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Preschool Teachers' Perspectives on
Caring Relationships, Autonomy, and Intrinsic Motivation
in Two Cultural Settings

by
Xiaoling Tian

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

Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership: Curriculum & Instruction

Dissertation Committee:
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Portland State University
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Abstract

Research has found that caring relationships provide children with a sense of security, acceptance, belonging, self-confidence, and personal connection with others. Caring relationships thus create a supportive environment that fosters children's autonomy and motivation. For these reasons, it is important that teachers establish caring relationships with the children in their classrooms using such techniques as modeling, dialoguing, practicing, and confirming (Noddings, 1992). Although a good deal of research has been conducted in this area on children in kindergarten and above, few studies have focused on the pre-K level. As a result, little is known about how preschool teachers conceptualize caring relationships; what they perceive as the connections among caring relationships, autonomy and motivation; and how culture influences the way in which caring is manifested in their classrooms.

In an attempt to shed light on this issue, this study explored preschool teachers' perspectives on caring relationships and their perceptions of how such relationships affect children's autonomy and motivation in preschool in two cultural settings: Shenzhen, China and Portland, Oregon. Data was collected from preschool teachers in both locations using a qualitative interviewing research strategy. Interviews were conducted with preschool teachers (N=20) who had had at least two years of college training in early childhood education and three years of experience working with children between the ages of 2 and 6 in early childhood centers funded by diverse sources in each city.

The study found that consensus exists among preschool teachers from the two cities about the importance of caring relationships, in which trust, acceptance, equality, and mutual respect were viewed as these relationships' primary characteristics. There were also shared values regarding teachers' roles and their effective strategies for establishing social skills and caring and sharing among children. Nevertheless, some underlying assumptions about caring, especially teachers' understandings of autonomy and motivation, differed somewhat in relation to the social, cultural, philosophical, or practical influences in the two cultural contexts. There were also differences in perspectives on the relationship between autonomy and intrinsic motivation. The results of the study provide opportunities for early childhood teachers and teacher educators in both contexts to reflect on their own assumptions about caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation. The findings also contribute to the literature on early childhood teachers' perspectives regarding these issues, as well as insights for preparing caring teachers in both cultural settings.

Dedication

To

the memory of my mother, Ling Lei,

and my sister, Dandan Tian

Acknowledgements

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Chapter One

Introduction

Why Caring

As a teacher and administrator in the early childhood education field in China for nearly two decades, the researcher has experienced and observed many cases where the relationships between teachers and children had a tremendous impact on the children involved. These relationships affected, either positively or negatively, the children's social and emotional development, their competence in building relationships with others in the classroom, and their motivation to explore and learn. In most cases, these were lasting impacts that eventually affected the children's performance and learning success later in school.

What the researcher has observed from personal experience has also been confirmed by many studies in the United States. For example, Hamre and Pianta (2001) conducted a longitudinal study that examined 179 children from kindergarten to eighth grade. The research measured the correlation between students' academic outcomes (test scores, work habits, behavior records, desire to pursue higher education), the kindergarten teachers' ratings of their relationships with the children, and the children's behaviors in kindergarten. Results of this study indicated that caring teacher-child relationships in the kindergarten years were predictors of children's later school competence and academic performance. Hamre and Pianta (2001) found that children who were able to establish caring relationships with teachers and others in preschool, kindergarten, and higher level

classrooms adjusted to the learning environment more easily and got along better with their peers. Such children were more confident about exploring and expressing themselves and had more success in learning from kindergarten through high school.

In contrast, research has also shown that children who have insecure or conflictual relationships with teachers, or who experience behavioral challenges, try to avoid or reject school, have fewer or no academic interests, and struggle with learning (Baker, 1999; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Many other studies have explored the effects of caring relationships with regard to intervention and compensation for children who have aggressive behaviors, are at risk, or come from difficult family circumstances (Baker, 1999; Birch & Ladd, 1998; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; Swick, 2005). Today, caring is considered an essential component of teachers' qualifications (Freeman, Swick, & Brown, 1999; McMullen, 2004; Swick & Brown, 1999). It is also fundamental in moral education and has the potential to transform education (Goldstein, 1997; Noddings, 2002; Nieto, 2003).

Based on these understandings, the researcher conducted research on early childhood teachers who work with children age 2 to 6, focusing on their perspectives on caring relationships and their perceptions of how such relationships affect children's autonomy and motivation in their classrooms. Furthermore, the study was conducted in two cultural settings: China and the United States. This chapter provides an overview of the study, the rationale for the study, the research questions, and definitions of terms used

in the study. It contains the following sections:

1. Definitions and connections among caring, autonomy, and motivation;
2. The rationale for the study;
3. Cultural contexts of the study;
4. The purpose of the study, and research questions.

Definitions and Connections among Caring, Autonomy, and Motivation

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) explicitly states that caring relationships play a major role in Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in early childhood learning environments (Moss & Petrie, 2002). In fact, it has even put this understanding into its Code of Ethics (Feeney & Kipnis, 2005). NAEYC maintains that early childhood is a unique and valuable stage of the human life cycle. For this reason, it is vital that early childhood teachers establish trust, respect, and positive relationships with children in their classroom; appreciate and support close ties between the child and family; care for and recognize the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each child; and help children achieve their full potential (Feeney & Kipnis, 2005). Growing numbers of studies in the United States have focused on caring relationships and their influence on children's moral, socio-emotional, and intellectual development. To date, however, no sufficiently comparable studies have yet taken place in China.

Researchers in the United States define caring relationships as positive,

cooperative, and responsible interactions between teachers and children and among children. Such relationships are warm, respectful, and personal. Caring involves trust, honesty, humility, understanding, courage, responsibility, and devotion (Mayeroff, 1971). Noddings (1992) posited that caring exists in relationships between the one who cares and the one who is cared for; she further stated that both sides must contribute to the relationship.

Noddings (1992), Goldstein (1997, 1998), and Nieto (2003) found that caring involves listening with great attention, understanding with great empathy, accepting without selectivity, and supporting and connecting with a sense of responsibility. When students have caring relationships with teachers and other children, they gain a sense of security, acceptance, belonging, comfort, confidence, happiness, and success (Dalton & Watson, 1997). Such relationships create a supportive environment in which all children feel valued and cared for, as well as safe to express their ideas and explore the world around them. They also feel like they have some influence and control over their own behavior. Caring relationships make children feel as though others care about them and are responsive to their needs. In such an atmosphere, children enjoy learning that is challenging and are able to resolve conflicts (Dalton & Watson, 1997).

Caring relationships are important for young children because it is widely recognized that the first several years of life are a time of enormous development of intellectual, linguistic, social, emotional, and motor competence. Early educational

experiences have longitudinal effects on children's later school outcomes (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Prince, Hare, & Howard, 2001). The Committee of Early Childhood Pedagogy studied "a broad range of behavioral and social science research on early learning and development" (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001, p. 3). These researchers concluded that an adequate education is important for young children ages 2 to 5, and can occur only within the context of a caring relationship.

Responsive interpersonal relationships with teachers nurture young children's dispositions to learn and their emerging abilities. Children's social competence, and their moral and pro-social behaviors, are all influenced by the quality of early teacher-child relationships and teachers' attentiveness to how the child approaches learning. Research on child socio-emotional development suggests that secure attachment with teachers will improve children's social and intellectual competence, as well as their ability to exploit learning opportunities (Rolfe, 2004). This is important because the development of the full range of capacities consisting of intellectual, social, moral, emotional, and personality development serves as a foundation for children's learning later in school.

Bowman et al. (2001) found that a supportive environment had a powerful impact on the pace and path of a child's development and on what the child learned. A supportive environment refers to a classroom in which caring relationships exist among the members of the community. As a result, acceptance, trust, belonging, and support for each other are the norm and learning is pervasive (Dalton & Watson, 1997). DeVries and

Zan (1994) defined this kind of socio-moral atmosphere as a community that includes the “entire network of interpersonal relations that make up a child’s experience of school” (p.7). They added that such an atmosphere gives children the opportunity to think autonomously and feel as though their ideas are valued.

Piaget (1932/1965) and other constructivists (e.g., Kamii, 1994; Castle, 2004) posited autonomy as the aim of education. DeVries and Zan (1994) defined autonomy as the ability to self-regulate within a community and suggested that it be promoted in early childhood education. The determining factor for autonomy is reciprocity (Piaget, 1932/1965; Deiro, 2003). Autonomy “appears only with reciprocity, when mutual respect is strong enough to make the individual feel from within the desire to treat others as he himself would wish to be treated” (Piaget, p. 196). Based on his in-depth interviews with six teachers and their students, as well as on long term observations in their classrooms, Deiro (2003) concluded that the core of a caring relationship is reciprocal respect between teacher and students. A caring relationship, therefore, is essential for autonomy.

Piaget (1932/1965) theorized that cooperation between teachers and children leads to autonomy. The autonomous moral individual follows moral rules that are self-constructed (DeVries & Zan, 1994): “For moral autonomy appears when the mind regards as necessary an ideal that is independent of all external pressure” (Piaget, p. 196). Kamii (1994) interpreted autonomy as the ability (of older children) to independently make right or wrong moral decisions and true or false intellectual decisions. Deci and

Ryan (2000) posited that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the basic psychological needs of human beings and that the satisfaction of these needs promotes intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the desire to do, know, and accomplish something, or to be stimulated to learn because of the joyfulness of learning itself (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991). Motivation is a process in which goal-directed activity is initiated and sustained. It can only be observed from behaviors such as interest, effort, persistence, and verbalization (Printrich & Schunk, 1996).

In summary, caring relationships are important in child development, establishing a caring relationship with teachers at an early age predicts children's later school success, caring relationships are essential to foster autonomy, and autonomy is fundamental to education. It is also one of the most important factors in promoting intrinsic motivation.

The Rationale for the Study

Because teachers are significant figures in children's school lives, they have important roles to play in building caring relationships and supportive environments (Goldstein, 1997; Swick & Brown, 1999). A considerable body of research suggests that teachers demonstrate their perspectives through the way in which they think about their work—including their purposes, goals, and conceptions of children and the curriculum—and through the ways in which they give meaning to their beliefs through behaviors and decision-making in the classroom (Fang, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Palmer (1998) contended that teachers' understanding of their own beliefs impacts their

teaching. How teachers perceive caring relationships and their role in promoting autonomy and motivation is essential for their practice. Nieto (2003) found that teachers' heritage, culture, values, beliefs, and experiences were involved in such practice. Vogt (2002) studied the identities of 32 Swiss and English primary teachers and found that certain aspects of their perceptions of a caring teacher were associated with their own social, cultural, and gender identities.

LeVine (1984) defined culture as "a shared organization of ideas that includes the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic standards prevalent in a community and the meaning of communicative actions" (p. 67). Culture reflects the overall ways of living built up by a group of human beings and passed down through generations. However, it is important to be aware that people who share one common characteristic, such as ethnicity or geographic location, do not necessarily have a shared culture. Pappamihel (2004) pointed out that "cultural differences often make concepts such as 'caring' difficult to regulate from a monocultural standpoint" (p. 539), and that to prepare caring early childhood teachers who demonstrate caring appropriately to students from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is essential for them to acknowledge, accept, and adapt to the cultural differences of the students. Cross-cultural research has led to open and honest dialogue about the successes and difficulties that nations around the world are confronting while seeking to provide quality education to young children (Hayden, 2000; McMullen, 2004). To further improve the preparation of professionals who work with

young children, McMullen (2004) posited that it was necessary to conduct research on perspectives of different cultures in order to understand what appropriate practice means within a cultural context.

Since the late 1980s, increasing numbers of Americans have visited the People's Republic of China, and many have observed or conducted studies of early childhood education there (e.g. Freeman, 1998; O'Keeffe, 2001; Romanowski, 2006; Vaughan, 1993). American teacher educators have shown interest in the fact that the practices of early childhood education in China contrasted sharply with the norms in their own country. Freeman (1998) wrote that one of the major cross-cultural insights gained from a visit to China was the degree to which "culturally determined beliefs, values, and goals were reflected in individual's definitions of childhood, parenting, and teaching" (p. 4). For example, Chinese culture emphasizes sharing, cooperation, and the expectation that children will adapt to their environment, while Western culture emphasizes "individualism, competition, and personal possessions" (Gonzalez-Mena, 1993, paraphrased by Freeman, 1998, p. 4).

Freeman (1998) observed that Chinese children were expected to share "limited supplies and resources and to care for themselves and their classmates during toileting, washing, and, other personal care routines" (p. 5). Vaughan (1993) also observed the emphasis on sharing and helping each other in Chinese kindergartens. O'Keeffe (2001) suggested that China and the United States had a lot to learn from each other because

both care deeply about children and want to provide them with the best possible learning experiences. She also found that Chinese early childhood professionals were eager to learn educational practices that encourage children to become more independent and creative (O'Keeffe, 2001).

Although the Chinese have conducted little research on caring relationships to date, there is awareness of the importance of such relationships on children's development, as well as awareness that love, trust, understanding, and support are important factors in a caring teacher-child relationship (Cheng, 2002). Pang (1999), a professor at Beijing Normal University, addressed the importance of relationships between teachers and children and among children in her research on child development. She stated that China's long history of emphasizing caring and sharing dates at least back to the time of Confucius, who taught people to respect each other's elders as if they were their own and to take care of each other's children as if they were their own.

Such teachings have strongly influenced the educational field and still exist to some degree in current societal beliefs. The application of this principle in current Chinese education has produced the slogan: "Respect Teacher and Love Students." However, this slogan also conveys Confucius' emphasis on the authority of teachers. In China, students are expected to listen to and obey their teachers. The *love* from teachers apparently is one-sided: students are passive recipients. In fact, echoing Noddings's (2002) contention, teachers frequently complain that students do not understand their

efforts and caring.

Individuality and autonomy began to be mentioned among educators in China in the late 1980s, which led to a growing recognition of the importance of autonomy, creativity, and child-centered, student-initiated learning (Wang, Elicker, McMullen, & Mao, 2008). However, because of the pressure of preparing students for high school and college entrance exams, teacher-directed learning is still the norm from kindergarten through high school (Romanowski, 2006). The 1990s brought a strong recognition that most students are the only child in their families due to China's *One Child* policy. As a result, many children are spoiled by their parents and lack sympathy for others (Ge, 2005; Freeman, 1998; Romanowski, 2006). Such recognition brought calls for moral education that would emphasize caring and loving, and thereby establish a new caring relationship among teachers and students (Wang, 2003; Zhu, 2002). There were also calls to add caring to curriculum reforms (Xu, 2006) and to establish equal and reciprocal caring relationships among teachers and students (Xi & Jiang, 2001; Wang, 2002).

The current educational reform movement in China has the goal of fostering creativity, autonomy, and problem-solving skills in students. Thanks to increasing influence from the West as the country began to open, Chinese teachers have discovered and begun to experiment with curriculum and program philosophies from such sources as Montessori and Reggio Emilia (Tang, 2006). Furthermore, it is recognized that constructivism supports an equal relationship between teacher and children, and thus is

different from the traditional role of teacher as the authority in teacher-student relationships in China (Zhu, 2002).

The reality of education in China today, however, is that the traditional Confucian ideals are being reinforced by the emphasis on a market-oriented economy, which stresses that academic achievement, effort, and perseverance are necessary to succeeding (Ho, 1994). Due to the need to compete among the large population, the belief that education is simply a path to a successful career and financial gain for an individual, has become stronger than ever (Rao, Koong, Kwong, & Wong, 2003). Such a focus means that teachers' authority is still emphasized more than critical thinking. Another challenge is that academic exams have been used to determine achievement for a long time in China (Ho, 1994), and current educational reformers lack the power to change this. Although moral and socio-emotional development is being emphasized to some degree in the curriculum, it remains a distant second to the goal of successfully passing the college entrance exams.

Cultural Contexts of the Study

As the largest city in Oregon, Portland has a rapidly growing population. It also has numerous universities, is relatively new and diverse, and has a sister city relationship with Suzhou, China. Portland has a liberal political base and a humane society. Based on observations by the researcher, many of its citizens are actively involved in advocating for improving education, building an inclusive community where diversity thrives, and

creating a caring and supportive educational environment for young children. The social and cultural context of Shenzhen is the focus of this section, as it is less familiar to readers in the USA.

Shenzhen, which is located on the border of Hong Kong, is a relatively new city as well. It was established in 1979 when Deng Xiaoping, the former leader of China, decided to “open” China to the world. Thirty years ago, Shenzhen was a tiny, one-street town surrounded by a few small fishing villages. Once “opened as a window to the world,” it began to attract foreign capital and investment. It developed so quickly that the saying arose that it was built overnight. The whole country was astonished by “Shenzhen Speed.” Today the city is relatively modern, wealthy, and filled with high technology. Mandarin is the official language for communication, but people speak many different dialects (or languages). They come from diverse cultural and social backgrounds and follow a variety of lifestyles (see Shenzhen government online).

Shenzhen’s diversity is also evident in its education programs. Scholars in early childhood education from prominent universities and educational research institutes/societies around the country have introduced various curricula/teaching philosophies and approaches, including Reggio Emilia, the Project Approach, Learning by Doing, Emergent Curriculum, Montessori, and Multiple Intelligences. Based on the knowledge of the researcher and information from former colleagues and directors, early childhood education programs in Shenzhen have openly adopted many of these theories

and teaching approaches; in practice, however, the centers modify each approach to fit the local situation and culture. To meet parents' needs and find the best way to compete and survive, center directors are constantly adjusting their focus. As a result, teachers (including the participants) are under pressure because they must continually adapt to changing directions. Another challenge teachers faced is that they frequently lack the training to incorporate the new approaches into their teaching successfully.

Early childhood education programs in Shenzhen may be either private or public. Private schools receive their funding mainly through tuition; therefore, they are more expensive than public centers. Centers whose funding comes from government sources are usually considered to be nonprofits and are called *Public Child Centers*. The word *government* here refers mostly to educational bureaus, either at the municipal or district level. It also refers to nonprofit organizations whose financial sources come from the government (i.e., tax money) rather than from the private sector.

In addition to cost, other differences exist between private and public early childhood education programs. Many teachers, including the participants, were concerned that because private centers focus mainly on recruiting students and increasing enrollment in order to survive, they strive to meet parent demand by emphasizing the academic learning and skills development believed necessary to perform successfully in elementary school (Guangzhou Daily, 2002). In contrast, government funding enables public centers to offer a greater variety of materials, more pedagogy support, ampler

space, and better environments. Due to supervision from the educational bureaus, educational activities in public programs tend to be more developmentally appropriate and give children more space and time in which to play.

The market driven economy is also staging a reform in early childhood education (Shenzhen News, 2008), pushing many public childcare centers to pursue a free-market model called “personally responsible operation,” originally introduced in Shenzhen as an experiment. Under this model, educational bureaus (i.e., governmental organizations) no longer provide the centers with funding; instead they retain ownership of buildings and facilities while accepting public bids from private individuals or companies who seek to operate the centers. The entity who is awarded the contract is responsible for the financial management of the center. In order to survive, the centers must either raise tuition to serve only families who can pay, or they must lay off high-salaried teachers to lower costs. To make things worse, many new private programs are opening up, which increases competition.

After a decade of experimenting with pushing early childhood education programs into the market, programs funded by the government, large organizations, and state-owned companies quickly vanished, and private, for profit programs quickly increased. In 2008, government funded early childhood programs had dropped to 17%, and private for profit program had increased to 62%; in urban areas the figure reached 70% (Feng, 2010). Many complain that getting into an affordable childcare program

(usually those funded by the government) is as difficult as getting into a college, as many have to be on a waiting list beginning when the child was born, and finally getting into a program after two or three years (Feng, 2010). Feng argues for the necessity of having universal, affordable early childhood education programs. In particular, the government must fund the poor, rural areas of the country. The quality of the early childhood education program directors and teachers all over the country is also a concern.

To summarize, people view the concepts of caring relationships, supportive environments, autonomy, and motivation through the lenses of their own cultures. Like the United States, China is undergoing reform in the field of early childhood education, and educators from both countries have much to learn from each other. An investigation of preschool teachers' perspectives on caring relationships, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation can help each culture understand the other one better. It can also reveal and clarify the cultural influences on preschool teachers' perspectives within the two cultural settings, and provide insights useful for guiding both practices and future research in early childhood education in general.

The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Studies in the United States have clearly demonstrated the importance of caring relationships in the development and education of young children. They have also demonstrated that a caring relationship is one of the characteristics of quality childcare (Howes, Phillips, & Whitebook, 1992). Nevertheless, an increasing number of schools

and child development centers in the United States are beginning to place a stronger emphasis on intellectual development (Bowman et al., 2001). As a result, the teacher-child and child-child relationships that form the socio-moral atmosphere in these programs are being addressed less frequently, and the emphasis on autonomy and intrinsic motivation in early childhood educational settings is also weakening (Bowman et al., 2001). Furthermore, few studies have explored how early childhood teachers conceptualize caring relationships in their practice; how they perceive the connections between caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation; or how perceptions vary in different cultural contexts.

It is important to clarify exactly what early childhood practitioners understand by the terms *caring relationships*, *autonomy*, and *motivation*. This is especially true because there is growing concern among researchers that the term *caring* is being overused by educational and other professionals so that “we no longer seem to know what it means to really care” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 58; Nieto, 2003). Evidence shows that although many teachers consider themselves to be caring, their students often have the opposite opinion (Deiro, 2003; Noddings, 2002). It is also important not to confuse caring with superficial behaviors such as “gentle smiles and warm hugs” (Goldstein, 1998, p. 244), with other “displays of affection” (Nieto, 2003, p. 42), or with rewards (Deiro, 2003). Goldstein (1998) advocates a deeper understanding of the ethical, philosophical, and moral dimension of caring.

This leaves several important questions to answer. For example, how is caring understood by current early childhood teachers in China's fast-moving economy, as well as in the context of the rapid social and political changes now occurring there? In a country whose culture has long stressed teacher authority, how do early childhood educators understand the concept of autonomy and its relationship to motivation and caring relationships? How do early childhood teachers in a modern, Western-oriented city like Shenzhen perceive their roles in building caring relationships with children in order to promote autonomy and intrinsic motivation? Similarly, how do American early childhood teachers currently understand these issues? How do early childhood teachers in these two different cultural contexts conceptualize a caring relationship and its connection with autonomy and motivation? The purpose of this study was to search for answers to these questions—specifically among teachers working with children between the ages of 2 and 6 years.

Figure 1 illustrates the connections among the three main focuses of the study that were discussed previously in this chapter: caring relationships, autonomy and intrinsic motivation. It shows that caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation exist in a certain cultural and social context and are shaped by this context. These concepts may connect to and be influenced by each other because they are essential for autonomous thinking and decision making. This plays a critical role in learning because autonomy forms the foundation for intrinsic motivation. In other words, an individual who can

think and make intellectual and moral decisions autonomously will be intrinsically motivated to explore, learn, and enter into caring relationships with others. This will be discussed further in the literature review. The arrows between the teachers in Portland and Shenzhen indicate the researcher's desire to investigate and clarify the similarities and differences between the two groups, each of which has been shaped by a different culture.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Because the investigator has studied these concepts in the United States, she is constantly wrestling with the question of “how would this work in China?” Romanowski (2006) suggested that gaining and using knowledge of education from other countries provides opportunities to strengthen one’s own education; it also brings new knowledge

and fresh insight into the discussion. Therefore, an understanding of how educators in each culture conceive of the terms caring, autonomy, and motivation may provide important insights for both groups and shed further light on best practices in early childhood education in both countries.

Teachers working in early childhood programs in both the United States and the People's Republic of China are historically underrepresented in educational research. Few studies have investigated their perspectives and practices, especially the relationship between their understanding of these concepts and how they are applied in the preschool classroom. An exploration of these issues will therefore make an important contribution to the literature. Caring is understood as one of the most important characteristics of quality teachers because caring relationships have a tremendous effect on children's development and learning. An exploration of current early childhood teachers' perspectives on caring relationships will add to knowledge used to guide future teacher preparation and improve the quality of early childhood education practices overall. The questions guiding the exploration are listed in below:

- How do preschool teachers in each cultural setting understand and construct caring relationships with and among children in their classrooms?
- What are preschool teachers' understandings of and experiences in fostering autonomy and intrinsic motivation in preschool children in each cultural setting?
- How are teachers' experiences in caring and their relationships with children

influenced by cultural and social contexts?

Chapter Two reviews the literature in depth. In particular, it examines the different perspectives and theories surrounding child development and the important factors that influence it. The review concludes that caring relationships do correlate strongly with social emotional competence and the development of children's sense of autonomy and intrinsic motivation. The results of a pilot study conducted by the researcher in 2006 are also presented in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two

A Review of the Literature

Introduction

Studies from the early 1980s to the present have explored various aspects of caring relationships, including the theoretical perspectives on caring and moral education. They also include empirical studies focused on caring and teacher-child relationships. Pianta (1994) identifies two foundations of research on teacher-child relationships. One is research in social development, attachment theory, and teaching/learning that increasingly shows the importance of adult-child relationships as contexts for development. The other includes common experiences of teachers, parents, and children that suggest children's relationships with their teachers are an important component of the school experience and are related to children's adjustment. The pioneering work of Bowlby (1969/1982) and Ainsworth (1967/1978) on attachment theory, which is connected to Erikson's (1963) theory on emotional development (Rolf, 2004), is the basis for research on the relationships among teachers, parents, and children and their effects on children's emotional development and school outcomes. Many studies have also focused on the ethics of care and the feminist approach to caring put forth by Noddings (1984, 1992, 2002) and Goldstein (1997, 1998), which are grounded in Gilligan's (1982) feminist theory of moral development. Much research has also been conducted on theories of autonomy and motivation (e.g., Deci & Vallerand et al., 1991;

Kamii, 1994; Piaget, 1932/1965; Schunk, 1991). Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized the importance of a caring environment from the perspective of a developmental and ecological system.

The theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in this chapter encompasses several areas identified as relevant to the conceptualization of caring, its connection with autonomy and motivation, and cultures and teachers' perspectives: 1) theories and research associated with the teacher-child relationship and caring, including attachment theory, ethics of care, child emotional development, and social constructivist theory, which emphasizes the social contexts for teaching and learning, 2) investigations of the teacher-child relationship as predictors for children's development, and studies identifying types/patterns of relationships, 3) explorations of the similarity between parent-child attachment and teacher-child relationships, 4) research of caring as compensation for children who come from difficult family circumstances or who have behavior problems, 5) studies concerned about how caring relationships create a supportive environment that fosters autonomy and motivation, and 6) studies related to cultural beliefs and education, the importance of teachers' perspectives in their teachings, as well as cross-culture studies in early childhood education. The research includes longitudinal (e.g. Birch & Ladd, 1998; Howes & Hamilton, 1992; Howes, Philips, & Whitebook, 1992), quantitative (e.g. Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Howes & Ritchie, 2002; Meehan et al., 2003; Pianta, 1994; Prince et al., 2001), and qualitative studies (e.g., Baker,

1999; Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997; Dalton & Watson, 1997; Goldstein, 1997, 1998; Noblit & Rogers, 1995; Vogt, 2002). Data collecting strategies used in these studies include teacher and student interviews, classroom observations, surveys, teacher rating scales, case studies, and assessment instruments. It should be noted, however, that research on caring relationships at the pre-K stage of development is limited, and none was found in cross-culture studies; the largest portion of the reviewed research literature focuses on kindergarten and above.

