the classroom as the lead teacher. Cristina mentioned that small group work required all of the teachers to show up. Meaning that rather than planning one whole-group activity, each individual teacher was required to make a plan for her small group. Lead teachers and assistant teachers attended team meetings as individuals and brought documentation that supported their individual studies. In contrast, many early childhood classrooms follow a model where there is a lead teacher and assistant teachers follow her plan (Haigh, 2007).

Our first CWT meeting began with a discussion of how each classroom was organized. I wanted the other team members to become familiar with the dynamics of the other classrooms. I asked the teachers to describe how they organized themselves and the children during the small group studies that took place for the duration of the initial four months. The teachers’ responses
coincided with the descriptive words—communal, decentralized delegation, and authoritative—that I chose for their classrooms.

**Our first CWT meeting.** Every week the teachers and I climbed the long, steep set of stairs to CK’s second floor. For myself, this meant climbing the stairs three times for the three separate meetings that occurred during the week. The second floor was made up of several rooms that were painted a dirty mint color. The rooms resembled what may have been an apartment. CK has been in existence since 1919 and in 1946 the organization came to this location. The upstairs contained an endless amount of materials that had been collected during the past sixty years. Piles of clothes, furniture, toys, and office supplies filled the rooms. There was no heat or air conditioning. It was either too hot or too cold, depending on the outside temperature.

We often discussed the state of the second floor in our team meetings. Some teachers seriously believed it was haunted. Others saw the second floor’s potential for future use. As we spent more time on the second floor, the environment began to change. Towards the end of my research study, the staff decided to clear out unused toys and materials and sold them at a neighborhood garage sale. A fresh coat of bright yellow paint replaced the dirty mint color. Gradually, the space transformed from a place filled with clutter that lacked function to an environment that reflected purpose and organization. The once unusable space was now a place for board members, teachers, and parents to meet.

**Communal Crickets’ classroom organization.**

Cristina: We work with small groups of children on different activities. The way we divide it is who ever are more interested in doing that activity. One teacher may sit with the group and another teacher sits with her and takes pictures or notes or getting more supplies for her. Sometimes one teacher moves between groups to help out. We mix the groups depending on their interests and our studies. The teachers share information for portfolios. (CWT meeting, February 22, 2011)
Cristina’s initial description of her classroom reflected the communal organization. As the lead teacher, she allowed both teachers and children to move freely between activities. Teachers supported each other with documentation and supplies. Children and teachers were organized according to the children’s interests. Teachers communicated with each other regarding what learning areas they observed for the children’s assessment portfolios.

In her initial interview Cristina commented on how the teachers were positively influenced by the small group organization. “I think it has built everyone else’s confidence in the classroom too. Now we are all open to each other’s ideas. I am not putting out all the ideas, the other teachers are too” (Interview, February 28, 2011). She promoted active listening, meaning that she listened to others’ perspectives and the group decided jointly how to implement policies and procedures.

**Decentralized delegation Dragonflies’ organization.** Doli’s initial description of the decentralized classroom revealed how Dyani asked for input from the other teachers, but also provided guidance in their decisions.

The lead teacher asks the teachers what they want to do. We have three or four groups. We have at least twenty-four groups and the kids are divided among them. The teacher takes notes and we share our notes with each other. For our super hero study we had twelve kids. Dyani helped us divide the children between two teachers. We based the group on who was interested in super heroes. At first we tried to do activities with a big group, but sometimes it was too much to do. Dyani suggested that we divide them into separate groups. We started out slow in the beginning to introduce them to materials. We did drawings first. Then they brought in their favorite super hero toys and we introduced materials like clay and creating costumes. (Doli Interview, February 28, 2011)

The data reflected how Doli was influenced by Dyani’s organizational style of direction combined with independence. In addition, teachers in the decentralized delegation classroom were successful at consistently carrying out small group activities with the children. Dyani left the program midway through my data collection. Dulce as the lead teacher replaced Dyani’s decentralized leadership. Dulce’s leadership style was centralized.
Authoritative Ants’ classroom organization.

Ana: At the present moment Adriana told us we are doing an ongoing study of learning abc’s through various outlets. She just changed groups to other kids and see how other kids react with us and how they interact with each other. I have a group of 6 new ones I didn’t have before. The activities we chose are sometimes a big group. One of us will stand up there in front of big group and do Bingo or some sort of group activity. If kids are not interested they can go to other areas of the classroom to play. (CWT meeting, February 22, 2011)

Based upon the feedback from other classroom teachers, Adriana’s leadership style was authoritative, meaning that she individually created the rules and expectations for the teachers and children. Assistant teacher, Alana, mentioned that even the children saw Adriana as an authoritative figure. “When Adriana is here the kids are in control, but they are not when she is not here” (CWT meeting, February 23, 2011).

Ana encountered resistance from the lead teacher and the other teachers in her classroom when it came to organizing small group activities. Ana told the CWT members that Adriana wanted the teachers to plan three activities for the children each day, one active, one quiet, and one for science. According to Ana, Adriana was not concerned whether or not the activities were focused on the children’s interests. Adriana was also resistant towards becoming a part of my research study. She did not sign the waiver to be part of my research study or the CWT meetings until eight weeks into the study. In addition, she only attended approximately half of the final eight weeks of the meetings for my study. This made it difficult to collect and analyze data in order to determine her motives behind her leadership style.

Discussion of small group work. In general, based upon the data collected from team meetings, teachers responded positively to small group instruction. Dyani, the lead teacher in the decentralized delegation classroom noted, “Children are talking more. They are noticing colors and names and not just mumbling. The small group work has changed the classroom behavior.” Cristina commented that, “Children are more comfortable with us because they notice us paying
attention.” Bowman (2001) believed that if there is a single critical component to instructional quality, it is the use of small group instruction.

The teachers felt that the small groups had an important impact on their own professional development. Colleen, an assistant teacher in the Communal Crickets classroom, observed that the small groups allowed her to take more time to get to know kids in many different ways. “We are learning their strengths and weakness and our own. We are able to pay more attention. The small groups balance things out so we can pay attention more. This has paid off” (CWT meeting, March 16, 2011).

While the general consensus among teachers was that the small groups were beneficial, some found the small group work problematic. The teachers from the Authoritative Ant’s classroom found it difficult to plan small group activities in weekly meetings when they were used to doing large group work that was developed by Adriana the lead teacher. For example, Ana stated, “I think it can cause some chaos because kids notice what the other group is doing and they want to do it” (Interview, February 28, 2011). It took Ana several weeks to negotiate with Adriana which children she could use for her small group study. For example, in week three of our collaborative meetings, Ana revealed that there was a lack of communication between herself and Adriana on the organization of the groups.

Ana: My study with the children was going to be my study. Adriana was confused because she didn’t really understand what I was doing in my study. She asked me, “Why aren’t you staying with your portfolio group?” But I was like, “Okay. There are only three kids in my group that are interested in the homework itself. I was trying to see from other groups who was interested.”

Me: There is a lack of organization.

Cristina: Even if you are not working with your portfolio group, there is no reason why she can not come to you and tell you what your kids are doing or vice versa, etc. It doesn’t mean that when it comes to portfolios you guys can’t
communicate what so and so is doing. That way you keep the same kids that are with you, but you relay info to the other teacher.

Doli: The whole point is your portfolio group does not have to be your study group.

Cristina: I think that is what Adriana does not understand. Regardless whether you are doing a particular kids portfolios that should not be the basis of a study group. (CWT meeting, March 8, 2011)

According to the data from the audio recordings, the teachers and I suggested that Ana make a list of the children that were involved in her study to share with Adriana. She never created a list or communicated with Adriana who was involved in her study.

Confusion around small group work in the authoritative classroom continued throughout the sixteen weeks of my data collection. This lack of flexibility had a major impact on how Ana conducted activities and collected documentation. Teachers developed a plan for their small groups in our collaborative team meetings. But the implementation process required a classroom environment that was organized and supported small group work. This required the classroom teachers to communicate and to be in agreement on the implementation of these practices. These sentiments reflected what Wong (2010) reported as challenges experienced in the adoption of new approaches.

**Organization: Inquiry Based Learning**

Wasik (2008) suggested that small groups are often used without an identified purpose and without careful planning to support the instruction of a specific concept. Our weekly CWT meetings attempted to assist teachers in how to organize and conduct purposeful small group activities that focused on an inquiry related to children’s interests. We collaboratively created studies based upon a question to help define the children’s interests or structure small group studies. I asked the focus group if questions were helpful in their work with small groups. Ana responded, “It’s easier. It gives you a way to look at a topic with children, a focus point” (CWT
meeting, March 8, 2011). Eleni, the education coordinator, said that creating studies around a question provided teachers a “structured path.”

Teachers began a study by observing and documenting children’s actions and interactions in the classroom. The teachers attempted to collect documentation that reflected a particular event or events that they believed best represented something with which children were highly engaged. The documentation was brought to our CWT meetings for discussion. Our discussions lead to creating an inquiry by asking questions that allowed the teachers to extend and further investigate the children’s interest. Collaboratively we created questions and activities that would address the inquiry.

**Arriving at an interest study.** Teachers arrived at a topic of interest in a variety of ways. In our collaborative team meeting teachers described what they observed as children’s interests. Collaboratively, we created a focused inquiry for their small group studies.

**Communal Crickets’ classroom: Babies and buildings.** Cristina, in the communal classroom described how the teachers organized themselves after observing the children playing out their interests. Cristina and the other teachers agreed that the children were interested in both babies and building structures. Based upon these interests, they determined which teachers would work with the children and these interests. In our March 1, 2011 CWT meeting, Cristina described the classroom organization and initial inquiries:

We decided to go ahead and split the classroom up in half, so the babies are going to be with the other two teachers, Chenoa and Carlina. I asked Chenoa if she was okay with it. Chenoa is going to focus on the babies group in the morning and Carlina is going to focus on the babies group in the afternoon. We want to see if they notice if there is a difference between the morning and afternoon. That will be their study. Colleen and I are going to do the study with the blocks and building. Only because the groups are so big, I don’t want one of us taking on twelve children. The interests are almost split down the middle.

Next, Cristina described how she began the study of buildings with the children. She described how the teachers noticed the children spending large periods of time in the block area
of the classroom. Some children were interested in creating pretend buildings, like castles. Other children were more interested in creating real life buildings, like houses or skyscrapers.

Me: It would be interesting if you and Colleen could collect different documentation that focused on different kids.

Cristina: Yeah, for example, some kids are more interested in real life buildings, the height or some are interested in the material or the imagination behind it (passing around pictures of the children’s block structures).

Me: So could you hypothesize about that, the pretending versus real life? Could you make a guess? Are you seeing any distinctions?

Cristina: Right now they are building anything from castles to houses.

Me: Do you see them all doing that or certain kids?

Cristina: Yeah there is a certain group, mostly the boys, but some girls. Some of them like stacking things up really tall like skyscrapers. The boys like the construction and the girls like the dramatic play. K. is the one who started to move the furniture and the people into her block buildings.

Doli: Do you think it is the height? You know sometimes when you are walking you look up and in some buildings when you are up you look down.

Cristina: It would be neat to take them somewhere high where they have to look down from an actual building.

Me: What are you wondering about in this study?

Cristina: Are kids interested in the real life buildings, the height or are some interested in imaginative play buildings?

In this example, Cristina developed an inquiry towards her study of buildings with some of the two and three year old children in her classroom. She developed an inquiry into whether or not the children were interested in creating buildings that represented real life structures or make believe structures. Developing an inquiry approach allowed the collaborative team to help Cristina organize small group activities that focused on these two interests. Cristina and Colleen began to investigate the children’s individual approaches towards construction, while the other two teachers Chenoa and Carlina began to investigate with children, what do babies do.
Extending an inquiry with children. Cristina and Colleen investigated the children’s approach towards buildings using a variety of activities. As part of our cycle of inquiry, the teachers carried out activities and then brought documentation back to our collaborative team for discussion. The teachers engaged children in reflection and inquiry similar to our approach in our meetings. For example, in our March 8, 2011 CWT meeting, Cristina described an experience where she shared pictures of buildings with children after their walk in the neighborhood.

Cristina: We gave them some of the photographs of the buildings. We printed the photographs and put them up in the block area. You can see what they were doing (passed out children’s drawings).

Me: Did they build those with the pictures? Wow! Did they say anything about the pictures?

Cristina: They like the windows but they call it a house. They are doing a lot of house play right now, so I’m not sure if they are interested in buildings or houses.

Me: What is the difference between a building and a house?

Cristina: In those pictures, K. is putting the blocks around the photographs and then she started moving things into it where the foam blocks were, like people, furniture, and things like that (passed around photographs of K. building with blocks).

Me: Can a building be a house? Can it? They are two and three years old, so their experiences with buildings are for what purposes?

Doli: For people living in them, right? It would be an interesting question to ask, what they think a building is. If you see a building you could ask them, what do you think that building is for? Do they even use the word building?

Cristina: You know what, I don’t know. I only hear them use the word house. They use house and castle now that I think about it.

Elena: What you could do is show them pictures of houses and buildings and say what is this and what is it for or something like that.
By asking questions, teachers encouraged each other and children to further explore their ideas. They also challenged each other in their thinking and as a result, the teachers challenged the children’s thoughts. Reflection and inquiry provided guidance for teachers’ planning processes.

Decentralized delegation: Who are you? Doli often demonstrated an interest in working with different kinds of materials with children. At first, it was challenging for her to focus on children’s interests in a subject matter versus her own interest in different materials. During my first interview with Doli on February 28, 2011, I asked her if she remembered the first activity she did during a study of super heroes with children. Doli cut out puppets of characters such as Minnie Mouse and Spider Man that she copied on construction paper. Afterwards, she gave the children glue and glitter to decorate the puppets.

Me: I remember when I first met with you and the first super hero activity you did with the puppets. What changed after you saw Dulce’s drawing activity with children?

Doli: I added too many materials at first. I kind of thought of what “I” thought of super heroes and then what they told me about super heroes was different.

Me: Did you see what Dulce did and that helped you?

Doli: Yes, because Dulce started off down at the bottom and I kind of started up here. She gave the children sharpie markers and asked them to draw a picture while studying their favorite super hero toy. She asked them to describe what they thought super heroes looked like.

Doli often referred to a study as “starting up here” when the teacher focused on activities that promoted a product or what the teacher wanted as an answer. She described an activity that promoted process or inquiry, as “down at the bottom.” In our CWT meeting on March 1, 2011, Doli described how she arrived at her study of children’s self-image and the influence of Dyani, the lead teacher, in the following way:
I just gave the kids chalk and paper because I really wasn’t ready for what to do (she passes around scribbled drawings the children created on paper). Then yesterday, I talked with Dyani. I asked, what else can I do in the art area. I wanted to have big paper and have other kids trace each other to make themselves. Dyani told me to start smaller, like asking them who are you? We went from that point of view (laughing with hands up in the air) all the way down to the bottom.

In this study, Doli chose to engage children in an investigation of how they viewed themselves. The study did not begin because she observed the children talking about or studying their appearances. Her approach towards this interest study was similar to what Jones (1994) described when teachers may have a general topic they think is important for children to study. Doli was interested in asking children the question, who are you. She wanted to investigate how children viewed themselves and their physical appearances. Doli purposely included certain materials or experiences that related to this question as jumping off points.

Doli: So with a project like this, can we give them mirrors and ask them to draw themselves and start out by asking what color are your eyes.

Me: Yes. You can also ask them who are you? One day you could ask that question and another day you could do an activity, like drawing their eyes. Let’s talk with Doli about different things she can do during the week.

Ana: I think the mirror one.

Cristina: You could do more of a one on one with them and really ask them what they see. Yeah and then you write down what they are saying.

Me: I like the big question, what do you see and then ask them smaller questions. (CWT meeting, March 1, 2011)

In my journal notes, I wondered how I could support her study based upon my own experiences as an art teacher. I had also conducted a study with teachers while at Chicago Commons related to children’s hands and identity. I often thought of ways to share my experiences of using different types of drawing and sculpture materials to enhance the study. Some of these experiences are shared in the self-study section of this chapter.
**Telephones and robots.** According to the data collected from the first two weeks of our CWT meetings, the other Decentralized Dragonflies teachers conducted similar inquiry studies with small groups of children. Dyani chose to study, how do telephones work, after observing children frequently pretending they were using cell phones and other types of telephones during their play in the classroom and on the playground. Dyani demonstrated the children’s interests in telephones through her documentation of photographs of children using blocks as telephones, transcribed conversations, and examples of telephones the children made out of folded paper with written numbers.

Dulce chose to study robots. She observed and documented a small group of children frequently gathering in the block area to create robots. She brought photographs and her written observations of children creating robots out of different types of building materials. Her investigation was focused on the inquiry, what is a robot.

**Authoritative Ants’ classroom: What is homework?** Ana often struggled with finding the children’s voice and her own in the classroom. Her interest topics were chosen because Adriana, the lead teacher, told her what to do versus work from what the children were interested in. It was difficult for her to realize the difference between classroom topics that were chosen by the teacher and those that followed children’s interests. I was interested in how, as a team we could support her studies with the children.

**Ana:** Recently, we’ve started sending home homework with the kids and for them to start writing their letters. Every Monday we are supposed to give them homework.

**Me:** What do you mean suppose to?

**Ana:** The teachers. Adriana [lead teacher] is requesting the homework. They have a whole week to turn it in and then we hang it up on our wall and then the kids are really excited about having their work hung up. I guess they are excited seeing it on display and what other kids have done.
Me: So my question is, is this something children are interested in or is this something the teachers are interested in? If it is something you are interested in, where do we fit in the children’s interest in your interest? Does that make sense (to the group)? Can you help her?

Cristina: Do you have kids coming up to you and saying, “hey can you give us homework” or is it something that you just came up with? Most of them have older brothers and sisters in their class, so is it something they see them doing? Is it something they want to do at home so that they can do it with their older siblings or was it something you said, “Hey let’s start giving them homework?”

Ana: I didn’t get the feeling that the kids were asking for it, so possibly it was more forced on them. Was something they observed their older brothers and sisters doing, I don’t know. (CWT meeting, March 1, 2011)

Ana’s response demonstrated that she chose a study based upon the lead teacher’s decision to bring homework into the classroom. It was difficult for her to see the difference between what the teachers wanted to do and the children’s interests. Alana, the other assistant teacher in the Authoritative Ants’ classroom, mentioned in the CWT meetings on March 2, 2011, that their interest study was determined based upon Adriana’s decision and also pressure from the parents to give homework. Parents requested homework for their children because they wanted to prepare them for kindergarten. Alana also mentioned that Adriana chose the homework.

Homework was in the form of letter and number tracing worksheets. As mentioned earlier, Adriana was not attending the CWT meetings during the initially weeks. Therefore, it was difficult to determine her motives for the homework. A discussion of the homework study is continued in the self-study section of this chapter.