This chapter is organized into sections ordered as follows:

1. Theoretical framework for caring relationships;
2. Caring relationships and child development;
3. Caring relationships and supportive environments;
4. Caring relationships and autonomy;
5. Caring relationships and motivation;
6. Cultures and the teachers' perspectives;
7. Summary of the reviewed literature and the gap in research;
8. About this study; and
9. The pilot study.

Theoretical Framework for Caring Relationships

The traditional understanding of caring relationships in education refers to caring as affection, parenting, or mothering. This is mostly associated with women and primary

school teachers and students (Vogt, 2002). The attachment theory of Bowlby (1969/1982) and the ethics of care (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002) inform studies in caring and teacher-child relationships.

Attachment refers to an emotional bond between infants and caregivers (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Bowlby believes that the child's early attachment relationships with a caring adult are fundamental influences on his/her development, as infants and children have the need for belonging/acceptance; they also need to feel worthy of care by the adults who provide it. Furthermore, children develop skills of emotional self-regulation through their earliest attachment relationships. Bowlby's colleague, Mary Ainsworth, later identified the characteristics of different kinds of attachment relationships, either *secure* or *insecure*, and the Strange Situation procedure to assess these relationships (Rofe, 2004).

Current research has expanded attachment theory from the primary mother-child relationship to relationships between children and childcare teachers who consistently and predictably provide physical and emotional care for children (DeMulder, Denham, Schmidt, & Mitchell, 2000; Howes, 1999; Howes & Hamilton, 1992; Howes & Ritchie, 2002). Research shows that "the construction of attachment relationships between children and their alternative caregivers appears similar to the construction of infant-mother attachments" (Howes, 1999, pp.684-5), as the process of attachment formation in child care settings appears similar to the processes within families. Attachment Q-Sort

(see Waters & Deane, 1985 in Rolfe, 2004) can be used to assess attachment security in older children in both home environments and in early childhood education settings.

Based on Attachment theories, children with responsive caregivers develop the belief that they are worthy of care, and trust they will receive it when needed (Dalton & Watson, 1997). These beliefs enable them to act on their natural instinct for empathic and cooperative relationships with others and to establish a sense of security. When provided a sense of security and support from teachers, children are more confident in using the teachers as a secure base from which to explore the social environment in school (Coplan & Prakash, 2003). Researchers believe that securely attached children are able to engage more actively in peer interaction and show a greater capacity for forming friendships since they have higher self-esteem, are more popular with peers, and demonstrate less negative emotion and hostile aggression than peers who are less securely attached (Coplan & Prakash, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Howes & Phillips et al., 1992;). On the contrary, children who are less competent with peers are at risk for peer rejection, which appears to be a powerful predictor of later negative outcomes (Howes & Phillips et al., 1992). Forming bonds with others in the early years has also been found to protect children emotionally from the negative effects of poverty, domestic and community violence, parental substance abuse, and other stressors that threaten mental health (Meehan et al., 2003).

The ethics of care discusses a different dimension of caring. The most important

proponent of the ethics of care was Noddings (Goldstein, 1997). Noddings (1992) theorized caring as “a way of being in relation” (p. 17), an action and a mutual relationship that “both parties must contribute to it in characteristic ways” (p. 15). She wrote that a “caring relation is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings, a carer (one-caring) and a recipient of care, or cared-for” (p. 15). Caring involves “stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference and into the other’s” (1984, p.24). According to Noddings, caring is a combination of engrossment and motivational displacement. By *engrossment*, she means the one-caring opens herself to the cared-for with nonselective receptivity and full attention. The one-caring will hear, see, and feel the perspective and situation of the cared-for and what he tries to convey. By *motivational displacement*, she means the willingness to give primacy to the goals and needs of the cared-for, or as Noddings put it, “The sense that our motive energy is flowing toward others and their projects” (p.16).

Noddings (1992) further posited that caring is not merely a value or belief about how we should view and interact with others, nor is it a set of specific behaviors. If one were to consider caring as simply a virtue, personality trait, or individual attribute, she wrote, it would focus on the one caring self rather than on the mutual relationship. However, this one-dimensional caring relationship would not make much difference to the one who is cared-for (Davis, 2005). Noddings (2002) asserted that “learning to care and to be cared for is a major developmental task” (p.25). To help develop children into

caring persons, teachers must first care for each child, because it is by being the cared-for that he or she will learn how to be the one-caring (Noddings, 1992). Furthermore, having continuing relationships with adults who obviously care for them, children are able to survive material poverty, or “ignore much of the violence in the media—or at least keep its effects to a minimum” (Noddings, 2002, p.26).

Caring can then be measured by the capacity for entering into caring relationships. Teachers not only have to create caring relationships in which they are the ones caring, but they also have a responsibility to help their students develop a capacity to care through modeling, practice, dialogues, and confirming. Noddings (2002) further contended that caring teachers need to listen to and respond differently to the contextual, emotional, cultural, and developmental needs of each child, because “the primary aim of every teacher must be to promote the growth of students as competent, caring, loving, and lovable people” (p.154).

Goldstein (1997) specifically used feminism and the ethics of care to promote a deeper understanding of caring and what it means to be a caring teacher. She intended to explore a vision of early childhood education “that is rooted in feminism’s emphasis on caring and connection and fueled by passion” (p. 30), and to apply a feminist curriculum theory, teaching with love, to early childhood education. She asserted that women’s ways of knowing in terms of relation, interdependence, and caring blend perfectly with the reality of working with young children. She developed her theory from a case study of

an experienced caring teacher who was teaching in a mixed-age classroom with children from kindergarten to second grade. Goldstein collected information on the role of love from participant observations conducted within the teacher's classroom, from co-teaching with the teacher, then returning to the observer's role during a period of three months. In addition, she analyzed her own practice and gathered data from journal dialogues, structured conversations, and collaborations between the author and classroom teacher. She believed that "what was really important about teaching was having a relationship with the children" (p.159). A teacher should be involved in a mutually caring relationship with students, within which both children and their teachers benefit. She further maintained that:

Teachers who meet their students as ones-caring, and who look upon the act of teaching as an opportunity to participate in caring encounters, will be teaching their students more than academic knowledge. These children will have the opportunity to learn how to care. This is more than the mere modeling of desired behaviors. It is a moral stance that has the potential to transform education. (p.15)

Erikson (1963), whose social-emotional theory also addressed caring relationships between adults and children, found that children's emotional development was largely influenced by their relationships with the significant adults in their early lives at a time when they were physically and emotionally dependent on them. Erikson also found that a critical emotional struggle in infancy occurs between trust and mistrust.

Nurturing, responsive caregivers (including parents and other significant people) who meet babies' basic needs establish a trusting relationship between adult and infant, and this relationship leads infants to conclude that the world is safe and predictable (Rolfe, 2004, Trawick-Smith, 2006). Since emotion is experienced as a feeling that motivates, organizes, and guides perception, thought, and action, it has specific motivational properties that can guide children's behavior, color their expressions, and stimulate or discourage learning and creativity (Hyson, 1994). The relationships children establish with adults and other children influence them greatly and form the basis for later developmental transitions in their lives (Fopiano & Haynes, 2001).

Howes and Hamilton (1992) examined maternal attachment and the quality of child-teacher relationships by conducting two longitudinal quantitative studies with a total of 178 children from infancy through preschool. To do so, they used assessment instruments such as the Strange Situation, four-year-old reunion behavior, and the Attachment Q-Sort. The latter method, devised by Waters and Deane in 1985, utilizes Q-Sort methodology and is based on a set period of observation of children ages 1 through 5 in a number of environments. It consists of 90 items intended to cover the spectrum of attachment related behaviors, including secure base and exploratory behaviors, affective response, and social cognition. It can rate a child along a continuum from secure to insecure, but it does not classify the type of insecurity. The current model, which is Attachment Q-set Version 3.0, 1987, also assesses the quality of the child-teacher

relationship. Results show that the majority of children in the two longitudinal samples had secure relationships with both their mothers and their teachers. The younger the children were, the more the stability of their relationships with teachers was affected by the changing of teachers in the childcare. If teachers remained the same, security scores were correlated. However, the children in Study 2 differed from those in Study 1 in that their security scores decreased during the preschool years. The possible cause the authors suggested was that children in Study 2 enrolled in more academic or highly structured childcare programs than the children in study 1. The authors suspected that the academic emphasis may account for the decrease in teacher security scores from age 3 to 4.

A study conducted by DeMulder et al. (2000) compared 94 preschool children's security of attachment with their mothers to their behaviors at school. The child-parents, child-peers, and child-teacher relationships were assessed using the Attachment Q-Set, home visits, and observation. Results indicated that children who were less securely attached to their mothers were more angry-aggressive in preschool, and that boys with a more secure attachment to their mothers were more securely attached to their preschool teacher and more popular with their peers.

In summary, the conceptual framework for caring relationships was developed from the attachment theory of Bowlby (1969/1982), which were based largely on emotional development theories of Erikson (1963), the ethics of care by Noddings (1984, 1992, 2002), the work of Goldstein (1997), and that of many other researchers (e.g.

Ainsworth 1967/1978; Coplan & Prakash, 2003; DeMulder, et al., 2000; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Howes & Hamilton, 1992; Howes & Ritchie, 2002) studying relationships and interactions between teachers and their students.

Caring Relationships and Child Development

Research has shown that teachers have a significant influence on young children's social emotional development and their school readiness. Children who experience closer and more positive teacher-child relationships tend to have fewer behavior problems. They like school more, and perform better academically than do children who experience more conflicted or dependent teacher-child relationships (e.g. Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes, Cavell & Jackson, 1999; Palermo, Hanish, Martin, Fabes, & Reiser, 2007; Pianta, Steinberg & Rollins, 1995).

Hyson (1994) posited that the quality of the relationships and the environment children experience in the world around them in their early years determines their emotional development. A caring and trusting relationship between a child and adults and a safe and responsive environment among peers are essential for the development of emotional competence. Studies on teacher-child relationships support this theory. Pianta (1994) conducted a factor analysis of responses from a teacher-report measure of 436 children and generated six clusters of relationships. A positively involved relationship refers to a trustful, cooperative, responsible interaction between teacher and child. According to Pianta (1994), children were able to use the support from this relationship

to establish positive relationships with peers, demonstrate confidence in navigating the school environment, and engage in and master learning tasks more readily. In contrast, children involved in dysfunctional and angry/dependent relationships with teachers were anxious and fearful about going to school. They were unable to use support from their teachers because they lacked a sense of security and trust in them. Children with dependent relationships were confused, depended on the teachers' authority, could not investigate learning independently, and failed to establish peer relationships.

Early childhood is a crucial period in which children form positive feelings toward themselves, others, and the larger world (Denham, Bair, DeMulder, Levitas, Sawyer, Auerbach-Major, & Queenan, 2003; Meehan et al., 2003). Researchers (e.g., Baker, 1999; Cohen, 2001; Meehan et al., 2003) found that children were emotionally well-adjusted to the school environment when they were nurtured, encouraged, and accepted by adults and peers. Conversely, children who were abused, neglected, or rejected had social and mental health problems. Pianta (1999) found that a caring teacher-child relationship was a source of preventive intervention for such children because it provided emotional experiences and opportunities for them to learn social skills and self-regulatory capacities.

Caring relationships may also lower children's aggressive behaviors. Meehan et al. (2003) assessed the quality of teacher-child relationships in 140 second and third grade children who were identified by their teachers as aggressive. They found that

teachers who had built caring relationships with their students and actively worked to understand and appreciate their cultural diversity and ethnicity were able to reduce aggressive behaviors. Birch and Ladd (1998) conducted a longitudinal quantitative study that explored children's (N= 199) behavior and teacher-child relationships in kindergarten, and found that they were able to predict teacher-child relationships in first grade. The results indicated a link between children's early interpersonal behaviors and later classroom relationships. They also indicated that relationships in the kindergarten classroom were associated with a variety of school adjustment outcomes.

A study conducted by Palermo et al. (2007) is consistent with previous research and supports the idea that the teacher-child relationship is important and correlated of early school-related outcomes. The study was carried out in six classrooms of three different types of preschools, with 95 ethnically and socio-economically diverse preschool-aged children. Quantitative data was collected across 2 waves over 2 years, using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale of Pianta (2001), and 4 other quantitative measures, such as the Child Behavior Scale and subscales, behavior checklists teacher report form, and teacher assessment of children's school readiness in logical thinking, mathematical, reading, and writing capabilities. Palermo et al. found that a positive and close teacher-child relationship was correlated with children's academic school readiness and adjustment, whereas both teacher-child dependence and conflict relationships were correlated with diminished academic readiness. They also found that when children have

a positive and close relationship with teachers, they were reported to behave prosocially, showing less aggression and less peer group exclusion. Children who had behavioral or peer adjustment problems also had more negative teacher-child relationships. The researchers argued that positive social relationships with teachers and peers could maximize young children's academic adjustment by engendering a greater sense of classroom inclusion that increases children's motivation to engage in academic tasks (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Ladd et al., 1997; Palermo et al., 2007). In addition, enhancing children's early social skills and relationships may have an impact on their long-term adjustment. They suggested that teacher training, education, and support for establishing close teacher-child relationships would maximize preschoolers' academic readiness by promoting social adaptation.

In short, research reviewed in this section indicates that close and positive teacher-child relationships are correlated with children's social and emotional development, school readiness and adjustment, and later academic outcomes.

Caring Relationships and Supportive Environments

Recent research on child development emphasizes the role a supportive environment plays in strengthening and supporting children's learning and experiences in school. A supportive environment refers to a classroom community in which caring relationships connect all members of the community. Caring relationships between the teacher and children, and also among individual children, create a supportive

environment in the classroom. Studies from a variety of theoretical perspectives suggest that a key feature of a supportive environment is a responsible and responsive adult (Bowman et al., 2001). Children's abilities to learn depend on their abilities to establish a secure relationship with teachers and other children in the classroom (Howes & Ritchie, 2002). A supportive environment is especially important for children who come from difficult life circumstances. Noblit and Rogers (1995) contended that caring is central to education as a context that creates possibilities. They also found that caring was a "glue that binds teachers and students together and makes life in school meaningful" (p. 680).

Baker (1999) examined teacher-student interactions and the quality of these relationships among urban African-American children who were dissatisfied with their experiences in school. He used classroom observations, interviews, and self-report questionnaires to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from 61 third to fifth grade students. The results suggested that students' satisfaction with school was related to a caring, supportive relationship with teachers and a positive classroom environment from as early as third grade. A caring, supportive environment increased academic engagement and satisfaction with school. Baker found that children learned skills as well as attitudes and beliefs through their relationships with teachers and significant others. As a result, these relationships were important variables in learning.

Peer relationships form a major part of a supportive environment and are largely influenced by teacher-child relationships (Dalton & Watson, 1997; Gifford-Smith &

Brownell, 2002; Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994; Hubbard, 2001). Ramsey (1991) provided a theoretical framework for children's social development and peer relationships based on observation, teaching experiences, and research. In identifying the links between theory and classroom practice for preschool teachers, she found that children's relationships with teachers and peers had a major effect on their ability to develop social competence and skills; it also influenced their overall wellbeing and ability to learn.

Howes and Hamilton et al. (1994) conducted a longitudinal study of children's relationships with peers within six different childcare settings. Altogether, they observed 72 children ranging in age from 12 to 24 months for three years. Their findings indicated that teachers' sensitivity was positively associated with children's sense of security. They concluded that secure adult-child relationships correlated with children's social competence with their peers, and that a secure, caring relationship with caregivers/teachers and peers had positive effects on their academic and interpersonal behaviors, attitudes, and motivation.

Gifford-Smith and Brownell (2003) reviewed the literature on school-based peer relationships during the elementary and middle school years, with a focus on children's acceptance by their peer groups, the nature and quality of their friendships, their participation in larger peer networks, and their associations with social and academic functioning. The research Gifford-Smith and Brownell (2003) reviewed suggests that "children's peer acceptance, the ability to make and maintain friendships, and their

participation in social networks each contributes to their development and overall well-being” (p.265). Children with lower peer acceptance are at risk for school difficulties and attendance problems. Gifford-Smith and Brownell found that feelings of rejection by both teachers and peers were a key factor in school failure. They concluded that children’s ability to interact effectively with a variety of peers is important because peer relationships influence adjustment to the school environment, group participation, and school satisfaction.

Dalton and Watson (1997) introduced the theory, principles, and teacher practices of the Child Development Project (CDP) by describing the daily lives of teachers and children in the classroom. CDP is a research-based initiative that helps schools across the United States develop caring learning communities by providing classroom materials and guiding principles. Based on the narratives from classroom observations and interviews with many teachers involved in the program, Dalton and Watson described teachers’ best practices as fostering caring teacher-child, child-teacher, and child-child relationships. In this context of best practices, teachers recognize each child as a distinctive person with unique needs, experiences, and perspectives. Children learn that they are valued and that their voices are valued, which provides them a sense of belonging, a feeling of security and confidence, which are essential for them to be happy and successful in school. The caring learning community teachers and their students built together foster children’s autonomy and motivation in learning in different grade levels and with different student

populations.

The literature reviewed in this section suggests that caring relationships between teachers and children influence children's peer relationships. It also suggests that a supportive environment based on these relationships is essential for children's positive experiences in the early school years and for their development of autonomy and motivation.

Caring Relationships and Autonomy

From a constructivist point of view, autonomy does not simply mean independence or doing things for oneself without help. DeVries and Zan (1994) asserted that the term autonomy derives from self-regulation, which is an "internal system that regulates thought and action" (p. 26). They added that an autonomous individual is one who follows moral rules that are self-constructed. Kamii (1994) interpreted autonomy as being governed by oneself and making decisions for oneself, and suggested that it has both a moral aspect and an intellectual one. *Moral autonomy* refers to the ability to make moral judgments of right or wrong for oneself. *Intellectual autonomy* refers to a child's ability to make true or false decisions. Kamii also found that children develop autonomy only if their ideas are respected and taken into account when teachers make decisions in the classroom.

According to Piaget (1932/1965), the long-range goal of education is to prepare individuals for autonomous moral and intellectual thinking. Piaget contended that there

are two types of morality: heteronomous and autonomous. Heteronomous morality means following rules made by others without question, while autonomous morality means following self-constructed rules and “internal convictions about the necessity of respect for persons in relationships with others” (DeVries & Zan, 1994, p. 46). Erikson (1963) also discussed the importance of autonomy in early childhood education and child development. He argued that preschool children were either in a stage of initiative or guilt, and found that they were less dependent on adults and more self-assured and confident in their abilities if they were able to take initiative in their interactions with peers. Taking initiative requires a sense of independence, as well as reasonable opportunities for choice and control in order to develop self-control, self-esteem, confidence, and autonomous thinking. The child who “feels respected for the way he thinks and feels is more likely to be respectful of the way other people think and feel” (Kamii, 1994, p. 44).

Caring is an “appreciation for the independent existence of the others” (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 3). Mayeroff asserted that a cared-for person had her/his own worth and grew in her/his own right. Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintained that the core values of caring were trusting, nurturing, and mutual respect. He further pointed out that mutual respect was essential for a child’s development of autonomy. DeVries and Zan (1994) believed that a teacher-child relationship in a constructivist classroom should be a mutually respectful and cooperative one that minimizes unnecessary authority in relation to children. In such

a classroom, they found, teachers respect children's rights to have their own "feelings, ideas, and opinions" (p. 26); teachers also give them "opportunities to think autonomously" (p. 25). Within a caring relationship, a teacher encourages and accepts children's autonomy and initiative, prompting children's curiosity to explore the world around them and take responsibility for their own learning. As they do so, they become problem solvers (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Within this kind of socio-moral atmosphere, children gradually construct "self-confidence, respect for self and others, and active, inquiring, creative minds" (p. 26).

To establish an autonomy-supportive environment, teachers should provide a meaningful rationale for what is expected, acknowledge students' perspectives, and extend an atmosphere of choice rather than control (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994). Thus caring relationships in the classroom contribute to a supportive and safe environment that encourages children to become autonomous by developing a sense of self-worth, as well as social, ethical decision making, and self-governance skills (Baker et al., 1997). Teachers who express warmth and supportiveness toward students and spend more time listening and talking with them about personal and social issues increase students' engagement and satisfaction with school, as well as their capacity for self-direction (Howes & Ritchie, 2002).

Results from a study conducted by Montie, Xiang, Lawrence, and Schweinhart (2006) support the idea that teachers' interactions with children and children's autonomy

in child-initiative learning yield positive results in child development. The study was conducted in ten countries, Finland, Greece (urban), Hong Kong (SAR), Indonesia (Java), Ireland, Italy, Poland, Spain (Catalonia), Thailand, and the United States (six sites), and included 838 settings, 2,904 children in Phase 2, and 2,247 in Phase 3. Direct observation was used to record children's and teachers' behaviors and activities in preschools, and three sets of questionnaires were conducted to obtain information about setting structural characteristics of family backgrounds, provider beliefs, and teacher expectations. One of the purposes of the study was to examine whether children's experiences in settings at age 4 were related to their language and cognitive performance at age 7. Some of their findings are consistent across all of the countries included, and associated with children's autonomy needs. For instance, children's language development and cognitive performance at age 7 were positively related to the frequency of teacher-child interactions, the frequency of child-child interactions, and access to a child initiated learning environment where free choice activities predominated, and where adult-centered teaching and whole group activities were infrequent. Children's cognitive performance improves at age 7 as children spend less time in whole group activities and the variety of equipment and materials available increases. Children's cognitive scores at age 4 were strongly and positively related to their age-7 scores. These findings support child-initiated learning and small group activities, and are consistent with active learning promoted by developmentally appropriate practices.

Montie et al. (2006) found that in countries where adult-centered teaching, whole group activities, and group response are common, the prevailing cultural belief may be that it is of primary importance for children to listen, learn from, and obey those in authority. In contrast, in countries where child-centered teaching is typical or where children spend more time interacting with adults and other children individually and in small groups, children have a greater opportunity to express their own thoughts, opinions, and questions. Under such circumstances, independent thought and freedom of expression were encouraged, thus fostering cognitive development and language learning.

Emphasizing autonomy in early childhood education would change the common perception of children as powerless to a perception that they are “rich in potential, strong, powerful, and competent” (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 5). It is the responsibility of education, Moss and Petrie (2002) maintained, to promote children’s development of autonomy, well-being, learning, and competence. In short, a teacher should “establish a setting where children take ownership and pursue activities in which they learn about their talents and then have chances to use them with others in caring ways” (Swick & Brown, 1999, p. 118).

In summary, constructivists see the autonomous individual as one who follows self-constructed moral rules to make moral judgments regarding right or wrong decisions, and as one capable of making true or false intellectual decisions. Caring relationships contribute to creating a supportive and safe environment, and foster autonomy in children

by developing their sense of self-worth and their decision making skills in a child-initiative learning environment. Mutual respect in caring relationships between teachers and children is essential for the development of autonomy in young children.

Caring Relationships and Motivation

Printrich and Schunk (1996) defined motivation as something that gets people going, keeps them moving, and helps them get jobs done. They combined major motivation theories, principles, and research to understand the complexity of motivational processes. They concluded that motivation was a process that involves goal-directed activities, as well as physical and mental activities that entail effort, persistence, planning, organizing, decision-making, problem solving, and assessment. Printrich and Schunk (1996) also studied motivation by observing how people responded to the difficulties, problems, failures, and setbacks they encountered as they pursued goals. They found that engagement in learning was a visible outcome of motivation indicated by such factors as preference, energy level, and persistence. Deci and Ryan (1991) discovered that when children were in an environment that satisfied their needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence, they were intrinsically motivated to learn what was important to learn in that environment. They also found that children's motivation to perform a task decreased when their sense of autonomy was diminished. Constructivist approaches foster intrinsic motivation in children's learning by demonstrating respect to children and their individual needs, encouraging children to take initiative in learning in order to construct

their own knowledge.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

The literature includes many discussions (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1991; Deci & Vallerand et al., 1991, Ryan & Deci, 2000) of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. A person who is intrinsically motivated desires to do, know, and/or accomplish something, to experience stimulation because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable (Deci & Vallerand et al., 1991). Deci and Ryan (1991, 2000) considered intrinsically-motivated students to be curious. Such students, they found, enjoy and persist in the learning process while employing strategies that demand more effort. As a result, they are able to process information more deeply. According to this theory, intrinsic motivation increases in a caring environment that supports children's needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence. In contrast, extrinsically motivated students perform learning tasks in order to gain rewards or avoid punishment; therefore, they are inclined to make minimal efforts to achieve rewards.

Self-determination.

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991) explains the distinction between motivated behaviors, self-determined behaviors, and controlled types of intentional regulation, with an emphasis on "promoting in students an interest in learning, a valuing of education, and a confidence in their own capacities and attributes" (Deci & Vallerand et al., 1991, p.325). It focuses on the basic psychological needs of

human beings: competence, relatedness, and autonomy (or self-determination).

According to Deci and Vallerand et al., competence involves the understanding and the ability to attain various external and internal outcomes, as well as perform the requisite actions. Relatedness refers to developing secure and satisfying connections with others in one's social surroundings. Autonomy addresses the need for being self-initiating and self-regulating of one's own actions. Opportunities to satisfy these needs contribute to and also maximize motivation, performance, and development. Deci and Vallerand et al. wrote that SDT was concerned with behaviors that are intentional or motivated by the desire to obtain certain behavioral outcomes: "When a behavior is self-determined, the regulatory process is choice, but when it is controlled, the regulatory process is compliance" (p. 326).

Self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy describes people's judgments of their ability to organize and conduct actions required to attain designated types of performances (Schunk, 1991). Based on the theory of Schunk, self-efficacy is considered to be the underlying force behind the formation, maintenance, and change of people's behaviors, and behind their motivation for taking certain actions. Self-efficacy theory relates to an individual's choice of activities, effort, and persistence. According to Schunk (1991), children who feel self-confident about learning and perform well in school are motivated to seek challenges, expend effort to learn new material, and persist at difficult tasks. The teacher's positive

feedback and awareness of progress in learning can elevate students' self-efficacy levels. Significant, positive correlations exist between intrinsic value, self-efficacy, strategy use, and self-regulation (determination) and academic performance measures.

Intrinsic motivation and early childhood education.

Carlton and Winsler (1998) argued that children are born with an innate curiosity to learn about the world, yet many children lose this mastery motivation or replace it with extrinsically motivated learning strategies by the time they reach school. Therefore, early childhood years are crucial for establishing and strengthening robust intrinsic motivation which will last a lifetime. Teachers influence children's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes through their interactions with them (Schunk, 1991), and children's sense of competence is closely related to the development of secure relationships with significant caregivers/teachers. If children develop secure relationships with their teachers, they become freer to explore within the environment. Their sense of control over their behavior and environment strengthens their feelings of competence and leads to further exploration and experimentation (Carlton & Winsler, 1998). Carlton and Winsler maintained that when children have reached a level of self-regulation (autonomy), they feel they have gained some control over their own environment, which leads to feelings of self-competence, all of which leads to strengthened intrinsic motivation.