Summary of Action Research Study: Organization

In this chapter, I described the role of organization in our praxis of studying children’s interests. The data reflected the organizational complexities that were present in the study of children’s interests. The first section described the initial experiences with organization of classrooms. Based upon my initial experiences and observations of the classrooms, I chose three
different titles to describe them: communal, decentralized delegation, and authoritative. Each of these classrooms constructed their own policies, practices and processes for observing and organizing activities based upon children’s interests. The data collected and analyzed from the CWT meetings and interviews reflects the successes and challenges of the different classroom organization for creating small group studies that focused on children’s interests. While the Communal Crickets and De-centralized Dragonflies were able to organize small group, inquiry-based studies that reflected children’s interests, the Authoritative Ant classroom found this more challenging.

The data reveals two possible reasons for the Authoritative Ants’ challenges. First, the classroom was organized in an authoritative way. This meant that Adriana, the lead teacher, chose the activities and determined the classroom organization. It was difficult for Ana and the other Authoritative Ant teachers to study children’s interests based upon the structure of the classroom.

The second reason was the lack of communication. Ana revealed that it was difficult to conduct small group activities because of the lack of communication between the teachers. Although teachers developed a plan for their small groups in our collaborative CWT meetings, the implementation process required a classroom environment that was collaboratively organized. This required the classroom teachers to communicate and to be in agreement on the implementation of these practices. It is also difficult to determine Adriana’s motives because she was not attending the CWT meetings.

In the next section, I discuss the data findings through the lens of my self-study in my efforts to guide the teachers to create inquiry-based activities that focused on the interests of children.
Data Analysis and Findings: Self-Study Research

The above conversation reflects how teachers organized the study of children’s interests in small groups that focused on an inquiry. This section focuses on the mirror, or reflection of myself in the CWT meetings. In this section, I discuss my practice and role as facilitator in the collaborative team meetings. My journal notes, the audio recordings, and interviews provided me with data to analyze my practice of organizing the meetings using an inquiry based approach. An inquiry approach was also used towards professional development, for the teachers and myself.

My Practice: Organization Through Inquiry

I often expressed in my journal notes my own hesitancies about my role as the facilitator. For example, 10 out of the 16 weeks of data collection I wrote questions like, what is a facilitator, what is my role, who am I in this context? My role at CK as team meeting facilitator was non-authoritative and non-administrative, and I wasn’t observing in the classrooms. So, what was my role?

Based upon the in-depth study of my practice, I determined that I often asked teachers questions that brought focus to the events of their classrooms and practices. I followed the advice of Allen and Blythe (2004) who suggested that questions are a facilitator’s most important tool. Questions were built into the structure of the documentation protocol. For example, when teachers shared documentation, I asked questions to the group like, “What do you see children saying or doing?” I asked questions during the planning phase like, “What kind of activities can the teacher try to further the children’s interests?” I also asked questions to help teachers hypothesize what might happen during planned activities, “How do you think the children will
respond to this activity?” It was important for me to develop a culture of inquiry in which I used questions that supported the children and teachers’ learning.

Often, the questions were developed spontaneously in response to the groups’ conversations as they developed. I used questions as an organizational strategy to help teachers think more deeply about their practices with children, including how they determined what children were interested in. I was familiar with this approach from my prior teaching experiences and also with my work as a coordinator for Chicago Commons. I often created studies with children based on an inquiry such as, where do your feelings come from and what color were the dinosaurs. I found developing an inquiry to study with children was a way to understand their theories and motives towards their interests.

For example, during the initial conversation about homework, I attempted to create questions that allowed Ana and the other teachers to look more closely at children’s interest in homework.

Me: So my question is, how do you know children are interested in homework? Is it something that we can expand upon?

Ana: I notice C. talking about homework. When he comes in the morning, he says, I am going to do my homework. I have noticed other children saying when we are cleaning up, don’t take that it is my homework.

Me: Do you think they know what homework is or what do you think the children see as homework?

Cristina: You could do a small group study and ask, do they like doing homework or what kind of homework would they like to do?

Me: Yes, what should you do for homework. How do you think they might respond?

Ana: I think it could be split.

Cristina: Some like S. may want to go home and make guns as homework! By asking them it might pull them in. They have input because their ideas are actually being heard and considered.
Me: How can you begin this study?

Ana: I can ask a small group of children what they think homework is and what do they think they should do for homework. (CWT meeting, March 1, 2011)

It was difficult to distinguish between the teachers, parents, and children’s interest in homework. By using questions, I attempted to call Ana’s attention to how the children perceived the homework or how their interest in homework might differ from the adults. Ana brought the question, what is homework, back to the classroom. Unfortunately, she never engaged in an in-depth conversation regarding homework with children. Because of this, it was difficult to understand the differences between children and adult’s theories for homework. The data from Ana’s experience is also provided in the following chapters.

I found that asking questions rather than giving answers was sometimes a challenge for me. It was difficult to think of questions to ask that were not implying a specific answer. In one journal entry I wrote:

If I am totally honest with myself, I feel like asking questions is in someway giving up control. When ever possible, I try to think of a question versus try to give direct advice. For example, my initial reaction was to tell Ana that the study of homework as an interest was ridiculous. But when I let go and asked more questions, I began to see the possibilities. I notice that teachers often have a frustrated look on their faces and there are long moments of silence. I have to learn to feel comfortable with the silences. I’m not sure if I know the answers to some of my questions! I do think the questions are helping me understand the way teachers think.

I notice that my questioning strategy often comes up in conversations with the teachers. Teachers mention that I ask open-ended questions or questions that made them think in deeper ways or from a different perspective. I think Eleni said I ask questions that make teachers realize that they know the answers. How can I teach or model teachers to do the same thing with children? (Journal, March 9, 2011)

**Inquiry with materials.** In addition to asking questions to focus teachers’ attention on children’s interests, I also encouraged teachers to develop an inquiry stance towards the use of materials. As part of my practice, I provided advice and suggestions on how to use materials for
exploration of an inquiry with children. In my own experience as an art educator, I have found that there is a balance between allowing children to explore materials and use materials for expressing their ideas. I have found that it is important to understand the difference between giving children lots of materials and telling them to make whatever they want and giving them a few materials to allow them to focus on what they are making. I also have experienced children produce more detailed work with materials after they have been given chances to explore and experiment with them.

In our collaborative meeting on March 7, 2011, I recommended for Doli to have children first focus on drawing their faces with mirrors and pencils before giving them paint. This would allow children to focus on their features, rather than the paint.

Doli: I asked them to draw first using mirrors. (Passing around drawings)

Me: Do you notice that she has eyebrows and two parts to the eyes. Are those dimples?

Doli: I think so.

Cristina: She doesn’t have dimples.

Doli: After they were done, we used watercolors. I showed them how to paint, dab the water and that you can mix colors on paper or stick with one color. It was interesting, they painted based upon the color they liked. When I asked if they wanted to do other colors, they said I like green.

I then asked teachers what the difference was between exploring materials and using them as a tool. Doli responded, “I think it is good to have children play with the material and then allow use it as a tool.” I encouraged her to continue using the paint with the children. I also suggested investigating further why the children all chose green to paint themselves. I asked the teachers, why do children choose certain colors and does this represent what they are investigating? As a result, Doli focused her next painting activity on the colors children chose to paint themselves. After a few more attempts at looking in the mirror, drawing, and then painting,
children’s choice of colors were more similar to their skin tones, than the color green. Doli responded to my previous question, “I think children originally chose green because they liked the paint color. After they were used to painting, they were more interested in actually creating their skin color.” By assisting Doli in developing an inquiry of process towards the use of materials, much was revealed about the artistic development of the child. For instance, providing opportunities for exploration of a material before diving into creating something brings different results. An important element of my practice as a facilitator was to call teachers’ attention to experiences with materials. I did this by not simply telling teachers what to do, but asking questions and providing recommendations.

**Inquiry towards my own practice.** Creating an inquiry stance towards my work with the teachers was an important part of my practice as a facilitator. I began to take an inquiry stance towards organizing my thoughts of the teachers and their practices. Questions were an important strategy that I not only used to help focus the teachers, but also as a way to organize my research and journal writing. The questions helped me think more deeply about the occurrences of the meetings. For example, after our conversation on homework, I wrote about my interests in Ana’s study.

Why are the teachers in the Ant room so interested in giving homework? Is Ana choice of homework only because Adriana “requiring” it? Is it possible for teachers to make the topic of homework interesting? Am I talking at her too much? Am I being too judgmental? Does she need more direct advice? (Journal, March 9, 2011)

The process of organizing my thoughts in the form of questions was pivotal in shaping my role as facilitator. The questions brought attention to my practice as a facilitator.

**My Role as Facilitator and A Differing View of Professional Development**

Organizing my practice as a professional development provider around a questioning strategy was in contrast to other professional development models. While I viewed professional
development and my role as facilitator as an inquiry based collaborative process with teachers, the SW university consultants who were working with the teachers demonstrated a more top-down model. The differences were discussed in an interview with Eleni on April 4, 2011.

Eleni: When they do come they don’t really sit and talk with us. Hey, I was in your room and this is what I noticed.

Me: Do they come to the classroom?

Eleni: She will come and spend a little bit of time in one classroom and then another one and another one. She sort of interacts with the children. She has her ideas that she wants to do with the kids, but like I said, there is not that big interaction like with the teacher. She would come by on specific days. The facilitator engaged the children so much that the teachers were using that time to do other things. I don’t think she gave teachers a way to incorporate themselves into what she was doing. The teachers didn’t latch on to it. She just came in expecting the teachers to learn from what she was doing. She wasn’t really asking them what they were doing. I think part of it was the way we approached it as administrators. She’s coming, you know, we just went with it. We all played a role in how it played out.

Me: How do you view my role as different?

Eleni: Asking questions. Getting teachers to look more in-depth at what they are doing and to really find the needle in the haystack and not the hay stack itself. Does that make any sense? Your questions are helping the teachers to think a little different, to really get in there and think in-depth with children and how we can build their knowledge. That gets teachers thinking okay what can I do in my classroom? They are adding a little bit more knowledge at every meeting and we are starting to see bigger changes in their approach.

The SW university professional development provider attempted to provide experiences that were connected to the classrooms. What appeared to be lacking was the opportunity for teachers to discuss and reflect upon their own classroom experiences. The SW provider entered the classroom as an expert, who modeled what she considered as appropriate teaching practices. I found it interesting that the teachers chose to tune out instead of pay attention to what she was doing. In contrast, I viewed my role, as facilitator was to orient teachers towards an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning. I wanted them to be engaged in their own experiences.
I also approached our meetings with an inquiry stance. I was curious and wanted to know what they perceived versus telling them what I thought they needed to know. I used questions to help teachers focus on their practices. Cristina and Ana commented on my use of questions as a strategy during their interviews.

You ask a lot of open-ended questions about our processes, instead of giving us the answer. It’s kind of like you are doing Reggio with us too. That is how I take it. We are part of the whole process as adults. You are feeding off of our ideas too. You study what we are doing and our ideas and throw ideas back to us to get us going again. We are able to build on the suggestions we made together. (Cristina Interview, June 14, 2011)

Getting ideas from you when you are not in the classroom and then sharing the results with you is a highlight. During weekly meetings we are telling you what happened and you ask questions. You phrase certain questions around an activity and challenge it. It’s a reflective question, like is it working or what can we change. The questions challenge us to find other ways to do something. (Ana Interview, February 28, 2011)

My questioning strategy was well received by most of the teachers. Based upon the data collected from 59 feedback forms, only a few teachers found my role as facilitator frustrating and believed I should enforce classroom practices, such as small groups. Three of the teachers’ feedback forms echoed these sentiments. One teacher wrote, “Get all the teachers to follow the same plan for small group work.” Another thought I should be more direct in my strategies. “Teach me how to do small group studies.” Another teacher wrote, “Tell me what should I do next or how do I work in small groups?”

These few statements challenged my perceptions of what I thought should be my role as facilitator, and how to meet the differential needs of the teachers. After I read these comments, I questioned whether the SW university professional development provider’s strategies were more effective than my own. Throughout this study, I continued to explore how to create a balance between what Moran (2007) suggested as directive instruction and when to wait for the teachers
to discover things on their own. In the next chapter, I discuss the category of documentation and how it related to the study of my practice and role as facilitator.

**Chapter Summary: Self-Study**

In this section, I discussed my practice and role as facilitator in the collaborative team meetings. Based upon the data collected and analyzed, I have documented how I used an inquiry approach within our collaborative team meetings to guide teachers’ studies with children. I used questions to develop a culture of inquiry that supported my own learning as well as for the children, and teachers. In addition to asking questions to focus teachers’ attention on children’s interests, I also encouraged teachers to develop an inquiry stance towards the use of materials. Through my self-study, I realized that an important element of my practice was to assist teachers with visual arts materials. As part of my practice, I asked teachers questions that focused their attention on children’s development with the visual arts and I also provided recommendations.

In this section, I also reflected on my role within the collaborative team meetings. My role as facilitator was in opposition to the other professional development providers that were or had been used at CK. Eleni and the teachers commented that the other professional development providers came into their classrooms and monthly staff meetings positioned as experts. In contrast, I chose to focus teachers’ attention on children’s work and their own practice by asking questions in our collaborative team meetings. My role was generally well received and challenged by only a few teachers. Ana commented that the questions I asked challenged the teachers to find new ways to conduct activities in their classrooms. The following chapter reports on the further analysis of the study related to my practices and role as facilitator in the collaborative team meetings.
Chapter 5.

Documentation

What people make, child or adult, has meaning and importance—the work bears the imprint of the maker—and that these meanings and the maker’s hand are visible in the work. A main value of collecting works—one’s own or a child’s is that embedded in these collections is a story embodying a perspective, an aesthetic, a way of seeing and grappling with the world. (Carini, 2007, p. 4)

In this chapter, I present the findings from the data analysis within the category of documentation. The use of documentation was central to our praxis and this dissertation. Documentation in this study served as a guide for understanding children’s interests and our own professional development. As Eisner (1998) pointed out, thoughts or ideas can be very slippery and hard to grasp. However, documentation provided a visual represent of thoughts, either through the photographs, videos, writing, or graphic representations. Documentation gave us something to hold on to, to study more closely, and to learn from. Documentation was crucial to our understanding of the children’s interests and learning styles as well as providing information necessary to revisit experiences and discoveries, serving as a launching point for further inquiry.

In the first section of this chapter, I describe the role of documentation from the data analyses. I report on our collaborative team meetings as they reflect the teachers’ classroom practices. Two categories emerged from the data analysis to describe our use of documentation, revisiting and time. Following the description of revisiting and time, I discuss the challenges the teachers encountered using documentation. The second section describes what I learned from the self-study of my role as the facilitator. I describe what I found in my data related to the use of documentation in my practice as a facilitator of the weekly meetings.
Introduction to Documentation

Prior to our CRT (classroom team) weekly meetings and my involvement at CK, teachers used documentation for children’s assessment portfolios. In my first focus group teacher interviews, I asked teachers about their prior experiences with documentation.

I have not done extensive documentation with activities I planned. This is kind of a learning process for me, remembering to write down or take pictures and then organize the documentation. (Ana Interview, February 28, 2011)

We haven’t done a whole lot with documentation. The most is for portfolios and pictures that apply to different areas of development. I think using documentation in the way we are now means we are able to focus on a group of kids and see how they influence each other. Portfolios we just had a checklist and then you pick one and show how children can do that. (Christina Interview, February 28, 2011)

I really haven’t had any experience with documenting until now. (Doli Interview, February 28, 2011)

Documentation practices in Reggio Emilia and descriptive review as well as other educational programs that build curriculum based on children’s interests, are used as a methodology for teachers to study children in order to understand their motives (Carini, 2007; Rinaldi, 2001). Documentation gives educators a glimpse at children’s unique thoughts as well as how they make decisions.

In this study, teachers observed and documented children during planned activities. The more comfortable teachers became with using photography or other recording devises, the more likely they were to start using them during different times of the day. For example, teachers Cristina and Colleen recorded children constructing buildings with a variety of boxes and crates that were found on the playground during outdoor play. They also recorded a child studying the picture of a building that was posted on a wall near his naptime mat. The collected documentation was brought to weekly team meetings and shared with other members of the group. We collaboratively discussed what we observed in the documentation and jointly planned
next steps for the teachers’ work in the classroom. In addition, documentation was used to study the teachers’ and my own practices and instructional strategies.

**The Role of Revisiting: Noticing Details**

In order to understand the child’s interests and strengths they must be made visible. The teacher is what makes these visible. (Carini, 1986, p. 7)

I realize to pay attention more when studying the children. I gain so much more to pay attention. (Doli, Team Meeting, March 8, 2011)

The documentation teachers brought to our meetings allowed us to collaboratively analyze the details in children’s learning styles and approaches. The children in Doli’s study of self-image first created a self-portrait after she asked them, “Who are you?” Teachers often began a project by asking children an initial question and then inviting them to create a drawing of their ideas. The combination of comments and drawings gave us an opportunity to see a progression of their experiences.

Doli: I didn’t give them mirrors the first time and I asked them, who are you. M. said Mickey Mouse. I asked them, can you draw yourself. S. drew himself in his pajamas (passing around their drawings). The rest of the children, four of them, included their moms or whole families.

Me: Interesting how they perceive themselves. What do we notice?

Cristina: They associate themselves with a character.

Me: Something fantasy or pretend like. Do they play those characters?

Doli: No.

Cristina: Could be who they want to be.

Me: I find that very interesting. And then I thought about how they drew themselves and their mom or family. I was thinking how interesting that is. Do they see themselves separate from someone else – their family?

Cristina: then again how often do they see themselves as separated? (CWT meeting, March 15, 2011)
Both the drawings and the children’s explanation caused us to wonder about children’s image of themselves as individuals. We continued the conversation as we discussed the individual children in the group and also our own recollection of ourselves as children.

Cristina: Those that drew themselves with their parents, do they have separation anxiety as opposed to those that drew themselves as characters.

Me: Do you have any ideas about that?

Doli: M. spends a lot of time away from her family. She goes with her grandma for weeks and then she comes back. V.’s family gives her a lot of confidence and freedom. They don’t baby her. I wonder if that has anything to do with it?

Me: that connection is so deep. And there is nothing wrong with that. I’m not trying to give psychoanalysis. When I was in kindergarten, I could not leave my mom. Now I live very far from my parents – I definitely out grew that.

Cristina: I was the opposite. I would distance myself a lot but now that I am older I talk to my mom every day. I still call her and say mom I’m sick. Can you come?

Me: What I’m trying to say is that it doesn’t necessarily mean anything in terms of that child having some kind of issue of separation, but I found it interesting.

Cristina: That strong relationship they have with their family helps them to see themselves or have a strong image of themselves. (CWT meeting, March 15, 2011)

Rather than assuming that the children simply did not understand the assignment, to draw a picture of who they are, we instead engaged in a conversation based on the documentation Doli brought to the meeting. The children’s responses were not what we expected. We did not expect children to draw themselves as cartoon characters nor with their families. We began to reflect on events in our own lives, as children and adult when we paid attention to the details in their work. In Carini’s words: “Meaning arises through the relationship among things or persons: that mutual reciprocity that occurs in the act of truly ‘seeing’ something” (1979, p. 15). By sharing our own
experiences with separation from our families, it caused us to consider children’s perspectives on the images of themselves.

Collaboratively, we were curious how children would perceive themselves if they used mirrors to study their faces. Doli shared this experience at our next team meeting:

Doli: Today, I used the medium mirror. I had them draw just their eyes. This is what I got (passing around the images). Some of the pictures look pretty good.

Me: I think it is interesting as you progress – although you focus on their facial features it also calls into question for them, who you are.

Elena: That is what I was going to say, how many of them actually stop and take the time to look at themselves. (CWT meeting, March 29, 2011)

Figure 11. Mirror activity

Throughout the next several weeks, Doli continued to bring documentation to the meetings that demonstrated how children focused on the details of their face and bodies. For some of her activities she used a few different sizes of mirrors. Large or medium sized mirrors
allowed children to see their whole face, while tiny mirrors brought attention to specific features of their faces. The children also studied their faces from photographs of themselves. Each time children revisited the activity of drawing themselves; their drawings became more and more detailed.

Me: Do you notice how they are adding more detail to their drawings?

Doli: In this drawing, I asked them to draw their mouths. Yes, they are more detailed.

Me: I notice that if you look at the drawings from the beginning, it is interesting to see where they have gone (looking through earlier drawings).

Doli: The next time I asked them, I gave them a picture of themselves and I asked them to draw a picture of their whole face.

Ana: Wow! They really have changed.

Doli: Next, I want to have them add color.

Cristina: You could have them use black sharpies and paint.

Doli: Their drawings are getting better.

Elena: Are they noticing anything new about themselves?

Doli: Yeah, I showed them a picture from a couple of months ago and they said, what is that.

Ana: I noticed their hand drawings are very detailed and that they are paying more attention. (CWT meeting, April 5, 2011)
Figure 12. What do you see?

When teachers and I revisit and reflect on our work, we begin to notice new details. Reflecting and revisiting allowed us to go deeper in the investigation. One teacher commented, “I realized that it is important to revisit events and pay better attention to what the children are asking. Revisiting also helps me see key moments that I may have missed before” (Feedback Form, April 27, 2011).

Similarly, Ana often brought video recordings of her working with children to our team meetings. In the April 5, 2011 collaborative team meeting, Ana described what she learned from revisiting and noticing details from her use of video recordings.

Me: What is the role of documentation for you in the classroom? Has it changed your practice?

Ana: I feel like when you transcribe or go back after taking pictures, it is interesting to hear yourself talk to the children. It makes it more fun to see what they are saying when you are able to play it back. You can only remember so much and documenting helps you remember what you did last week. You see new details.
Sharing documentation in our meetings was often referred to as a highlight. Ana, for example commented on how she found sharing documentation both challenging and enjoyable.

Ana: Hearing and seeing the progression from classrooms is a big highlight.

Me: How?

Ana: During weekly meetings we are telling each other what happened. Being able to see how children come up with ideas or observing their play is interesting. We can see the progression of ideas. (Interview, April 4, 2011)

Documentation offered the teacher and myself a unique opportunity for re-visiting, re-listening, and re-seeing, both individually and with others. This gave us the chance to interpret the documentation together, giving us a sense of the events that took place. The joint discussion of documentation created professional growth that derived from exchange and discussion, because in our shared conversations, we were able to jointly learn about children from children. Opportunities were created that allowed us to apply theory to practice.

The role of revisiting: Seeing children as capable. The process of collecting and studying children through documentation allowed us to see what children were capable of as opposed to what we thought they should know. Gradually, the children in Doli’s study became more interested in what was inside their bodies, not just the outside. They were mainly curious about their bones. Prior to becoming a teacher, Doli studied anatomy in school. She brought in several anatomy books and showed the images to the children. Children were curious about the names and functions of their bones. In our final interview Doli expressed that studying documentation that reflected what children were actually interested in, not what we assumed, helped her see children in a new way.

I think children learn a lot more through interests. I overlooked things because my teaching courses wanted us to teach through “readiness” skills and the standards. With documentation and using the Reggio approach, we learn more by studying what their interest is and then we bring other areas into it. They learn easier that way. Through our
study, children were learning anatomy terms. They were getting the anatomy terms better than recognizing letters on their own. They were recognizing the words rather than the letters. (Doli Interview, June 14, 2011)

All of the teachers and Eleni, the education coordinator, commented on how our study and documentation of children’s interests oriented them to seeing strengths and capabilities that could be built upon. One teacher wrote, “I realized that the way we are teaching our children is helping them to become critical thinkers. This is important to me as a teacher and as a parent” (Feedback Form, April 20, 2011).

The use of documentation for observations and the study of children’s interests were in contrast to teachers’ prior use of documentation when it was used for checklists and portfolios.

The difference for me, is that the focused portfolios were just a developmental growth checklist rather than documentation to see the learning process. We are able to see the learning process a child has versus just the milestones. Documentation for us now is seeing what children are actually capable of. (Eleni Interview, February 28, 2011)

Our use of documentation allowed us to see what children can do. Unlike the milestone checklists, documentation did not freeze a child in time in order to quantify her achievement or development through a score or rating. Documentation provided an image of children in a contextual process that allowed us to understand children through their interests. Documentation was at the heart of this process (Forman & Fyfe, 1998). In addition, studying and discussing documentation allowed teachers to learn about children from children.

The children become our teachers. We do certain things like lesson plans because we are suppose to, but when using our documentation, it is based on what the children are learning. I think that is the best way for us to learn – based on the children’s interests. (Doli Interview, April 4, 2011)

The Role of Time

Time moved slowly in this process of documenting, studying, and revisiting. Rather than rushing through planning and executing projects, the teachers and I were forced to slow down. Our documentation practices required us to slow down in order to examine the details in the
children’s work and our processes. Teachers valued taking time to document and reflect on their
documentation to inform their next steps. I asked Cristina in an interview what she had gained
professionally from the use of documentation.

It helped me slow down, to take a study step by step. Also too it helped me focus on what kids are interested in and how to build on it in different ways. I pay more attention to detail. I’m just really observing the kids and learning from them. (Christina Interview, June 14, 2011)

Slowing down made it possible to create plans that were based upon what we observed in the documentation. We were also able to study children’s individual learning styles. An example of slowing down is illustrated in the building study in Cristina’s classroom. The documentation that Cristina brought to our meetings revealed individual approaches to the building study. For several weeks Cristina and the other teachers in her classroom noticed a particular child, L., building with blocks and then immediately crashing them down. She did this repeatedly over and over. The teachers and I were curious about why two-year old L. was interested in crashing down her buildings. In a team meeting, Doli suggested that Cristina show L. a video of a building being demolished to see her reaction.

I pulled her into the office where the computer is to show her the demolition of a building. I videotaped her reaction [shows the group the video of child watching video]. I found it on YouTube. She really got into it. They were using a bulldozer. She was saying it was a trash man. I showed her another one of a really tall building during an earthquake. She loved it. She kept saying, “Again and again. It fell down teacher. It crashed.” (Christina, Team Meeting, June 7, 2011)

Interestingly, L. appeared more interested in structures being torn down in contrast to the other children who enjoyed structures being built. Cristina observed that most of the two year olds in her classroom took the blocks out of the basket one at a time. Instead, L. dumped them all out at once and left them on the ground.

After awhile she would start building. She would go from where the mats were and kick it with her feet to knock them down. After we watched the video of a building being destroyed with a wrecking ball, she got out the cubes and the blocks. She stacked the
blocks and then said, “boom” and used the cubes to knock down the blocks. (Christina, CWT meeting, June 7, 2011)

In this process of observing only one child, teachers could envision many children they have taught or will teach (Carini, 2007). While discussing L.’s interaction with buildings and block play, the teachers and I were able to envision the many possible directions the study could take. Slowing down our planning process allowed us to observe and hypothesize L.’s behavior. At first glance, many teachers might perceive her destructive nature as disruptive and inappropriate. By slowing down and looking more closely, we were able to develop a deeper meaning for her play and her interest in tearing down the blocks. The documentation from this example is similar to descriptive review because we studied and focused on the motives of one child. Himley (1991) described this as deep talk. By focusing on something in depth, knowledge is constructed that represents many ways of learning including the children’s spirits, wills, imaginations, intellects, and emotions. The teachers were developing the art of seeing (Himley, 1991).

**Taking time to purposefully plan.** Forman, G. & Fyfe, B. (1998) wrote, “The passage from display to documentation travels the path from informing to educating and thereby changes the teacher’s perspective from observing children to studying children” (p. 245). Our use of documentation allowed us to slow down our planning process. Teachers and I were able to use documentation to help us determine what steps to take next, rather than creating activities that might or might not relate to children’s interests. Based upon my early journal notes, teachers often struggled with introducing new furniture or materials into the classroom. Materials or furniture was often misused or destroyed. Slowing down and reflecting on documentation allowed teachers and I to think about how to introduce materials or furniture so that children saw them as purposeful.
For example, Ana brought in documentation that focused on children’s interest in creating a writing area (the creation of this inquiry is discussed in more detail in the self-study section of this chapter). A new desk was purchased for the classroom’s writing area and as a group we discussed how to include children’s ideas into the introduction of the desk in the writing area.

Ana: The last couple weeks we did a review of what people do in writing areas. Today we talked about rules for the writing area:

1. Draw pictures
2. Listen to teachers
3. No toys from other areas
4. No pillows
5. No more than two people
6. Don’t climb on desk
7. Keep it clean
8. No food in writing area

Me: How can we have the children from your small group introduce the rules to the whole group?

Ana: do it right before they go into small groups, during large group discussion in the morning?

Eleni: She can have the children show the designs they created for the writing area and then have them share the rules. (CWT meeting, May 3, 2011)

In this example, we used the reflective discussion of documentation in our meeting to help Ana think of ways to introduce the new desk into the writing area. Teachers documented children’s work, shared it with the other weekly team members, and then we planned activities that were based on a collaborative understanding of children’s interest. Using the children’s
ideas to design future activities changed the way they saw the purpose of the new furniture and materials in their classroom.

Making Panels

Documentation took on another role when teachers created panels that were displayed in the classroom or throughout the center. Documentation became public when teachers used the data they collected to create a story of their studies with children. I also saw documentation panels as a way for teachers to stop and reflect on where they began and where they are now with their study. In a weekly team meeting we discussed the purpose and construction of panels.

Me: When you make a panel, what do you think you are doing?
Cristina: Showing progress.
Eleni: Giving insight as to what went on during a certain process.
Me: What are some things you need on a panel?
Doli: Pictures, quotes, photographs, interactions between children and children, children and teachers. For example, showing how we ask questions and how children respond. The parents are sometimes questioning the teachers’ role and how much freedom we allow children to have. I think it is important to show our role as teachers to show them we are responsible for children’s learning.

Me: I think it is important to show what you say as well as what children say. This way you can show your role in the process.
Cristina: Should we show developmental areas?
Me: How can we do that without being too literal?
Cristina: I think we can write something like, what we learned about children from this event. I think the parents are familiar with the developmental areas because of the checklists from the children’s portfolios. I think they will not have a question about what children are learning when they see the panels because they show parents in more detail.
Eleni: Show they choose one child to focus on or the whole group of children?
Me: You can choose. It is more about educating people what is happening, is it one child or is it a group of children who can best show others what happened?

Ana: For example, I would include the input of the children, like their drawings of their writing area floor plans.

Cristina: Yes, and also your conversations with them. I think I will use pictures from our walks looking at buildings. Then I am going to show examples of what children did after the walks. For example, K. made a house, C. and E. focused on how they could build with blocks.

Me: Good. You can write your reflection on the return from the walk and how children interpreted what they saw.

Cristina: They talked to each other saying, it’s a house or a sea castle, and how tall they wanted their buildings to be.

Me: What could she title it?

Cristina: Building Buildings! (CWT meeting, May 3, 2011)

The planning and creation of panels during weekly meetings was an important element of teacher’s professional development. This activity required them to take time to think retrospectively and systematically about children’s learning and their role in promoting it (Scheinfeld, et. al, 2008). Ana reflected on her panel making process in the following meeting. I asked Ana what her experience was in creating her study of the writing area panel.
Figure 13. Writing area panel.

Ana: It was a reflection of the process I’ve taken. I didn’t realize how much I have done since I started this study. It was hard to highlight certain points.

Me: Did you think of any ideas of what you would want to explore further.

Ana: Not off the top of my head. I didn’t know where I was going at first, but then it started to flow. Making the panel helped me organize what happened.

Cristina: You can show people, what is going on in the classroom. They have an idea and it doesn’t take a long time to look at it. It’s not a newsletter shoved in the backpack.

Ana: The photos and short synopsis make it more enjoyable to read. (CWT meeting, May 10, 2011)

During a weekly meeting I discovered an old panel that Cristina made prior to our weekly team meetings. The panel was made with the SW university consultants. The panel had photographs of children playing outside on the playground.
I asked Cristina how she thought her panel making had changed. “I think I see things as more of a process. I now see how to take an activity apart and show the children’s interests and ideas. We use documentation to show what actually happened.”

Figure 14. Fun in the sun.

Figure 15. Kayla’s house.
The other teachers found the activity of planning documentation panels in our weekly team meeting helpful. Eight of the teachers commented on the feedback form that they learned how to do panels during these meetings. One teacher wrote, “Panels are more complicated to put together than I thought. They need to be organized and draw attention to parents and others that view them” (Feedback form, April 26, 2011).

**Challenges with Documentation**

It was a challenge at times for teachers to bring in actual documentation rather than telling about what happened. According to the data, at least one teacher at every meeting struggled with bringing documentation to the meeting. Some teachers commented that the camera was not working or that they did not have time to print out the pictures for the meeting. This made it difficult to plan activities based on the children’s interests because we were only hearing from the teacher accounts of the activities in contrast to also seeing what occurred.

In addition, it was difficult to find time outside our meetings for teachers to create panels. One teacher commented on a feedback form, “teachers need more time to put documentation together aside from the meetings.” It was a challenge to find this extra time in an already busy schedule for the collection of documentation and creating of panels.

**Chapter Summary of Action Research Study: Documentation**

In this chapter, I presented the data that reflects the category of documentation. The use of documentation was central to our praxis. We used documentation in our collaborative team meetings to reflect, discuss, question, and organize activities for the study of children’s interests. The teachers were challenged to bring documentation as evidence of children’s interests and capabilities. Teachers sometimes found it difficult to bring in documentation rather than simply
re-telling their observations. They mentioned that having enough time and the equipment not working as two major challenges for bringing documentation to the meetings.

However, when teachers did bring documentation to the meetings, they were able to identify children’s unique approaches towards interest-based activities. Slowing down and reflecting on documentation also allowed us to plan purposefully plan rather than creating a series of disjointed activities. In addition, the teachers were able to reflect and discuss children’s capabilities that were not evident in checklists and portfolios used prior to this study. As a result, our collaborative discussions using documentation created professional growth that derived from our shared dialogue. Collaboratively, we were able to learn about children from children through the study of documentation.
Documentation Self-Study: My Use of Documentation

In this section, I discuss the use of documentation for the study of my own practice and role within the collaborative team meetings. Prior to my research study, I had used documentation protocol in my role as facilitator at Chicago Commons. In this position, I used documentation with teachers for planning and studying children’s interests and learning styles. I also used it in meetings with my colleagues to reflect and discuss our practices. The challenge for me in my research study was to study more closely how I used documentation to understand my practices and processes as a facilitator without colleagues to share it with. In this study, I used documentation to reflect and analyze my professional growth and my role in the professional development of the teachers.

My Documentation Practice

As mentioned earlier, I recorded every meeting and then went back and transcribed the recordings. During transcription, I made notes including questions and comments on the teachers’ and my own practices. I then used the comments and questions as follow up for the next meeting. I shared my documentation practice with the teachers to demonstrate that we are all part of the documentation cycle.

Me: I notice for myself. When I go back and listen, I have more ideas. It is helpful to have something to go back to. The same is true for children when we ask them to go back and look at a picture from a walk. When you are on the walk they might not notice something, but when you take the picture back to them, it helps them to rethink what they saw, to notice the details. It is a continuous cycle. I am looking at what you are doing. You are looking at what the children are doing. We keep moving through this cycle to create new understandings. (Team Meeting, April 5, 2011).

One of my biggest challenges was to reflect on my strategies as facilitator. As mentioned earlier, I was accustomed to using documentation to reflect on children and teacher’s learning. For this research study, I attempted to take the use of documentation a step further by reflecting more closely on my strategies as facilitator. Studying my documentation helped me create an
inquiry about the teachers’ professional development and my own as facilitator. In my documentation, I often asked myself questions that allowed me to think more deeply about my role in the teachers’ professional development.

After reading through my research journal, I realized that Ana was stuck. Week after week, for the first eight weeks of my study, she brought documentation of children simply creating letters out of different materials in her study of homework. It was difficult to see any progress in understanding children’s interest in letters or activities that expanded upon their ideas of homework. Although the collaborative team provided Ana with questions to ask the children and different activities to try, she consistently came back to the meetings with no evidence of trying anything new. She often stated, “I didn’t have time” or “I forgot” when I asked why she did not attempt any of the activities we planned. I realized it was important to reflect on how my role contributed to her work.

In my reflective notes I wrote, “I am worried about how Ana jumps from activity to activity. How can I help her go a step further? I think the kids are bored. Maybe she just doesn’t know what to do next. Maybe she is bored” (Journal, April 19, 2011). I remembered an earlier conversation I documented with Ana regarding her prior experiences with curriculum planning. In our conversation she described a previous position she had as a camp counselor for the city.

I wasn’t actually planning, but implementing activities planned by the coordinator. We did things like, arts and crafts, activities with large and small motor and for kids with special needs.

I asked her what she noticed as the difference between someone telling her what to do and collaborating on planned activities. Her response was,

I like both. As a teacher I was also learning from what someone delegates. I learned from taking what someone else planned and trying to figure out how to implement it (Ana Interview, February 28, 2011).
After reflecting on this conversation, I realized that my strategy for asking open-ended questions in regard to planning might not have been an effective approach for Ana’s learning style. I decided to try a different strategy during a team meeting. I decided to deconstruct the subject of letters by creating a visual diagram with the teachers. I used visual diagrams in my practice at Chicago Commons. Collaboratively, we created a diagram that included possible interests and purposes of people who use letters, including the children and teachers.