Carlton and Winsler (1998) suggested that teachers should remain flexible and responsive to the changing needs of children to foster intrinsic motivation. They also

asserted that teachers need to support children's autonomy, provide challenges, and allow children to set their own goals and evaluate their own successes. Tomlinson (2002) emphasized students' needs for affirmation, contribution, purpose, power, and challenge in the classroom. He found that students feel affirmed when they believe they are accepted and physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe in the classroom. They need to know that they can make a difference in the class, that they are able to help others, and that they are connected to others. Learning is meaningful to them when they have a sense of control and challenge.

Constructivist views of teaching, learning and motivation.

Social constructivist theory calls attention to the "primacy of social processes in learning and development and suggests that teacher-child interaction and relationships (social and emotional processes) may play a meaningful role in schooling" (Pianta, 1994, p.15). Social constructivists see knowledge as a subjective representation of an interdependent world, a cognitive state reflected in a person's schemas, and they view a person's meanings as socially constructed by interaction with his/her physical and social environment (Jipson, 2001). Learning is largely determined by social and cultural circumstances through the interaction between the learner, peers, and adults. Learning is learner initiated, and it is a search for meaning with an understanding of wholes as well as parts (Phillips & Soltis, 2001). What learners learn and how they learn largely depend on their previous experiences, the social and cultural backgrounds, and their relationships

with others.

From the social constructivists' point of view, learning experiences of young children must be socially, culturally, and developmentally appropriate, and must enhance logical and conceptual growth. Play is essential for children's learning, as play provides context and meaning for children to explore, to experience, and to build their own theories (Chaille & Britain, 2003). Within such learning environments, teachers are facilitators who provide a rich atmosphere, including materials and opportunities for children to explore and investigate. Teachers are researchers who observe children, record their learning process, engage children in learning and present them with the appropriate balance of knowledge and skills. They also must be able to recognize each child's needs and potential, and to provide appropriate support for children to accomplish what they cannot do without the support of a teacher.

The social constructivist approaches focus on children's natural curiosity for discovery and their interest in exploring the world around them, with the goal of fostering autonomy in children (Powell, 2000). Constructivist teachers understand that cognitive processes work best when the child's interest is engaged. They listen and ask questions, encourage the child to generate his/her own ideas, seek and value the child's points of view, and create meaningful and authentic learning activities based on his/her interests (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). In constructivist classrooms, creativity as well as risk-taking is nurtured and encouraged. There are no right or wrong answers, nor winners and losers.

Thus authentic interest is viewed as the key to student motivation (Powell, 2000).

To summarize the literature reviewed in this section, the satisfying of a person's basic psychological needs in competence, relatedness, and autonomy contribute to and also maximize motivation, performance, and development. The early childhood years are crucial for establishing and strengthening robust intrinsic motivation. Children's sense of competence is closely related to the development of secure relationships with a caring teacher. With secure relationships with their teachers, children become freer to explore and to learn. Thus, caring relationships and supportive environments encourage children's autonomy and initiative, and also stimulate their motivation.

Cultures and the Teacher's Perspective

Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, and Hernandez (1993) argued that understanding the psychological context of teaching, especially teachers' thought processes, is critical for us to understand teachers' actions in planning, teaching, and assessment. Teachers' beliefs affect teacher-student interactional and instructional planning (Brunning et al., 2004 in Wang, Elicker, McMullen, & Mao, 2008), and are associated with teachers' behavior and children's outcomes (Kagan & Smith, 1988; Maxson, 1996; Wang et al., 2008; Yonemura, 1986). Yonemura (1986) maintained that a teacher's belief that children were intrinsically motivated leads her to trust them as learners. This belief results in the teacher allowing children to choose many of their own tasks. Children work more intently and with greater concentration at these tasks than at those assigned by teachers.

Similarly, a belief that children need to experience autonomy and initiative will allow the teacher to offer possible solutions when children come to her with disagreements, but also allows them to come to a mutually acceptable resolution.

Studies of teacher beliefs within and across cultural contexts is an important emerging aspect of research in early childhood education (Wang et al., 2008), with an increasing understanding that educational practices are strongly influenced by the cultural, social, economic, and political characteristics of each society. Mutual understanding among nations is required to improve education for children within an era of increasing global economic development, and it is critical to understand the role of culture in teacher beliefs and perspectives on education (Wang et al., 2008). Wang et al. maintained that cultural influences are necessarily reflected in early childhood teachers' beliefs about early childhood curriculum, in their classroom practices, and in their relationships with children. Nonetheless, teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning may also be affected as their international awareness increases and broad changes in each society occur.

Studies conducted on the cultural aspects of child development and child rearing (e.g., Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989; Wagner & Stevenson, 1982) have brought awareness to educators that conceptions and practices vary widely from one culture to another. McMullen (2004) found that cross-culture studies allow educators to challenge their own assumptions and question beliefs that were previously taken for granted.

For instance, McMullen (2004) explored what the concept of developmentally

appropriate practice means across different cultural contexts by interviewing scholars who had experiences in cross-cultural or multi-cultural studies. She found that what could be gained from studying early childhood education and care beyond people's own cultural borders was that they could learn about themselves, and understand both the commonalities and differences extended across countries and cultures. Responses from her interviews show that the commonalities between cultures include the concern for children, the desire to create the best situation for them, and the dedication of the teachers. Some believed that general principles that are important in many different cultures might exist. She concluded that the benefits of learning from each other and teaching each other could not be underestimated.

Cross-cultural studies in early childhood education have increased in recent years. Among them was research examining beliefs about appropriate practice among early childhood education and care professionals from the U.S., China, Taiwan, Korea, and Turkey (McMullen et al., 2005); the consistency of U.S. and Chinese preschool teachers' self-reported curriculum beliefs and practices (Wang et al., 2008); preschool experience's effects on children's cognitive and language performance at age 7 in ten countries (Montie et al., 2006); and childrearing beliefs of professional caregivers from different cultural communities in the Netherlands (Huijbegts, Leseman, & Tavecchio, 2008), just to name a few.

As caring relationships are constructed in unique cultural and political settings, it

is necessary to develop a cultural perspective on caring relationships in early childhood education. For example, some Asian cultures and societies, such as the Chinese, perceive of caring teachers as those who strictly guide children according to what is *good* for them within that cultural norm (Pratt, Kelly & Wong, 1999). Others, with different (or even similar) cultural and educational expectations, such as those Tobin, Wu, and Davidson (1989) observed in a Japanese preschool, allow children to experience on their own, express themselves, and to be “a childlike child” (p. 30). Teachers in that preschool did not even stop a child’s continuing misbehavior and fighting with others, but argued that not directing the children would give them the autonomy to explore and construct their own knowledge regarding how to interact with peers. Tobin et al. (1989) also found that having a large number of children in a classroom is considered desirable in Japan, as it gives children more opportunity to learn from one another and reduces the demand for one-on-one interaction with the teachers. This is in contrast to the attitude in the U.S., where interaction with teachers and small group size is encouraged (Montie et al., 2006).

Understanding teachers’ perspectives in different cultures may help us improve both teacher education and society itself. Swick and Brown (1999) maintained that teachers of young children could be leaders in the community in terms of potentially creating a culture with a caring ethic. As early childhood teachers model caring relationships with young children and their families, they have the opportunity to help transform American society from one that values excessive materialism to one that values

a more humane, nurturing society. Swick and Brown (1999) also suggested that teachers have transformational skills that enable them to create a learning environment in which caring relationships can flourish. They added that teachers could use their personal interaction skills, knowledge, and competence in designing environments to help children gain a sense of decency that enables them to become caring persons and professionals.

Recognition of the importance of early childhood education in the development of young children has increased in China. Yi and Pang (2004) contend that teachers' personal beliefs have vital significance for the teacher education. According to them, it is crucial to make teachers' personal beliefs about education the starting point for teacher education, and then further improve the conceptions, contents, and methods of early childhood teacher education in China.

Chinese traditional view of teaching and learning.

Childrearing and education in Chinese societies is strongly influenced by Confucian values, which emphasize teachers' responsibility as moral authorities and role models (Arndt & Luo, 2008), as well as students' academic achievement, effort, and perseverance. Education is regarded as both the path to success and financial gain (Rao et al., 2003). During the preschool period, impulse control is stressed, as it is widely regarded as a foundation to academic achievement (Ho, 1994; Rao et al., 2003; Tobin et al., 1989).

Chinese teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning are combinations of their

personal conceptions and cultural influences (Pratt, 1992). Pratt et al. (1999) found that Chinese teachers were expected to have a close, protective relationship with students, “similar to that of a coach or even a parent” (p. 247). They were expected to be strict and hold high expectations, but also to care about students as individuals, to understand their difficulties, and to guide them in their learning and personal development. Being part of a hierarchy in the society, students should give teachers their respect, as “each person in the hierarchy of the Chinese society must assume responsibility for those below, and conversely their own well-being is the responsibility of those above them in the hierarchy” (Pratt et al., 1999, p.247), and as responsibility, authority, and morality are considered all part of the same hierarchy of relationships.

Using an ancient children’s literacy book, the Three Character Classic (三字经 San Zi Jing), translated by Hebert Giles (1910)¹ as an example of traditional educational materials, it is easy to see the prominent role of Confucian beliefs in early childhood education. This book has been used for several hundred years, with its history section added to cumulatively over time up to the founding of the Republic of China in 1911. It is said to have been put into the reading collections of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (see China Book International, 2011; People’s Daily Online, 2011). It recently has regained its popularity in mainland China as some have

¹ All of the translations here are from Herbert Giles (1910), "San Tzu Ching - Elementary Chinese", original of the Song Dynasty in 13th century version by Wang, Ying Lin (1223-1296).

applied it in early childhood education programs as a textbook for advanced early literacy promotion. The Three Character Classic covers many subjects, such as history, astronomy, geography, ethics, and morality, in a thousand words, and historically children were required to recite it. From this book we can see that, traditionally, learning means to read, to write, to memorize, and to know about history, society, ethics, personal responsibility, and how to relate to others. It recommends that children should learn while young, because, for instance, “If the child does not learn, this is not as it should be. If he does not learn while young, what will he be when old?” (Chinese characters: 子不学 非所宜 幼不学 老何为. Chinese Pinyin: *zi bu xue, fei suo yi, you bu xue, lao he wei*). Everything has its purpose, and the responsibility of children is to learn to become productive adults, because “the dog keeps guard by night, the cock proclaims the dawn. If foolishly you do not study, how can you become men?” (犬守夜 鸡司晨 苟不学 曷为人 *Quan shou ye, ji si chen, gou bu xue, he wei ren*). By learning, a person knows the relations in the society as well as his own responsibilities. Therefore he can be better than others: “The silkworm produces silk, the bee makes honey. If a man does not learn, he is not equal to the brutes” (蚕吐丝 蜂酿蜜 人不学 不如物 *can tu si, feng niang mi. ren bu xue, bu ru wu*). The purpose of learning is to “learn while young, and when grown up apply what you have learnt, influencing the sovereign above, benefiting the people below,” (幼而学 壮而行 上致君 下泽民 *you er xue, zhuang er xing, shang zhi jun, xia ze min*) and also to “make a name for yourself, and glorify your father and

mother; shed luster on your ancestors, enrich your posterity” (扬名声 显父母 光于前 裕于后 *Yang ming sheng, xian fu mu. Guang yu qian, yu yu hou*). Confucian principles also value knowledge acquisition and diligence in learning, perceived opposites to play. The book includes many folktales about how people (old or young) have worked hard to learn, and how all of their efforts were paid back in the end. The book ends with: “Diligence has its reward; play has no advantages. Oh, be on your guard, and put forth your strength” (勤有功 戏无益 戒之哉 宜勉力 *qin you gong, xi wu yi, jie zhi zai, yi mian li*).

Despite the Western philosophies and pedagogies that were introduced into the country beginning in the early twentieth century, and have been highly influential on education in China since the country reopened its doors in the 80s, or that from the 60s to the 70s Confucianism was officially discarded during the period of the Cultural Revolution, peoples’ thinking in one way or another still reflects some of the traditional values. Recently, an important figure in early childhood education in China, professor Zhu, reported in his speech in an OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) conference about the standards, designs, and implications of early childhood education curricula (Zhu, 2011). He stated that to design and apply the “low-structured” curricula guided by “romantic” theories in education is unrealistic in China and some other developing countries because it requires high quality teachers and also increases difficulties in assessment. This will end up requiring increased funding from the government, and thus such curricula are not practical for poor or developing countries.

He suggested designing and applying practical curricula in accordance with the reality of the country. He asserted that Chinese society values the culture of knowledge learning. Common people hold high expectations for their children, and they believe that diligence will be paid back as it leads to success. He emphasized Chinese basic education's success, citing a report of Shanghai students having received high scores on PISA (Program for International Students Assessment) tests (OECD Home, 2010). He did concede that he agrees with those who think the PISA scores of Shanghai students do not represent the whole country.

Nonetheless, as China becomes more open to outside influence, traditional teaching based on Confucian principles and socialist ideas has come into conflict with Western ideas and the goals of individuality, creativity, autonomy, and critical thinking (McMullen et al., 2005). More and more people understand the developmental needs of children for their wellbeing, and are aware of the problems of practices with a heavy academic focus in the field. The China Early Childhood Education Association website published an article from China Education Daily (Jan. 10th, 2011), reflecting on what was happening in early childhood education during 2010, when it was in the spotlight for the first time. It synthesizes articles that criticize many practices in the field, such as advanced early literacy, which focuses on memorizing Chinese characters and reciting ancient poems, such as the Three Character Classic (Su, 2010a). English, math, and mental and abacus calculation were added to the curriculum, as well as many varied

subjects offered as extracurricular activities (Yu, 2010). This resulted in an increase in academic learning and decrease in outdoor play in many early childhood education programs (Qin, 2010). Qin contends that the emphasis on heavy academic learning runs against children's development, and will ultimately take away children's interest and confidence in learning.

In summary, how a teacher teaches and interacts with children reflects his/her beliefs about and understandings of knowledge, learning, and his/her role as a teacher. Teachers' beliefs and their practices are shaped by their social and cultural contexts. Cross-cultural studies have provided opportunities for early childhood professionals to learn from practices of the other cultures, and also about themselves. Western influences, including constructivist theory and Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), encourage early childhood professionals to promote children's social emotional development, to integrate subject matter content across curriculum, to provide concrete and hands on materials, and to allow play and free choice in the curriculum. The importance of creativity, critical thinking, and child-centered learning are recognized by many early education professionals. Nevertheless, Chinese traditionally value academic knowledge and skill learning. The Chinese traditional view of knowledge and learning conflicts with the growing recognition among educators of children's developmental needs.

Summary of the Reviewed Literature and the Gap in Research

Burgeoning research over the last three decades has enhanced understanding of the nature and value of caring in children's school experiences. Studies relating to attachment theory, the ethics of care, and children's socio-emotional development, have explored the conceptualization of caring and caring relationships and identified various types of relationships that exist between teachers and children. The reviewed research indicates that caring and being cared for correlate highly with children's social-emotional competence and their development of a sense of autonomy and intrinsic motivation.

Most of the reviewed literature on caring and teacher-child relationships focuses on children from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Research with preschool children has focused on identifying the similarities and differences between child-parent relationships and teacher-child relationships (e.g., Howes & Hamilton, 1992). Research has investigated patterns of relationships, such as the intervention and compensation factors in caring relationships for children who have insecure relationships with their prior caregivers, are facing violence, displaying behavior problems, at risk, or come from poverty and other difficult circumstances (e.g., Meehan et al., 2003; Swick, 2005).

Some research has been conducted on how to use caring relationships and supportive environments to build learning communities that foster autonomy and motivation for learning. However, the connection between caring relationships and the development of autonomy, as well as its effects on motivation, has not been examined at

the preschool level; nor has it been explicitly explored from different cultural perspectives. Although the topic of caring has been a focus of much research, the voices of pre-K teachers are missing. Early childhood teachers' perceptions and practices regarding caring relationships, including their understanding of the interrelationships that exist among caring, autonomy, and motivation, have not been specifically analyzed. Cross-culture research reviewed in this section explores various topics in early childhood education among different cultures, yet no studies were found that examine cultural variations in preschool teachers' perspectives on their relationships with children, or their understanding of autonomy and motivation in different socio-cultural contexts. Gaining both a cultural perspective and pre-k teachers' perspectives in the field may deepen understandings of caring relationships, autonomy and motivation, and it may also provide insights for improving early childhood practices and teacher education in both cultures.

About This Study

For the reasons described above, an examination of caring, autonomy, and their connections to motivation in pre-K settings within two different cultural contexts will make a valuable contribution to the field of study. Conducting a study that elaborates on the multiple ways in which caring relationships can manifest, and that examines the perspectives and practices that foster intrinsic motivation in two cultural settings, will provide a better understanding of the complex and multiple meanings of caring relationships. Finally, an analysis of the relationship between caring, the development of

autonomy, and the effects of motivation will help to encourage deeper reflection on the overall goals of education itself.

Most of the studies reviewed in the previous section used quantitative approaches that relied on data collected largely from test scores, rating scores, questionnaires, and check-lists of observations to find correlations between the teacher-child relationship and other aspects of education. In contrast, the purpose of this study was to let the voices of preschool teachers be heard, as well as to help teachers understand and reflect on their own practices and relationships with children in their classrooms. For these reasons, this study used a qualitative approach to collect its data.

Specifically, the researcher interviewed preschool teachers in Portland, Oregon, and in Shenzhen, China, regarding their practices and perspectives on caring, autonomy, and motivation. The study recorded teachers' experiences in building caring relationships with young children in preschool settings, their expectations of the children, their educational goals, and what they viewed as the cultural influences that affected the way they established relationships with children. A pilot study was conducted in the beginning of 2006, the findings of which are discussed briefly below.

The Pilot Study

The pilot study used interviews and questionnaires to collect data. The original interview questions and questionnaire are located in Appendix D. Five preschool teachers from each city were interviewed. The interviews were conducted face-to-face

with participants in Portland; due to time and financial limitations, the interviews with Shenzhen participants were conducted via telephone. Questionnaires were sent to 50 preschool teachers in each city; the return rate was approximately 55%.

Analysis of the pilot study indicated that early childhood educators from both cultures valued caring relationships and supportive environments; in fact, overall scores on these two aspects of the survey were similar. Interview participants from both cities saw themselves as friends of the children in their classroom. They believed that it was important to establish trust between teachers and children, and that it was equally important for teachers to understand children via observation, listening, and one-on-one communication. There was also a consensus on children's need for belonging, acceptance, and respect. Furthermore, participants from both cities agreed that caring relationships provide children with a sense of security and confidence that fosters children's motivation. The teachers' perspectives echoed the theories and literature that good teaching is based on caring relationships.

On the other hand, respondents from the two countries differed somewhat in regard to their underlying beliefs about caring and the value of the development of autonomy and intrinsic motivation. For example, most participants from Shenzhen referred to autonomy as children's self-care or self-support skills. Some participants from Portland thought autonomy does not exist in a classroom setting since activities are group oriented. Furthermore, most Portland participants agreed that limitations or

boundaries are necessary; yet most of the Shenzhen participants disagreed with this statement. The Shenzhen participants' response surprised the investigator because it seems to contradict the traditional Chinese belief that a caring teacher should also be strict when necessary. Another difference between the two groups of participants lies in how teachers conceive of motivation. Those in Shenzhen believed that motivation was very important in preschool, an attitude that may be linked to China's strong emphasis on academic learning. In contrast, teachers from Portland paid less attention to motivation. This attitude may be linked to the more child-centered approach to activities taken in U.S. preschools.

The investigator took all of these differences into consideration for this study. As a result, the final study placed a stronger emphasis on what autonomy and motivation mean to preschool teachers and children, and why teachers consider autonomy and motivation to be important or unimportant within a preschool setting. The pilot study confirmed the qualitative focus and interview design of the final study. Chapter Three describes the methods, population, and data collection procedures used in the current study, as well as the data analysis process.

Chapter Three

Methods

This chapter describes how the present study was conducted. It includes a restatement of the purpose of the study and the research questions, the rationale for using a basic or generic qualitative research approach for the study, and a description of the population, sites, participants, ethics, data collection procedures, process of data analysis, and credibility of the study.

The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions Restated

The purpose of this study was to evaluate early childhood teachers' understandings and their self-reported practices in caring relationships, as well as their conceptions of autonomy and motivation, in two different cultural settings in order to obtain cultural perspectives and insights into early childhood practices and the preparation of caring teachers in early childhood education. The research questions guiding the study were:

- How do preschool teachers in each cultural setting understand and construct caring relationships with and among children in their classrooms?
- What are preschool teachers' understandings and experiences of fostering autonomy and intrinsic motivation in preschool children in each cultural setting?
- How are teachers' experiences in caring and their relationships with children influenced by cultural and social contexts?

The goal of this study is to understand the participants' perspectives, the meanings they construct from their experiences, the cultural contexts within which they act, and the influence that this context has on their actions (Maxwell, 2005). Based on an understanding that qualitative studies emphasize the influence of participants' personal perspectives and focus on the exploration of their constructions of meaning (Aubrey, David, Godfrey, & Thompson, 2000; Maxwell, 2005), and that qualitative researchers are interested in how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 1998), this study fits into the qualitative genre as a basic or generic qualitative study.

The Basic or Generic Qualitative Study

Merriam (1998) states that qualitative research "is an umbrella concept covering forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p.5). According to Merriam (1998), the major types of qualitative research commonly found in education include the basic or generic qualitative study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. He characterized basic or generic qualitative studies as one qualitative research strategy:

Many qualitative studies in education do not focus on culture or build a grounded theory; nor are they intensive case studies of a single unit or bounded system.

Rather, researchers who conduct these studies, which are probably the most

common form of qualitative research in education, simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved. (p. 11)

Many researchers (e.g. Arksey & Knight, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Merriam, 1998) maintain that research is value-bound and subjective since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Thus, the researchers' beliefs and values will influence their decisions in determining the theoretical perspectives of the research, its topic and subjects, its rationale and methodology, and its process of exploration.

Arksey and Knight (1999) maintain that "perception, memory, emotion, and understanding are human constructs, not objective things" (p. 3). Teachers' perspectives encompass their purposes, goals, and conceptions, and also guide the way they think about children, the curriculum, and their work, as well as the meaning they give to their beliefs through their behaviors and the decisions they make in the classroom (Fang, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Shavelson & Stern, 1981). This study explored teachers' perspectives by focusing on their self-report and reflections in regard to their understanding of caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation. In particular, it focused on teachers' interpretations of their relationships with children and the meaning they derived from these interactions. It also focused on their expectations and educational goals as reflections of their understanding of caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation for

the children in their classrooms.

A decision to use qualitative methods often involves collecting participants' responses, interpreting the data, and establishing relationships with participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This study used qualitative interviewing for data collection. It was based on a belief that such interviews could explore unique, personal understandings and provide data about the opinions, attitudes, and feelings of the participants (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Patton, 1990). According to Patton (1990), "The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on a person's mind...to access the perspective of the person being interviewed...to find out from them things that we cannot directly observe" (p.278). Arksey and Knight (1999) affirm that qualitative interviews are "powerful way(s) of helping people to make explicit things that have hitherto been implicit—to articulate their tacit perceptions, feelings and understandings" (p. 33).

The above discussion, as well as the study's research design, is illustrated by Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. An Interactive Model of research design, adopted from Maxwell (2005)

From the visual model presented above we can see that the goals of the study, the

conceptual framework, the research questions, and the methods and the credibility of the study are integrated and related to each other. The research questions are the heart of this model as they connect to all of the other components and “should inform, and be sensitive, to these components” (Maxwell, 2005, p.5). The two way arrows show that each component is closely tied to several others. For instance, to understand preschool teachers’ perspectives on caring relationships, autonomy, motivation and the cultural influences on their understandings are the main goals of the study. They were informed by current theories and knowledge of teacher-child relationships such as attachment, ethics of care, constructivist and other theories in autonomy and motivation. These theories and understandings are relevant to the goals and research questions of the study. Based on the study’s goals and theoretical framework, the research questions solicit answers from preschool teachers in two different cultures for their perspectives on these aspects of their work. The components on the bottom triangle also are closely integrated. The research method used in this study must enable the researcher to answer the research questions, and also enable her to confront validity threats to these answers. This chapter focuses on the way this study was conducted, the methods used, and the credibility of the study. The sites, participants, data collection strategy, and the process of data collection, data analysis, and credibility of the study will be discussed respectively, in detail, in the subsequent sections. Figure 3 below further depicts the method section of this study.

Figure 3. An overview of the study on teachers' perspectives in two cultural settings

The above figure provides an overview of the participants, their locations, the data collection, and the data analysis processes of the study. Twenty early childhood teachers participated in the study, ten from Shenzhen, China, and ten from Portland, Oregon. A semi-structured interview strategy was used to elicit the perspectives of preschool teachers who work with children 2 to 6 years old in the two cultural contexts. Their responses were recorded, and then fully transcribed. The responses of each interview within a cultural group were first analyzed individually, and then synthesized and woven into the prevalent themes of each group. The results of each group were then compared and contrasted for commonalities and differences between the two groups.

In the next section, the process of selection of sites and recruitment of participants are discussed.

Site Selection and Participant Recruitment

This study sought to understand the conceptions and experiences of preschool teachers who work with children between the ages of 2 and 6 in Portland, Oregon, and in Shenzhen, China. It should be noted, however, that the definition of preschool is different in the two countries. In China, two types of early childhood programs exist: nursery schools that serve children under 3 years of age and kindergartens that serve children between the ages of 3 and 6 (however, today more and more kindergartens in Shenzhen also provide care for children younger than 3). The term early childhood

education in the United States refers to education for children from their birth to 8 years old, including kindergarten to third grade in elementary schools. Pre-k programs are also varied, and based on the programs in Portland, preschools generally refer to programs that serve children between the ages of 3 and 5. Currently, many childcare facilities in Portland also provide care for children from infants and toddlers up to five- and six-year-olds. Therefore, in this paper, the terms pre-school, early childhood program, and child center are interchangeable, and all refer to early childhood education programs in both cities that serve children between the ages of 2 and 6. The terms Pre-school teacher and early childhood teacher were used to refer to teachers who work in such programs that provide education for young children before they enter elementary school.

According to Stake (2000), it is important to choose participants who are most accessible and from whom one can learn the most. Early childhood programs in both cities are diverse in terms of the educational philosophies and approaches they adopt, their funding sources (e.g., profit or nonprofit), and the children they serve. The researcher decided to include not only diverse participants but also participants from diverse settings. Therefore, Portland participants were intentionally recruited from government funded programs such as Head Start, programs for educational training or research purposes such as university lab schools, and programs inspired by specific philosophies such as Montessori and Reggio Emilia. Participants were also recruited from programs that serve children from the community and from both corporate-owned

programs and privately owned centers.