One category represented children and letters. Teachers recalled earlier activities that Ana created where children had shown interest in using different kinds of materials for making letters, like clay and paint. Children had also commented that letters were a part of their environment, for example on street and building signs and in books. Children also expressed described places where they saw people using letters and words, such as in restaurants and for homework. In another category, we discussed teachers’ interests in this study. Teachers commented that they were interested in how children approached letter making and what children thought letters and words were used for. We created another category that described the interests of people who use letters and words, for example authors and journalists. Based on our categories, we thought of new activities that Ana might try for exploring letters and words. Below is a re-creation of our diagram.
This discussion led to creating an area of the classroom that could be used for creating letters and words. I suggested that they may not know what a writing area looks like and it might help to show them examples. Ana seemed inspired by this challenge. The following meeting she brought documentation that demonstrated her enthusiasm.

Ana: This past week I asked them what they think should be in a writing area. U. said I want to draw me. L. said she wanted a picture of Justin Bieber. L. said magazines and the ones with toys in them. Today I revisited the same question and printed out pictures of writing areas. What would you like to see in our writing area? Here are some examples of writing areas. They all noticed the computers. One said a different kind of carpet. Different chairs. A lamp. The desk. Then I took them into Elena’s office to look at what she has in her office. They noticed the paper holders and her computer. Then I asked them what do you need to write with. They said markers, paper, pencils, and Jessie mentioned highlighters. They said tape and paper clips. They were looking at the pushpins. I was thinking we could do a corkboard I was thinking we could use that to put up their work. Caleb was interested in the hole puncher, what does that do. He thought it was cool. That is what we did this past week.

Me: That was a very good idea.
Ana: It was helpful to ask them the questions with something to look at, to give them examples of writing areas. I am trying to refer to the new space in the classroom as a writing area.

Me: What if, before you bring all this stuff in and ask what do people do in the writing area? I want to make sure that we are trying to do stuff with intention. When we bring in the new materials, the children understand the intention of them.

Cristina: And then maybe have them be involved in the actual set up of the area. Where everything goes and how things are put together.

Ana: Oh, yeah (CWT meeting, April 26, 2011).

I was also inspired. I found that documentation was a useful tool that could help me study the teacher’s and my own development. The documentation I collected allowed me to reflect, rethink, and re-strategize my practice in team meetings. I realized that I needed to be more flexible in my facilitation strategies to address the teachers’ needs. It appeared that making a visual diagram was a usefully strategy for me to implement in our meetings.

An element of my facilitator’s practice was to take notes within my documentation that described how the group responded to my strategies. The documentation I collected from meetings allowed me to strategize steps to take at further meetings. While transcribing the meeting, I wrote, “it appears that the diagram was a springboard for Ana’s study and allowed her to see the results of purposeful planning” (Journal, March 21, 2011). As a result, she noticed changes in the children’s approach to writing and using letters. In an interview with Ana, she commented that observing and documenting children using the writing area changed her perspective on children’s ability to write on their own.

I know at the beginning we felt like we needed to make sure that they know how to use their letters and we felt like we had to give them homework, but they were able to write things by themselves. We had to create a place for them for writing and watch and observe how they were using letters and writing on their own. (Ana Interview, June 14, 2011)
I used different types diagrams for planning with teachers. These types of diagrams were more like webbing or creating a map. These diagrams started with inquiry categories and then included: possible activities, what happened as a result of activity, and possible paths to continue. The following is a diagram example taken from Cristina’s building study.

**Figure 17. Buildings web.**

For myself, it was necessary to visually represent connections between activities. In this way, it helped me to see the vast amount of possibilities for project work and helped me organize. The teachers also reported that creating the webs helped them plan more cohesively as a group.

The webs are my favorite. They are so simple and they really get my brain thinking. It puts our ideas on paper so we can see the flow of where we can go and where we have gone. At first we may only have a couple of ideas and then it turns into this big web. They help us when we get stuck, we can back track or go off in a different way. (Christina Interview, April 4, 2011)
Creating a dialogue. The documentation I collected from meetings was used to generate reflection and learning opportunities at subsequent meetings. I used documentation collected from our meetings, my journal, and the interviews as a springboard for examining and assessing my own work and the teachers’ over time. I shared and discussed the documentation with the teachers during the parts of the meeting devoted to reflection and planning next steps. In doing so, I helped the group build a collective picture of our learning. It also helped create a dialogue between my thoughts on a previous meeting and the teachers’ recollections.

I take notes during the meetings too, but I can’t always remember what we said the week before. You are able to read back parts of conversations that we didn’t write down. It helps us out a lot. I am able to remember what I said and I can go back to a thought. I have more time to reflect on what I said. Revisiting the conversation I am able to think more about it and go back to my thoughts. I have a terrible memory and being able to have my thoughts played out again helps. It triggers my memory. (Christina Interview, April 4, 2011)

Similarly, I used my documentation to create a dialogue with myself. Documentation served as a mirror that allowed me to see my reflection. It was important for me to refrain from judgment as much as possible so that I could study myself in a nonobjective way. While transcribing meetings and reflecting on my journal notes, I took note of events when I felt frustrated, excited, or uncomfortable. I also took note of things I said that stood out in my mind. As a result, I learned many things about myself. I learned that my tone changed when I became frustrated with teachers for not bringing any documentation or not following through with planned classrooms activities. I also learned that I became excited when teachers shared ideas for classroom activities that I had not thought of myself. I discovered that I became uncomfortable during the silences that followed my questions. In return, I had to learn to become comfortable with allowing time for teachers to reflect and respond. Documenting myself was an opportunity to slow down and reflect on my behavior and interactions in the meetings.
Documentation and My Role as Facilitator

In my role as facilitator, I also used documentation to call teachers’ attention to children’s interests. Within our conversations of children’s interests, I also focused teachers on learning concepts that were being addressed in their studies with children. In the following collaborative meeting example, I asked teachers Alana, Chenoa, and Diana to describe the connection they saw between their studies with children and learning skills. I found it challenging for them to see this connection.

Chenoa: A few children notice their names on cubbies and saying the letters. We incorporate the alphabet.

Me: What about through the study? You are studying baking, what are children doing?

Chenoa: We are using measuring cups. I was telling them the different sizes of the cups and teaspoons and asking do we use the big one or small one. They knew the different measurements. They were able to tell the difference. E and L noticed how many eggs from the on the cake box. They can see it on the box and they are reading it.

Alana: For me they ask me how to spell whale and stuff like that.

Me: What about through what you are planning to do with them for the fieldtrip to the aquarium?

Diana: when you go to aquarium—they are going to see names on wall and letters.

Me: I will tell you what I think. On a much larger scale you are teaching them to be a critical thinker and how to be someone that asks questions about things. They are thinking of their own questions regarding what they want to know about the fish at the aquarium. That is a much more motivational way of learning things versus just looking at a book for information or having someone tell them the answer. You are asking them to create their own questions.

Chenoa: I was thinking that, but I didn’t know how to say it. (CWT meeting, June 8, 2011)

In my experiences working as a facilitator with teachers, I notice that they often lack the ability to describe how children are constructing learning in an interest-based curriculum.
Chenoa’s last statement reflected this inability. Although teachers saw children as capable of many different types of learning skills, they often lacked the language to describe their experiences. The above example described an incident in our collaborative conversations when teachers and I discussed the connections between children’s interests and learning skills. As a result, teachers began to feel more comfortable discussing these issues. I found it an important aspect of my role as facilitator to bring attention to this issue so that teachers could be more comfortable when talking with parents or others outside of CK about the interest-based curriculum they were using.

**My Challenges With Documentation**

I found it challenging to find the time to transcribe and reflect on the recordings from the meetings. For every meeting that lasted an hour, it took me approximately two hours to transcribe and review the data. I thought this process was a necessity, because it allowed me to review what was actually said in contrast to solely relying on my notes from the meeting. It was important for me to study and analyze what teachers said and how I responded in order to concentrate on our next steps as a group. This consuming process of recording, transcribing, and analyzing is an important aspect of a facilitators’ role to consider.

In addition, I initially mentioned the challenge of not having colleagues to share and reflect on my documentation. However, the data I presented in this chapter revealed that I was able to use documentation to critique and reflect on my practice through my self-study process in this research study. This challenge is further explored in the next chapter, Collaboration.

**Chapter Summary of Self-Study Research**

In this chapter, I discussed the data that reflected my practice of studying documentation. I used documentation to create an inquiry about the teachers’ professional development and my
own as the facilitator. I revealed through the data that documentation was used to reflect, rethink, and re-strategize my practice in team meetings. As a result, I realized that making visual diagrams was a usefully strategy to implement in our study of children’s interests and planning processes. In addition, I found it necessary to be flexible in my facilitation strategies in order to address the teachers’ needs.

I also used documentation to create a dialogue and to generate reflection and learning opportunities at meetings. I shared my documentation at meetings with teachers in order to create a dialogue between my thoughts and the teachers’ recollections. In addition, I found it an important aspect of my role as facilitator to use documentation to point out for teachers how children were developing learning skills through the interest-based curriculum we were using.

I also described the data that reflected my use of documentation to create a dialogue with myself. While transcribing meetings and reflecting on my journal notes, I took note of my interactions with the teachers in the collaborative team meetings. As a result, I was able to critique and reflect on my practice through my use of documentation in my self-study process. In the next chapter’s self-study section, Collaboration, I provide data that reflects my practice and role within the collaboration between the teachers and myself.
Chapter 6.

Collaboration

Education is a social process. Dewey, J. (1897)

This chapter is a discussion from the data analysis that represents the category of collaboration that existed between the teachers and I during our weekly meetings. In this research study, the role of collaboration was an integral part of our understanding children’s interests. Collaboration and the use of dialogue were two important strategies used within weekly team meetings. The teachers and I worked collaboratively in many different ways. During the meetings our collaborative discussions focused not only on curriculum planning, but also classroom practices and issues that related to the whole CK site. Teachers used the collaborative meetings to vent frustrations, give advice, and share strategies for working with other teachers.

In this chapter, I describe the role of collaboration in the classrooms and our weekly team meetings within three categories: (a) shared learning, (b) a safe place, and (c) a place to create a collective voice. These were derived from my action research study. In the self-study section, I discuss in more depth what collaboration meant to my practice and role as facilitator.

Shared Learning

Collaborative weekly team meetings promoted learning for the teachers and myself. The collaborative process of the meetings supported problem solving and strategizing through the discussions of classroom practices and policies. The co-construction of knowledge was dependent on the ability of the team members to learn from one another. Ana and the other teachers in the Ant classroom were preparing for a trip to the aquarium. A group of children were looking through books about sharks one day and asked the teacher, how do sharks breath.
The teachers and I discussed the interesting question the child asked. We decided to try to engage the other children in the group to form their own questions about the aquarium before the field trip. In the following example, the teachers and I strategized about how to formulate questions with children.

Me: What happens when you ask children to ask a question?

Cristina: They often do what Ana is saying, and they often give you a statement versus a question [for example, fish breathe in water versus how do fish breathe in water?].

Me: It would be interesting to spend a session with children thinking up questions and modeling for them. How might she do that?

Ana: Maybe ask children one on one or two at a time.

Doli: Ask them things they want to know and then turn it in to a question.

Me: Let’s try that together.

Ana: What do you want to know about sharks?

Me: Well sharks live in the water.

Ana: Why do sharks live in the water?

Me: Because they like to breathe in the water [laughing together]. It is complicated. How do we turn it into a question?

Doli: You could give them a fact, show them a picture—this fish lives in water and maybe they would ask why?

Me: I think you could go back and visit the girl’s question, how do sharks breath in the water. You could start out by asking, we are going to the aquarium and one of the questions that O. asked was, why do sharks live in the water. What kinds of questions do you have?

Doli: You can say, what would you like to ask? A child might say, I want to know what sharks eat.

Cristina: You could model it as a question and say, what do sharks eat?

Me: Can you record it? Then we can find out if they get it. Then you have an investigation to go with to aquarium.
Ana: I can work with my small group of children in a quiet place outside of the classroom. (Team Meeting, April 21, 2011)

The teachers and I collaboratively planned and hypothesized how to work with children on creating their own inquiry approach. Unfortunately, Ana was not able work with her small group of children before our meeting the next week. She said Adriana would not allow her to leave the classroom with her small group because, “There were too many behavior issues with the rest of the children.” As a result, the children were not able to conduct an activity at the aquarium based on their own investigations.

The collaboration promoted individual and group learning experiences. Teachers responded to the feedback form question, “What did you learn today” in the following ways about the content and learned experiences from the CWT meetings.

1. How to ask children questions
2. That I could help my co-workers extend on their ideas and get more ideas from them also
3. Since I wasn’t really “taught” how to plan, these little meetings are helpful
4. How to approach classroom management
5. Sharing ideas about different art media
6. The importance of linking things together. The role of the environment, the placement of certain areas and linking areas together, writing and quiet areas, etc.
7. Sticking to a schedule
8. How to use culture and celebrations within a study
9. How to communicate with other teachers
10. How to talk with parents about project studies and kindergarten readiness

Doli commented in her final interview on her learning experiences as a result of working with the other teachers in the CWT meetings.
The other teachers helped give me more ideas. These meetings helped me out because I didn’t actually think I would be going into like anatomy. For example, Cristina called my attention to children’s interest in what was inside of their bodies and to bring in the rib bones and x-rays. She suggested having the children explore with different textures of body parts. I learned a lot about how to bring the outside world into my classroom. The meetings helped me grow. (Doli Interview, June 18, 2011)

**Sharing ideas.** Collaborative weekly team meetings became a highly valued place to share and receive ideas for classroom activities. Teachers Dyani and Chenoa spontaneously shared their enthusiasm during a CWT meeting.

Dyani: This is really interesting talking about our studies like this. It is helping me get new ideas.

Chenoa: Especially because the ideas are helping us move forward with our studies, huh?

Dyani: Other people give you new ideas and when you run out of things or get stuck, you know the Wednesday meeting is coming and you will get new ideas.

Throughout my research study, teachers and I collaborated and strategized ideas within the CWT meetings. In addition, Eleni noticed that teachers’ conversations had also changed outside of the meetings.

Their [the teachers’] conversations are changing. Rather than just the friendship conversations, now they are conversing about different kinds of materials. They are saying, hey how is your study? What can we do with this? They are feeding ideas off of each other as opposed to, before it was more just conversation. Now they are feeding each other a little differently like, hey I noticed these kids are doing this. And another teacher responding, yeah, I’m noticing it too. (Eleni Interview, March 3, 2011)

As a member of a collaborative weekly planning team, teachers were compelled to think, articulate, question, explain, and problem solve with one another. Collaboratively we discussed what we observed as children’s interests and brainstormed ways to expand on them. As a result, there was a move away from considering one’s own viewpoint toward considering the multiple perspectives of the other members of the team meetings. Teachers discovered how their ideas
were part of each other’s ideas, from individual to shared meaning. In my final interview with Doli, she described our collaboration in the following way:

Collaboration means many ideas becoming one. We work together to achieve something. There were four people in the meetings. All their ideas become one and the teacher takes this idea back to the classroom to try it out. The teacher carries out the ideas, she is the practitioner—the one that practices it and shares the result so we can all learn from it. (Doli Interview, June 14, 2011)

Sharing children’s interests. Teachers discovered ways that they could share children’s interests. As mentioned in Chapter 5, prior to becoming a teacher, Doli studied anatomy in school. She was able to share her interest in anatomy with the children by bringing in books to share and introducing them to anatomy terms. In another example, the teachers and I had been discussing Dulce’s study of robots with the children (a teacher from the Decentralized Dragonflies classroom). I asked her if it was difficult to study children’s interests. She responded, “No! Cause I like what they like!”

Sharing an interest with children meant that teachers needed to be open to their ideas and curiosities. During my final interview with Cristina, she commented on how the children were able to draw her into their interest of buildings.

I wasn’t that excited with the buildings study at first. We are downtown and there are buildings all the time, what is so exciting? But when I saw the things that the children were interested in like, the texture, or height or width or whatever, I became interested too. I let them guide me a little bit and they pull me in. I get excited about it too just seeing them excited about building things. (Christina Interview, June 14, 2011)

Collaboration Challenges

In my final teacher interviews, teachers commented on some of the challenges and frustrations they experienced during our collaborative planning meetings. Teachers found it challenging to plan for different age groups, either younger or older than the children from their classrooms.
Some teachers are not as creative as others. They may think, they think it is good and when you try to put it to use it wasn’t. I think this is because of the differences in the way teachers perceive children’s interests. It was hard for me to think of things to try with two year olds. The teachers were thinking on the level of their classroom. (Doli Interview, June 14, 2011)

Although planning for other age groups within our collaborative weekly team meetings challenged teachers, they also expressed that they learned a lot. All three of the focus group teachers mentioned in my final interviews that they found the collaborative team meetings a place to learn about how to work with other age groups. Cristina mentioned, “I learned from Ana and Doli, how to organize things, step by step for their age groups. It was important learning what the other classrooms were doing to prepare us for working with kids in that room” (Christina Interview, June 14, 2011).

Another challenge was that teachers often did not follow through with the activities we planned as a group. There was at least one teacher in each team meeting that did not follow through with the planned activities from the prior week. Both the teachers and I felt frustrated when we planned activities with another teacher and she didn’t put it into practice in the classroom. We often waited in anticipation to see what would happen and then experienced a let down when the teacher came back with a totally different activity. It felt frustrating for Cristina when she tried to give ideas and suggestions for Ana and she would not try them.

What was challenging working with others? When I know I had a good idea and they didn’t use it. You have to try it, especially with Ana. I was in that room for so long. When we put out ideas and she wouldn’t try them, even the ones we knew would work, she didn’t try them. That was frustrating for me. We are putting out ideas and what you are doing is not working. That was not so much challenging, but frustrating. (Christina Interview, June 14, 2011)

I was curious about Ana’s perspective on the lack of follow through with the plans we created in CWT meetings. In my final interview with Ana, I asked her why she thought teachers might not follow through with planned activities.
Sometimes as a teacher we might not share the same enthusiasm or we get intimidated because we think the kids won’t get it or we don’t know how to bring it to them. Or we get side tracked and we are dealing with our colleagues or new kids, so it could be all those challenge that could possible effect our plans. The ideas that we come up with as a team might not translate into the classroom. (Ana Interview, June 14, 2011)

Ana described possible reasons for not carrying out planned activities because of a lack of enthusiasm, intimidation, or other challenges with new children or colleagues. Her response reflects a lack of confidence in her teaching abilities or possibly challenges in communicating with her colleagues. In the following section, A Safe Place, I discuss how collaborative team meetings provided a place for teachers to share their classroom challenges. Teachers in the collaborative meetings demonstrated a level of comfort in sharing their concerns while helping each other strategize how to address their challenges.