Early childhood programs in Shenzhen have similar features in regard to funding sources, such as different levels of the education bureaus of the government, large corporations, and private individuals. However, there are no programs funded by China's central government comparable to those funded by the federal government in the United States. Participants in Shenzhen were recruited from early childhood education programs whose funds come from education bureaus at the municipal, district, and community levels; corporations; organizations affiliated with universities and school boards that have educational and research missions; and private individuals. During the time of the interviews, many participants claimed their centers were conducting experiments using a variety of educational philosophies and approaches, such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and Emergent Curriculum.

Information regarding the social and cultural environments used in the study was based on the knowledge and observations of the researcher, The Teacher Background Information forms, as well as the descriptions shared by participants during the interview process. A brief description of the sites is provided below.

Sites in Portland.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggested that a realistic site is one with entry possibility, one that has the characteristics the research requires, and one where the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relationships with the participants from

whom credible data can be obtained. In order to ensure the diverse settings appropriate for this study, sites in Portland were researched in three ways: 1) web searches, 2) recommendations from educational organizations, and 3) personal contacts with directors and administrators in the field. Most of the large early childhood education institutions, such as KinderCare and Montessori schools, have websites that include information about the center and contact information. Information on community child centers and private child centers was obtained with the help of the Oregon Association for the Education of Young Children (OAEYC). The researcher also had personal connections with some centers—either because she had volunteered or observed in them, or because she knew the directors as a result of having attended conferences and/or classes together. Head Start centers and university laboratory schools were contacted through these connections.

Altogether, information on 20 center-based early childhood programs was obtained. Each site (except one) accommodated more than 50 children and was located in the greater Portland metropolitan area. The investigator phoned the directors of these centers and explained the purpose of the study. Some declined to participate, saying that their teachers were too busy to be involved or that they did not have teachers who fit the participant criteria. Fourteen agreed to distribute letters to the teachers in the centers and schedule a time for the researcher to visit the site and explain the study in more detail. Eventually, 10 teachers who had learned about the study and were interested in participating were included. Both phone and e-mail were then used for follow-up

communications.

As Table 1 demonstrates, the final sites from which participants were recruited included two Head Start programs (one full-day and one part-day), two individual privately owned child centers, one Montessori school, one corporate childcare center, two university lab schools affiliated with different post-secondary educational institutions, and two community nonprofit child centers.

Table 1. Sites in Portland

Type	Funding Source	Size	Socio-economic & ethnic backgrounds	No. of Participants
Head Start 1	Federal Funds	4 classes, 80 children	Low income & diverse	1
Head Start 2	Federal Funds	5 classes, 90 children	Low income & diverse	1
Montessori	Tuitions & Grants	6 classes, 140 children	Upper-middle income & mostly Caucasian	1
Community 1	Tuitions & Grants	2 classes, 30 children	Middle income & some differing ethnicities	1
Community 2	Parents' Cooperation	4 classes, 60 children	Middle income & some differing ethnicities	1
Lab school 1	Tuitions & Grants	10 classes, 200 children	Low income & Diverse in ethnicity	1
Lab school 2	Tuitions & Grants	5 classes, 100 children	Low income & Diverse in ethnicity	1
Corporate	Tuitions	11 classes, 190 children	Middle income & Diverse in ethnicity	1
Individual 1	Tuitions	6 classes, 108 children	Upper-middle income & mostly Caucasian	1
Individual 2	Tuitions	6 classes, 100 children	Middle income & mostly Caucasian	1

Sites in Shenzhen.

Although the researcher had worked in Shenzhen for over a decade, she did not recruit participants in the district in which she had worked in order to avoid any personal

assumptions that might be involved (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). She went to Shenzhen between December 2006 and January 2007 to collect data. During that time she called the director of the Early Childhood Division in the Municipal Educational Bureau to ask her opinion of the overall situation of early childhood education in the city. This follows Rubin & Rubin's (2005) suggestion to first find people monitoring the arena to figure out who might be informed. The director provided brief descriptions of each district, including their strengths and weakness. In order to draw samples from different representative districts, the director suggested that the researcher contact educational bureaus at the district level. According to the director, some districts were stronger than others, as they had better support from the district, strong leadership, and high quality programs in their areas. Some were similar in terms of the structure, size, leadership, and educational reputation. Each district had child centers funded by different sources, such as government (district educational bureaus), corporations, educational organizations, local communities, and private individuals. She recommended three districts that would represent different aspects of the city.

Altogether, the city has 6 governmental/educational districts; to ensure their anonymity, this study refers to them using the numbers 1 through 6. Based on the recommendations of the director of the Child Division of the City Education Bureau, the researcher contacted the early childhood education leaders of Districts 1, 2, and 4. Besides obtaining more information about the districts, she was invited to attend open

houses in 2 districts and to give talks during the discussions following these open houses with teachers and directors from each district. Thanks to such opportunities, she was able to meet with many program directors and teachers in person, explain the research project, distribute consent letters, and recruit participants. She also contacted friends and previous colleagues in administrative positions in different districts and child centers who invited her to visit their centers, meet teachers, and observe classroom activities.

To ensure that participants came from diverse working environments, teachers were recruited from all six districts of the city. The details are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Sites in Shenzhen

Type	Funding Source	Size	Socio-economic & ethnic backgrounds	No. of Participants
District 1	Educational Bureau and Tuition	12 classes, 380 children	Middle income & mostly Han	1
District 2	Educational Bureau and Tuition	9 classes, 210 children	Small business owners & mostly Han	1
District 4	Educational Bureau and Tuition	10 classes, 300 children	Middle income & mostly Han	1
University 1	Tuition	10 classes, 250 children	Upper-middle income & mostly Han	1
University 2	Tuition	9 classes, 230 children	Middle income & mostly Han	1
Corporate 1	Tuition	8 classes, 160 children	Upper-middle income & minor differing ethnicities	1
Corporate 2	Tuition	6 classes, 180 children	Middle income & mostly Han	1
Individual Private 1	Tuition	10 classes, 300 children	Upper-middle income & minor differing ethnicities	1
Individual Private 2	Tuition	6 classes, 170 children	Middle income & mostly Han	1
Community	Local Government & tuition	5 classes, 100 children	Low income & mostly Han	1

From the table above we can see that three public programs of three

governmental districts, two university experiment centers, two corporate centers, two private individual centers, and one community center were selected.

Participants in Portland.

Participants were selected using a purposeful sampling strategy, according to criteria that included those who were experienced and knowledgeable in the field (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). According to information provided by the participants, the entire Portland sample was comprised of Caucasian female teachers. However, their ages, years of teaching experience, educational and social backgrounds, as well as children served varied widely. Participants' ages ranged from 27 to 58, and years of work experience ranged from 3 to 30, including working with children from diverse family backgrounds. Educational backgrounds included associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees.

The participants had grown up in different parts of the country and came to Portland for various reasons. Before working with young children, some had worked in other fields, such as public schools (3), social work (3), business (2), and real estate (1). Their social backgrounds also varied. Some were the first in their families to receive a college education, whereas others came from well-educated families and had attended private schools through college. Their majors included early childhood education, psychology, human development, sociology, or child and family studies. Table 3 presents the details.

Table 3. Participants in Portland

Participants' Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Education	Ethnicity	Years of Teaching	Age of Children ²
Amy	F	27	BA	W	9	3-5
Betty	F	34	AA	W	17	2.5-3.5
Cathy	F	37	MA	W	12	2.5-6.5
Debbie	F	29	BA	W	6	5-6
Eva	F	45	BA	W	17	3-6
Fanny	F	39	AA	W	3	3-5
Grace	F	58	BA	W	20	3-5
Holly	F	54	BA	W	12	3-6
Irene	F	54	BA	W	30	2-6
Joy	F	35	BA	W	10	3-5

Participants in Shenzhen.

Like participants from Portland, Shenzhen participants all shared the same ethnicity (Han Chinese), and all but one were female. Their ages ranged from 21 to 39, and years of work experience ranged from 3 to 19. In contrast to Portland participants, most Shenzhen participants began working in preschools right after their professional training. The families of the children served ranged from low income to affluent; some parents lacked any formal education, whereas others were well educated. Participants were born, studied, and worked in eight different provinces of the country before coming to Shenzhen.

All felt proud of the fact that they had been selected to work in the city. This was due to the fact that, since jobs in Shenzhen are very competitive, their recruitment had

² Children's age in this column indicates that the teacher works either with one age group of children or in a multiage classroom.

involved many exams and interviews prior to being hired. In fact, each job opening had received 100 or more applicants. Final applicants had to compete not only via in-person interviews, lesson plan writing, and class presentations, but also via demonstrations of their singing, dancing, painting, piano playing, and storytelling skills. The reason for such requirements for early childhood teachers is that different types of arts, such as musical rhymes, singing, dancing and drawing, are heavily emphasized in the teaching of young children in China.

Participants' educational backgrounds ranged from 3 to 5 years of college education. Shenzhen preschool teachers were required to have at least three years of teacher training in early childhood education. Most of them took two more years of part time college courses later to earn an associate's degree in early childhood education, which is roughly similar to an AA degree in the U.S. Three of the participants had bachelor's degrees, one of which was in early childhood education. Two participants had 3 years of early childhood teacher training plus 2 more years of full time courses in music education. Two male participants from Shenzhen were recruited, but one of them was unable to participate in the interview due to technology challenges. Table 4 presents the details.

Table 4. Shenzhen Participants

Participants' Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Education	Ethnicity	Years of Teaching	Ages of Children ³
An	F	34	AA	Han	14	2.5--6
Fu	F	37	AA	Han	15	3-6
Ni	F	29	AA	Han	11	5-6
Kai	M	21	3yrs	Han	4	5-6
Bai	F	22	BA	Han	3	2.5-4
Yang	F	25	AA	Han	5	2.5-3.5
Dai	F	29	BA	Han	10	5-6
Lan	F	26	BA	Han	7	4-5
Chen	F	30	AA	Han	12	5-6
Han	F	39	3yrs	Han	19	2.5-6.5

As mentioned previously, participants were selected, using a purposeful sampling strategy according to specific criteria. The investigator does not claim that the sample is representative of the two cities involved; however, the participants chosen for the study had a depth of knowledge, education, and experience in the field that made them valuable informants. This is in line with Morse (1998), who said that “a good informant is one who has the knowledge and experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed, and is willing to participate in the study.”

Participants' perspectives were well articulated and informative, and they provided insight into the experience of caring within different cultural contexts. The ethical considerations of participant recruitment will be discussed in the next section.

³ Children's ages in this column indicate that the teacher either is in a loop of teaching, staying 3 or 4 years with same group of children, or teaching only one age group. There were no multiage classrooms in the centers from which the participants were recruited.

Ethical considerations in research.

Maxwell (2005) argues that research must be conducted ethically during each step of the process. Ethical considerations during the process of recruiting participants include honoring the sites and respecting the rights of participants (Creswell, 2002). In line with this approach, the researcher worked hard to create a study that was both respectful of participants and ethical. For example, she obtained permission from early childhood education program directors to visit their centers and to contact teachers. Prior to the interview, she visited teachers' classrooms, showed interest in their lives and work, and shared information about herself and her interests. She also did her best to respond to participants' questions about her study, culture, and what she knew about the education systems in both China and the United States. Furthermore, observations and interviews were conducted without disturbing other teachers' work and children's activities in the centers.

In the next section, data collection strategies and procedures are described in detail.

Data Collection

As mentioned previously, focused interviews were conducted for data collection. This section discusses the data collection strategies, the duration and location of the interviews, the procedures, the interview questions, and their connection to the research questions.

Data collection strategies.

The basic data source of this study was semi-structured interviews with teachers from the two cities. A Teacher Background Information form was used in China to collect demographic information from the participants and the structural characteristic of their workplaces. Demographic information for Portland participants was collected during the interviews. The researcher also wrote memos and summaries during the data collection process.

Semi-Structured Interviews.

A semi-structured interview approach was adopted in this study. Merriam (1998) states that highly structured interviews are actually an “oral form of the written survey” (p. 74), and totally unstructured interviews “are particularly useful when the researcher does not know enough about a phenomenon to ask relevant questions” (p.75). Nevertheless, while conducting a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has a specific agenda to follow because relevant topic areas have been selected beforehand. According to Arksey and Knight (1999), semi-structured interviews generate qualitative data: “Participants answer questions in terms of what they see as important, likewise, there is scope for them to choose what to say about a particular topic, and how much” (p. 7). The interview agenda in this study was structured with open-ended questions that allowed conversations to take place between the researcher and participants (see either Table 6 or Appendix-C for the interview questions).

A focused interviewing approach was adopted in this study based on the purpose of the study as well as on what the researcher learned from the pilot study. As mentioned previously, a pilot study was conducted between January and March 2006 to test the design of the study, using interviews and a questionnaire for data collection. The questionnaires reached a broader population, yet the feedback from the questionnaires indicated that confusion existed around some of the terminology, and that the responses for open-ended questions overlapped with those from interviews. For this reason, the questionnaire was not used as a data collection strategy for this study.

Teacher Background Information form.

A Teacher Background Information form was used to collect the demographic information of the participants and their workplaces in Shenzhen. It collects two categories of information, personal and center structural characteristics. Personal information includes gender, age, years of education, highest degree and the institute graduated, years of working as a teacher, teacher certificate, and ethnicity. The center structural characteristics information includes the funding source of the center, total classes in the center, group size in the classroom, and the age of the children whom the participant works with. Portland participants were not required to fill out the form. Collection of demographic information was included in their interviews. The reason for using this form in Chinese locations was because the situation in many Chinese centers was complicated, and some of the Chinese participants would not mention much

demographic information during their interviews. Providing them a form proved much easier for both the interviewer and the interviewees.

Memos and summaries.

During the data collection process, the researcher also wrote research memos to keep track of the interviews, to make records of each center and classroom, and also to record reflections and thoughts as they occurred. Some major points that struck the researcher after interviews were also summarized.

Durations and locations of the interviews.

The interviews were conducted between December 2006 and May 2007, with each interview lasting from 60 to 90 minutes depending upon the participant's willingness to talk. The average length of the actual interviews in each city was about 76 minutes. Each participant was interviewed once, with one exception from each city. One of the Portland participants was interviewed twice because the time she had for the first interview seemed too brief for her to fully express her ideas. She felt she could talk more on the topic, so a second interview was scheduled. One of the Shenzhen participants had only half an hour for the first interview, so another time was scheduled.

Most of the interviews took place in a quiet office or conference room at the center where each participant worked. Some were conducted in classrooms or activity rooms after school, or on Sunday when no other teachers or children were around. One interview in Shenzhen was conducted in a café, in keeping with the preference of the

participant. The café was quiet, with only two or three customers entering before the end of the interview and sitting in a removed location. Table 5 shows the durations and locations of the interviews.

Table 5. Durations and locations of the interviews

Portland Participants	Duration	Locations	Shenzhen Participants	Duration	Locations
Amy	74mins	Conference room	An	67mins	Conference room
Betty	58mins	Center	Bai	78mins	Classroom
Cathy	92mins	Classroom	Chen	71mins	Conference room
Debbie	57mins, 50mins	Conference room	Dai	75mins	Center office
Eva	60mins	Center office	Fu	33mins, 60mins	Classroom
Fanny	85mins	Activity room	Kai	80mins	Café
Grace	94mins	Center office	Han	79mins	Conference room
Holly	73mins	Activity room	Lan	79mins	Conference room
Irene	60mins	Center office	Ni	74mins	Center office
Joy	62mins	Classroom	Yang	74mins	Classroom

Interview procedure.

While recruiting participants, the researcher first e-mailed some of the prospective participants to briefly introduce herself and the research project (see Appendix A for the introductory script). Then she either met with teachers in person or talked with them by phone in order to grow acquainted with them and explain more about the study. Her goal was to begin to establish a relationship with teachers that would encourage an open exchange of ideas without becoming too involved with them (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Once a teacher had expressed interest in participating, the researcher explained the study in greater detail, including its purpose and procedures, and assured the teacher of complete confidentiality. Interviews were then scheduled at the convenience of the teacher.

As each interview began, the researcher greeted participants formally and expressed her appreciation for their participation. She also explained the purpose of the study again, as well as the procedures that would be followed during the interview and how the results would be used. After making the participants fully aware that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, the researcher handed them a consent form and gave them time to read it before making their final decision about participating in the interview (see Appendix B for the Informed Consent for Interviews). The researcher again assured the participants that the study would not include their real names or any other identifying information. She also assured them that they would not be judged by their relationships with children, their classroom practices, or their understanding of certain concepts. She emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers. She asked participants to share their real thoughts and opinions honestly, and not simply tell her what they thought she wanted to hear.

Interview protocols were designed to guide the semi-structured interviews. Written first in English and then translated into Chinese by the investigator, and reviewed by a bilingual colleague (see Appendix C-2 for Chinese translation). They consisted of

open-ended questions that encouraged conversations to take place between the researcher and the participants. For example, the first question was: "Would you please tell me something about yourself, just what you feel comfortable sharing with me?" The researcher encouraged participants to talk about their families, education, and jobs over the years; as they did so, the conversation unfolded naturally. This process was encouraged by asking follow-up questions regarding why participants wanted to work with young children, what it was like to work at the center where they were currently employed, what their relationships with the children were like, what their classroom routines were, and what kind of social environment was present in their classroom.

The investigator then guided the conversation to focus on how participants created this environment and these relationships among their children. She also asked participants to elaborate on what they had just said, and provide examples for their understanding of autonomy, motivation, cultural influences, and the social environment in the classroom. Participants were further asked to tell stories of how they had built caring relationships with the children, and what they had done to meet children's needs. Such an approach allowed the participants to relax, and encouraged them to talk about themselves and their children, to share stories, and to engage actively in the conversation. Following the interview, the researcher expressed her sincere appreciation to participants for their support and the time they had sacrificed for the study.

The research questions and interview questions.

Table 6 presents the central focus, basic research questions, interview questions, and follow-up questions that comprised the study. It illustrates the connection among the lines of inquiry of this study (in the first column), the research questions (in the second column), and the interview questions and possible follow-up questions (in the third column). For example, one of the goals of this study was to elicit teachers' perceptions of caring relationships and how they viewed their practice of building such relationships in the early childhood program in which they worked (first column, second row). The associated research question (column two, second row) was: How do preschool teachers in both cultural settings understand and construct caring relationships with and among children in their classroom? The four interview questions and five follow-up questions (column three, second row) were designed to elicit opinions from the participants by asking them to describe their relationships with the children in their classroom and what they had done to establish these bonds. The questions also encouraged participants to reflect on what kinds of relationships between teachers and children would best support children's development, and how the social atmosphere in their classroom might affect the children.

Table 6. Relations between research questions and the interview protocols

Inquiries of the Study	Research Questions & Purpose	Main Interview Questions with Probes & Follow-up Questions
<i>Warm-ups</i> <i>Culture and personal experiences</i>	Cultural and social background of the participants and the workplace	1. Would you tell me something about yourself? Just what you feel comfortable to share with me. a. Why did you become an early

		<p>childhood teacher? (Why did you choose to work with young children?)</p> <p>2. Can you tell me about this center and the centers you have worked in before?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What is your classroom routine? How many children are in your class? What are their ages? To what kinds of cultures do your children belong?
<i>Teachers' perception of caring relationships and their practice</i>	I. How do preschool teachers in both cultural settings understand and construct caring relationships with and among children in their classrooms?	<p>3. How would you describe the relationships between you and the children in your classroom?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> You described your relationships with the children as _____. What does that mean to you? What do you see your role to be with the children in your classroom? <p>4. What did you do to establish such a relationship with the children?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What have you done to help children build relationships with each other? <p>5. In your experience, what kinds of relationships among teachers and children support children's development?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> You describe the relationships that support children's development as _____. What does this mean to you? <p>6. Is the social atmosphere in your class more important than other aspects?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Why? If not, what are the most important factors that affect child development?
<i>Teachers' perspectives on autonomy and motivation</i>	II. What are preschool teachers' understandings and experiences in fostering autonomy and motivation in preschool children in both cultural settings?	<p>7. What does independence mean to you? What does autonomy mean to you? Do independence and self-regulation mean the same as autonomy to you?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What choices do children have in your classroom? What kind of decisions do children want to make? When and on what matters should they be allowed to make their own decisions? Do you think it is necessary to foster autonomy in preschool? Why or why not? What do you do to help children in decision making? (Or what have you done to foster children's autonomy /self-regulation?) <p>8. How do you know if a child is motivated or</p>

		<p>not? Please give examples of children who are motivated to learn and those who are reluctant to learn.</p> <p>9. What does intrinsic motivation mean to you? Do you think it is important in preschool?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Do you reward or praise good behaviors and those who do well in learning? Can you give any examples? How do you deal with "bad" behaviors, or those who seem unwilling to learn? <p>10. Are there any connections between children's social competence and their curiosity and ability to learn? Examples?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think that children's ability to make friends and communicate with teachers supports their learning? <p>11. Do you think that caring relationships (or a supportive environment) have anything to do with autonomy?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> If not, why not? If yes, what is the connection between the two? <p>12. Do you see any connection between your relationships with children and their intrinsic motivation in learning?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Please give examples to describe the connection. <p>13. Please describe an event that demonstrates how your support (direct or indirect) changed children's behaviors or influenced their decision making and their motivation to learn.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> If you could change anything about your relationships with the children in your classroom, what would it be?
<i>Background and cultural contexts' influences</i>	III. How are teachers' experiences of caring and their relationships with children influenced by cultural and social contexts?	<p>14. In your experience, what cultural factors have influenced the relationships between you and the children in your classroom?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Do children's cultural heritages affect the way you approach them and their relationships with you, or their relationships with other children in the classroom?
<i>Wrapping up</i>	Teachers' own opinions or stories	<p>15. Is there anything else (any story) you want to share or tell me more about?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Do you have any questions for me?

In regard to teachers' perspectives on autonomy and motivation, it became clear that some were unfamiliar with such terminology. Therefore, instead of asking questions using the word autonomy, the investigator used terms like independence and decision making to elicit information about the choices that they gave children in the classroom. Questions also focused on what kinds of decisions children would like to make and could be allowed to make for themselves, and what the participant had done in the classroom to help children develop decision making and social skills. The follow-up questions asked for additional information, examples, and clarifications.

During the actual interview process, the interviewer listened attentively to the participants and asked succeeding questions based on how they responded to the prior ones. The questions and their sequences in each interview were not always the same as those that had been planned prior to the interview. The interviewer tried not only to encourage the participants to talk, but to also reach their inner voice by following up on what they had said. She respected the participants and tried to let their perspectives unfold without interference, listening intently for what was not said, and probing gaps and omissions for further information and clarification (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). All of the interviews were recorded with an MP3 device. The investigator focused on listening to and having a conversation with the participants, though notes and marks were made occasionally about what needed to be followed up on. In the next section, the focus will be on how the data was analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making meaning out of data (Merriam, 1998) by “moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations,” and is also a process that “entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.201). This process includes consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read (Merriam, 1998). These meanings, understandings, and insights constitute the findings of a study. The reports constructed from such an analysis should both accurately reflect what the interviewees have said and answer the research questions. Researchers (e.g. Dey, 1993, in Merriam, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 2005) argue that the findings must come from systematic coding of the transcripts rather than from looking for confirmation for the researcher’s initial ideas, and that the concepts created must be relevant to the data rather than the result of applying a set of pre-established rules.

The data analysis of this study went through two phases in order to generate findings: data preparation, and concepts and themes comparison, following the strategies Rubin and Rubin (2005) put forth for interviewing data analysis. Because there were two groups of interviews, ten in Portland, and another ten in Shenzhen, the interview data from each city’s participants were first analyzed individually, then as a group, and then

the results of the two groups were compared and contrasted.

Data preparation.

Data preparation for interview research was a process of transferring the raw interview data to analyzable word processed data, dividing text data into meaningful and easy to locate segments, and determining the themes and categories. It included transcribing, constructing categories/themes, and coding the interviews so what the interviewees said about the identified concepts and themes could be retrieved for further analysis.

Transcribing.

As each interview was finished, the recording in MP3 format was uploaded to the investigator's private laptop computer and saved in one of two folders: one for Shenzhen and one for Portland. After each interview had been uploaded, the investigator listened to the recording again, made notes, and transcribed some of the major points from the interview. Then all the interviews were fully transcribed, and the transcripts, memos, and summaries were entered into the laptop computer. Fully transcribing here means that the recordings of the interviews were transcribed precisely, including laughter, pauses, and hesitation. Finally, the researcher read the transcripts while listening to the recordings one by one again to check the accuracy of all of the transcripts, and then printed out hard copies of each interview. All of the pertinent information was noted at the top of each transcript, including the pseudonyms for the site and the participant, as well as the

participant's age, gender, ethnicity, educational background, and years of experience working with children. Also noted were the type of center, the number of children in the center, and the time and length of the interview. Upon finishing the transcription, the researcher summarized the contents of each interview, including the main points made by the participants that addressed the research questions, and the tentative themes developed during the process. The next step was to construct themes and categories of the interview data.

Constructing categories/themes.

This process includes identifying data units, developing categories/themes, and coding.

Identifying data units.

The first step in constructing categories is to determine data units. Data units are the smallest, most meaningful pieces of data. Data units can stand by themselves, are relevant to the study, and can be sorted into groupings that have something in common (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). These data units are then assigned to categories. Merriam defines the task of constructing these units as breaking data down into bits of information, and then comparing one unit of information with the next while looking for recurring regularities in the data.

During this process, the researcher listened again to the original recordings to refresh her memory of the interviews and make sure she had captured what the

participants really meant. She underlined meaningful words, sentences, and paragraphs and wrote notes, comments, and quotes in the margins next to potentially relevant information. She also summarized the major points of important paragraphs and typed these into a table under the pseudonym of each participant, along with the memos and summary she made previously.

Developing categories/themes.

Categorizing involved applying two major sets of categories: organizational categories and substantive categories (Maxwell, 2005).

Organizational categories were developed during the data collection by listening to the recordings, and reading the transcripts, as well as referring back to the purpose of the research and research questions. Throughout the preliminary analysis, the categories function as sorting *bins* for the data, to allow for further analysis and to be used as section headings in presenting results (Maxwell, 2005).

Substantive categories were descriptions of participants' concepts and beliefs. They were inductively developed through analysis of the transcripts. These were concepts frequently mentioned by participants and prevalent in the data, indicating their importance (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

After the data units had been identified, the investigator grouped the marginal notes, quotes, comments, and summaries from each interview that seemed to go together under the organizational categories and attached a running list of these groupings to the

transcript. After each manuscript had been similarly analyzed, all the information derived from the data were compared and merged into one master list for the participants from each city. The master lists were refined, revised, and reconfigured into categories/themes that captured recurring patterns (Merriam, 1998). The categories or themes of the two groups were concepts supported by the data. They reflected both the focus of the study and answers to the research questions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, in Merriam, 1998).