A Safe Place

The teachers and I used the meetings to collaboratively strategize classroom practices, including how to work with children and the other teachers. As mentioned earlier, there were challenges in creating collaborative practices in the authoritative classroom. Ana often found it difficult to communicate with Adriana, the lead teacher, and the other teachers in her classroom. Our collaborative meetings were a safe place for Ana to share her feelings. In the following example, Ana admitted that she was afraid of confrontation.

Me: Do you feel that way, intimidated, just be honest? (to Ana)
Ana: Sort of.
Me: Can you help us understand what you are worried about?
Ana: I guess confrontation, causing issues. I think we are all just learning about each other’s teaching styles. We haven’t figured out how to mesh together. I guess I feel intimidated, am I allowed to [over]step that boundary.
Doli: Dylani tries to make us independent. She is the lead teacher, but she wants us to think of our own ideas. We don’t have to go through her all the time, but it is good to.

Cristina: What if you initiate the conversation to talk about how to communicate? (Team Meeting, March 22, 2011)

The teachers and I attempted to help Ana strategize how to develop a better line of communication with the other teachers. In my final interview with Ana she mentioned that the meetings were a place to share feelings. This helped her feel more confident when working with the teachers in her classroom:

In the meetings you check out how we are feeling and if we need help. We also help others get through the same process. We are all new to the approach and we help each other. The meetings helped build my confidence as a teacher. (Ana Interview, June 14, 2011)

Approximately half way through my study, Dyani from the Decentralized Dragonflies left the program. She relocated with her family to another city. As a result, Dulce was promoted to the lead teacher position. Diana moved from a part time to full time teacher to take Dulce’s place. There was immediate tension in the classroom, which caused Doli to feel stressed and frustrated. According to Doli, Dulce’s leadership style was more authoritative in comparison to Dyani’s who promoted a decentralized delegation classroom. The collaborative team meeting was a safe place for her to discuss her feelings.

Me: I think we should give Doli time to talk. This is a safe place and we are not going to talk behind Doli’s back about what she says here. How are things going?

Doli: I am stressed out. It is not my duty to clean up after everybody. Dulce is not helping Diana as a full time teacher. She is bossing her around. I don’t want her to feel the way I did. I’m tired and I just want to go to sleep. For portfolios, I am typing Dulce’s. She didn’t do hers and she said, can you do it for me. I’m thinking is it my responsibility? I don’t know how I feel right now.

Me: What can advice can we give to Doli in this process. What do you think is going on? (Team meeting, April 26, 2011)
I tried to remain neutral in these conversations by asking questions and allowing the teachers to give each other feedback. Ironically, Ana was the first to offer her feedback on the situation. She was able to describe the issues of lack of communication and different teaching styles that were affecting the new dynamic of the Dragonflies’ classroom. She also mentions the need for flexibility.

Ana: The group dynamics have changed. Dyani is gone and there is a teacher in a new role. I guess it is about communicating and just see what worked but what might not work for the new team. New people come in and you might have to shift. It might not be wrong now or it might not have been wrong before.

Me: So what do you think should happen?

Cristina: I see where Doli is coming from. If you have to pick up slack for others, it is added stress. I really think it is better time utilization. Planning, follow through with what you say you are going to do.

Me: I think anytime there is a transition with new people or a change in roles, you have to step back and redefine the whole group. I would start with meetings. Until this team becomes a team again. Not in a way like Dulce you are doing everything wrong, but we have a lot of changes. How can they work together.

Ana: They have to start making choices together (CWT meeting, April 26, 2011)

The collaborative meetings were a place for teachers to vent their frustrations and share their feelings. We also attempted to provide teachers with advice on how to handle certain situations. There were many changes and challenges that occurred during my research study. CK lacked an executive director. An interim director, a member of the board, was appointed to handle the operations of the center. At times teachers felt unsure of who was in charge. Doli and Ana described the interaction between the teachers, interim director, and Eleni, the education consultant during a staff meeting.

Doli: We don’t have a dominant person.
Me: What do they do?

Ana: They [Eleni and interim director] tell us what we are not doing right and then ask for comments.

Me: What should they do?

Doli: We need someone who can step in and help us work out our differences in the classroom. (CWT meeting, May, 31, 2011)

As a result of the lack of leadership, teachers felt a sense of instability. They suggested that either Eleni or the interim director should take on leadership roles, but they were not. Cristina commented that there was a lot of growth from the teachers despite the lack of a director.

Everyone’s been able to grow despite not having a director. In terms of the overall functioning of the center, we have done a lot without anyone here. But we do have those people who want to stir things up. The weeds start to show. We can see who is self-motivated and who needs more leadership. (CWT meeting, May 24, 2011)

The collaborative meetings became a safe place for teachers to share their feelings. In the next section, I address some of the ways the teachers and I continue the discussion of leadership and hiring a new director. I provide examples of how within the collaborative meetings teachers constructed a collective voice.

Creating a Collaborative Voice

Occasionally, I used meeting times to bring in quotes from literature about Reggio Emilia or other inquiry based learning approaches to create a dialogue with teachers. The intention of reading an articles or quotes was to prompt teachers to begin thinking about various aspects of their professional growth. The teachers and I were able to share our perspectives by comparing and contrasting our thoughts and actions within our discussions. Often it can be difficult or challenging to begin a discussion or dialogue, so teachers were given a reference point from which to begin our conversations (Haigh, 2008). The reference point could be reading an article,
quotes, or viewing slides, or a video. In the following example, I shared a quote from a Chicago Commons teacher on studying Reggio Emilia.

Reggio is not something that you do exactly in one way. It is a way of thinking and a way of working with children. Once you change the way you think about children, you start working with them using the Reggio ideas. (Scheinfeld, et al., 2008, p. 167)

Me: What do you think about this quote and your own professional growth using this approach?

Eleni: I think we are barely dipping our fingers in. We see it in our mind. Teachers are talking with kids, taking in their ideas and thoughts and supporting them.

Cristina: I feel like we had to come out of our comfort zone and be able to try new things. For example, we had to take a step back and look at what is going on in the classroom. Being in the classroom in this way, we do things at a slower pace. Sometimes we have to just sit and watch what children are doing. We noticed what children were actually doing. This is not a classroom of chaos. Instead of forcing things, we allowed them to take the lead.

Me: Where do you see yourself wanting to grow? What do you want to know more about?

(Several minutes of silence filled the room).

Cristina: I didn’t know we were going to have a deep thinking conversation today.

[Everyone laughed]. (Team meeting, May 31, 2011)

Although I asked teachers to think about themselves and their practice, they found it difficult to articulate their ideas. After transcribing the teachers’ responses to the quote, I decided at the next meeting to revisit our conversation and to continue the dialogue. I thought that if we revisited the conversation, the teachers might have a different insight into their situation. At the start of the meeting, I read the above conversation back to the group. I re-visited the questions, how do you want to grow and what do you want to know? This time they had new responses to the questions.

Eleni: I want us to have more experiences with the parents, to draw them into our studies with the children more.
Doli: Everyone’s been able to grow. Everyone has grown without having a director. I think the overall function we have been able to do a lot without anyone here. We do have those people who are not self-motivated and the weeds start to show.

Ana: I think it would be helpful to hire an executive director who is willing to learn about our approach or at least willing to try to learn about Reggio Emilia. Just like we are doing in our classrooms.

Cristina: I think we are learning to become more aware. I think we have a long way to go. We are not even halfway done compared to other centers exploring Reggio Emilia.

Me: What do you think that would look like?

Doli: I think the overall environment.

Me: Physical?

Cristina: The whole atmosphere, the parents, the teachers response, everything comes into play. The support we get from our director and from the board using this approach. I think all of these people play into it. I think everyone needs to be united. (CTW meeting, June 7, 2011)

I found it interesting that the teachers commented on the importance of the overall organizational structure in supporting their work. As mentioned in chapter three, CK’s executive director was on maternity leave during my study and chose not to return after having her baby. A board of directors, whom were responsible for hiring the new executive director, governs CK. Up to this point, the board of directors had not involved the teachers in their decision-makings.

After the above team meeting conversation, teachers decided to post a checklist of characteristics they would like to see in their new executive director at the entrance to the center. The teachers voted on which characteristics they felt were the most important by placing a sticker after it. The checklist was for the board, parents, and other visitors of the center to see.

Supports staff (meaning the executive director would be supportive of staff) was by far the most important. Over half of the teachers rated, knowledgeable about the Reggio Emilia approach as important.
The search for a new executive director was an important part of CK’s present and future existence. A new executive director would also determine whether or not CK continued collaborative team meetings and Reggio Emilia inspired practices. The collaborative meetings allowed teachers to work politically together toward supporting their interests within the center. Interestingly, the board never asked any of the teachers to be part of the executive director interview process, although, they did ask the interviewees their knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach during the interview process.

**Chapter Summary of Action Research Study: Collaboration**

In this chapter, I presented the data that reflects the category of collaboration. The teachers and I engaged in collaborative discussions regarding curriculum planning, classroom practices, and issues that related to the whole CK site. The co-construction of knowledge was created through our collaborative problem solving and strategizing of classrooms practices and policies. Teachers also discovered ways that they could share children’s interests.

The collaborative process was in general well received by the teachers. However, some found it challenging to plan for children in different age groups. Yet, teachers also commented...
that they found planning for children in different age groups as an opportunity to learn about the development of different age levels. This suggests that teachers were able to create a deeper understanding of children’s diverse interests through shared and reflective ongoing conversations that were embedded in our collaborative team meetings. Rinaldi (2006) referred to this shared process where together we jointly learn about children from children as the “true professional training of the teacher” (p. 58).

Teachers expressed frustration towards other teachers that did not carry out the activities that were planned in our collaborative team meetings. Ana mentioned that our planned activities were not always carried out because of a lack of enthusiasm, intimidation, or other challenges with new children or colleagues. Moran and Abbott (2002) suggested that teachers need more preparation for working collaboratively with each other in the classroom. The experiences of the teachers in the Ant and Dragonfly rooms reflect these research findings because teachers struggled to shift their classroom approaches and give up traditional power roles. This made it difficult for teachers to implement activities that were collaboratively created in our team meetings.

The teachers experienced similar challenges found in Wong (2010) and Wien’s (2002) research findings. These research studies found that teachers often experience challenges in adopting new approaches due to lack of adequate administrative support. However, the teachers used our collaborative team meetings to organize their interests toward the hiring of a new executive director at the center.
Collaboration Self-Study: Collaborator

In the self-study section of this chapter, I describe my practices and role within our collaborative team meetings. I discuss my facilitator collaborative practices of sharing, and listening. These two themes emerged from my self-study analyses of the data. Following the description of these themes, I discuss my role as a facilitator within the collaborative meetings and at CK.

Sharing

My practice as facilitator in this study went beyond facilitating collaboration among the teachers. It was an important part of my practice as a facilitator to share my prior knowledge and experiences to add to the teachers learning experiences. Teachers specifically mentioned that I gave advice in regards to schedules, classroom materials, and environment. This type of advice was shared regularly at collaborative team meetings.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, I have found that teachers often lack the skills to describe how children are constructing learning in an interest-based curriculum. In addition, I have found that teachers need guidance in how to incorporate learning skills within an interest-based curriculum. In my practice, I found ways to share ideas with teachers on how to introduce learning concepts that connected with children’s interests. For example, Dulce was engaged in a study with children on the topic of robots. In a CWT meeting she brought in photographs of the children comparing the size of their robots created from linking cubes. As a result, I shared an idea to introduce the concept of measurement. I suggested that she demonstrate to children how they could use rulers to graph the sizes of their robots. Dulce described the experience:

We measured their robots. I did use the rulers like you suggested with them and they counted the inches. It went well. (passing around photographs of children measuring their robots.) J. made it up to 10 inches and A. did up to 11 inches. They were competing. This week I was thinking of doing the wideness. I’m still going to work on
what we are doing. We are going to try bigger blocks, count the cubes, and graph them. We are going to measure how long and wide they are. (Dulce Interview, March 13, 2011)

As part of my practice, sharing was a way for me to respond and participate in the collaboration with teachers. It was exciting for me to share my ideas, see how the teachers interpreted them, and hear how they were implemented in the classrooms. I found it particularly important to share ideas, similar to the example above that would allow teachers to combine learning skills with children’s interests.

When teachers did not use my ideas or suggestions, it was an opportunity to investigate further why they did not. Similar to Cristina, I often felt frustrated when I gave teachers ideas and they chose not to incorporate them in their practice. In one journal entry I wrote, “How many of these ideas do teachers actually use that I am suggesting.” In my final interview with Cristina, she gave me insight into why she assumed teachers sometimes did not try out my or the other teachers’ ideas.

Stubbornness, wanting to do things their own way. That was me too. You or another teacher would share an idea and I would be thinking, I don’t know if that is going to work. Also, for me if I would see that what I am doing is not working, it would force me to be open to try different ideas and take in others’ ideas. It is very hard. I think the structure of the classroom, time management, and finding supplies are a part of it. I think the overall chemistry of teachers in the classroom. I think if one teacher is thinking, I really don’t want to do this, it kind of pulls everyone else down too. (Christina Interview, June 14, 2011)

Cristina pointed out many important aspects to our collaboration. That in order for the collaboration to work, the members need to be open to trying new ideas that were not their own. She also mentioned the overall organizational structure of the classroom, including the relationship of the teachers and their attitudes as elements that affected the success of trying out new activities. Her comments call into question whether or not certain classrooms or teachers would be able to integrate an interest-based curriculum into their practice. Classrooms that lacked the ability to function as a collaborative unit or teachers who were unwilling to try new
ideas seemed to be struggling the most with an interest-based curriculum. It was not necessarily
the ideas that I shared, but the unwillingness or inability to try them.

**Sharing personal experiences.** Riley and Roach (2006) found that it was important for
facilitators to develop a trusting relationship with teachers for effective collaboration. In my
facilitator practice, I not only shared professional, but also personal experiences with the
teachers. On occasion, I shared stories regarding my four-year old son. For example, Chenoa
was investigating birthdays and cakes with children. In our collaborative meeting on April 27,
2011 I shared stories and photographs from my son’s first birthday. My son is half Korean, my
husband is Korean and I am not. In Korean culture, a child’s first birthday is a big event. As a
result, Chenoa shared pictures of her Navajo daughter’s birthday celebration at the following
collaborative team meeting. She shared how she created a “blue corn underground cake.” Then,
Chenoa asked parents from their classroom to bring in photographs from the children’s first
birthdays as part of their investigation.

On several other occasions, I shared stories from home of my son’s interests in super
heroes. I shared his interests as a way to connect with the teachers and the children in their
classroom. In my final interview with Doli, she responded that it was helpful when I shared
stories about my son.

I liked it when you shared your stories about Sam [my son] and his interest in super
heroes and acting like a ninja. We didn’t think about a super hero interest that children
had in our classroom or how we could bring it into a study. Dulce and I started talking
about it. I think your personal experiences led us into ideas. (Doli Interview, June 14,
2011)

My four-year old son proved to be one of our best teachers. He constantly reminded me
of how important it was to listen to children. On March 7, 2011, I wrote down a conversation I
shared with my son. I asked him, why he did not like preschool.
Sam: Because we have to do all this work and we have to listen to the teachers all the time and do what they want us to do.

Me: What should school be like?

Sam: They should have to listen to us.

His comments were inspiring. I was reminded how important listening to children regarding their interests was to them. Sharing the interests and experiences of my son with the teachers allowed me to share personal insights into the interests of children in their classrooms.

**Listening**

Listening, helping teachers generate ideas, and being collaborative were key characteristics of my role as facilitator. Giving attention and listening to different perspectives were valued within my practice. Collaboration occasionally seemed frustrating and inefficient, and there were times that I was tempted to take on the familiar role of leading, rather than facilitating. For example, when Doli discussed the frustrations she was experiencing with the change in leadership in her classroom. I listened to her perspective and allowed the others to speak before giving my advice. I had to remain true to the value of being listened to in a collaborative learning experience. I found listening to be an important action that could support and guide the direction of the teachers professional development as well as my own.

**Listening to suggestions.** Additionally, through listening as a facilitator, I gained an overall sense of direction in the meetings and the interests of the teachers.

Listening to the teachers for me was about being able to hear their voices during the meetings and afterwards. As such, I found the feedback forms an important aspect of listening. Occasionally, teachers provided suggestions or ideas on the feedback forms. I reviewed their responses and reflected on how to implement new procedures or policies for our meetings. For example, two teachers suggested that they would benefit from a planning guide or form for that
would allow them to keep track of the activities that were suggested and planned within our collaborative meetings. One teacher wrote, “a plan to follow when running out of questions to build on the children’s interests” (Feedback form, February 22, 2011). Another teacher wrote, “a plan of activities ahead of time” (Feedback form, February 23, 2011). “A little extra time to write out our curriculum plan. It would be nice to write it out at weekly meetings. Maybe after the meeting so the info is still fresh” (Feedback form March 20, 2011).

In response to these requests, I created a planning guide for each teacher to use at the meetings and in her classroom (Appendix E). It was a challenge to create a planning form that balanced preplanning and spontaneity. I attempted to create a form that would allow teachers to plan activities for children to investigate and extend their interests. At the same time, the form was designed to keep track of the spontaneous events that may happen during the execution of planned activities.

The form was a planning guide and not a typical lesson plan where teachers list step-by-step instructions. The planning guide included areas for inquiry and a brief description of the activity that addressed the inquiry. The other areas on the planning guide included materials, goals, and a section for follow up. In this area teachers wrote about events that took place during the activity that they might want to follow up. I brought the form to CTW meetings to share with the teachers and for feedback. The teachers suggested enlarging the boxes and eliminating the group numbers to make more room for writing out their plans (Appendix F).

The planning form also allowed the teacher to communicate with the other teachers in her classroom the plans for her small group study. In her final interview, Doli described the planning guide as helpful. “I thought the planning form was easy to understand. It wasn’t complicated to fill out. We posted them in the classroom for the other teachers to see and the
parents as well” (Interview, June 14, 2011). I found listening and acting upon suggestions an important aspect of my role as facilitator within the collaborative groups.

**The Facilitator’s Practice**

To examine my position as facilitator in the collaborative meetings, I analyzed the range of words teachers used on feedback forms that described my practice. These items are not exactly the same as the above themes, sharing and listening, that emerged from the larger data analysis. However, they do indicate in more detail the kinds of things teachers recognized regarding my practice as they left the weekly meetings.

Table 1

*Words to Describe My Practice.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words to Describe My Practice</th>
<th>Number of Times Mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asks Questions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice with Schedule</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives Support</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives Ideas</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice with Materials and Environment</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps Us Brainstorm</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The words most chosen to describe my practice were asking questions, giving advice, support, and ideas. Moran (2007) stressed that a facilitator must be aware of when to provide
directive instruction such as procedural or practical information and when to wait for the teachers to discover things on their own. I have found that in general, teachers have limited opportunities to participate in designing their own activities for their classrooms. During our meetings, I had to make it my subjective call regarding when to provide direction and when to allow them to discover things on their own.