The substantive categories were sorted under the organizational categories. They were often seen as subcategories of the organizational categories. Maxwell (2005) argues that substantive categories are generally not subcategories because they cannot simply be used as conceptual boxes for holding data.

Coding data.

Coding data is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of the data so that the specific pieces of the data can be easily retrieved (Richards & Richards, 1994, in Merriam, 1998). The designations can be single words, letters, numbers, phrases, or a combination of these. Coding occurs at two levels: identifying information about the data with organizational categories, and then using substantive categories as interpretive constructs related to analysis.

The first level of coding involved coding data with organizational categories. The process consisted of refining the categories, elaborating on them, and placing each data unit in the location where the matching concept appeared. As an example, one

organizational category pertained to teachers' relationships with children. Therefore, data units associated with teachers' identification of their relationships with children were coded with the Roman numeral II. Data units associated with the action teachers took to establish such relationships among children were coded with the numeral III. Those associated with how teachers understood and practiced helping children to become independent and effective at decision making were coded with the number IV, and so on. The designated numerals were also assigned different colors for easy recognition.

The second step was to code data with substantive categories. As described previously, the substantive categories were constructed out of each interview, grouped according to organizational categories, and then merged into one master list. The subcategories were also developed in this manner under each substantive category.

These substantive categories were then used to code each interview transcript. For instance, a majority of the participants described their relationships with children as that of friends, family members, or suggested their roles were various under different situations, and there was a reciprocal caring relationship between themselves and the children. These responses were grouped within organizational category II, and the capital letters A, B, C, D were then designated for the four substantive categories presented above. Every data unit associated with participants' identification of their relationships with children as friend was coded with the number and letter combination of II A, as family member, II B, and as multiple roles, II C, and so forth. During this process, the

exhaustiveness of the categories was also checked to ensure that all of the data were included. When participants talked about their roles, they described themselves as changing roles among that of friend, mother, and teacher to the children in different situations. These became the subcategories, and the data units associated with these topics were coded as (II-C-1.), (II-C-2.), and (II-C-3.) accordingly.

Concepts and themes comparison.

A period of intensive analysis begins when tentative findings are substantiated, revised, and reconfigured. This process includes sorting, retrieving, and rearranging segments into meaningful findings. After the investigator had coded the data, she began an intensive analysis that involved an examination of all interviews in both groups (Portland and Shenzhen) with the intent of pulling out coherent and consistent themes, descriptions, and theories that applied to the research questions. To do so, she took four steps: 1) sorting and summarizing, 2) sorting and comparing, 3) weighing and combining, and 4) integrating, checking, and modifying (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Sorting and summarizing.

After physically coding the interviews, the data units with the same label were sorted as a group into a single computer file. For instance, all data units coded with the Roman numeral I, including its associated alphabet letters, were put into a file titled “reason for working with young children.” Data units coded with the numeral II were placed in a file titled “relationship with children.” A similar process was followed for the

remaining organizational categories.

Within each file containing data under the same label, the contents of the file were summarized, articulating the main points in the text associated with the coded category listed. During this process, the summary was examined to check what might be missing and to reflect on what the contents collectively imply.

Sorting and comparing.

The files were sorted a second time, analyzing and comparing the coded data to see if any concepts, themes, or events were highlighted in a distinct way. For example, regarding participants of different ages, or those who worked in different settings, their focus and understanding might be different. Some Shenzhen participants, for instance, who worked in private programs constantly compared their programs with the public ones, and had stronger opinions about the impacts of academic focused curriculum on children's motivation than those who worked in public programs. The comparisons helped foster a better understanding and further theorizing about what is going on.

Weighing and combining.

In this process, the investigator combined the separate and overlapping parts, and synthesized different versions of the same concept or theme in order to fully explain it. For example, some of the participants did not talk about autonomy per se; instead, they used concepts such as independence, the choices children could make in the classroom, what kind of decisions children were allowed to make, and how they helped children

practice problem solving skills. All of the versions having to do with ways of teaching children to be self-sufficient, responsible, and able to make decisions and resolve problems independently were synthesized.

Integrating, checking, and modifying.

The final step was to check the accuracy and consistency of the categories, while integrating different parts of the findings and modifying them if the initial interpretations were not quite correct. At this point, the researcher frequently returned to the coded data to look for evidence that justified the findings.

The completeness and credibility of the interpretation of the data was then double checked. Finally, the summaries from Portland and Shenzhen were compared and contrasted to find the commonalities and differences across cultures.

Credibility of the Study

The term credibility describes one of the criteria for evaluating the quality of a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Many researchers agree that the credibility of quantitative research depends on instrument construction (Golafshani, 2003; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). However, in qualitative research, "The researcher is the instrument" (Patton, 2001, p. 14), and thus the credibility of a qualitative research depend on the ability and effort of the researcher (Golafshani, 2003). Some researchers (e.g. Denzin, 1978; Golafshani, 2003) suggest the possibility of using diverse sources of information to minimize bias, thereby increasing the credibility of the research. The most

important task for a researcher is to “investigate the research problem thoroughly, accurately present what the interviewees have said, and carefully check apparent contradictions and inconsistencies” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.64). In this study, the major validity threats could be the self-report bias, the researcher’s bias, and reactivity.

Self-report bias.

This study used a focused interview approach to collect participants’ perspectives on caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation, as well as their self-report on how to build such relationships with children to enhance autonomy and motivation in their classrooms. A Teacher Background Information form was also used to collect demographic information of participants in Shenzhen, and memos and summaries were kept during the data collection process. Aubrey et al. (2000) point out that when the purpose of a study is to explore questions related to complex philosophical or moral realms, the interpretation of these realms may be negotiated, altered, and manipulated by both the participants and the researcher. To minimize participants’ self-report bias, the researcher did the following: a. selected knowledgeable interviewees from ten varied settings in each city, b. asked questions from a variety of angles to obtain sets of rich data, and c. analyzed responses for each question by comparing it with those for the other questions the participants answered and the stories they told.

Selecting knowledgeable participants.

To enhance the credibility of the data collected from interviews, the investigator

chose interviewees who were experienced in the field, who were knowledgeable, and who worked in various settings, “Whose combined views present a balanced perspective” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.64). As described in the previous section, the majority of the participants have years of experience working with young children, and they also have worked in various settings in various states and cities. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that if “the participants in the setting studied may themselves have experience with other settings, the research may be able to draw on this experience to identify the crucial factors and the effect that they have” (p.254). In short, the participants in this study were knowledgeable, experienced, and diverse with regard to their age, work experience, and their social and educational backgrounds, which enabled them to provide valuable information for the study.

Asking questions from various angles.

The researcher worked hard to obtain accurate information from the participants by asking one question from several different angles and by requesting clarification of concepts. For instance, when participants used the term *friend* to describe their relationship with children, the researcher asked for clarification as to what it meant to be a friend, and what they have done to be friend of children, and also asked participants to provide examples or stories. In this way, the researcher obtained rich data from the interviews. Rich data refers to data that “are detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on” (Becker, 1970, in Maxwell, 2005, p. 110).

In this study, many participants talked with the researcher longer than an hour. In this amount of time, participants had plenty of time to think and convey their ideas. The verbatim transcripts also ensured the richness of the data for the study.

Comparing answers for related questions.

Seidman (2006) suggested that researchers examine the validity of interviewees' responses by comparing their answers to related questions. During the processes of analysis, the researcher compared participants' responses to those of other questions and to the stories they told. For instance, answers for questions related to their relationships with children were compared, such as their image of the children, their roles in the classroom, their passion for teaching children, what they had done to establish the relationship they identified, and their stories describing their relationships with children. For example, one of the participants described her relationship with children as that of a "friend." When asked how she defined "friend" and if a teacher could really be a friend of the children, her answer was that the meaning was different from friendship between peers, and, though it was her goal, it was also not easy to actually do. In this way, the consistency of her statements was checked. Participants' responses to other questions were compared in a similar way.

Quantitative researchers seek causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings, whereas qualitative researchers seek illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997, in Golafshani, 2003). Generalization is

not a concern of this qualitative study (Maxwell, 2005). The results of the study represent the opinions of the teachers who were involved in it. However, if a research result is credible and defensible, it may lead to generalizability (Stenbacka, 2001, in Golafshani, 2003).

Researcher bias.

Maxwell (2005) defines researcher bias as the subjectivity of the researcher. Two important threats to the validity of qualitative research are “the selection of data that fit the researcher’s existing theory or preconceptions and the selection of data that ‘stand out’ to the researcher” (Maxwell, 2005, p.108; from Miles & Huberman, 1994; Shweder, 1980). However, “It is impossible to deal with these issues by eliminating the researchers’ theories, beliefs, and perceptual *lens*” (Maxwell, 2005, p.108). To minimize researcher bias, it is important to avoid providing only information that is filtered through the view of the interviewer in the summary of the research report (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). To minimize the selection of data through the researcher’s filter, the researcher listened to the interview recordings and read through each line of every interview transcript several times so she could fully capture the essence of what the participants sought to convey; in other words, she worked hard to examine and report exactly what the participants said through thoroughly analyzing the interview transcripts of each participant and summarizing themes and categories in participants’ own words. After the categories were summarized from the transcripts, she also checked the validity of the

coding categories to ensure that they captured what the participants really wanted to convey, and that the data were correctly sorted under the categories that best described their meanings.

Other methods to minimize researcher bias were to write memos recording and reflecting on her thoughts during the data collection process and to monitor possible bias from the lens of her culture and experiences. For instance, memo entries were made when she heard one of the Portland participants emphasize that she was strict with children's behaviors, and when other Portland participants talked about the disciplines and boundaries in their classrooms. The researcher reflected on the stereotype that Chinese teachers were strict, and American teachers allowed total freedom for students. Another example is when one Portland teacher discussed the problems of only children. The researcher reflected that only children were not solely the concern of Chinese teachers. These memos were also reflected in the data analysis.

It is understood that the processing and interpretation of the results of the research may be limited by the experience, knowledge, and cultural bias of the researcher, as the researcher is the instrument of the research (Patton, 2001). The researcher was fully aware of her cultural background, and the limitations of her experiences and knowledge. She hopes that her twenty years of experience working with children in China, and ten years of studying early childhood education and working in different early childhood education programs in Portland, helped her to understand the context of early childhood

educators and what they were trying to convey.

Reactivity.

Reactivity refers to the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied (Maxwell, 2005). Many researchers believe that it has “a powerful and inescapable influence,” as what the interviewees say is “*always* influenced by the interviewer and the interview situation” (Maxwell, 2005, p.109; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). According to Maxwell, the point is not to minimize the effect, but to understand how the researcher influences what the interviewee says. In this study, some of the Portland participants were concerned about what the researcher wanted to hear. Some Shenzhen participants saw the investigator as the “expert,” and were concerned about the value of what they said. The researcher assured the participants that she wanted to learn about their opinions and perspectives, that there were no right or wrong answers. She made sure the participants relaxed and expressed their ideas freely, and she avoided asking leading questions (Maxwell, 2005).

Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter discussed the rationale for using a qualitative interview design for the present study and the process of selecting sites and participants. It also described the cultural and social contexts under which the participants were recruited, the ethics applied in the study, the data collection procedures, the data analysis process, and the credibility of the study. Chapter IV presents the study's results.

Chapter Four

Results

This study explored early childhood teachers' perspectives on caring relationships, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation in both Portland, Oregon and Shenzhen, China.

Teachers' understanding of the cultural influences on their perspectives regarding their relationships with children, as well as the interrelationships between the caring relationship, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation were also explored. During the interview process, participants reflected on their reasons for working with young children and described their relationships with children in their classrooms. They further discussed what they have done to establish caring, positive, and trusting relationships, as well as their efforts to foster autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and a supportive environment in their classrooms. Analysis showed consensus among the participants from both of the cultures represented in the two samples about the value of caring relationships and supportive social environments in the classroom. Both groups also expressed similar understandings of their roles in establishing caring relationships with children, of the strategies for doing so, and of some of the obstacles they faced.

However, the underlying assumptions about these concepts were different. Perspectives about the ways that caring is manifested in each of the cultures, the expressed relationship between caring and the development of autonomy and intrinsic motivation, as well as the meaning of autonomy differed between the two cultures. The

differences were embedded in teachers' views about the goals of education and about their societies' expectations of teachers. Differences were also observed in the use of a learning community to promote caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation.

In this chapter the results of the interviews, both from Shenzhen and Portland, are presented, compared, and contrasted. The results are divided into six sections:

1. Reasons for working with young children;
2. Relationships with children;
3. Establishing caring and sharing among children;
4. Teachers' understanding of autonomy;
5. Teachers' understanding of motivation;
6. Cultural influences.

Reasons for Working with Young Children (Shenzhen)

At the beginning of each interview, the participants from both cities talked about themselves. Their stories naturally led to the reasons why they chose to work with young children. Three categories of shared interest and experience emerged based on the stories told by Shenzhen participants:

- (a) love of children,
- (b) interest in the performing arts, and
- (c) job opportunities.

“I love children, and working with young children was my dream.”

Many participants from Shenzhen asserted that to be an early childhood teacher was their dream, simply because they love young children. According to their descriptions, their love can be described as: sentimental love, ability-based love, and reward-based love.

Participants explained that the reason they became early childhood teachers was simply because they possessed a sincere love of children. For example, one participant remarked, “I loved children, and it was my dream to become a teacher who works with young children.” Another, Bai, emphasized this love by adding: “It was not because I liked music, or dancing, or any other things that I chose this profession.” Two of them even described how their parents tried to stop them from choosing an early childhood major, but they assured their parents of their determination to devote themselves to this profession. “I told my parents that I won’t go to any other colleges if they don’t allow me to choose early childhood education as my career.”

Three out of the ten participants considered their personality suitable to working with young children because they liked to play with young children and the children loved to play with them, too. One of the examples was that before one of the participants, An, became a teacher, she loved children and enjoyed playing with any child. Children of her relatives and around the neighborhood loved her so much that they were always looking forward to seeing her. If she did not show up for a period of time, the neighbors’

kids would even come and ask her relatives: “Why she hasn’t come for so long?” and “When will she come?” It was this love that kept her in the field for about two decades.

Some of the participants found this job rewarding. They explained that the children were lovely and genuine. They loved and cared for the children, and the children loved and cared for them as well; as one of them, Fu, said, “I love the children and they will love me back...I cared for them and they did the same to me.” Kai and Yang were happy when the children from their previous classes sent them messages over the holidays or came back for visits.

“I liked singing, dancing, and playing piano.”

Five out of the ten participants also welcomed the opportunities to learn the performing arts. Going to an early childhood teacher college allowed them not only to work with children, but also gave them opportunities to learn singing, dancing, and musical instruments, and to use these skills at work.

Three of these five also mentioned the influence of their former kindergarten teachers, or of a famous national TV hostess from a children’s program of the past two decades. When they were between three and five years old, they had the impression that their teachers were very beautiful and were always singing and dancing with children. They wanted to become that kind of teacher. Although it turned out that the reality was not exactly like their impressions of their former teachers, they felt that they had fulfilled a dream. Another participant admired the famous children’s program hostess on TV in

the 80s who told stories, sang songs, and danced with children. She felt that was what she wanted to do.

These participants admitted that although they were not accomplished in the field of performing arts, they had tried their best to do a good job and enjoyed what they were doing. They felt happy working with children, and that happiness influenced the happiness of the children in their classes. "I have found a lot of happiness from my work and from the children. I am happy to be with them," they concluded.

"It is a good job for a girl."

Two of the participants also thought that going to early childhood teacher colleges would secure a job, which was important for the family, or that being an early childhood teacher was considered a good job for a girl at the time. Not knowing what it would be like working with young children, one of them found during the first year how hard it was to deal with the parents and would have preferred to work in a quiet place, such as a library. However, after a couple of years, as she put her best effort into the job, she had a feeling of accomplishment. These participants liked children and their jobs now because they found that children were sincere and lovely, and their relationships at the workplace were relatively simple. In short, the longer they worked, the more they enjoyed it.

Summary

In summary, seven out of the ten Shenzhen participants expressed their love and desire to work with young children and stated that it was their dream career. In addition,

five out of the ten participants had an interest in the performing arts. Their training in the performing arts consisted of the core courses both in their early childhood teacher training program and in early childcare facilities. Motivation also came from former teachers or media figures and as a function of job availability.

Those who had a clear goal motivating their choices tended to be younger and passionate about their job. However, for older teachers, their choices were limited by the social and cultural situation of 15 or 20 years ago, as people in China had fewer choices regarding which college to go to or what majors were available as compared to the present day.

Reasons for Working with Young Children (Portland)

The majority of the Portland participants expressed their enjoyment of working with young children as well, although some experienced that enjoyment after they had settled into the profession. Some of them chose teaching because there were jobs available when they graduated from college, or they had moved to a new location. Others found certain educational philosophies inspiring or had a desire to make changes in the lives of children and their families. Their choices can be sorted into three categories:

- (a) enjoyment working with young children,
- (b) job availability, and
- (c) goal orientation.

Enjoyment working with young children.

Seven out of the ten participants expressed their happiness with working with children. They enjoyed working with young children because children made them feel happy, children's curiosity and enthusiasm in learning made the job interesting, or the job was less stressful and more relaxing compared with other professions they were in before.

“Children make me feel happy.”

Four of the seven participants felt that they always wanted to be a teacher, and both enjoyed and felt comfortable being with young children. They enjoyed looking at the smiling faces of the children, liked to play with children, and liked to watch them learn and grow. They were interested in knowing how children think cognitively and how they process the information from the world around them. They also expressed an interest in how children behave, and in their ways of dealing with their peers, and the classroom materials.

“Children are enthusiastic about learning.”

Three of the participants really enjoyed working with the three, four, and five-year-olds because of children's curiosity and interest in learning at that age. The children were open to explore, to do any kind of project, and to learn, so teachers could really be creative with the curriculum.

“There is less stress.”

There were also two participants who considered working with young children

less stressful than other professions in which they had previously worked. They felt this was the time in their life that feeling good about what they were going to do in the morning and being happy coming home in the evening was very important. Working with young children allowed them to help others without only worrying about making money.

Job availability.

Four out of ten participants found there were few jobs for grade school teachers during the time prior to graduation or when they moved to a new city. One of them mentioned that when she was in her junior year in college studying to become an elementary teacher, "There were not many jobs for teachers coming out of school." Therefore she switched to a new program called, "Becoming a Nursery Teacher," following advice from faculty members. She graduated as a trained child development and nursery teacher, which is equivalent to an early childhood education degree today. Others who moved took early childhood teaching jobs and went back to take courses in child development.

Goal orientation.

Five participants had specific goals such as to apply certain educational philosophies, or to make changes for children and their families. Two of them specified that their reasons for working with young children were inspired by certain educational philosophies and approaches, including the Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches.

When they were introduced to the philosophy that inspired them, they either liked the way it approached children with dignity and respect, the role of the teacher, or the image of the child under the guidance of the approach. They enjoyed working with young children in an innovative and creative way, under a certain philosophy that they felt better addressed the children's needs.

Three participants expressed their desire to work with families and children to make a difference in their lives. They believed that it is important for young children to obtain a good basis for their lifelong education. They wanted to inspire children from the very beginning to be eager to learn and to be excited about being in school. Two of them also expressed strong desires to help parents improve their relationships with their children and know what the children were doing at school. They not only wanted to help children communicate more effectively with peers at school, but also to show both the children and parents better ways to communicate with each other at home.

Summary

Overall, seven out of the ten Portland participants expressed their enjoyment of working with young children. Some of them described their love for children, and others felt happy and comfortable being with children. Of the ten, four of the participants were guided by the job opportunities at the time. Nonetheless, five others had strong goals related to early childhood education, as two of them were interested in working under the guidance of certain educational philosophies, and three others were dedicated to making

changes in the lives of children and their families.

Compare and Contrast

Comparing the reasons given by participants from the two cities reveals that the majority of the participants from both cities expressed their interest in working with young children and their happiness and enjoyment of their job. There were also similar considerations, such as the characteristics of the children, their curiosity, and their authenticity, that made the job interesting, rewarding, or allowed for less complex relationships in the workplace. There were also teachers in both groups who took the job because of its availability. Table 7 summarized the reasons participants chose to work with young children.

Table 7. Reasons for working with young children

Participants Shenzhen China	Frequency	Initials	Participants Portland, USA	Frequency	Initials
Love for children & dream job	7	A B D F K L Y	Enjoyment working with children	7	A B D E F H J
Performing arts learning opportunity	5	C D K H L	Job opportunity	4	E G I J
Children's authenticity	3	C F N	Children's curiosity	3	G H J
Less complexity	3	C F N	Difference making	3	A B H
Job opportunity	2	C N	Inspiration from philosophies	2	C D

Nonetheless, their choices clearly were shaped by the cultural and social realities where they live. For instance, half of the Shenzhen participants valued the opportunity to learn performing arts, which was not the case for their counterparts in Portland. Five Portland participants identified specific goals such as making a difference or applying

innovative educational philosophies. Participants from the two cities also used vocabulary differently in accordance with their cultures. For example, Shenzhen participants used *love* more readily than did their counterparts in Portland.

Teachers' Relationships with Children (Shenzhen)

Shenzhen participants reported fundamental changes in their views about teacher-child relationships, some during their own educational training and some during their teaching careers. In the late 80s and 90s, when some of the participants first entered into the profession, and before other participants moved to Shenzhen from inland cities where they used to work, early childhood education focused on the acquisition of the knowledge and skills believed to be essential for later schooling. Five content areas, language, arithmetic, social and science common knowledge, music, and physical education, were the main subjects in the early childhood education curricula, and were addressed separately in structured learning activities. Teachers were certainly the authority figures, as they were supposed to be the ones who knew and transferred knowledge, while children were the passive recipients. For example, one of the participants, Lan, recalled her childhood classroom activities as “just sitting and listening to the teacher.”

Many participants described recent changes in their perspectives and practices, as many educational philosophies and innovative teaching approaches had been introduced (or reintroduced) and modified to apply to the educational field in their country. The philosophies and teaching approaches the participants mentioned included Piaget and

other constructivist theories, the practices of the Reggio Emilia municipal schools, and Montessori. Participants also mentioned High Scope, which focuses on child initiative and hands-on experiences, creating, problem-solving, and conflict resolving as children learn with people, materials, events, and ideas (see HighScope Educational Research Foundation); Project Approaches, which builds on natural curiosity, enabling children to interact, question, connect, problem-solve, communicate, and reflect; Learning by Doing, a teaching approach adopted from France, which, according to one participant, An, presents children with a hypothesis and lets them experience and discover with minimal guidance from their teachers; and Emergent Curriculum, a curriculum that responds to children's interests and is relevant to children's social lives, that engages children intellectually, and that it is personally meaningful to children (see Northern Illinois University, Campus Child Care website). These theories and practices brought with them a call for re-thinking the role of teachers, their relationship with children, and also the image of children in order to provide them with equal status in the classroom, and to respect and encourage them to be active in learning. Participants found that observation, listening, and interactions between teacher and students are necessary to developing learning activities that are based on children's interests.

Many participants, including Bai, Chen, Fu, Kai, and Han, recognized that their relationships with children were crucial in communicating with them, and also necessary in order for the children to accept the teacher. One of the participants, Bai, referred to

this as “to open the doors of their hearts.” Many reported that they had been working on establishing a relationship that was more interactive, close, and intimate with the children than what used to be conventional. This approach also created a happy and relaxed environment that was good for children’s wellbeing.

Shenzhen participants used vocabulary such as friend/playmate, mother/aunt, and sister/brother to describe their relationships with children. The majority of them also believed that a teacher has multiple roles depending on the circumstances, such as teacher, mother or friend. As elements necessary to establishing a close relationship, participants elaborated on the themes of equality, respect, trust, and acceptance. Their ideas have been sorted into five sections and presented in below:

- (a) friends,
- (b) family members,
- (c) multiple roles,
- (d) reciprocal caring between teacher and children, and
- (e) obstacles to building caring relationships.

“We are friends.”

Friend frequently appeared in the Shenzhen participants’ descriptions of their relationships with children. As Chinese tradition emphasizes the respect of children for teachers rather than the reverse, many participants believed that the essential idea of making friends with children was to establish equality in the relationship, and to base this

equality on mutual respect. For instance, three participants demonstrated respect to children by lowering themselves to the same height as the children so they could be face to face as they talked, and also to avoid intimidating children by towering over them. Others, such as Fu and Han, stressed apologizing to children when they realized their mistakes. Many mentioned that they allowed children to use their first names. Since using a first name to address a teacher or a member of an older generation was unusual in past traditions, allowing children to use a teacher's first name suggests a new sense of equality.

Participants remarked that when children regard a teacher as a friend, they trust and open up to the teacher. This allows the teacher to better understand their feelings and needs. Many elaborated that being a friend of the children meant playing with them so as to understand them, to gain their trust, and to be accepted by them. They asserted that respecting children's requests, understanding and resolving problems from their perspectives, learning and accepting correction from them, listening to children's ideas and following their leads, and not forcing children to learn or to agree with teachers' ideas were essential components of this equal and respectful relationship.

Playing with children.

Many participants believed that participating in children's play not only gives children encouragement and increases their self-esteem, but also allows the teacher better opportunities to observe, to talk, and to listen to children. This allows the teacher to

acknowledge the feelings, strengths, weaknesses, concerns and needs of the children.

Children grew closer to the teacher and trusted the teacher as a result, because to be the children's friend was much better than merely telling them "I love you." One of the participants, Bai, explained that the children became close with her when they played, and sometimes "they would tease or chase me and almost pull me to the ground."

However, she interpreted this as the children's way of telling her that they accepted her as one of them.

Adopting the children's perspective.

Many participants, such as Bai, Chen, Han and Ni, recommended respecting children as independent individuals, and not forcing them to do things from a teacher's perspective. Instead, they emphasized understanding children and seeing the world from their perspectives, including the reasons behind their actions. They believed in resolving conflicts from the children's perspective by listening to them respectfully, even when what the children had done made no sense from an adult's point of view. They felt that teachers should discuss and analyze incidents with the children to find out the real motives behind conflicts, and to give children space to think and to come up with solutions.

Learning and accepting correction from children.

Six out of the ten participants felt that they could be equal in both teaching and learning from children. They believed that learning from children is also essential in

becoming a *friend* of the children because it created an avenue for communication, thus establishing a harmonious atmosphere in their classrooms. Some of them pointed out that when they respected the children and gave them the freedom to talk, they found that they had a lot to learn from the children. One participant, An, remarked that “if a teacher puts herself in the position of a learner and lets the children talk, she will be amazed at how much the children know.” Another participant, Lan, reflected, “It is not that children in the past knew nothing. It was just because teachers did not give them opportunities to show what they knew.”

Three of the participants believed that with equality in mind, they could even let children point out the teacher's mistakes and accept corrections. One of the participants, Ni, recalled on incidents when children corrected her, and she felt that she had learned a lot from the children as they gave her opportunities to think and reflect.

Listening and talking with children.

Eight out of the ten participants believed that to respect children it is essential to listen to them and take their ideas seriously. The purpose of listening and talking was to provide children opportunities to share their ideas. This also helps teachers to understand what the children have gone through and helps them deal with the children's problems. Furthermore, having conversations with children was an effective way of establishing positive relationships with them, because knowing about the children allowed the teachers to communicate with them appropriately.

“We are family.”

Six out of the ten Shenzhen participants described their love for young children and their relationships with children as those within a family, such as a mother/aunt and child, or a big sister/brother. They believed that family was a concept easily understood and accepted by the children. When children were supported as within a family, they felt safe and close to each other, and had less fear in the classroom environment. Many participants reported that they were commonly addressed by the children in the classroom as “mama.”

Some participants reported that they purposefully introduced the concept “we are family” to the children. One participant reported that at the beginning of the year, a teacher would assure the children in her classroom that they were a family. Since the teacher was the taller and older one, they could consider her as a big sister. They could count on her for support whenever they encountered any problems and could talk with her whenever they had any concerns. She would also allow children to point out her mistakes.

Other participants mentioned that children in their classes naturally called them mother. At first, some children might not be used to it, objecting, “She is a teacher, not your mother.” However, the teachers assured the children that it was okay to call a teacher *mother*, as they were family and the teacher was there to love them and care for them as a mother would.

Another participant, An, admitted that she had not felt much like a mother figure when she first became a teacher and was still single at that time. She felt it was ridiculous when the parents stayed outside and peeked into the classroom after they had dropped off their children. She could not understand why the parents worried so much about their children since she was taking good care of them. Only after she had her own daughter several years later did she come to understand the feelings of the parents. She tried to take care of the children's physical and emotional needs just as she did for her own child. She also tried to be their friend while playing and working together with them. She verbalized this as: "I play with them as their friend or big sister. I take care of them as if they are my own children."

Many participants described themselves providing physical care that demonstrated their love for the children. They give children hugs, kisses, and as close attention as they would their own children. One of the participants, Bai, who was young and single, emphasized her love for children through actions such as cleaning up a child's accident in the restroom during her lunch break and resuming her meal afterward without hard feelings. She believed that because she loved the child, she did not feel inconvenienced. She also wanted to make sure not to hurt children's feelings by showing any signs of dislike verbally or nonverbally.

Many participants, including Fu, Kai, and Han, also reported providing support for children from single parent families and children experiencing domestic violence at

home. They believed that these children especially needed love from the teachers. Many stories were told about what exactly they had done for children who were facing such challenges or having behavior problems. They established close and trusting relationships with them that resulted in positive attitudes and behaviors. The affection that the teachers provided soothed children who were neglected by their parents, or reduced the influence of the violence they had experienced.

Different roles under different circumstances.

The majority of the participants, eight out of the ten, expressed their awareness that they were also teachers. Those who described themselves as a “friend” or “mother” to the children also believed that a teacher had multiple roles depending on different circumstances. Many shared ideas similar to the following:

During the play time, I play with children as their friend. They trust me and like to come to me and talk to me. In daily life, I take care of them like their mother. They want me to kiss them and to hold them. I am also a teacher who provides support. I explain the rules clearly before each activity so they know the expectations and follow instructions.

Some of the participants, including Bai, Fu and Kai, were aiming to be both a good teacher and a friend to the children, someone that children can always count on for help and support. One participant believed that the children had “accepted me into their play as a friend, and they would also accept me as their teacher when we learn.”

Reciprocal caring between teachers and children.

As mentioned previously, participants found the job rewarding because when they love the children, they receive love in return. They believe that how a teacher treats a child impacts how a child treats others, including the teachers in the classroom. In their classroom, there were reciprocal relationships among the teachers and the children. Fu, Kai, Yang, and others felt amazed that when they loved the children, as well as cared about and paid attention to their changes, the children would be considerate and caring in return. They reported that the children tried to take care of the teacher when the teacher felt sick.

Being part of each other's lives.

Three of the participants mentioned that the children in their classes were as much a part of their lives as they were a part of the children's lives. They shared their feelings, their experiences and their happiness with each other and enjoyed being together. For instance, one of the participants, Fu, described that when she arrived in the morning, she observed the children, greeted them, and offered positive comments. The children responded and also paid attention to her. They might notice her new hair cut, or her new coat. She gave them positive feedback and they would continue the conversation by sharing their dreams and what had happened at home. Fu would share stories of her time with her family after work, and the children shared their experiences with their parents.

Obstacles to building caring relationships.

Some of the participants, such as Chen, Dai, Ni, and Han, mentioned obstacles and pressures regarding building caring relationships, such as class size, the expectations of the parents and the society, as well as the academic emphasis. They mentioned that sometimes they would realize that they had not talked with some children individually for days because the large class size and busy academic curriculum. Some also mentioned that when they spent a lot of time dealing with parents, worked on additional activities for publicity or tasks given by the office of administration, or focused on the academic learning that the parents expected, they had less time to work with children individually in order to build close relationships.

Summary

To summarize, many Shenzhen participants referred to the changing of early education practices in the city, which influenced their views of their relationships with children. They recognized that traditional practices, such as mothering, loving, or physically caring for children, as well as focusing either on children's cognitive or moral development, were not sufficient in education today. Equality and respect were now believed to be essential for a caring teacher-child relationship, and observing, listening and communicating were also crucial for understanding children. However, obstacles such as class size and academic focuses can hinder building a close relationship with children.

Teachers' Relationships with Children (Portland)

Participants in Portland described their relationships with children as respectful, loving, caring, trusting, and supportive. Some considered themselves as mother figures or as family members, and others believed in creating a supportive classroom environment where teachers and children worked collaboratively on projects that both of them were excited about. Some thought that teachers were friends of the children, yet they were also adults in charge, there to provide guidance and to set up boundaries. Some also mentioned that high stress from work, or pressures from assessments for academic accountability, which took time away from being with children. Their ideas were organized into the following categories:

- (a) working in a learning community,
- (b) loving and nurturing children,
- (c) providing unconditional support, and
- (d) being a friend yet a teacher and disciplinarian.

“We are a learning community, we respect each other.”

Some participants, such as Betty, Debbie and Eva, described their relationship with children as a mutually respectful and collaborative learning community. Within this community, teacher and children listened to and expected a lot from each other. They made agreements and decisions together on how to keep the learning community alive, what listening really means, what collaboration is really about, and what they could do to

make their projects work and move forward. They appreciated their experiences together as a learning community and celebrated things they were learning together. A comment from Debbie summed up participants' ideas about learning community: "We like to work together, and we are working together on stuff that we all are really excited about."

The majority of the Portland participants considered mutual respect to be essential for establishing a learning community and a trusting and supportive relationship between teacher and children. To respect children implies understanding that children are competent, thus valuing children's abilities, their creativity and their contributions. Respecting children also means listening to the children and letting them talk, as well as being interested in understanding children as individuals with unique interests and ideas. Many, such as Debbie, Eva and Grace, documented the process of children's learning and in so doing honored their work. Some participants, including Amy, Betty, Eva and Irene, also conducted activities to demonstrate respect and to learn about the cultures and languages of the children and their families, which they saw as one of the essential components of their relationships with the children and their parents.

"I love and nurture the children."

Seven out of ten participants described their relationship with children as a very close, warm, loving, and nurturing one. They described their love as understanding, nurturing and treating each of the children as their own.

When asked what they meant by loving, most of the participants associated the

term with understanding. They believed that it is important to understand children's social, cognitive, and emotional development; to understand children as individuals, including their special needs and their language skills; and especially to understand the children's competence. Understanding children, their families, and their cultural and social backgrounds helped teachers better interact and communicate with them, as well as tailor their relationships with them.

Seven participants reported that they nurtured children. They rubbed children's backs to help them sleep, offered hugs and comfort when children needed it, and assured the children that they were cared for by their teachers. Some participants intended to make the classroom a "home away from home" and the class a family unit for the children. They tried to give the children the feeling that they were at home with their teachers since some of them came from two-parent professional families and stayed in the center for ten hours a day. Two of the participants expressed their sense that the children spent more time with their teachers than with their parents. They felt that the children were part of their lives, and that a strong bond had been established between them. Children came happily every morning and felt comfortable and safe in the center. Some participants reported that some children did not want to leave at the end of the day.

There was also belief in the need for mothering children. Three out of ten participants considered that in early childhood programs teachers were mother figure for the children. When children were hurt, sick, or scared, the teacher was the one they

turned to. Teachers protected the children “just like a hen and little chickens,” by giving them attention and care, and by treating them as their own. Grace described herself as a part-time parent, an aunt, or a grandmother, especially when she and the children had been together for a long time.

“I provide them unconditional support.”

Five Portland participants argued that a teacher should be responsible and be available whenever the children needed them. They wanted the children to feel that they could come to the teacher whenever or for whatever they needed.

Some participants, especially those who worked with children from low income families, worked on providing children both physical and psychological safety in the center. They wanted to provide stability for the children who perhaps lacked it at home. Four out of ten participants reported that the children in their classrooms trusted the teachers and could always come to them for anything, whether they were hurting, upset, had fallen down, or had questions or concerns. They could also come and talk to the teachers and let them know what was going on, what was wrong, or what had happened at home that was bothering them.

Some participants, such as Holly, Irene, and Grace, saw the need to pay attention to the deeper reasons for children’s behaviors. They believed that when a child exhibited a lack of communication skills, he might act out his frustrations. To be supportive, teachers needed to be understanding, kind and patient, and to always provide children

with positive guidance and feedback. The positive reinforcement teachers provided let the children know that the teachers recognized and appreciated their efforts to keep their behavior safe both to themselves and to others in the classroom.

“A friend, yet a teacher and a disciplinarian.”

Some participants, such as Eva, Holly, Irene and Joy, reported that they tried to be a friend to the children. However, while playing with children, they were also teaching by asking children questions and giving them ideas about how they could learn about various concepts, including science, math, language, or social interactions. One of them, Eva, said: “I am their friend and their ally in the fact that I am there for them and I am there to help them learn new things.”

Five participants remarked that they were adult figures who established structure, boundaries, and discipline for the class. Participants maintained an authoritative aspect of their relationship with the class that ensured the children trusted them to be in charge, as evidenced when the children looked to the teacher to say, “Yes, this is okay,” or “No, this is not okay.” The teachers should be there to set boundaries and to provide redirection when unsafe actions occurred.

Summary

Ultimately, a majority of the Portland participants considered mutual respect between teachers and students important. Not only should teachers demonstrate respect to children, they also should expect respect in return. Some of them stressed the

importance of the learning community, in which teacher and students collaborate together. Many of them also described the physical care they provided and the closeness between teachers and children. Some of them emphasized the different roles they played, such as that of a friend, a teacher, and a disciplinarian who establish boundaries.

Compare and Contrast

To summarize the section above, participants from both cities shared many perspectives on caring relationships and the developmental and emotional needs of children. They all spoke about the importance of building trust and establishing a strong bond between teachers and the children. They shared similar ideas about being respectful, positive, caring, warm, supportive, and patient with children. Their perspectives are summarized in table 8.

Table 8. Relationship with children (Overlaps exist as more than one choice was given)

Participants of Shenzhen, China	Frequency	Pseudonym Initials	Participants of Portland, USA	Frequency	Pseudonym Initials
Equality & respect	8	A B C F K H N Y	Mutual respect & community	8	A B C D E F G J
Multiple roles	8	B C F K H L N Y	Loving & nurturing	7	A B E F H I J
Friendship	7	A B C F K H Y	Family/parents	6	B F G H I J
Mother/child	6	A D F H L Y	Being supportive	5	B D H I J
Reciprocal relationships	4	F N K Y	Friendship & discipline	5	C E F H I
Class size & pressures	4	C D N H	High stress & pressures	3	A D G

As summarized in the table above, participants from both cities understood that children needed to feel cared about, loved, and safe. They worked towards ensuring children were well taken care of and felt comfortable in the center. They described their

relationships with children as embodying respect and trust as both family and friend, and at the same time stated that the teacher should be in charge in many situations.

The majority of the participants from Shenzhen believed there were multiple roles they played, including friend or mother, but also teacher. The underlying assumption was that by understanding and caring for the children teachers therefore ensured that the children would trust them and follow instructions.

The majority of the Portland participants described their relationship with children as mutually respectful, collaborative, loving, and nurturing. Like their counterparts in Shenzhen, they expressed recognition that knowing the children, their families, and their needs allowed for the provision of appropriate care.

The Portland participants who were working in full day programs and spending long hours with children had a feeling of being a family or of serving as mother figures for the children. They felt the time mattered, given that over the course of a long day they grew closer to the children by providing hugs, comfort, and physical care. The majority of the participants from Shenzhen also had strong feelings about mothering children, as the Chinese have a tradition of encouraging the respect of the teacher as a father/mother. Fathering and mothering students were often described as traits of a good teacher. Although no Shenzhen participants mentioned the length of their time with the children, all of the early childhood programs in Shenzhen are, in fact, full day programs where children could be dropped off to the center at seven o'clock in the morning and

picked up at six or seven in the afternoon. Both groups also expressed similar ideas about high stress and pressures from work that interfere their relationships with children.

The majority of the Shenzhen participants expressed the desire to be friends with the children, with the intention of being equal with children. They also agreed on the fact that they had to maintain a teacher's role and to be in charge. Fewer participants in Portland used *friend* to describe their role in playing with the children. Those who did also agreed that sometimes a teacher needs to be the person overseeing things.

Fostering Sharing and Caring Among Children (Shenzhen)

Participants from Shenzhen believed that teaching children how to both care and share was an important task for Chinese teachers, not only because caring and sharing were the most important qualities of human beings in society, but also because the reality in China is that most of the children are the only child in their families. They have no siblings to play or to share with, and instead most of them receive a great deal of attention from the adults in their families. Many also have nannies and tutors who provide care for them. They have less free outdoor play time than previous generations did and thus fewer opportunities to make friends and learn how to interact with the other children, not to mention care or share with others. To learn how to care and share is an important step in their socio-emotional development.

Shenzhen participants described the following strategies for establishing caring and sharing among children in their classroom:

- (a) modeling,
- (b) recognizing caring actions,
- (c) helping children to make friends, and
- (d) encouraging sharing.

Modeling.

Seven out of the ten participants mentioned how important the teacher was as a model for children in many aspects of their lives. The language the teachers used and how they interacted with others in the classroom was followed and picked up quickly by the children. The best way to foster a notion of caring in a child was to exhibit the qualities of a caring person. Many participants pointed out that children learn caring largely from adults, including parents and teachers, through observation, listening, and practice.

Participants modeled caring by caring for every child in the classroom and providing for their physical and emotional needs. Many of them mentioned that they used simultaneous situations such as by calling a child who was absent from school because of sickness and letting the children in the class talk with that sick child, or by writing cards to the sick child to help create experiences of exhibiting and receiving care.

Many participants also modeled cooperation and support with each other in the classroom. They worked as a supportive and collaborative team with their colleagues. They understood that how they worked with each other would have a tremendous effect

on the way children interacted with each other.

Recognizing caring actions.

To instill caring in the classroom, half of the participants also tried to set up caring models among children by recognizing their caring actions and providing positive feedback about these actions. Whenever a teacher noticed that a child was being kind, or helping others with even a very small thing such as tying shoe laces, helping another up when he/she fell, or picking up a dropped coat, they pointed out the caring actions to the children in the classroom by providing positive encouragement. They also talked directly about the caring actions with the whole class when they gathered together.

Four of the participants found that positive feedback encouraged children with feelings of respect, trust and, achievement. It also set up peer models for the rest of the class to follow. One of the participants had corresponded with parents about children's pro-social behaviors or the progress that they had made in considering others either at the center or at home. She wrote down her observations during the day and let the children bring them home to their parents. If the parents had anything good to report about the children, they also wrote notes to the teacher. When the teacher or the parents opened the letters and read them to the children, the children felt proud of themselves. They learned to think of and to take care of each other.

Three participants also reported that they had encouraged children to turn to their peers for help, and had encouraged the children to provide assistance to anyone

encountering difficulties, such as buttoning a coat, pulling up a zipper, or shedding layers. When someone wet his/her pants, these participants encouraged someone with an extra pair to lend them out. By sharing their extra clothes, they might understand how being helpful resulted in appreciative behavior.

Helping children to make friends.

Six of the participants recognized the importance of encouraging children to make friends in the center and to allow time for them to play together. They believed that what a child learned from his/her friends might be something that they could not learn from their parents, teachers, or other adults. In order to make friends, children needed to learn how to be nice, to be respectful, and to learn from each other. To remain friends, children also needed to learn to be tolerant, to forgive others, and to work as a team.

Getting to know each other.

Three participants reported that they created opportunities to help children get to know each other at the beginning of the year or when a new child joined the class. One of the participants reported that she spent time welcoming the children, and allowing them to introduce themselves to each other and learn about each other through talking about their likes and dislikes and what they were good at. For the newcomers, the teachers also had some capable children show them around, go through the daily activities, and introduce them to how the classroom works. This helped the children to fit into the class more easily.

Pairing up children.

Another effective way of encouraging students to support one another that the participants described was to pair up capable children with those who struggled with following instructions. After pairing them up, the teacher could hear reminders from the more capable partner such as: “don’t talk now,” “listen to the teacher,” “follow the teacher,” and so forth.

Being accepting.

Two of the participants mentioned that they used positive comments to change children’s attitudes and to encourage them to be more accepting. They found that sometimes there were children who had been rejected or isolated in the classroom. The teacher continually gave positive feedback to those children. What one participant, Fu, did was tell the children, “So and so is very good at telling an interesting story. Why don’t you ask him to tell you the story?” The other children got the message that the teacher liked this child, and, after hearing the story for themselves, decided that this child indeed was to be admired. This strategy changed children’s attitudes, causing them to become more accepting.

Many stories were told about how teachers helped children to accept others and to make friends. One was about a girl who came from a middle class family, who was smart but not very popular among her peers. One day during lunch she came up to ask for an additional serving of the bone with meat on it in the soup, and found that it was tasty.

She then told the teacher that she should be the only one to have the bones from then on. The teacher reminded her that other children in the class might like it, too. She responded with, "Don't give them any. I don't need a friend. I love only myself." The teacher was astonished by this remark. She talked to the other teachers and to the mother of the girl about this incident. Although the parents of the girl were well educated and the girl was smart, she was kept at home and seldom had the chance to play with other children except for her time spent in the center. She lacked social skills, was bossy, wanted to be in charge, and wanted to be called *big sister* by everyone, even those older than she. She would also curse those who did not want to follow her lead. No one in the class liked to be with her. The teacher spent time talking to the girl and gradually was able to get closer to her. When the girl was bossy, the teacher reminded her of the appropriate ways to interact with the others and required that she try it out. Once there was a group activity and no one in the class picked her to be a partner. The teacher asked why no one wanted to work with her. The girl understood the situation and remarked, "Okay, next time I will treat them better." The teacher suggested that she go around and ask if any group would like to accept her. She did, and one group accepted her. They worked together so well that at the end of the day the teacher nominated their group as the most collaborative. She gradually changed and understood that she needed friends and should be nice to the others. Many similar stories like this indicated that helping children making friends promoted understanding and caring among children.

Encouraging sharing.

Nearly all of the participants recognized the importance of instilling sharing and caring in children. Many participants were aware that children in the classrooms came from different families with different experiences and personalities, and teachers should be the ones who join them together as a team. One participant stated, “Children are as grains of rice, and the teacher should be the hand to hold them together.” Like many of her colleagues, she suggested that fostering thinking collectively was the basis for fostering caring and sharing among children.

These participants believed that children care most for the people that they know, are familiar with, or have connections to. When they worked together with others in a group, they might feel a responsibility for the well being of the group, and would therefore care for the others in the group. They considered that to be the beginning of a sense of a collective mind.

Some of the participants, including An, Lan, and Ni, also created curricula that allowed the children to share with others naturally, such as through activities that involved families, birthday parties, and sharing time in the classroom. These participants reported that they organized outdoor activities with parents’ support and participation, which created natural situations for children to share with each other and to have closer relationships with each other. Some of them also created a “sharing area” in the classroom for children to bring and store their books, toys, and special arts and crafts to

share with others. Sometimes children also brought in souvenirs from their travels.

Many participants reported changes in the children. Similar stories were told by several participants about children who had never wanted to share before, but who changed dramatically and became eager to share. Examples are a child who once tried to stop his father from taking a suitcase out of their home, and another boy who never handed his school card to the teacher; both became so eager to share that whenever they saw things that they thought might be relevant to what was happening in their school, they would suggest to their mother, "Let's buy this for our class."

Summary

In summarizing participants' reports above, it stands out that almost every participant mentioned the importance of encouraging caring and sharing among children. The majority of them also saw themselves as models for children, especially in caring for and demonstrating respect to others, but also in cooperating with colleagues. Half of the participants also set up peer models for the children by recognizing their caring actions, and many intended to help children to make friends with others. By modeling and encouraging sharing, caring and friendships among children, the participants intended to establish a harmonious atmosphere in their classrooms where children were happy, supportive, and socialized well with each other.

Fostering Sharing and Caring Among Children (Portland)

Many participants in Portland described their classroom environments as full of

joy. Children were happy, enjoyed coming to the center, and had good relationships with one another. Some participants even described children in their classrooms as being close as siblings, and that they cared for, encouraged, and helped each other.

Nearly every participant reported that the social atmosphere in their classroom resulted from their efforts in helping children obtain socialization skills so as to socialize appropriately with their peers. Like their counterparts in Shenzhen, most of the Portland participants recognized themselves as role models, and the way they treated the children was reflected in the way the children would treat each other. They shared ideas and experiences related to the five major aspects of socialization they had focused on to help children build a supportive environment and an attitude of caring:

- (a) modeling,
- (b) instilling social skills,
- (c) encouraging friendships,
- (d) promoting acceptance and tolerance, and
- (e) encouraging kindness among children.

Modeling.

Seven out of the ten participants believed that children learned by watching and observing how the teacher communicated, solved problems, and interacted with others. They often likened it to the common saying: "Monkey see, monkey do." They realized that they should be role models for children in all aspects of children's lives in the

classroom. Some of the participants described themselves as being respectful, fair, compassionate, consistent, patient, honest, and upfront with the children.

Being respectful and supportive.

Many participants pointed out that teachers should model for children a respectful approach to working with the other adults and children in the classroom. They helped, cared for colleagues, and worked together collaboratively and supportively. They demonstrated respect for the children and gave them close attention. Some of them specified that they showed politeness by using kind words such as please, thanks, and sorry. An example one of the participants, Grace, provided was that when she was reading to a child, if another child came to join them, she always stopped to greet the newcomer, made room for him/her to sit, and included him/her in the activity.

Role Playing

Role playing was also applied by some participants to model and practice appropriate social behaviors in the classroom. The role-plays guided the children in how to behave, and helped them to understand the rules and expectations in the classroom through watching and practicing. By playing a role within a designed situation that may happen in real life, children learned courtesy and good manners, the ways to resolve conflicts, and words and phrases that are appropriate to use in different situations.

Instilling social skills.

The majority of the participants believed that the most important things for the

three to five-years-olds to develop were socialization skills. They reported that they had focused on helping children understand and demonstrate respect to each other, share and take turns, and develop communication skills.

Being respectful to each other.

Many participants suggested that to be respectful was essential for the development of social skills. Some of them, such as Fanny and Amy, expressed their concerns about the violence in schools and society, and they saw the urgent need to instill attitudes of love, care, and respect in children in their preschool years so they can be responsive and sympathetic towards other people when they grow up.

These participants also believed that one of the fundamental components of respect was to understand the feelings of others, and that to demonstrate respect for the physical existence of others meant no hitting, hurting, or pushing. Some participants applied a curriculum called Second Step, which is one of the programs of the Committee for Children, a nonprofit working globally to prevent bullying, violence, and child abuse. The Committee for Children began as a group that helped to keep children safe from sexual abuse in the early 1980s, based on Dr. Jennifer James's research. In 1981, the group produced the Talking about Touching (TAT) program, a personal safety and sexual abuse prevention curriculum. The Second Step Program (SSP) expanded on concepts explored in the TAT program by going beyond the explanation and identification of abuse to further stress development of empathy, impulse control, problem solving, and

anger management, with the aim of helping children avoid violent behavior (see Committee for Children). To apply the Second Step curriculum, one of the participants, Grace, mentioned that she worked with children to help them recognize feelings by looking at others' facial expressions and body language so as to detect if they were sad, angry, happy, or excited. She also worked with children on how to deal with angry feelings, to verbalize what they felt, to read how other people felt, and to play with friends respectfully. Another participant, Joy, described how she used music, stories, activities, or posters and pictures of friends to show how they could work and solve problems together. A third, Betty, mentioned that she discussed with children what was meant by soft touches, and the need to ask for permission from their friends before touching. They also encourage children to help and support each other.

Sharing and taking turns.

Some participants, such as Irene, Holly, and Joy, mentioned that children's behavior largely depended on their home environment. Sharing was an important skill to foster, especially for children without siblings. These participants were concerned that the only children did not know how to play with others, and they had problems in taking turns in playing with toys or using classroom materials.

Communication skills.

Learning how to communicate was another important aspect of children's lives in the classroom. Four participants mentioned that they had worked on helping children use

their words to stop conflicts and to socialize with the others, as well as obtain skills that involved using language to negotiate. They also emphasized the importance of encouraging children to go to the teacher for help if needed.

Many participants reported that children in their classrooms were open, honest and able to communicate their needs, as they had opportunities to practice interacting and playing with others without interrupting or disrupting the group. They could negotiate with friends in order to engage in group play appropriately. For instance, one participant, Joy, described the three and four year olds in her classroom using their words to ask to be included in their peers' activities, such as by asking "Can I play with you?" or "Can I take a turn?"

Encouraging friendships.

Six out of the ten participants emphasized the importance of encouraging friendships among the children. They encouraged children to accept, to care for, and to support each other. These participants reported that they had children work in groups, in pairs, or within a community where children support each other and are friends with each other.

Working in groups or in pairs.

Four participants mentioned that they connected children by grouping them for learning projects, plays, and other activities. One of the participants, Grace, mixed the older and younger children from different classes to work together on shows or activities

in which all of them could help each other while participating.

Two of the participants, Amy and Irene, mentioned that they paired up children who did not always play together, which helped children to form new relationships. One participant, Joy, assigned friends who were always together to different groups on purpose so they had chances to interact with other children with whom they did not normally interact. Sometimes she would have a more social and flexible child help with one who was shy and did not know how to play well with the others. Another participant, Irene, would stay with two children who had never played together before, and gradually would leave them alone so they could get to know each other and play together.

Building a community.

Some participants reported that at the beginning of the year they worked with children to figure out what it meant to work “collaboratively as a community” (Debbie). Participants, including Amy and Debbie, also helped children set up classroom rules and revise them together when necessary. Together, the teacher and the children decided that they should respect and listen to each other. Debbie also discussed problems with children and let them provide their own opinions on solutions. She put children in situations in which they would have to work together and share their thoughts to resolve problems or conflicts in learning.