This balance was a constant challenge for me. Part of this challenge was to involve all the teachers in the conversation by asking them to give each other ideas and advice. I wanted the teachers to learn from each other rather than see me as the main information provider. Doli described this collaborative process as challenging and rewarding:

Sometimes the meetings were hard. I know you were trying to make us independent, but it was hard to think of ideas when planning activities. Like when you would ask for ideas and then everyone would just sit there. You would just listen and wait for us to answer. You would ask us, what would you do next? Sometimes, I was thinking, I don’t know? And then the other teachers would try to help out with ideas and they would help me answer the question. (Doli Interview, June 14, 2011)

The Facilitator’s Role

I often questioned what my role was in implementing practices in the classroom such as the use of the planning guide or small group work. Without an executive director, it was difficult to determine who was responsible for supporting the implementation of procedures such as using a planning form. The planning form was used by half of the teachers. Teachers were given the form at the beginning of the meeting and time was allowed at the end of the meeting for filling it out. When I asked teachers why they didn’t fill it out, the standard response was, I didn’t have time or I forgot. I asked the teachers in the final interview why some teachers did not fill out the planning form. All three focus group teachers responded that they believed the other teachers did not feel it was required. I was in a position of suggesting and guiding, not making requirements.
Eleni was in the role of education coordinator and attended the collaborative team meetings. However, she often demonstrated hesitancy towards implementing structured practices for the classroom. She never commented on this, but it was evident in her actions. For example, when Doli had issues with Dulce’s new leadership role, Eleni simply asked, “Did you talk with Dulce?” There was never any intervention on Eleni’s part. I provided support by asking questions and making suggestions. I was not in a position to make any mandated change in policies or practices regarding the roles of lead teachers or how teachers collaborated. Those had to come from within the organization. As a result, on June 5, 2011, I wrote comments and questions in my journal like,

What should my role be? What should be my role in this context? Who’s in charge? Whose responsibility is it to support teachers and their collaborative work? Who’s making decisions? I sense that the teachers are feeling a lack of leadership.

After the collaborative team meeting on June 7, 2011 regarding the hiring of a new director, I started to reflect on my role within the organizational structure of the center as an outside facilitator. I began to wonder, “What effect will a new leadership have on my role? Will I have a role?” I knew that my role at CK was primarily self-initiated as part of my dissertation, but I questioned whether the new leadership would see the collaborative team meetings as an important part of the overall structure of the organization. I wondered about the differences between my work as an outside facilitator at CK and my role at Chicago Commons where I worked within the organization. In order to think about this, I created a chart that compared the experiences I had in both situations. Below is a recreation of the chart.
Table 2

Comparison of Coordinator and Facilitator Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coordinator Chicago Commons</th>
<th>Facilitator CK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate collaborative weekly team meetings – 5-6 meetings per week with six teachers from two classrooms, a site director, and family worker</td>
<td>Facilitate weekly team meetings – 3-4 meetings per week with 1-2 teachers from each classroom and Eleni, education coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboratively organized trainings for staff regarding art materials, emergent curriculum, and other Reggio Emilia elements</td>
<td>Collaboratively create plans and forms with teachers. The plans not seen as part of the programs policies and procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in collaborative weekly meetings with other coordinators and director of program. Discussed and reflected on our work with teachers.</td>
<td>No other colleagues to reflect on my work with teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in monthly meetings for center directors</td>
<td>No meetings at the administrative level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked collaboratively created with other coordinators created and implemented planning, environment, and studio materials guides for classrooms. The plans became part of the program policies and procedures.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chart helped me to reflect upon the challenges and successes of working in both contexts. One of the main differences in my role was that Chicago Commons was an organization with an infrastructure that supported the collaborative study of children’s interests, documentation protocol, emergent curriculum, and reflective practices for all members, including, teachers and coordinators. As a coordinator at Chicago Commons, I was supported in my work with teachers. This support came from the coordinator weekly meetings because it allowed us time to collaboratively reflect, on our own understanding and knowledge of teaching.
and learning. I learned a great deal about myself as a coordinator through this form of professional development.

In contrast, CK was in its initial stages of exploring and implementing collaborative planning and using documentation protocol. I was accustomed to these collaborative professional development practices, but was essentially alone in my practice as a facilitator at CK. In my journal I wrote, “Is it possible to reflect on one’s practice alone?” (May 31, 2011). While I was sharing my experiences with my advisor, Marilyn Johnston Parsons, there was no one within this program with whom I could collaboratively reflect and share experiences. This led me to reflect how collaboration was supporting professional development for the teachers and myself.

Advantages of an outside perspective. While I missed the collaboration in my previous position, I also became aware of the advantages of providing an outside perspective. The teachers and Eleni, the education coordinator, brought these advantages to my attention. For example, I noticed that coming as an outsider to the organization, teachers appeared more willing to share their feelings and frustrations openly. Eleni commented after the collaborative discussion regarding Ana’s conflict in the Authoritative Ant classroom, “Wow, I had no idea that was happening.” In my meetings as a coordinator at Chicago Commons, teachers were less inclined to talk about frustrations they were having with colleagues.

In addition, teachers often commented that my outside the classroom role in the collaboration provided an important perspective. Cristina commented, “by you not being in the classroom you gave us different ideas on how to approach our studies that we were doing (Christina Interview, June 14, 2011). Eleni believed that my role as a facilitator outside of the
organization provided an important perspective on issues related to the classroom and overall organization. In my final interview with Eleni she commented on my outside perspective.

Your role plays a big part. It helps us with a different perspective. The teachers are with the children all the time and a different person from outside gives us a different view a different perspective. You give advice. As someone from the outside you view things different than those of us who are with children every day. You help the teacher and I spark new ideas. Even though, I’m not in the classroom, it is still hard for me to step back. (Eleni Interview, June 14, 2011)

Allen and Blythe (2004) suggested one of the struggles that I encountered as an outside facilitator. Removed from the day-to-day operations from the school, I was not in a good position to keep the work alive and growing in a sustained way. My role was essential in our collaborative work as it provided a needed outside perspective when supporting and challenging teacher reflection and growth. The benefits my role provided for teachers’ ongoing support and challenges with collaboration, dialogue, and reflection would require recognition from the organization as a whole, not just Eleni and the teachers. The continuation of our ongoing, collaborative, and job embedded professional development practices would require commitment from the CK organization insiders, particularly the incoming executive director and board. The question remained whether or not my role would continue to be supported at CK when a new executive director was hired.

Chapter Summary of Self-Study

My practice as facilitator in this study included sharing advice and suggestions with the teachers. Teachers often commented that I gave ideas and advice that helped with their classroom studies. They specifically mentioned that I gave advice in regards to schedules, classroom materials, environment and incorporating learning concepts. In my practice, I also shared ideas with teachers on how to introduce learning concepts that connect with children’s interests. As facilitator, I found that it was important to create a balance between sharing advice
and allowing teachers to discover things on their own. Sharing also meant that teachers may or may not use my ideas and suggestions. I had to be comfortable if they disagreed with me or did not use my ideas or suggestions. I also shared personal information regarding my son and personal life in order to develop a trusting relationship with teachers knowing that this supports collaboration (Riley & Roach, 2006).

Additionally, through listening, I gained an overall sense of direction in the meetings and the interests of the teachers. Listening to the teachers during the meetings and afterwards, I was able to gain new insight and ideas to further our collaborative practices. Listening to teachers’ suggestions led to the creation of a planning form for teachers to use in meetings and afterwards to communicate with other teachers.

The teachers, and Eleni (the education coordinator), commented that my role as an outsider was beneficial to the teachers because I was able to provide a different perspective. While I agree that the outside perspective was beneficial, it also came with challenges. As an outside facilitator, it was challenging to sustain the work the teachers and I constructed after the meetings were finished. For example, implementing the use of a planning form did not have any backing from the administration; therefore some teachers did not use it. In addition, it was challenging to implement new practices or policies as an outside facilitator within the CK organization.

I discovered that there are both positives and negatives to being an outside facilitator. An outside facilitator provides a different perspective towards classroom experiences and teachers’ professional development. This was crucial for the teachers in this study. My role as facilitator provided ongoing support for the challenges teachers encountered with collaboration, dialogue, and reflection. At the same time, it was difficult to sustain the policies and procedures.
constructed as a result of collaborative meetings when there was not a supportive administration in place. A facilitator’s role is dependent on the commitment and efforts of not only the teachers, but also the organizational leadership.
Chapter 7.

Summary and Recommendations

It is a way of looking that affirms confidence in the capacity of people, children and adults alike, to benefit from the differences among us, each contributing to the whole. (Carini, 2007, p. 8)

My research study explores how teachers’ collaborative inquiry about classroom practices and the study of children’s interests contributes to teachers’ and a facilitator’s professional development. The findings of this study contribute to and expand upon major theories and empirical knowledge about a social constructivist theoretical framework applied to professional development through the study of children’s interests using collaborative inquiry and documentation protocol. In this study, the teachers and I attempted to move beyond the study of children’s interests as simply a catch phrase that is often found in literature (Birbili & Tsitouridou, 2008; Gestwicki, 2010). Instead, this research study investigated how teachers and I, as the facilitator, collaboratively constructed a study of children’s interests and used this knowledge for curriculum construction and professional development. Within this social constructivist framework, knowledge was constructed with one another through our praxis.

In this chapter, the research questions are used to organize my interpretation of the results of this study. The first section is a discussion of the action research outcomes and suggestions. The first three questions address the findings as related to the experiences teachers and I encountered during our collaborative team meetings. This discussion reflects the results of collaboratively viewing and discussing children’s interests through documentation. In addition, the findings related to the development of curriculum and professional development opportunities using documentation of children’s interests are discussed.

The second section is a discussion of the self-study findings. In this section I address the self-study research questions by first describing the in-depth investigation of my practice as
facilitator throughout the collaborative team meetings. Last, I discuss the issues related to what I learned about my role as facilitator in the collaborative study of children's interests within a social constructivist theoretical framework.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked: How does the collaborative viewing of documentation of classroom activities influence the researcher and teachers’ understanding of children’s interests?

Dewey (1903) defined interest as dynamic in his book, *Interest as Related to Will*. To be interested in something means to be concerned about it, emotionally, actively, and objectively. According to Dewey, “the root of the term seems to be that of being engaged, engrossed, or entirely taken up with some activity because of its recognized worth” (1903, p. 13). In this study, the teachers and I attempted to collaboratively create practices within our meetings and classrooms in order to study and understand children’s interests. The teachers’ attempted to implement the use of observations, documentation and small group work to identify children’s interests and collaboratively we discussed the results in our team meeting. The findings from this study indicate the social constructivist complexities of studying children’s interests.

Classroom collaboration. Few studies mention the complexities of collaboration among teachers in studying and planning with children’s interests (Wien, 2000, 2002). In this study, teachers in the Authoritative Ant and later Decentralized Dragonfly classroom demonstrated some of the challenges and complexities of working collaboratively among the teachers and with children. In these classrooms, teachers were accustomed to conducting large group activities lead by the lead teacher. Teachers commented on lack of communication and the inability of the lead teacher to delegate rather than dictate the classroom organization. Ana struggled with
Adriana, the lead teacher who resisted organizing and conducting small group activities, therefore making it difficult to study children’s interests. For example, Ana often described her struggles with communicating with the lead teacher Adriana, including feeling intimidated, regarding her small group studies with children. In contrast, Cristina, the lead teacher in the Communal Crickets demonstrated the ability to work with the other teachers to decide how they would form small group studies and support each other in documenting their work.

**Recommendations for classroom collaboration.** In order for teachers, both assistant and lead, to study children’s interests they need time and resources to develop strong collaborative classroom teams. The experiences of the teachers in the Ant and Dragonfly rooms reflect findings from the research that teachers need more preparation for working with each other in regards to classroom policies and procedures (Moran & Abbott, 2002). This process was difficult for some teachers because they were required to shift their classroom approach and give up traditional power roles.

As a result of this study, I question how teachers’ attitudes towards lead and assistant teaching positions influence their willingness to use a more social constructivist approach towards collaborative planning. Research suggests that beliefs about young children’s capabilities have profound effects on teacher decisions and classroom practices (Parajes, 1992; Raymond, 1993; Renzagalia et al., 1997; Richardson, 1996; Thompson, 1992). At the conclusion of this study, I also wonder how teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards working with each other effects the adoption of social constructivist approach towards curriculum planning and classroom practices. In particular, I wonder how lead teachers’ attitudes towards assistant teachers’ roles and responsibilities affect their willingness to adopt social constructivist practices in the classroom.
Many or most early childhood classrooms have at least two to three teachers in a classroom (Haigh, 2008). CK had three to four teachers in each classroom to cover all of the hours the center was open. As a result of this study, I learned that it is not easy to have three to four teachers working together in one classroom. Teachers are not often trained to share responsibilities, particularly between lead and assistant teachers. According to Haigh (2008), many early childhood classrooms follow a model where there is a lead teacher and assistant teachers follow her plan. Despite the teachers’ interest in continuing the use of an interest-based curriculum approach and collaborative team meetings, it was uncertain how much the CK teachers would use this approach after this research study was completed. The hiring of a new executive director will significantly influence this. His or her support will be critical to supporting teachers’ further work with a Reggio-inspired approach. The teachers will require further professional development support that focuses on communication and collaboration between lead and assistant teachers if this approach is to further be developed and maintained throughout the Center.

Based on my study, I argue here for more research that is related to the relationships existing between assistant and lead teachers working in early childhood classrooms, particularly those that are engaged in practices that focus on children’s interests. Research studies are recommended that would focus on how to build teachers’ abilities to communicate and delegate responsibilities in the classroom. This line of investigation might focus on how and if classroom teachers focused on communication and delegation would this change their collaborative efforts, and if their collaborative efforts would result in a more sophisticated study of children’s interests.
**Studying children in small groups.** Teachers commented on the benefits of working collaboratively in the classroom to support each other and engage children in small group activities based on children’s interests. As stated earlier, Wasik (2008) recommended instruction with small groups of children because they allow teachers unique opportunities to study and document children’s experiences. Teachers commented that they were able to observe individual learning styles and how children interacted with each other. In addition, teachers commented that the children talked more in their small groups. Teachers believed this was because the children felt more comfortable with them. Cristina commented that, “Children are more comfortable with us because they notice us paying attention.” Birbili and Tsitouridou (2008) suggested that “children can be revealing about their interests if given the chance to talk about them through genuine discussions and conversations” (p. 151). Teachers noticed the differences in working with small groups of children in contrast to their former practice of large group activities. The small group work allowed teachers to observe, listen, and converse with children in ways that were not possible when conducting large group activities.

**Documenting children’s interests.** The teachers and I attempted to understand children’s interests by observing them through documenting their interactions, work, and conversations. According to Birbili and Tsitouridou (2008), in order to be able to identify children’s interests, teachers need to know how to observe and document. The challenge was to call teachers’ attention to children’s interests through documentation versus relying on what they informally thought they were. Teachers were challenged to bring in actual documentation rather than simply re-telling their observations. Teachers often mentioned, “not having enough time” or “the camera didn’t work” when describing the challenges they encountered with
documentation practices. According to Haigh (2008), this is a common problem for teachers when they begin to implement documentation in their daily routines.

In our collaborative conversations regarding the documentation of children’s interests, teachers were able to discuss, question, and point out what they saw in each other’s documentation in order to create a deeper meaning. Studying children’s interests required teachers to suspend judgments and embrace uncertainties. Malaguzzi (1993) stated, “It’s important for the teacher who works with young children to understand she knows little about children” (p. 54). The documentation from Cristina’s study of L. tearing down buildings challenged us to look deeper at her motives. L. appeared more interested in structures being torn down in contrast to the other children who enjoyed structures being built.

In this study, teachers were able to collaboratively discuss the observations and challenges teachers were experiencing with one child. According to Kavensky (2001), shared discussions that focus on the documentation of one child, “create opportunities in the classroom for building on the child’s strengths—at the same time the recommendations support the strengths of the teacher and the realities of the classroom” (p. 153). Our collaborative discussions that focused on the shared documentation of one child are an example of social constructivism applied to the teachers’ growth and development.

Slowing down and reflecting on children’s interests through documentation revealed children’s capabilities in a way that the milestone checklists teachers were accustomed to using did not. When teachers’ documented children within the context of their engagement with their interests we were able to see their capabilities. Ana commented that the documentation helped her see that “children are really smart.” Doli used documentation to describe children engaged with a study of anatomy. During this study they were able to recognize and read anatomy terms.
Children were motivated to learn new words when the words were connected to their interests. Kathryn Au (1997) referred to this as an ownership of literacy development. The children expressed an ownership of their literacy development and applied reading and writing to their own experiences in their own ways.

**Recommendations for documentation.** An integral part of documentation is the use of technology such as digital cameras, video recorders, and computers. To collect good documentation, programs need to support teachers with resources such as functioning, high quality cameras. This is challenging for small nonprofit organizations like CK. Programs will need to be creative about locating funds so teachers can collect materials using a variety of documentation formats. I also recommend further research studies consider having a training component as part of the intervention to see if providing basic technology skills to teachers who are less familiar with technology will influence their engagement with documentation.

Preparing documentation also required time to organize these materials outside of collaborative meeting times. This is a big challenge for small, year round programs such as CK. CK has an advantage over other programs in that it has four teachers per classroom. The high number of teachers allowed more flexibility for teachers to leave the classroom during naptimes for meetings. Teachers could also utilize this time on the days they are not meeting to organize documentation. Of course, this would require support from the CK administration.

**Artwork as documentation.** The visual arts play an important role in documenting learning (Schroeder-Yu, 2008). Children’s visual interpretations reflect their understanding of the world around them. The result is not only the product, but also the processes by which these meanings are constructed.
Initially, the teachers were not accustomed to providing opportunities for children to express their interests through visual examples, such as drawings or sculptures. For example, Doli described her initial process as “starting up here” when the teacher focused on activities that promoted a product or what the teacher wanted as an answer. In contrast, the examples of the children’s self-portraits in Doli’s study showed individual the progression of the children’s ideas. Children moved from seeing themselves as part of their families to individuals after continual studying, discussing, and drawing self-portraits. Through Doli’s documentation, teachers discovered that by allowing children to revisit their own images, new details began to emerge in their drawings. When teachers shared examples of children’s artwork, whether they were drawings or examples of their building structures, we were provided new insights into the child’s interest and ideas. Children’s works allowed the teachers and I to study the context of their world in order to better understand their development.