According to the participants, children actively interacted and supported each other naturally within the community. One of the participants, Cathy, observed that there

were always social interactions among the children in her class. They helped others and received help, working together and depending on each other to satisfy their needs. The older children taught the younger ones and provided guidance. They communicated effectively and shared information while working and playing together.

Promoting cultural acceptance and tolerance.

Some participants suggested promoting a social atmosphere in the classroom that was accepting, relaxing, supportive, and inclusive. In order to fulfill this goal, they had worked on introducing different cultures and acknowledging differences among people, organizing social activities that built up connections among families.

Some participants reported that there were cultural issues in the classroom even among the three and four year olds. One of the participants, Betty, reported that a girl in her classroom said that she could not like people of a certain color. Another participant, Irene, also observed once that no one would play with a boy who spoke no English.

These participants worked on the issues by reading books, talking about skin color, and discussing the similarities people shared. Some participants, such as Irene and Grace, brought in books in different languages that reflected the cultures and the ethnic groups of the children in their classrooms in order to make them feel welcome, as well as to help the children to understand each other better. Irene and Betty also encouraged children to learn words from each other's native tongues.

Some of the participants, including Amy, Betty, and Fanny, organized cultural

activities, such as inviting parents from different cultures to the classroom to share food from their cultures, to introduce their traditions, and to show special objects from their cultures. This helped children learn to be tolerant and accepting of people different from themselves. Amy and Betty also designed curriculum or projects to help the children to experience different cultures and values.

Encouraging kindness.

Some participants reported that they encouraged caring among children by observing and acknowledging their caring actions towards others in the classroom. One of the participants, Debbie, called it “kindness collection.” Debbie, Grace, and others described their approach as being positive rather than negative by focusing on children’s good behaviors instead of correcting the negative ones. Whenever they noticed a child using a kind word, performing a caring act, or helping the teachers, they gave him/her positive verbal feedback. Debbie and Grace would also write down descriptions of these behaviors and put them in a “caring jar.” They would read the notes to the whole group at the closing of the day and clap for everybody before the notes were given to the children to bring home to their parents.

Summary

In summary, nine out of the ten Portland participants emphasized instilling social skills in children, as they believed they were the most important abilities for children to obtain in their preschool years. When children possess the ability to communicate, to

share, and to take turns, there can be less conflict, and children will be friendly and work together as a community. Seven out of the ten participants also saw themselves as role models for children in every aspect of their lives in the classroom, and especially as models of supportive and respectful people. Many also recognized that cultural competence, kindness, and friendship are important for children's lives in early childhood education facilities. In short, the majority of the Portland participants shared opinions about developing children's social skills, modeling, helping children establish friendships, promoting acceptance and tolerance, as well as encouraging kindness among the children in their classrooms.

Compare and Contrast

Participants' opinions regarding how to establish caring relationships among children are presented in table 9.

Table 9. Establishing caring relationship among children

Participants Shenzhen China	Frequency	Pseudonym Initials	Participants Portland, USA	Frequency	Pseudonym Initials
Encouraging caring & sharing	9	A B C F K H L N Y	Building social skills	9	A B C E F G H I J
Modeling	7	A D F K H L Y	Modeling	6	A B C G I J
Making friends	6	A C D F L Y	Making friends	6	A D F G I J
Recognition of caring actions	5	C D K F N	Acceptance	6	B C D F G H
Collective thinking	5	A C F L Y	Kindness	4	C D G H
Working with parents	5	A D H L N	Role playing	3	H G F
			Community	3	D F J

From the table above we can see that, grounded in the social, cultural, and

political reality of China, the majority of Shenzhen participants emphasized fostering caring and sharing among children, based on their concerns about only children and those unfamiliar with caring, sharing, or making friends. Many of them also argued for the need for children to learn to care for each other in a group setting and to care for the group as a collective whole. Portland participants focused more on developing children's social skills, especially in communication and taking turns, as some of them also found children who had no siblings and who seemed to have problems with their social skills. Those who worked with children from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds also emphasized the need to teach children to be more accepting and tolerant.

Similarities between groups emerged when the majority of the participants from both cities emphasized teachers as models for children, and some also acknowledged children's caring actions and provided positive comments to promote caring and kindness among children. An equal number of participants from both cities also sensed the need for forming friendships and helping children understand each other.

Teachers' Understanding of Autonomy (Shenzhen)

Some of the Shenzhen participants pointed out that the level of autonomy depends on the children's ages. For the two and three year olds, they focused on self-help skills so the children could gradually rely on themselves and feel safe and confident. The three and four year olds needed some personal space to manipulate materials, and also to develop social skills for interacting and building relationships with the others. As for the

five and six year olds, they had their own ideas, and the desire to explore the environment around them. They had the ability to make decisions, and so they should be involved in the decision making process in the classroom.

Most of the participants reported that they viewed it as their responsibility to encourage children to take the initiative in caring for themselves and the others in their class, and in being involved in the decision making and problem solving process when the situation allowed. They also talked about the need for rules and boundaries, and to work with parents to help children to be independent and self-regulated. What they described can be organized into the following categories:

- (a) teachers' concerns and attitudes,
- (b) responsibility,
- (c) decision making,
- (d) problem solving,
- (e) rules and boundaries, and
- (f) the need to work with parents.

Teachers' concerns and attitudes.

Six out of the ten participants believed that teachers' concerns and attitudes were essential for developing children's autonomous thinking. They believed that autonomy requires internal acceptance and the desire to explore. It would exist only when children felt confident about themselves and capable of controlling their own behaviors. Some of

them thought that children might not be able to be totally autonomous during the preschool and kindergarten ages, but that a teacher should demonstrate respect and encourage children to think differently and explore their own ideas. Furthermore, a teacher should trust children and give them the freedom and space to express their ideas and to act. Children need to feel safe in order to try things on their own, and then they can gradually take the initiative to explore. These participants believed that by letting children try to engage in activities within the range of their abilities, and by giving them encouragement to increase their self-esteem and confidence, children could become competitive and then be successful while growing up. To be able to think autonomously would benefit them when they reached adulthood.

These participants also recognized that if a teacher was an authority figure, children would be nervous or afraid of getting into trouble. Children would be afraid to express their ideas or ask questions, which would limit their abilities in many domains. The majority of the participants also believed that within a happy and relaxed environment, where the children are encouraged to create and to try new things based on their abilities, they have the opportunity to become independent individuals.

Responsibility.

The participants in Shenzhen considered autonomy, self-regulation, and independence to be very important for children in their early developmental stages. These qualities were considered especially important in early childhood education in

China because there were concerns that as only children in their families, most of the children received too much attention and care from the adults around them. Most of them were egocentric and selfish, and depended on the adults rather than taking responsibility for caring for themselves. When there were difficulties or problems, they blamed others or the circumstances. Many children were described as easily frustrated, and with short attention spans. Therefore, many participants advocated encouraging children to be independent and responsible.

Seven out of the ten participants asserted that trusting the children and encouraging them to take responsibility helped the children to be independent. According to them, the responsibilities that a child could take on were to self-help and to fulfill tasks such as being on duty, being a reminder, being in charge of certain events, and evaluating each other.

Being self-helping.

As mentioned before, all of the participants were concerned about the fact that the majority of children in the city were only children. Because these children received too much unnecessary attention and care, they lacked self-help skills. It was not unusual for several adults to run after a 4, 5, or even a 6 year old to feed him. To teach these children to be independent was a major task for the teachers, as all of the participants believed that 4-5 year olds should take the initiative in feeding and dressing themselves, taking care of their belongings, and arranging their own schoolbag. Teachers may provide initial

assistance, but gradually they must let children practice and do these tasks by themselves. Most of the participants also worked on establishing routines in the classroom and trained the children to be self-reliant and to take care of their own needs without reminders from adults, such as by putting on or taking off clothes as needed depending on his/her comfort without consulting or reminders from a teacher.

Fulfilling tasks.

Some of the participants, such as Fu and Han, assigned children take-home tasks, such as collecting certain materials or finding out information or answers for certain questions that related to their learning activities or projects. Six of the participants also mentioned that they established a system in the classroom that allowed children to take turns being on duty for classroom chores, such as setting up tables for meals and snacks, serving others, cleaning up, watering the plants, and many other responsibilities and jobs in the classroom. On some occasions, some of the participants also let children take turns being in charge of events, such as the ceremony of raising the flag in the morning, leading the morning exercises, or being an MC for parties or celebrations.

One of the participants, Lan, described how she assigned children to be on duty as a reminder for certain activities or transactions in the classroom in order to help them to be more reliable. Once she assigned a child who always skipped drinking water to provide a reminder for the teacher to drink water during the week. The child took it very seriously and also remembered to drink himself. Lan found that little incidents like this

not only help the children have a sense of responsibility, but also build up trust and a caring relationship between the teacher and the child.

Four of the participants also encouraged children to positively evaluate each other and themselves. Children were encouraged to give positive comments to their peers when they saw good behavior or progress. One of the participants, Dai, found that the children in her classroom had very good observation skills. They observed the good qualities and behaviors of the other children, even in those who always seemed to cause trouble. They could declare that “he is kind to me,” “she helps others with this,” and so forth.

Decision making.

Many participants asserted that taking children’s input into account for making decisions in the classroom was important in order to encourage autonomy. According to these participants, children were included in the decision making process for some aspects of learning, classroom decoration, and other activities.

Seven out of the ten participants mentioned that they provided some choices for children, including which areas to go to, what materials or instruments to use, or which direction to continue with a project. As some of the participants had adopted Emergent Curriculum, children had the opportunity to choose the topic of a project, to pick the partner they wanted to work with, and to find out different ways to fulfill their tasks. Other participants, such as Kai and Yang, would let the children know what they were

going to do at the beginning of the day, give children the opportunity to carry out the objectives of a PE class or a music lesson, or use children's ideas to compose exercises, dances, or other performances. Yang also mentioned providing materials that required children to use their creativity to work on and finish the job.

Two of the participants, Bai and Han, mentioned that they had used children's opinions for selecting classroom decorations on a regular basis or for certain special events. They considered it important to have children's input, even on minor details such as what materials they wanted to use and where they wanted pictures to be hung.

Three of the participants, Chen, Kai, and Han, talked about including children in the decision making for other activities, such as the games for outdoor play, the direction for a walk, or even the destinations for field trips. One of the participants talked about discussing with children what games to play before they went outdoors, and making their decision collectively. Another mentioned that she provided children a list of possible places for a field trip, and let the children choose where to go with the help of their parents. Then the class discussed the options together to decide which one would be the best choice. These participants emphasized that they respected children's reasonable requests, but they were cautious not to make the children think that they could do whatever they wanted.

Problem solving.

Seven out of the ten participants said that they encouraged children to solve

problems and resolve conflicts. They believed that the ability to solve problems by oneself was a sign of being autonomous. When children encountered difficulties in their learning or exploration, many participants would encourage them to try to deal with it first and then provide guidance if necessary. When there was a conflict, they would talk with the children, allow them time to think and come up with solutions, and then use the best suggestion to resolve the conflict.

Three participants reported that by adopting the Project Approach, Learning by Doing, or Emergent Curriculum approaches in their curriculum they were able to foster children's ability to problem solve and make decisions. As some of the topics and learning activities were developed according to children's interests and ideas associated with their life experiences, and as the teachers had collected and provided an abundance of materials and reference sources for children to use, when the children encountered problems, they would try to find out the answers from the reference books and use the materials provided to come up with solutions. When there were conflicts, children could also have opportunities to find the solutions under the teacher's guidance. After they had resolved a conflict, the teacher would give them the opportunity to reflect on whether they had chosen the best way to solve this kind of dispute.

Rules and boundaries.

Many Shenzhen participants interpreted self-regulation as the ability to follow the rules and to be both responsible and reliable. Though children should be self-regulating

to fit into the social setting and to meet the expectations of the classroom, and later the society, participants felt that these were important characteristics overlooked by many parents. These participants believed that rules and boundaries were necessary, and that to involve children in the rule-making process helps children better understand the rules.

The necessity of rules.

Five participants, including Dai, Kai and Lan, argued that there should be general requirements and routines for children to follow in the classroom. These participants believed that children could do anything that they enjoyed doing, except if it would hurt either themselves or others, or would make others in the classroom feel unhappy, in which case it should be prohibited. They also suggested there should be consequences for breaking the rules.

Three of the participants believed that sometimes situations arise in which children should not have a choice, such as anything associated with their safety, anything associated or required by the curricula for children's development, or anything involving obtaining proper nutrition from their meals. Whether they let children make decisions or not also depended on the reasonableness of children's choices.

Making and understanding rules.

Four of the participants mentioned involving children in the process of making rules and establishing routines. They believed that if children were given opportunities to make rules and the consequences for breaking them, these children could comprehend

and follow the rules better, and act within the rules' boundaries. These participants mentioned that beside having children discuss and set up rules for their general requirements and for using the classroom areas, they also used simultaneous incidents as opportunities to have the children reflect on whether their reactions were acceptable and on what rules should be set up to encourage people to do better from then on. Children remembered these rules better as they were generated from their experiences.

These participants, including Bai, Lan, and Yang, believed that children would not be able to regulate their behavior if they did not understand the rules. Although sometimes children might know what they were expected to do, they still might not follow the rules if they did not understand them. Another participant, Kai, reported that he would let children learn about consequences from their own experiences, so long as they did not harm themselves or the others.

To understand that an action might have serious consequences, these participants suggested children should learn from experiments demonstrating the possible results of their actions. One of the examples from Lan involved teaching the children to understand a "no climbing" rule. Since the classroom was on the fourth floor, climbing on the fence of the balcony was prohibited. However, the rule was not quite understood by some of the boys. One day she conducted an experiment with the children. They dropped two eggs, one cooked and another raw down to the ground from the fourth floor and let the children analyze the result. Seeing the smashed eggs, some of them said, "Oh, our heads

would be like the eggs if we fell from the fourth floor,” and the others agreed. She felt that the children finally understood the reason for the “no climbing” rule.

The need to work with parents.

Many participants, such as Dai, Kai, and Ni, pointed out that as more collective and structured group activities were emphasized, opportunities for autonomous decision making for children at the center were limited. In many situations, it was hard to let everyone make individual decisions, especially when working with a large group of children, as was the case in most of the centers. These participants considered the possibility that with the cooperation of the parents, autonomous decision making could be fostered at home. Two of the participants, Kai and Ni, mentioned that sometimes they met with parents to analyze a specific child and what the parents could do at home to let the child practice self-help and self-control skills, so he/she could become responsible and self-reliant.

Summary

To summarize, Shenzhen participants were concerned about only children and their ability to be independent and self-reliant. They urged children to obtain self-help skills and take responsibility for helping their peers and the teachers in the classroom. The majority of the participants also believed that teachers' attitudes and caring are important in fostering autonomy, because autonomous thinking cannot exist under pressure from authority. Efforts should be made to provide children choices, as well as

decision making and problem solving opportunities, both in their learning and in their daily lives. Nevertheless, many participants also recognized the limited choices in many aspects of children's lives in a classroom setting, where structured learning and group activities were predominant and class sizes were large. Some recognized the necessity to work with parents so as to encourage self-reliance and independence at home. Many participants also mentioned the need for rules and for children to understand and follow the rules so they could be self-regulated.

Teachers' Understanding of Autonomy (Portland)

All of the participants from Portland believed that to be independent children must be confident about their abilities and capable of meeting most of their own needs. An independent child has self-help skills and is able to be self-sufficient. Therefore, most of the participants considered fostering children's social, emotional, and self-help skills the main focus in their classrooms. The remarks of one of the participants represented their ideas: "I think mostly what they are learning at this age is how to be less dependent on adults, to have self-help skills that they can use, to have self-confidence about their skills, to get along with people their age, and to be a friend" (Grace).

Many participants mentioned that they not only provided children with the space to create, to imagine, to express their own ideas, and to make decisions, but also with expectations and boundaries. Children should be able to share their thoughts and negotiate in conversation with people to meet their own needs, but at the same time "keep

others' needs in mind and avoid being completely egocentric" (Debbie). Participants' main ideas about autonomy and independence are discussed according to the categories below:

- (a) self-help skills,
- (b) accessibility of materials,
- (c) choices, decision making and problem solving,
- (d) responsibility, and
- (e) various understandings of autonomy.

Self-help skills.

Six out of the ten participants considered self-help skills the focus of education for children between 3 and 6 years old. They expressed the belief that being self-reliant contributes to making children feel good about themselves. They agreed that with an increase in independence comes an increase in children's self-esteem, that children take pride in and have confidence about their ability to perform tasks for themselves and also to take care of others. As a result, children are happier because they know they can do something and they have somebody encouraging them.

An example given by one of the participants, Betty, was that a three-year-old boy had just learned how to tie his shoes, and he was very proud of himself, insisting on tying the shoes of everybody in the classroom. If anyone forgot to let him do it, he would run after him or her shouting, "Shoes, let me tie your shoes!" What the participants

emphasized was helping children to help themselves by ensuring they both felt and were capable of doing things such as getting dressed, washing their hands and face, brushing their teeth, eating, putting toys away, helping to clean up the classroom, taking care of their own mess, and having bathroom skills.

Betty pointed out that there is no need to rush the children if they are not ready. She believed that everything happened in due time, when children are cognitively and developmentally ready to take a step. Teachers should be patient and encouraging, but not push too hard.

Accessibility of materials.

Four of the participants believed that to encourage children to be independent the most important thing is to make the materials in the classroom accessible. These participants believed that children feel comfortable in an environment where they are able to access the materials needed for their activities and do not have to constantly ask for something required for a better learning experience. These participants offered children the chance to develop independence and competency through knowing what they are doing and what they need, and by providing the materials that satisfy these needs. They made sure that their classroom environment and furniture were well designed for the children and that the materials were accessible, functional, and inviting for children to pick up, to work on, and to return independently.

One of the participants, Debbie, reported that at the beginning of the year she

spent time with the children to teach them about the materials, their locations in the classroom, and how to use and return them. She and the other teachers arranged spaces where children were allowed to use the materials, to move around and to work with them.

Choices, decision making, and problem solving.

The majority of the Portland participants agreed that providing children the opportunity for choices, decision making, and problem solving were the most important elements for fostering independence and autonomy in children. They believed that it is important for children to be able to make choices that are appropriate for them. Children would be more confident when they were able to make good choices and resolve problems, as well as be responsible for their own learning.

Three of the participants believed that if children were raised under the principles of behaviorism, such as “do this to get that,” “do it to please the teacher or their mother,” or “just do what they were told,” they would not know how to make their own decisions once they had grown up. Instead, these participants offered children choices not only in their learning process and play, but also in redirecting behaviors and resolving problems and conflicts.

Choices.

Eight out of the ten participants emphasized the importance of providing children choices to make their own decisions. They reported that children in their classroom had all sorts of opportunities to make choices on their own. Although this did not include

whether or not children wanted to go to school on a particular day, they were given choices about what to do, when and how to do it, what tools to use, and how to use them. They could choose in which area to play and what activities to perform with the materials provided by the teachers. They could also make their own choices about what materials to use and how to use them creatively. They had choices as to who to play with or what to play. They could also choose how to deal with and get along with the other children in the classroom. One of the participants reported that children in her classroom could even choose to get food to eat whenever they felt hungry, and to lie down to sleep when they were tired. Having choices and some control over their own actions allowed the children to have a sense of independence.

Three participants reported that they offered structured learning opportunities for children, but would not force them to do things that they did not want to do. They let children decide whether to learn or not, to participate in group activities or at the art table or not, and to play with others or not. One of them, Fanny, explained that in the old days, students just had to do what the teacher said, and then were lost as they went to college because they did not know how to make decisions on their own.

Children were also offered choices in redirecting their behaviors. According to one participant, Holly, if a child had made poor choices, such as by not taking turns or sharing, the child would be offered choices about whether to listen to his/her friend or to choose another area in which to play. The participants believed letting children take part

in their choices empowered them, as they would be proud to be able to control their own behaviors. However, some of the participants believed there were things that children should not have choices about, such as hurting another child or, due to safety concerns, staying inside when everyone else was outside.

Decision making.

Seven out of the ten participants reported that they involved children in the decision making process so as to feel they were part of what was going on, that they were creating their own learning experience, and that they had the opportunity to learn things they wanted to learn rather than having somebody tell them what to do. Encouraging children to make decisions on their own empowered them with feelings of accomplishment.

These participants reported that the decision making for children ranged from choosing where to sit or work as a group, to making the rules in the classroom, to making bigger group decisions about their actual project work and environment. Some of them also let children decide on the subjects that they wanted to learn by observing and talking with the children to find out what they were interested in and what was relevant and important in their lives. They then provided learning that was relevant to children's experiences and their developmental needs.

Six participants mentioned that they involved children in decision making through utilizing curriculum that was set up as child initiated, based on the idea that children learn

through play and should have choices in both their daily lives and classroom learning.

Three participants mentioned that they planned activities, but it was up to the children to make their decision as to which ones they would like to do and when. Teachers were there to assist them only when they needed help. Children learned to be independent by being given the opportunities to make decisions.

Problem solving.

Four of the participants mentioned that they provided children with hands-on activities that required children to make decisions and to solve problems in their learning process through finding out how to make things work. One of the participants created opportunities for children to practice problem solving skills by using a toy to create stories and scenarios that raised questions. She let the class work all together or in groups to figure out how to solve these problems. Children worked together as a community, and were encouraged to share their thoughts and to come up with solutions collectively.

Rule making.

Three participants also mentioned involving children in the process of making rules in the classroom, as they believed children should have a sense of what the limits are and what they can or cannot do. Two of them mentioned that at the beginning of the semester they discussed with the children how to make the classroom a safe place for them all, and came up with rules and consequences. As children made decisions, they

came to know why they needed the rules: "Because it doesn't feel good to be hurt."

Knowing the consequences helped the children to better follow the rules.

Conflict resolution.

Developing conflict resolution skills was also an important aspect of children's life in the classroom. Two of the participants had the children resolve conflicts themselves instead of always going to the teacher for the solution. One participant described providing grace and courtesy lessons for the children. She would gather a group of four or five children who were not working to show them or to have some older children as actors demonstrate the polite ways to offer somebody something, what to say if someone needed to pass another in the aisle, and the appropriate way to respond to offers or requests. Then she would let the children practice. She also provided children problem solving formulas, which she explained as giving children the language to use to resolve their conflicts. For instance, when a child forgot to use his language to request that someone in the way let him/her pass, and instead pushed the other to the ground, a conflict started. The teacher would first attend to the victim and make sure he/she was okay, and then she would ask both children how they felt: "Are you mad?" and "Are you sad?" She would then request the one who had pushed to ask the one who was pushed if he/she was okay. Next, the victim should let the aggressor know that "I don't like..." whatever the other had done to him/her because "it hurts." Then the trouble maker should offer what he/she could do to help, followed by a request from the victim to "Use

your words next time,” or “Please don’t do it anymore.” According to the participant, after a period of time, the children in the classroom became very familiar with the formula and would apply it automatically without the assistance of the teachers. Another strategy she provided to children was to conclude an argument by simply saying, “I disagree with you.” Through lessons, additional practice, and eventually apply these formulas in their lives, children learned to use their words and listen to others.

Two other participants mentioned that they helped children to compromise and to negotiate in order to obtain what they wanted in a polite and respectful way, and to prevent conflicts. They taught children skills and language to demonstrate respect for others by asking for permission for materials or toys the others were using. If the one who was using the materials or toys had not finished with them, he/she should use his/her words to let the other know, and the one who wanted the materials or toys needed to listen and wait. They also mentioned the Peace Mat or Peace Table in their classroom, which was used when conflicts became too heated. Children would go there and calm themselves down before coming up with solutions.

Responsibility.

Four participants mentioned that they fostered responsibility in the classroom by assigning children classroom jobs such as watering the plants, recording the weather, feeding fish or other pets, picking up after themselves, and taking care of things in the classroom. Children were expected to be responsible on their own and to be able to take

out and put back materials as they used them. One of the participants stated that children had choices, but there was responsibility that went along with those choices and consequences that may result if those responsibilities were not met.

Various understandings of autonomy

Although most of the Portland participants emphasized the importance of self-help and decision making skills, their interpretation of autonomy and independence were not exactly the same. Some considered the terms independence and autonomy to be interchangeable, while others emphasized independence and self-help skills more than autonomy. Two of them did not even use the term *autonomy*. For example, one of the participants believed that autonomy relates to the sense of one's feelings about oneself, a sense of oneself in relation to other people acquired by knowing that one is unique from the others. She believed that children in the preschool and kindergarten age groups still needed a lot of guidance and that they could not be given total autonomy.

Although some participants did not mention autonomy directly, their statements revealed their support for it. One participant, Fanny, talked about making children feel secure in their independence by letting them know that it is always okay to ask for help and to ask questions. Another participant, Joy, showed concern about helping children stand up for their rights when facing other children who might be pushy and bossy. They both saw the need to encourage the children who were followers or were shy to make their own choices and to stand up for their own rights. Fanny emphasized that a child did

not have to do something simply because the other children did it. It is important to be able to say no to things that are against one's will, and it is okay to not always do what everybody else does, as long as one feels safe.

Two participants, who related autonomy to independence, or even individuality, were concerned that American culture places too much emphasis on individualism and independence. They intended to foster interdependence in children and to work "more on working together" than on encouraging individuality. One of them stated:

The United States in general is very much a culture of independence, doing everything yourself and being an independent person. I think what I am really trying to show them is that there is an interdependence between each other.

Rather than excelling their independent choices and the making of choices that affect only themselves, considering those choices that also affect others in the group.

These participants stressed that it was important for letting children know that their focus should not be entirely on themselves, but that there was a relationship between themselves and the rest of the children in the classroom.

Two other participants, Eva and Irene, found that parents from certain cultures preferred their children to be more dependent rather than independent, so they respected the choices of these parents.

Summary

In summary, the majority of the participants from Portland believed that being capable of meeting most of their own needs and confident about their abilities was essential for children in developing independence. Many of them asserted that social, emotional, and self-help skills were the main focus in their classrooms. Eight out of the ten participants provided children with opportunities to make their own choices in most aspects of their lives in the classroom, and many involved children in the decision making and problem solving process, which included making rules and resolving conflicts. Some of them also encouraged children to take responsibility for helping themselves and the others. However, participants' understandings of autonomy varied. Although what they described showed their support for children's autonomy and independence in the classroom, there were concerns that in a classroom setting children could not be given total autonomy. Some believed that autonomy meant being separated from the others or individualistic. They suggested valuing working together as a community instead of encouraging individuality.

Compare and Contrast

Shenzhen participants saw an urgent need to foster independence by emphasizing self-help skills and self-regulation abilities in children. They worked on encouraging children to take care of themselves, to take responsibility in the classroom, and also to fit into their collective groups.

Portland participants worked to create a classroom environment that was accessible for children and ensured that they had more opportunities to work on their own. Children learned mostly via play, so they had choices and autonomy in their learning. The major points of emphasis regarding independence and autonomy made by the two groups are presented in table 10.