**Recommendations for visual arts training.** As a result of this study, I suggest that early childhood teachers would benefit from more experiences in their training with using the visual arts beyond making projects. The teachers in this study benefited from collaborative discussions with a facilitator on how to create meaningful experiences that allowed children to visually create descriptions of their interests. Doli described this as “starting at the bottom” when she meant creating meaningful opportunities for children to express themselves with different materials. It also meant teachers respecting children’s works, in Carini’s (2007) words, “as illustrations of her interests and capacities” (p. 197). I would argue from my findings that teachers benefit from gaining insight into creating opportunities for children to demonstrate what they understand about their world through the visual arts. Teachers would benefit from training experiences that expose them to activities that move them beyond children’s artwork as products.
Valuing different perspectives. In all of the final meetings and interviews, teachers commented on their desire to continue the collaborative team meetings. They all mentioned that they considered the collaborative discussions as a way to help them see different perspectives and to think outside of the box. Moran (2007) called this a move away from considering one’s own viewpoint toward considering the multiple perspectives of the other members of the team meetings. Ana mentioned in an interview that the other collaborative team members helped her see different perspectives in regard to children’s interests, “the other teachers came up with other ideas about what they saw kids were really interested in not off of what I hoped kids’ interests were.”

All three of the focus group teachers mentioned in my final interviews that they found the study of children’s interests both challenging and a learning experience. All three teachers found it challenging to think about children who were younger or older than the children in their study groups. At the same time, they found learning about the interests of the age groups represented in the other classrooms as a learning experience. Cristina mentioned, “I learned from Ana and Doli, how to organize things, step by step for their age groups. It was important learning what the other classrooms were doing to prepare us for working with kids in that room.” From this perspective, teachers learned from each other as a result of participation in collaborative viewing of documentation of children’s interests. This is another example of social constructivism applied to teacher professional growth because the teachers were learning from each other and learning from their different perspectives and experiences.

Sharing interests with children. While studying children’s interests, teachers began to see how their ideas were part of children’s ideas. Teachers’ interests and children’s intertwined as revealed in Doli’s self-image study when children moved beyond an interest in their physical
appearances to an interest in the inside of their bodies. Doli was able to include in the study her prior knowledge and interest by bringing in x-rays, skeletal models, and anatomy books from her former university coursework. She commented on her excitement to share anatomy terms with the children. In addition, when asked if it was challenging to find out children’s interests, Dulce, a teacher from the Decentralized Dragonfly room, responded, “No! Cause I like what they like!”

Cristina also commented that the children drew her into their interests:

I wasn’t that excited with the buildings study at first. We are downtown and there are buildings all the time, what is so exciting? But when I saw the things that the children were interested in like, the texture, or height or width or whatever, I became interested too. When I let them guide me a little bit, they pull me in. I will get excited about it too just seeing them excited about building things. (Christina Interview, June 18, 2011)

This study suggests that meaning making relies on relationships (Moran, 2007). My priority was to establish a social constructivist learning community composed of collaboration between teachers, facilitator, and children while sharing interests and the possibility of learning from one another. In this study, socially based experiences in the collaborative team meetings and classrooms encouraged participants, including children, to share learning experiences. These experiences reflect what Rogoff (1995), a social constructivist theorist, referred to as participatory appropriation in which individuals create new understandings as a result of participation in collaborative learning contexts. In other words, teachers, children, and facilitator advanced their knowledge and skills by adjusting to mutual socially constructed planning. This practice of studying and learning with children may prove to be beneficial in creating teachers and facilitators who are able to more effectively incorporate children’s interests in the classroom.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question asked: How does studying documentation in weekly team meetings enable teachers, and facilitator to collaboratively construct curriculum based on children’s interests?
In this research study, the teachers and I attempted to understand how the study of children’s interests could apply to our curriculum planning. Despite the current focus on academics in early childhood curriculum, early childhood educators have long advocated for approaches that are inquiry based and include the child’s interests as part of curriculum development. According to Birbili and Tsitouridou (2008), however, the use of children’s interests as a basis for organizing learning is rarely elaborated on in early childhood literature or discussed in practical terms for teachers. In this research study, we used observations made by teachers of children’s interests during their play or other activities to create classroom studies.

Organizing learning. Our weekly team meetings assisted teachers in their organization of purposeful small group activities that focused on an inquiry related to children’s interests. We collaboratively created studies based on a question to structure possible paths to investigate children’s interests. In other words, our collaborative conversations and planning around an inquiry helped the curriculum become focused. Creating an inquiry based on children’s interests allowed us to design meaningful activities rather than a hodgepodge of unrelated experiences (Walton, 1971).

As per a few teachers’ request, I created a planning form for organizing activities. The planning form allowed teachers to organize activities based upon their inquiries with children. Only about half of the teachers used the form. The other teachers relied on notes they took during the meetings to keep track of suggestions. The planning form might have been more useful if all of the teachers used and posted it in the classroom. This may have contributed to stronger communication with the other classroom teachers and parents because they would have been able to see the inquiry and activities the teacher was conducting with the children.
The results of this study indicate similar challenges found in Wong (2010) and Wien’s (2002) research findings. They found that teachers often experienced challenges in adopting new approaches due to lack of adequate administrative support. At the time of this study, there was no executive director on site. Therefore, there was no one to establish and maintain policies such as implementing a planning form. While some teachers used the form on their own initiative, others didn’t feel they had to because there was no one in authority position supporting this decision. As a result, it is difficult to determine whether or not the planning form was a successful tool for teachers to use.

**Having faith.** In their prior curriculum planning processes, the CK teachers were accustomed to using a prepackaged curriculum with preplanned activities. Prescribed curriculum kits reflect the notion that children and teachers are not capable of creating their own learning experiences. In our curriculum collaborative planning process, the teachers needed to trust their abilities to continually hypothesize about the development of projects. Rinaldi (2000) referred to as a “faith in themselves” (p. 128) and confidence in their ideas.

In final interviews with Cristina and Doli, they expressed that the collaborative meetings and study of documentation helped them “slow down” when planning activities. Cristina commented that she learned to “take a study step by step and focus on what kids are interested in and then think about how to build on them in different ways.” When teachers were challenged to follow the direction of children’s interests it helped move them into new ideas. This reflects what Carini (1979) described as the connection between the children’s interests and education. “If we are going to make the inner experience and interest of the person at the center of education, then we must be able to grasp that experience or we will fail in our task” (Carini, 1979, p. 16).
This was more difficult for Ana. The data revealed that she was often concerned with a power struggle between herself and the lead Ant classroom teacher. She commented that she felt intimidated to conduct her small group studies with the children, because the lead teacher did not recognize the practice of studying children’s interests. Ana also mentioned that she was comfortable with learning from others who delegate in the classroom. As Birbili and Tsitouridou (2008) pointed out, the biggest difficulty is for teachers to understand their role in building curriculum with children’s interests.

It seems apparent that Ana struggled with what her role should be in the classroom and also in creating activities for children. There is a certain amount of peer pressure to conform within a teaching team when the lead teacher expects things to be done in a particular way. This was confusing for Ana because the lead teacher was doing things in a way that contradicted what was being discussed in our collaborative weekly team meetings.

In addition, Cristina mentioned that in order for collaboration to work, the members need to be open to trying new ideas that were not their own. She also mentioned the overall organizational structure of the classroom, including the relationship of the teachers and their attitudes as elements that affected the success of trying out new activities. Her comments call into question whether or not certain classrooms or teachers would be able to integrate an inquiry, interest-based curriculum into their practice.

Slavit and Nelson (2009) suggested that it can take years of modeling, gentle persuasion, and professional development to influence teachers’ core believes about teaching. They also suggest that developing an inquiry stance towards teaching and learning is even more complex and possibly controversial because it requires changes to a teacher’s very nature. Supporting the
teachers’ development towards using an inquiry and interest-based curriculum would require more time than the four months of my research study.

**Children’s interests and school readiness.** According to Scheinfeld, Haigh, and Scheinfeld (2008), there are no known controlled studies that examine child development outcomes related to school readiness within a Reggio approach. Teachers in this study recognized the connections that were be made between children’s interests and school readiness concepts. Our planning meetings did not initially focus on discussing how to incorporate children’s interests with early childhood learning standards or school readiness concepts. I was primarily concerned with how teachers were developing an understanding of children’s interests rather than focusing on school readiness concepts. I was also fairly sure, based on my prior experiences with planned interest based activities, that these concepts would be covered within our small group studies.

In fact, teachers did comment that they learned that is was possible to weave school readiness concepts with children’s interests. Cristina commented, “I learned if it is something they are interested in, like buildings, you can get them ready for school with literacy, letter recognition, things like that through their interests.” In Cristina’s study of buildings, she documented how children recognized the letters on building signs and used the letters to identify the buildings. As mentioned earlier, the children in Doli’s study group recognized anatomy terms. This is another example of how children developed what Au (1997) referred to as children owning their literacy development by connecting their interests with print awareness skills.

As a result of our collaborative planning, teachers were able to identify different learning concepts that were incorporated within their studies of children’s interests. Dulce shared
documentation from her robot study of children comparing height and size. In our collaborative meeting we planned activities that included measuring, graphing, and comparing the size of the children’s robots. Chenoa shared in her documentation the children’s fascination with the design, color, and shapes on cupcakes after a visit to a bakery. To reflect this interest, children used different drawing materials to create the patterns they observed. The following quote reflected the kind of learning experiences the teachers created for children. According to Scheinfeld et al. (2008):

> Skill development is most meaningful and effective when it builds on children’s motives to explore relationships and explore the world in the context of those relationships. Through these processes, children experience the pleasures of speaking, thinking, reading writing, and mathematics as rewarding ways of pursuing their deep lying interests and their curiosities. (p. 114)

**Recommendations for school readiness.** In this research study, the teachers and I investigated a possible alternative approach to early childhood classroom instruction inspired by the social constructivist theory of the Reggio Emilia approach. This approach is in contrast to early childhood curricula designed to emphasize academics and activities that can be measured (Shepard et al., 1998).

Prior to and during my study, I had experienced parents and program evaluators who confronted teachers wanting to know how their children were being prepared for kindergarten within a socially constructed interest based curriculum like the Reggio Emilia approach. I argue here that early childhood teachers would benefit from learning about research that demonstrate the learning benefits for children in interest-based classrooms. There were incidents in our collaborative conversations when we focused on what to say to parents when they ask, what is my child learning. As a result, teachers began to feel more comfortable with providing answers to them that reflected the learning skills children were acquiring as a result of exploring their interests.
I recommend that teachers need to be given opportunities to think about their pedagogy, to learn about research that supports their practices, and to work in a supportive environment that creates opportunities for discussion about their practice. When teachers adopt new strategies, they will themselves have questions similar to the parents about effectiveness of the approach. Gaining experience with a new approach, plus developing a research based rationale to support it, can only happen if teachers are given the professional development opportunities required to both teach in new ways and talk with parents about the value of the new approach. When teachers are provided with this kind of support, they will be able to talk intelligently to parents and others outside of their center about their concerns using a Reggio Emilia based approach.

Research Question 3

The third research question asked: How does studying documentation of children’s interests at weekly team meetings provide professional growth for teachers? For my research study, teachers played a major role in providing quality experiences for young children in early education programs. In my review of literature, I discussed issues that relate to current early childhood teachers’ professional development. There is a general lack of understanding how the study of teachers’ practices beyond traditional staff development supports teachers’ development. Dunne, Beach, and Kontos (2001) argued that teachers often lack training that builds reflections of their teaching practice approaches or addresses the individual needs of children. In this research study, professional development was created through joint discussions of documentation at collaborative weekly team meetings that focused on children’s interests and real classroom experiences.

This type of professional development is in direct contrast to what has traditionally been offered to early childhood teachers. Typically early childhood teachers’ professional
development opportunities are conducted away from their sites (e.g. university courses or offsite trainings) and are not explicitly focused on teachers’ own classrooms and instructional practices. They also do not allow for collaborative reflection and experimentation (Cohen et al 1993; Little, 1993). In my research study, teachers had ongoing, professional development that required direct reflection on their classroom experiences. The outcome was teacher learning. This kind of long-term, collaborative and embedded professional development is supported by the teacher education research literature (Mangione, 1992; Schmoker, 2006; Winton & McCullum, 2008). The results of this study demonstrate how embedded professional development opportunities supported teachers’ use of documentation and reflection to enhance their instructional practices as a result of collaboratively studying the interests of children.

Eleni mentioned two ways that our meetings were different from the professional development offered by the SW University. The first was that our collaborative meetings were happening weekly in comparison to once a month. Our meetings were consistent and frequent so that teachers were able to have ongoing support for their work in the classrooms. Second, teachers discussed in our meetings their experiences with children in the classrooms. In comparison, the SW University professional development providers came into the classrooms and conducted activities with children. They expected the teachers to model and learn from their approach. Instead, teachers disregarded them and took the role of bystander. It is difficult to determine if their modeling had any impact on the teachers teaching practices. However, Cristina commented on the differences between the SW providers and our more consistent conversations.

The meetings have helped us in the classroom and in planning as well. The other ones (professional development providers), they just threw activities at us and we were expected to just do them. We didn’t really get anything out of them and the kids didn’t
get anything out of them, so it was almost like a waste. Yeah it really was. (Christina Interview, February 28, 2011)

Similar to Mangione’s (1992) findings, our discussions led to teachers to create visions for their teaching practices. Our conversations and planning sessions were in direct relation to what was happening in their classrooms. Teachers’ ability to develop and carry out plans was supported by collective reflection on documentation. Rinaldi (2006) referred to this use of documentation as a process where together we create common meanings and values. She stated, “Documentation becomes a process of true creativity and growth for everyone involved. It is the true professional training of the teacher” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 58). The joint discussion of documentation created professional growth that derived from exchange and discussion we were able to jointly learn about children from children. Opportunities were created that allowed teachers to apply theory to practice.

Cadwell (1997) argued that knowledge of child development principles and the ability to engage in ongoing studies with children are the main challenges teachers face when using an interest-based curriculum. Findings from this study suggest that teachers addressed these challenges through collaborative efforts, creating what Fosnot (1996) referred to as a “community of discourse” (p. 201). This community was dependent on experiences that were shared and embedded in our practice through consistent and reflective ongoing conversations.

Collaborative learning opportunities, however, were not enough to ensure that plans would be carried out or would succeed. Ana’s experiences demonstrated that the successful implementation of plans required the teacher to feel support in her classroom. The classroom environment was the place where teachers carried out the planned activities. In Ana’s situation, she did not always exhibit confidence or enthusiasm in implementing activities with children. Doli experienced similar setbacks with Dulce’s authoritative leadership style. Despite these
setbacks, the collaborative team meetings provided the teachers a place to share and strategize how to move forward.

**Creating a collective voice.** Teachers in this study demonstrated that they not only engaged in collaborative team meetings because it was expected, but also because they cared about their work, one another, and the children in their classrooms. Despite the lack of administrational leadership, teachers continued to regularly participate in weekly team meetings and conduct studies within their classrooms. Interpersonal and professional relationships grew throughout the collaborative weekly team meetings, between teachers and myself as facilitator. These relationships were supported by an environment and pedagogy of collaborative inquiry created within the context of our meetings. Teachers shared not only their challenges and experiences with children, but also the challenges they experienced with their colleagues. It became common practice for teachers to provide advice and guidance for each other in regards to all aspects of their classroom practices, including their relationships with other teachers. Eleni noticed the teachers’ changing conversations as a result of the collaborative team meetings and described the change in the following quote.

Their [the teachers’] conversations are changing. Rather than just the friendship conversations, now they are conversing about different kinds of materials. They are saying, hey how is your study? What can we do with this? They are feeding ideas off of each other as opposed to, before it was more just conversation. Now they are feeding each other a little differently like, hey I noticed these kids are doing this. And another teacher responding, yeah, I’m noticing it too. (Eleni Interview, February 28, 2011)

Teachers expressed their desire to continue the collaborative team meetings and the ability to share ideas with one another at the conclusion of my study. In addition, in the closing weeks of my study, teachers shared their concerns and interests in the hiring of a new executive director. Collaboratively, they represented their interests by creating a list of the most important qualities they desired. In this example, teachers demonstrated that they valued an administrator
who would continue to support their exploration of the Reggio approach and one who would be supportive of teachers’. Kinney and Wharton (2008) discussed the need among Reggio-inspired educators for continuous support through professional development. Democratic conversations between the teachers and I allowed for meanings regarding professional growth to be socially constructed.

**Further Discussion from Action Research Study**

As a result of this study, there are issues that I still question and that deserve attention. This research study focused on the professional development of the classroom teachers and not the education coordinator. Eleni, the education coordinator, was present and participated in this study, but she was in the periphery. In addition, her role and responsibilities were unclear to me. She attended most of the collaborative team meetings. Her participation in the meetings was often similar to the teachers. She asked questions about the teachers’ documentation and provided suggestions. I often discussed issues with her like meeting times or teacher coverage in the classroom. On occasion, I would informally talk with her regarding the happenings of meetings after they occurred. She often commented on what she was learning about the teachers and children from the meetings. She was never negative and always noticed the positive aspects of the children and teachers.

However, she did not intervene when teachers were having conflicts with each other. I found this surprising. Nor did she make recommendations or establish requirements for things such as using the planning form or conducting small group activities. CK was lacking an executive director and it is my assumption that the teachers looked to Eleni for administrative leadership. No one ever said this directly, but it appeared that they relied on her for support in their classrooms, even though her approach was non-interventionist. I am left with several
questions about Eleni’s role at CK. I wonder if she was committed to a non-interventionist approach, or if she was simply lacking leadership skills. Or, did she simply not think it was her role as an education coordinator to be a leader? It is difficult to determine this based on this research study. This causes me to also wonder how this research study would be different if Eleni would have been more active or if there was an executive director.

This leads to the next issue regarding the difference between classroom teams and collaborative team meetings. Prior to this research study, I worked with the CK classroom teams during weekly meetings; which included the lead and assistant teachers from each classroom. We had to change the groupings due to teacher coverage issues during our meeting time that took place during naptimes. Eleni and I then reorganized the meetings to include a teacher from each classroom in each of the three weekly meetings. Initially, I thought this would be a great opportunity to study how collaboration with the other classroom teachers would influence their practices in comparison to discussing individual classrooms at each meeting. I also assumed that teachers had established organization in their classrooms during my initial engagement with the classroom teams at CK and were prepared for sharing their practice with teachers from the other classrooms. I thought cross-classroom discussions might be productive because the classrooms were very different.

However, as a result of this study, I am left wondering if the cross-classroom collaboration contributed to the teachers’ confusion and lack of communication, particularly in the Authoritative Ant classroom. I am unsure if the team meetings were less effective because teachers were not planning with their classroom team and instead planning with the collaborative team members. Were teachers missing opportunities to help support each other’s classroom studies? I also wonder if there would have been a more effective way to support collaboration in
the classrooms, for example with an additional meeting time during another day of the week.

These are all topics for further investigation.
Self-Study Research Questions

There are a few recent studies that mention the practices of a facilitator (Moran, 2007, Riley & Roach, 2006), coordinator (Haigh, 2007), or pedagogista (Carr, 2004; Wong, 2010) in the collaborative study of documentation and children’s interests. These three titles represent similar positions. The results of my self-study expand the findings from these studies about the practices of a facilitator in collaborative inquiry and documentation protocol.

My second set of research questions reflects the self-study approach I used to investigate myself as the facilitator. The first question represents the study of my practices as a facilitator while working with the teachers in weekly meetings. I identified three words that emerged as categories from my self-study data—inquiring, listening, and sharing. The second research question represents my role as a facilitator in the collaborative study of children’s interests.

Self-Study Research Question 1

The first self-study research question asked: How does the collaborative study of documentation of children's interests with teachers change my practice as a facilitator? I initially expected to find changes in my practice as facilitator in this study. As a result of the research findings, I did not identify changes in my practice, but I did develop a much deeper understanding of the complexities of my role as facilitator in the collaborative study of children’s interests. Jones (1993) described facilitation as a relationship; something that you do with teachers not to teachers. Cultivating and maintaining collaboration with the teachers was complex and an important part of my practice as the facilitator in this study. The analysis of my practices reveals an important balance that I needed to maintain between guiding and instructing teachers. Using documentation as a tool for shared discussion and reflection, for myself and with the teachers, involved facilitating the reciprocity of ideas and communication within team
meetings. The first data category I found to describe my practices within the meetings was inquiring.

**Inquiring.** The results of this self-study indicated that the practice of asking questions of both the teachers and myself was an important part of my practice as a facilitator. Teachers mentioned on several occasions that my questions helped them focus on their practice and activities. My questioning strategy helped them think of their experiences in new and compelling ways. My intentions as facilitator were to compel teachers to reflect and re-examine their own practices, beliefs, and preconceptions about children and interests and their roles as teachers.

My practice of asking questions was in opposition to the practices of other professional development providers that were or had been used at CK. Eleni and the teachers commented that the other professional development providers came into their classrooms and monthly staff meetings positioned as experts. They expected teachers to follow their lead. Sparks (1994) suggested that there needs to be a shift from the usual professional development practice of educators sitting passively, watching from a distance, while an expert introduces them to new ideas or attempts to train them in new practices.

In my practice I chose to focus teachers’ attention on children’s work and their own practice by asking questions. I followed the advice of Allen and Blythe (2004) who suggested that questions are a facilitator’s most important tool for organization. Asking questions rather than making assumptions about their practice helped develop a facilitator and teacher relationship. Teachers described my questions as open-ended, challenging and reflective.

I asked questions because I was genuinely curious and wanted to know what was happening in their classrooms or what their ideas were. Asking questions meant facilitating
autonomy among participants to sustain their own ideas and professional learning. As Eleni said, “You ask questions in a way that teachers get to answer their own questions. You ask things in a way that they pretty much figure it out for themselves. You get them to come up with ideas on your own rather than you giving it to them.” As a result of this study, I learned that my practices of asking questions, suspending judgments and embracing the teachers’ ideas were helpful practices in my role as facilitator.

In addition to asking teachers questions to inform their practice, I also created an inquiry stance towards my own practice. Questions were an important strategy towards organizing my research and journal writing. My practice involved the complementary processes of doing, asking, and thinking (Dewey, 1938). The doing involved participating and recording the meetings. Following the meetings, I transcribed the audio recordings and asked myself questions about the teachers and my interactions and experiences. The questions caused me to re-think our work and think of ways in which I might change my practices as the facilitator. New understandings emerged from the inquiry into my practices.

While I am calling this part of my research a self-study because my focus was primarily on myself as facilitator, this cycle also closely resembles an action research cycle. In this cycle I was asking questions (in the meeting with teachers), collecting data (audio taping our meetings), and analyzing the data (reflecting and coding the transcriptions of the meetings), which led to further questions for myself and the teachers (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001).

**Recommendation for facilitator professional development.** The findings from recent research on facilitator practices generally focus on inquiry approaches towards teacher development (Carr, 2004; Haigh, 2007; Moran, 2007). Self-study research findings also suggest
developing an inquiry stance and documentation strategies for the facilitators’ own professional growth (Loughran, Mulhall, & Berry, 2004). Asking myself questions was pivotal in shaping my facilitator practice. In addition, documenting myself was an opportunity to understand my practice in the meetings. To be an inquiry-based facilitator required me to be involved in an ongoing, inquiry into my own practice.

The self-study literature also recommends that teacher educators and facilitators who are investigating their roles through self-study research, develop interactivity through critical friends with whom they can dialogue to examine their practice (LaBoskey & Hamilton, 2010; Samaras, 2010). Some have argued that a critical friend is a necessary component of self-study (Loughran, Hamilton, et al., 2004). I was accustomed to collaborative professional development practices with my colleagues at Chicago Commons, but was essentially alone in my practice as a facilitator at CK. However, I was able to critique and reflect on my practice through my self-study process in this research study and with my advisor over Skype. In this self-study, I used the concept of the mirror to examine my practices and myself. I often reflected on my past experiences as a teacher, coordinator, and teacher educator in order to understand my present role as a facilitator. I found my situation similar to Goodell (2011) who also developed a self-study of her practice as a teacher educator without the use of critical friends. She stated, “I see the process of self-study as my critical friend, since engaging in the process of reflecting on my experiences in the classroom, and writing this paper, has made me look critically and refine my practices” (Goodell, 2011, p. 124).

Engaging in this self-study research has allowed me to examine my work and actions through reflective inquiry. In addition, I relied on the data collected from teachers on feedback forms, in meetings, and interviews to help understand my facilitator practices. In this sense, I
opened up my practice for self-scrutiny and scrutiny by others (Goodell, 2011). An important result of this study reveals my professional growth through studying my practice by asking questions and documenting my practice. My self-study research contributes to the practice of other facilitators engaged in collaborative inquiry with teachers.

**Listening.** Equally important to asking questions in my practice was listening to responses and ideas. As I observed the teachers’ dialogue in our collaborative team meetings, I listened and asked myself how to facilitate collaboration. I found listening and acting on suggestions an important aspect of my role as facilitator within the collaborative groups. As part of my practice, I encouraged collaboration so that participants could “develop common starting points for deeper discussion and reflection upon pedagogical issues” (Wong, 2010, p. 140). Listening required being open to the teachers’ ideas and in return recognizing their importance. As a result of listening, I found myself inspired by the input and suggestions that teachers gave to each other. Rinaldi (2006) described listening in this way as, “an active verb that involves interpretation, giving meaning to the message and value to those who offer it” (p. 65).

Reflecting on my experiences, I realized that a facilitator needs to practice being attentive and listen before rushing in to give advice. I examined my practices in this area by studying myself through the audio recordings from meetings. My self-analysis demonstrated that, I first listened in order to instill confidence by asking for feedback from their fellow collaborative team members. I wanted to contribute to their support by pointing out successful aspects of their inquiries and suggestions. As a consequence, the teachers demonstrated on several occasions the ability to support and encourage each other.

**Listening to children.** In addition to listening to the teachers, it was an important part of my practice to listen to the voice of children. I often called attention to what children were
saying, doing, or creating within the documentation teachers brought to collaborative team meetings. In response to the interview question “What kinds of strategies do I use as a facilitator in weekly meetings that help you to think about how to use the interests of children for planning your classroom activities,” Cristina responded, “you remind us to think how the kids are thinking.” As facilitator, I listened and asked questions to move teachers beyond what appeared to be children’s interests on the surface to find deeper understandings. This task was often not easy, particularly when teachers did not bring enough documentation to the meetings to form any kind of understanding of children’s experiences. However, it was my job to continue to listen and inquire about what teachers did bring and to help teachers’ construct ideas regarding children’s interests.

Sharing. My practice as facilitator in this study went beyond facilitating collaboration and teacher learning. I also realized that a facilitator must also practice sharing with the team members. Filippini (2008) stated that social constructivism and “interactionism” or relationships are the theoretical frameworks that guide teacher professional development. In the context of this study, sharing contributed to my relationship with the teachers. Teachers often commented that I gave ideas and advice that helped with their classroom studies. They specifically mentioned that I gave advice in regards to schedules, classroom materials, environment and incorporating learning concepts. This type of advice was shared regularly at collaborative team meetings. Sharing cannot be separated from the relationship of asking and listening with teachers. It meant putting my ideas and suggestions out there and feeling comfortable with teachers’ interpretations. I had to be comfortable if they disagreed with me or did not use my ideas or suggestions. Sharing was a way of responding and participating in the dialogue and contributed to a social constructivist learning experience for the teachers and myself.
Riley and Roach (2006) asserted that facilitators should develop a trusting relationship with teachers for effective collaboration. As a result of this study, I became more aware of how I developed my relationship with teachers. The teachers commented on the fact that I shared professional and personal experiences with them. For example, Doli found it helpful when I discussed stories regarding my four-year old son’s interests. She commented in an interview, “I think your personal experiences can lead us into ideas.” Cristina also commented in her final interview, “your experiences and stories helped us out.” Sharing the interests and experiences of my son allowed me to share personal insights into the interests of children. As a result of this experience, I affirmed my commitment to sharing both personal and professional experiences because it was helpful to them and to building our relationship. The intimate relationship between the teachers and myself allowed for a multi-layered interpretation of collaborative inquiry and reflects a social constructivist approach towards teacher professional development.

**Self-Study Research Question 2**

The second self-study research question asked about what was my role as a facilitator in the collaborative study of children’s interests. Previous studies suggest the need for more research on the role of facilitators in early childhood education collaborative inquiry groups (Carr, 2004; Haigh, 2007; Moran, 2007; Riley & Roach, 2006; Wong, 2010). My research study applied a focus on this role through self-study methodology. The results from my self-study research suggest possibilities in regards to the role of a facilitator in collaborative inquiry and documentation protocol. In this section, I address the role of facilitator within the collaborative team meetings and within the CK organization. The results suggest possible suggestions for facilitators working with teachers and organizations.
The role of facilitator within collaborative team meetings. The CK teachers’ were initially unfamiliar with a collaborative professional development provider. My facilitator role contrasted with the CK teacher’s previous encounters with experts who delivered their professional development. I had determined that it was not my role to go into the teachers’ classroom to tell them what was right or wrong, but rather my role was about provoking, supporting, and offering a different perspective (Gambetti, 2006). I also thought that teachers were more likely to engage in reflective practice if they spent more time working on their teaching with peers and a facilitator (Camburn, 2010). The results of this study indicate that teachers benefited from a professional development provider who met with them regularly to reflect on their classroom practices and provided an outside perspective about their experiences.

I continually focused on creating a balance between facilitation and imposition (Wong, 2010). By examining my data, I became sensitive towards when it was beneficial to offer direct advice or whether it was more important to focus on facilitating autonomy among the teachers. Moran (2007) also stressed that a facilitator must be aware of when to provide directive instruction such as procedural or practical information and when to wait for the teachers to discover things on their own. The teachers’ comments from the feedback forms and during interviews and team meetings suggested that my role as facilitator was beneficial in both circumstances. While I struggled with how to deal with this tension, the teachers seemed to have found both of these kinds of efforts helpful and did not indicate there was too much of one or the other.

Allen and Blythe (2004) provided a different perspective and suggest that a facilitator should not provide special expertise about the content of the conversation, but his or her role is to guide the process of collaborative inquiry. As a result of this study, I find Allen and Blythe’s
recommendation rather romantic and impractical. Instead, my findings indicate that it was important and beneficial for me as the facilitator to have prior relatable experiences and to provide advice and guidance.

My findings were more similar to Camburn’s (2010) results that indicated that teachers benefited from working with facilitators who had expertise in teaching and job embedded collaborative learning groups. I brought to this study prior experience working in a Reggio inspired program and also as an arts specialist. In my study, teachers commented in interviews and feedback forms that my prior knowledge of the Reggio approach, art materials, documentation, and classroom environments was helpful.

**Recommendation for facilitator professional development.** As a result of this study, I suggest that it is important for facilitators to have background knowledge of early childhood development, including classroom environments and materials. This study reveals some of the complexities facilitators are faced with when working with collaborative inquiry groups, including developing an intuitive balance between when it is appropriate to give advice and when to step back. It is important for facilitators to have some training and expertise in how to facilitate collaboration and inquiry among teachers in order for the group to be an effective part of teacher and children’s learning experiences.

**Facilitator’s role with organizations.** Previous research studies have not addressed the role of facilitator within an organization (Carr, 2004; Haigh, 2007; Moran, 2007; Riley & Roach, 2006; Wong, 2010). The results of my study indicate the importance of a facilitator’s role in collaborative work with teachers and with the organization overall.

My prior experience in a facilitator’s role was from the inside of an organization, meaning my role was created as part of the overall structure of the organization. For this
research study, I was an outside consultant coming into CK. I was often conflicted about whether an insider or outsider position was most beneficial. Eleni commented on the importance of my outside perspective. While I agree that the outside perspective was beneficial, it also came with challenges. As an outside facilitator, it was challenging to sustain the work the teachers and I constructed after the meetings occurred. Allen and Blythe (2004) also suggest this as one of the struggles of an outside facilitator. In addition, it was challenging to implement new practices or policies without the support of the overall organization. For example, implementing the use of a planning form or small group work did not have any backing from the administration and some teachers were thus less likely to participate.

**Organizational support for facilitator’s role.** My role as facilitator was to help the teachers think about the learning process for both the children and themselves. Within programs that are adapting approaches such as an interest-based curriculum and the Reggio Emilia philosophy, teachers are expected to see themselves as researchers and collaborators. According to Carter (1998), the role of a facilitator is to, “help them [teachers] identify their questions, pursue hypotheses, observations, and forms of documentation that will facilitate learning for the adults, while communicating and preserving a record of what is unfolding” (p. 41).

However, according to Haigh (2007), the resources to fund a facilitator are seen as a financial luxury and rarely as a beneficial way for programs to spend their money. Yet, she believes that programs would benefit overall by supporting teachers’ collaborative and reflective work, including the role of a facilitator, which would reflect in the quality of education for children. As a result of this study, I found that the benefits an outside facilitator can provide are dependent on the commitment and efforts of the organization insiders.
I suggest that programs consider ways they can support the role of facilitator in their programs. Carter (1998) provided suggestions for small programs such as CK. She suggested sharing this position with several other centers. While programs may currently have administrative positions such as education coordinators, staff trainers, or mentor teachers, Carter suggested that programs rethink how this role may be used to support job embedded practices that reflect teachers’ ongoing classroom practices. The findings and outcomes of this study suggest that job embedded professional development can empower teacher learning but this requires early childhood programs finding a way to support the role of a facilitator who focuses on this type of program for teachers.

Further Discussion from this Self-Study

At the conclusion of my self-study, there are issues that I still wonder about in terms of my practice and role as facilitator. I wonder how practical the role of facilitator is for many early childhood or other school programs. My role as facilitator was an important aspect of the collaborative teams. Yet, CK is a unique program that from the beginning was interested in a facilitator to do this kind of collaborative inquiry and professional development. I wonder if other schools would value a facilitator working in this way if the program did not have a commitment to a Reggio-inspired approach. This approach was also time consuming. I had the time because I was doing my dissertation research. I wonder if this is a practical professional development model for early childhood or other school programs in terms of time and resources. I wonder how the role of facilitator might be different if onsite teachers or administrators took on this position.

I also wonder how to professionally prepare facilitators for their position. I came to my position with a varied background in teaching, art education and working in a similar position as...
a coordinator at Chicago Commons. Through the study of my practice and role, I have
developed a much deeper understanding of the complexities of the role of facilitator. As a result
of this study, I also realize the importance of engaging in one’s own professional development
while facilitating this kind of group collaboration. I created an inquiry into my own practice by
asking myself questions and reflecting on audio recorded meetings and feedback forms. In
addition, my journal was immensely important in understanding my practice. These were all
methods I used for my own professional development. Further, I wonder how this study might
have been different for me if I had opportunities for collaborative discussions with other
facilitators to compare our work. This may or may not have contributed to more changes in my
practice. This study has the potential to contribute to the practice and professional development
of other facilitators and also for further research on their roles.

Post Script

As a result of this study of children’s interests, I am genuinely inspired by collaboration
and the relationships that form through it. I am reminded of my visit to the Reggio preschools
several years ago. I had the opportunity to hear Sergio Spaggiari, director of the municipal
preschools and infant/toddler centers. In his speech he argued that what is lacking in today’s
educational systems is the lack of connectedness and relationships. He expressed that there
needs to be opportunities for different points of view to communicate and represent equal parts.
The right part of the brain needs to discuss with the left, the sciences need to dialogue with the
arts, the hand must communicate with the brain, the teacher with the child, and the curriculum
with the child. The opportunity for teachers and I to engage in collaborative discussions,
suggests ways for creating connections between educators and children’s interests in the ways
Spaggiari suggested.
References


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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1) What kinds of prior experiences have you had with planning classroom activities with other teachers?

2) What kinds of differences do you notice when planning activities with other classroom teachers and a facilitator rather than alone?

3) What kinds of experiences have you had with collecting documentation from your classroom?

4) Does discussing children’s interests with other teachers during weekly meetings have any effect on how you plan activities in your classroom?

5) What kinds of prior experiences have you had with planning classroom activities with a facilitator or other person outside your classroom?

6) How does working with a facilitator change your experiences with planning classroom activities?

7) What kinds of strategies do I use as a facilitator in weekly meetings that help you to think about how to use the interests of children for planning your classroom activities?
Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. What kinds of differences do you notice when planning activities with other classroom teachers and a facilitator rather than alone?

2. Does discussing children’s interests with other teachers during weekly meetings have any effect on how you plan activities in your classroom?

3. How does working with a facilitator change your experiences with planning classroom activities?

4. What kinds of strategies do I use as a facilitator in weekly meetings that help you to think about how to use the interests of children for planning your classroom activities?
Appendix C

Final Interview Questions

1. What kinds of differences do you notice when planning activities with other classroom teachers and a facilitator rather than alone?

2. Does discussing children’s interests with other teachers during weekly meetings have any effect on how you plan activities in your classroom?

3. How does working with a facilitator change your experiences with planning classroom activities?

4. What kinds of strategies do I use as a facilitator in weekly meetings that help you to think about how to use the interests of children for planning your classroom activities?

5. These meetings are built upon the concept of collaborative planning between teachers and facilitator. What does collaboration mean to you?

6. What role have the meetings played in your professional development?

7. Can you think of an event during the meetings you learned from another teacher?
Appendix D

Feedback Form

1. What did you learn today?

2. What do you need from the facilitator or from these meetings to better help understand children’s interests and how to plan for classroom activities?
Appendix E

First Version Planning Guide
## Planning Guide

### Week:

### Inquiry:

### Group of Children:

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<th>Materials</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Follow Up</th>
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Appendix F

Final Version Planning Guide
### Planning Guide

**Week:** Inquiry:  
**Small Group of Children:**

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