Table 10. Independence and autonomy

Participants Shenzhen China	Frequency	Pseudonym Initials	Participants Portland, USA	Frequency	Pseudonym Initials
Decision making & choices	7	B C D H K L N	Choices	8	B C D E F G H J
Problem solving	7	B C D H L N Y	Decision making	7	A C D E F I J
Teachers' concerns/attitude	6	A B F N L Y	Self-help skills	6	B C F G H J
Classroom duty	6	C D H L N Y	Problem solving	4	A B D J
Self-help skills	5	C D H L Y	Responsibility	4	B C D F
Rules & boundaries	5	B D K L Y	Accessibility of materials	4	C D G E
Rule making	4	C F H N	Rule making	3	A D H
Working with parents	4	C H K N	Conflict solving	2	C J

In the table above we can see that many participants from both cities intended to encourage children to obtain self-help skills in order to be self-reliant, and also to take on classroom duties to help themselves and others. A roughly equal number of participants from both cities also expressed similar understandings about providing children choices, as well as decision making or problem solving opportunities, both in their lives and in the classroom in order to foster autonomy or independence in children. However, according to Shenzhen participants, children had more choices in free play or outdoor play than in

structured learning activities, which were still the dominant activities in preschools in Shenzhen, whereas most Portland participants organized learning activities for children via project or play. Even when there were structured learning activities offered for the children, children were allowed to choose to participate in these learning activities or not, which was not the case in Shenzhen. Some Shenzhen participants agreed that children should be required to participate in the learning activities that carry out the educational goals for their development, although a few others recommended not forcing children to learn. Close to half of the Portland participants emphasized the accessibility of the classroom materials that allowed children have controls of their own learning, which was not mentioned by any of the Shenzhen participants.

As evidence of their concerns about only children, more Shenzhen participants than those from Portland talked about the need for encouraging children to take on classroom duties and to work on problem solving or conflict resolving, but at the same time to follow the rules. Recognizing that authority suppresses autonomy, some Shenzhen participants were concerned about teachers' attitudes about providing a free and happy environment for children to express their own ideas and think creatively.

Teachers' Understanding of Motivation (Shenzhen)

Shenzhen participants recognized that motivation is evident when a child is able to work, focus on, and finish tasks. Some participants described the motivated children as very active, attentive to teachers' questions, and interested in participating in

classroom activities. The ones who were not motivated paid no attention to what others were doing in the classroom and were only interested in their own thoughts.

Most of the participants mentioned that structured teaching and learning activities were required in their centers. Many of them also understood that children found it hard to be intrinsically motivated for this kind of learning. It was an important part of teachers' jobs to find the key elements of motivating children to be engaged in such learning activities. Based on what the participants described, there are many elements associated with motivation in children's learning, such as

- (a) teachers' attention and concern,
- (b) children's interest,
- (c) developmentally appropriate subjects and contents,
- (d) encouragement and a sense of success, and
- (e) parents' cooperation.

Teachers' attention and concern.

Seven out of the ten participants acknowledged that teachers' attention and care motivated children to learn or work on tasks. Most of them believed that a caring, mutually respectful, and equal relationship, both between teachers and children and among children, creates a harmonious, trusting, and supportive classroom atmosphere where children have space and freedom to express their ideas, to communicate with others, and to be motivated to explore and learn.

Four of the participants suggested teachers should care about children, should observe them and find out their interests and abilities so as to provide learning experiences relevant to their interests and the support that they need. These participants often sat by the children and listened and talked with them, both in groups and individually. They also read to and played with the children, which brought about a sense of closeness and a feeling of safety amongst the children. Children were free to talk and to express their ideas, which allowed the teacher to get to know them and what they were interested in. One participant stated: "If a teacher does not communicate with children, she will never find out what motivates them."

Children's interests and motivation.

Eight out of the ten participants believed that children would be intrinsically motivated to work on what interested them. Based on their observations, when children were curious, they paid attention, listened closely, and were eager to answer questions. They even would suggest further work on the topics and played with the themes after class. Some of the participants also found that when children were interested in something they had heard about at home, on TV, or from friends, they would bring in questions about these subjects for the teachers and discuss them. When they were interested in learning math, they would continuously ask the teacher to teach them to solve math problems. When they were interested in the growth of their bodies, they paid close attention to it and would ask questions about it.

Many participants suggested following children's interests and their curiosity to develop activities for further exploration. Children would be motivated to explore and to solve problems when they wanted to know more. As their desire to learn developed, they became actively engaged in the learning process and began to find out answers on their own. When they were interested in what they were learning, they enjoyed the learning process and remembered more details.

These participants suggested developing projects based on children's interests, projects that children had ownership of and were eager to work on. For instance, one of them, Han, noticed the children in her class were interested in robots and dinosaurs when she observed their play. She then asked the children to talk more about what they already knew about these subjects. Based on what the children knew, she worked with them to develop ideas for further exploration.

Five out of the ten participants suggested encouraging children to take initiative in their learning, as intrinsic motivation was observed mostly during free play and after class activities when children were free to explore, think, and initiate solutions. These participants recognized the limitations of the current curriculum in their center, and argued that an emphasis needed to be placed on child-centered learning activities in order to promote children's motivation and direct their energy towards taking the initiative in their learning.

Interactions among teachers and children were also considered essential for

motivating children to be actively involved in learning activities. One participant reported that the children in her center loved the learning activities led by the foreign English teachers because they brought in a lot of interesting toys and materials, as well as prepared activities that allowed the children to actively participate in and interact with the teachers and their peers. Since the children had a lot of fun learning they looked forward to class every day.

Developmentally appropriate subjects and content.

Four participants suggested the importance of selecting subjects and content that were developmentally appropriate, that children were interested in, that were within the range of their abilities, and that were presented in a way that made it easy for children to comprehend and see results.

These participants showed their full awareness of the different ages of the children and their different needs for successful learning. They reported that they took children's ages and individual abilities into account. They focused on children's starting points by learning what they already knew and what they did not know in order to select activities that children would be successful at and would be interested in doing. For example, one of the participants found it was hard for some of the three-year-olds in her class to use a pencil or crayon to draw shapes and lines in detail. As a result, she first tried to let them work on coloring and dyeing. Dyeing activities were much easier for most of the children to handle, and also were like magic because the children could see

the beautiful patterns of color resulting from their work. All of the children were very interested in participating, as seeing the results of their work gave them a feeling of success.

These participants also suggested hands-on learning, as children learn better by manipulating materials. When activities involved materials that children could manipulate, they had the intrinsic motivation to explore and learn, and they were interested in finding different ways to play with the materials.

Nonetheless, there were differing opinions about the focus of learning. Four participants felt that academic learning should not be emphasized for the pre-school or kindergarten age groups. The teachers' main concerns should be on children's capabilities in self-regulation, their willingness and good habits in learning, and their experience in the learning process instead of the results. Three other participants reported that many parents required that the center focus on academic knowledge and skills. These parents disapproved of play-based learning, preferring their children to learn Chinese characters, English, and math, or even to memorize and recite ancient children's literature. They assumed that if the children do not sit and listen to the teacher, they are not learning and the teacher is not doing her/his job. Based on this cultural assumption about learning, three participants mentioned that even some kindergarten aged children did not see playing as learning. When asked by parents, "What have you learned today?" A typical answer, though disturbing to the parents, would be "Nothing, we just play."

One of the participants, Ni, stated that some kindergarten aged children were motivated to take on challenges such as learning math and other subject matter. Their strong desire to learn these subjects was revealed by their asking: “What classes are we going to have next?” “What are we going to learn today?” “Where are we now?” and “When will we study math?” To prepare them for elementary school, some participants felt they had to let children grow used to sitting longer and working on reading and writing tasks.

Encouragement and sense of success.

Some of the participants believed that self-confidence and the feeling of success was important for motivating children to learn. With confidence children have less fear of expressing themselves and exploring. Many participants believed that encouragement from teachers increased children’s self-esteem and confidence, which thus motivated children to engage in the learning process.

Positive encouragement.

Seven out of the ten participants believed that positive feedback from the teachers motivates children to learn. These participants observed that positive comments and feedback encouraged children to keep on task, and that even hugs, kisses, and smiles were effective ways to encourage them. Most important was to focus on children’s strengths and to offer encouragement. These participants observed the children and their activities throughout the day to find out what they did well and what they needed to

improve on. They tried not to miss any small signs of improvement and were persistent in encouraging children over the long term.

Three of ten participants considered stickers and stars to work well in motivating children, and found that children loved to have tangible reinforcements when they had performed well. These types of motivation systems were also supported by the parents. After a child had earned a certain number of stickers, parents would reward him/her at home as well.

Four others considered material rewards unhelpful for the children in the long run, and they tried to minimize the use of such types of reinforcement. Rather, they depended more on a smile, a gesture, a hug, or a verbal expression, as well as group recognition. Three of them reported that once a year their centers selected several children center-wide, awarded them with the title of “the Wonderful Child,” and issued them certificates. These participants also encouraged children to use their own judgment to evaluate and encourage each other.

Those participants who disagreed with the use of stickers, flowers, or star charts tried to avoid comparing children to each other based on material rewards in the classroom in order to protect children’s self-esteem, as the rewards might encourage some and discourage others. These participants tried not to point out a child’s shortcomings in front of the others, but instead they talked with him/her individually. One of the participants mentioned that she would discuss with the children why a

particular behavior was unacceptable and what they could do better next time. At the same time, she assured the children that though a particular behavior was not tolerated, that did not mean that they were bad, and that the teacher still loved them despite that particular behavior.

Sense of success.

Nearly half of the participants agreed that intrinsic motivation would be reinforced if children were successful in their learning and felt happy about their achievements. Some of them observed that if a child felt accomplished he/she would remain in a good mood all day, whereas the experience of a failure had a negative effect. Feelings of failure reduced a child's self-esteem and caused him to avoid learning or playing with the other children.

Avoiding pressure.

Five of the ten participants agreed that children would feel unhappy and not be motivated to learn if they felt forced to do so. Children would learn better if learning were an enjoyable experience in a happy atmosphere. With fewer feelings of pressure, children were more likely to learn successfully. One of the participants, Bai, stated that if learning activities were designed and led by the teachers, children might follow the teacher's instructions, but that there would be no intrinsic motivation to learn. These participants cautioned against forcing or pushing children to learn.

Cooperation from parents.

Three of the participants explicitly stated that cooperation from parents was important in motivating children to focus on tasks. Families should be involved in building a good routine for learning to ensure children's behaviors are consistent between the center and home, and children should be provided encouragement from both teachers and parents.

Summary

In reflecting on participants' descriptions, we can see that although some centers worked on integrating innovative educational philosophies or approaches which incorporate child-centered and child initiated activities into their curriculums, structured group learning activities were still dominant in most of the centers because of the need to satisfy the majority of the parents. Many participants recognized that it was hard to have children intrinsically motivated, and felt the urgent need to create ways to encourage children to be engaged in learning. Seven out of the ten participants associated motivation with teachers' care and attention, as knowing the children was important to motivating them to learn. Eight out of ten participants also emphasized focusing on children's interests, as they saw children's curiosity and interests as essential for motivation. They focused on preparing subjects and materials that interested the children and were appropriate for their developmental stages, and at the same time intended to provide encouragement and a learning environment without pressure. Many participants

believed that when children were confident about their own abilities, they would be motivated to take initiative in their own learning and be successful.

Teachers' Understanding of Motivation (Portland)

There were two different views about motivation among participants from Portland. Some stated that children are naturally motivated by their curiosity or by the nature of the curriculum they adopted in their programs. They did not consider motivation a concern. There were a few others who considered it hard to have intrinsic motivation at the preschool age, and to them encouraging motivation and a positive attitude were important. Although both groups of teachers had a similar view that a teacher needs to figure out what children are motivated by in order to teach subjects they enjoy and are excited about, those who were concerned about motivation organized more structured group activities. Different opinions also exist regarding the use of rewards or consequences.

“Motivation is not a concern.”

Seven out of the ten participants felt that motivation was not a major concern in their classroom. Some of them believed that children were naturally motivated as their curiosity made them open to exploration. They described children as observant, as little sponges that were absorbing and learning while seeing, hearing, or handling materials. Others asserted that learning naturally happened when children were engaged in curriculum based on play and their interests.

Children are naturally motivated.

Three of the seven participants who asserted that motivation was not a concern also stated that children were born with the desire to understand, to figure out how things work, and to do things themselves. According to these participants, children's curiosity led them to explore, to practice, and ultimately to become experts at what they wanted to know. They argued that children were naturally motivated and wanted to know what was going on and what the teachers wanted to provide them. Children follow their interests in handling, discovering, and understanding. They are intrinsically motivated to be capable human beings.

Play-based curriculum and Constructivist approaches.

The majority of the participants, seven out of ten, including those who believed that children are naturally motivated, when they further elaborated on the curriculum they adopted, either described it as a play-based curriculum or a constructivist approach based on children's interests. These activities therefore proved to be intriguing, creative, and fun.

Four of these participants felt that learning was still a game for the three to six year olds, and so based their curriculum on play to the extent that every subject was integrated into play. Some stated that they had integrated math, science, and many other subjects into play, and had set up a rich environment for children to explore. They could also integrate literacy and language development into play by providing vocabulary and

extending their sentences, repeating what the children had said with the correct diction and syntax. They also provided a variety of inspiring materials for children to interact with, and kept on adding new materials and different tools to allow children to work with different media and be engaged in the learning process.

The other three participants pointed out that the Constructivist approach emphasized stimulating children's intrinsic motivation by focusing on what kinds of materials children could manipulate and make discoveries with on their own. What they discovered or the challenges they encountered motivated them automatically to continue their exploration, or to shift the exploration in a different direction if it was too challenging.

Emergent Curriculum, one of the Constructivist approaches, was specifically mentioned by two of the participants. Emergent Curriculum refers to the idea that the plans for the curriculum are open-ended, and that the ideas for curriculum emerge from responding to the interests, questions, and concerns "generated within a particular environment, by a particular group of people at a particular time" (Jones & Nimmo, 1994). Jones and Nimmo contend that Emergent Curriculum is never built on children's interests alone; teachers and parents also have interests worth bringing into the curriculum. The class curriculum is always open to new possibilities that had not been thought of during the initial planning process.

One of the participants, Eva, developed such curriculum based on observations

she and her colleague made regarding what interested the children. They provided materials accordingly, and continued their observations of what materials the children used the most and what they were interested in doing during the week. Based on the results of these observations, they introduced new materials to lead children for further explorations.

Although structured learning activities such as songs, reading, counting, and writing were presented to children by some participants, they gave children freedom of choice and did not force them to participate. One of the participants asserted that when children chose to engage in structured learning activities, they were intrinsically motivated because they had chosen to do so.

“Children at this age are hard to motivate intrinsically.”

The other three out of the ten participants suggested that children at the preschool age found it hard to be intrinsically motivated to learn, and that their motivation comes from external stimulation. According to one participant, “If the learning is enjoyable to them, or it is exciting and something they are interested in, then they are motivated.” To motivate children, teachers needed to figure out what the children liked and what they were excited about. In addition to children’s own interests in learning, teachers and their peers’ attitudes toward learning were also essential tools for motivating children to engage in learning activities.

Motivating children by interests.

Like the other participants, these participants also emphasized the importance of children's interest in learning. They suggested learning should be exciting and enjoyable for the children. The difference is that they focused on the structured group learning activities, both the content and how they presented it to the children. One of the participants claimed that she would not force children to go through anything they were not interested in, such as sitting still to listen to a story. Another participant mentioned that when she read books she used to skip half of the words to make the story go quicker, because the children had short attention spans. She chose to do more finger plays, movements, and songs with the children than reading because the children could not sit still. She believed that if the teacher could not keep the children's attention, then the content or the way it was presented must not be interesting to the children and the teacher needed to try something else.

The teacher's and the peers' attitudes matter.

However, four out of the ten participants, including participants from both groups, had the same idea that children were motivated by the attitude of the teacher or by their peers. One suggested that a teacher should act as an energetic, enthusiastic, and positive model in learning activities. When the teacher was enthusiastic and excited about what they were going to learn, the children would be excited about it as well. If teachers enjoyed what they were doing, the children would feel the same way. One of the

participants explained that she did fun things with the children and laughed together with them, and that the children picked up on this excitement and wanted to follow along.

Another participant found that some children were interested in doing certain things because they wanted to please their teacher or someone else significant in their lives.

Two of the participants who believed that children were naturally motivated also felt that sometimes children would be motivated by their friends or by each other since they wanted to be like their friends, to be with their friends, and to do what their friends did. A child would be motivated to learn if the other children were excited about learning.

Rewards or punishments.

There were also differing opinions about rewards and punishments among the ten participants. Three out of the ten participants asserted that children liked the approval of their teacher, and that they liked tangible material rewards. Many others believed that material reinforcements would destroy children's intrinsic motivation in learning, and suggested using positive encouragement instead of material rewards.

“Stickers work well for this age group of children.”

A couple of the participants thought that stickers worked well for children between 3 and 5 years old. They used stickers to reinforce positive behavior or encourage learning. One of them organized parties once or twice a month for children who had made progress towards their personal goals. Another felt that it depended on the situation. Stickers or material rewards, such as working together on a goal in order to

have a party, might work in transition periods, so as to get the whole group moving to accomplish a goal such as to clean up for the classroom. As for individual behavior or school work, she suggested just a pat on the back and verbal recognition of the fact that a child had done a good job.

Two participants talked about consequences for inappropriate behaviors. One of them described some consequences as not being allowed into the party, taking away a job, or being asked to calm down in the thinking-chair. Another thought that there should be no punishment, but natural consequences for the children. An example would be if someone was distracting and disturbing the others during their project work, and that person ended up not being able to finish his or her job, he or she would need to stay in to work on the task while the others went out for recess.

Another participant did not believe in material rewards, but felt they were difficult to avoid. She tried not using material rewards, but felt that the children liked stickers and they always wanted the teacher's approval. Sometimes there were children who needed some kind of incentive program because they had a really hard time doing something. She tried to make the children feel good about themselves as they tried new things, but not for the sake of rewards or to please the teacher or others. Occasionally, she would provide popcorn for everybody to celebrate their progress together as a group, or stickers for all of them "because they are all good kids."

No rewards or punishments.

Five participants expressed differing view of material rewards. They were concerned about rewards taking away the joy of learning. The majority of them suggested not applying any kind of material rewards or punishments. They tried to let the children experience the happiness of learning, such as by doing activities based on their interests and keeping them involved in play. They worked on providing children an environment that kept them enthusiastic about learning, and tried to let them experience the fun of school so that they would look forward to going to school. They believed that children would remember a fun experience rather than a bad one.

Six out of the ten participants suggested encouraging children by providing positive verbal recognition and encouragement for children's positive behaviors and schoolwork, or through facial expressions, a simple gesture, or a pat on the back. They believed that as children took great pride in their work, their positive feelings of accomplishment were the best reward. Several participants mentioned that they tried to be positive by acknowledging children's positive behaviors, and by avoiding any negative reinforcement. One of them claimed that she would never say, "No that's wrong," but instead say, "That was a very good try," and providing the correct version.

As for children's inappropriate behaviors, some participants suggested trying to understand the reasons for the misbehavior. One of the participants believed that sometimes a child's frustration might originate from "Daddy hit mommy last night," or

“Daddy was out of town.” Without language skills, some children might act out their frustration by hitting another child or knocking things down. Some participants tried to guide children to see what their actions caused or how they affected others by making them unhappy, crying and hurt. They focused on helping children learn how to express their feelings in an appropriate way and to see the difference it made, as well as understand the different feelings they might have, such as feeling good about themselves.

As for particularly challenging children, one of the participants described using a Heart System. The system required that the teacher, the parents and the child work together to decide what specific behaviors needed to be worked on. They generated a list of four or five special things that the child might like to do, which were not material rewards but rather involved spending quality time with parents. Every day when the child arrived at the program, he/she had a little slip of paper with six hearts drawn on it. The teacher wrote the child's name on it and the date. During the day, if the child forgot what he/she needed to do, the teacher would give a warning for redirection, and with the second redirection one heart would be crossed off of the slip. What the child worked toward was keeping a certain number of hearts by the end of the day, so that when the child went home he/she could choose from the list at home and receive the “reward” he/she wanted to do. This allowed the teacher to be on the same page with the parents, and also to let the child know there was consistency between what was happening at school and what was happening at home.

Summary

In summary, seven out of the ten Portland participants regarded motivation as not a concern in early childhood education, as children were naturally motivated by their curiosity, or by the play-based and constructivist approaches. They based their curriculum on children's interests and their developmental needs so that children would be engaged in meaningful learning. Three others felt it was hard to have children intrinsically motivated. They aimed at finding what interested the children so as to organize structured learning activities in an interesting way, thus encouraging children to be engaged. Some participants from both groups agreed that the teacher's attitude matters, and that children would be motivated by their peers as well.

There were also two differing ideas about rewards. Five out of the ten participants avoided using any kind of material rewards. Six participants believed in positive recognition and acknowledging children's positive behavior and the progress they made. Several participants claimed to use no negative reinforcement of any kind. However, there were three participants who found that children welcomed material rewards, and that some children were seeking their teachers' approval. Two of the participants also talked about the various degrees of consequences children had to face for their actions.

Compare and Contrast

Based on participants' reports described above, we can see there are some

similarities in participants from both cities in terms of understanding what is important in motivating children, such as teachers' attitudes and encouragement, as well as children's curiosity, interests, and feelings of success. Four participants from Shenzhen and five from Portland also tried to avoid material incentives as they were trying to avoid reinforcing the children's desire to obtain material rewards, to receive approval from teachers, or to please someone other than themselves. Some of the participants from both cities also intended to avoid putting pressures on children, and would not force children to learn. The major points of their understandings regarding motivation in learning are presented in table 11.

Table 11. Teachers' opinion about motivation

Participants Shenzhen China	Frequency	Pseudonym Initials	Participants Portland, USA	Frequency	Pseudonym Initials
Children's interest	8	A B C D F K H Y	No concerns about motivation	7	B C D E G H J
Teacher's attention & concern	7	B C D F H L Y	Encouragement	6	B C D F E G
Verbal encouragement	7	C B D K H L N	No material rewards	5	C H J F G
Avoiding pressures	5	A C D H L	Play-based curriculum	4	B G H I
Child-centered curriculum	5	B K H L N	Teachers' attitude	4	A F H I
Sense of success	4	K H L N	Constructivist approaches	3	D E J
Children's curiosity	4	A F L N	Children's curiosity	3	C G J
No material rewards	4	C D H L	Peers' influence	3	B C F

Nevertheless, there is a major difference between participants from the two social and cultural backgrounds regarding of their opinions about motivation. The findings show that the majority of the Shenzhen participants considered motivation for learning

very important, whereas the majority of the Portland participants did not list motivation as a concern.

As structured group learning activities dominate children's learning, the majority of the Shenzhen participants found it was hard to have children intrinsically motivated in a structured learning environment. They believed that some extrinsic elements, such as teachers' care and attention, as well as interesting class contents and learning materials, were likely to stimulate children's interests and were appropriate for their developmental needs.

The majority of the Portland participants found children naturally motivated by the play-based curriculum or constructivist approaches assimilated in their teaching. By integrating curriculum that emerged from children's interests and developmental needs into play, or children's interest in exploration, these participants observed intrinsic motivation in children, and thus expressed fewer concerns about motivating children to engage in learning.

Teachers' Understanding of the Role of Culture (Shenzhen)

As mentioned previously, many participants from Shenzhen had witnessed changes in their society during the past two decades, including many children in the city being only children, more and more single parent families, more stresses and tensions in many families, and children having more exposure to violence in their families, in society, or from the media. All of these factors have had a negative impact on the children. The

participants described most of the children as egocentric, passive, and lacking the concepts of caring, sharing, and motivation for learning. Some children were very aggressive, while others were timid. Participants saw the urgent need for fostering caring and sharing, as well as respecting others. Some believed that more attention and care should be given to children's psychological needs than physical needs.

Shenzhen participants believed that a good teacher was one who loved children and also was respected by children. Some participants affirmed that Confucius's ideal of respecting teachers was a good one and should be maintained. Some recognized that Chinese tradition emphasized collective processes more than individual autonomy, and that learning was more teacher-centered. They believed that autonomous thinking and children's initiative should be encouraged.

Chinese culture and autonomy.

Some participants reflected on Chinese cultural beliefs that a good teacher should be one who is strict about children's learning and the forming of their morality. This strictness was also reflected in the literature and the requirement for teaching conventional manners under the guidance of Confucius's principles. For instance, people used to think that "to feed without teaching is the father's fault; to teach without severity is the teacher's laziness" (养不教，父之过，教不严，师之惰) (Wang, 1910). However, these participants were concerned that teachers' strictness might constrain individuals and leave little room for autonomy, creating a situation where children are supposed to follow their

teachers without question, and what the teacher says should be regarded as absolutely correct.

As mentioned previously, most of the participants were concerned about the traditional Chinese view of teacher, and believed that to be a friend of the children reduced teachers' authority. As a friend, a teacher could try to see things from the children's perspective, which would help the teachers provide a better education to the children so that they might reach their potential.

Two of the participants pointed out that some of the Chinese traditions and cultural assumption were unnecessarily strict regarding manners and virtues, and that some of the parents were overprotective, placing too much emphasis on saying "no" to what children wanted to do. They asserted that, with exceptions for some safety issues, children should have choices and be given more freedom to explore on their own. They believed that both teachers and parents should understand and tolerate children's mistakes, as most of the time their mistakes resulted from their curiosity and their energy. They believed in letting children learn from their own experiences, including their mistakes.

Chinese culture and caring.

Participants were aware that Chinese culture has a tradition of respect in the care of both the old and the young. Stories of caring are well known by everyone in China. The story *Kong Rong Took a Small Pear* is one of them, telling of a four-year-old boy,

*Kong, Rong*⁴ (158-203 AD), who left himself the smallest pears, and distributed the larger ones for his one younger and five elder brothers. This exemplifies the cultural principle of caring for others more than oneself.

Some participants, such as Yang, Han, Lan, and Fu believed that it was necessary to keep this culture of caring and to instill it in the children, especially the only children. Some other participants, such as Dai and Chen, carried out projects of caring to let the children explore what adults had done for them, and what they could do to care of their parents and the people around them in return. These participants believed that care for the society starts with caring for the people around oneself.

Many participants also expressed concerns that if children were not educated to care for others when they were young, there might be a general lack of caring among people, causing many conflicts in the future society. Their opinions were echoed Lan's statement: if there were no caring relationships, life would be miserable. These participants also pointed out that many children believed that their parents should take care of them, without bothering to think about the needs of their parents and others. They were used to receiving care instead of caring for others. Early childhood educators have a big responsibility to prepare caring people for the future society.

⁴ *Kong, Rong* was a distant descendent of Confucius (*Kong, FuZi*), and a famous figure in Chinese history as a politician, scholar, and a chancellor (Book of the Later Han, chapter 70, Biography of Kong, Rong, by Fan, Ye, 398-445).

Chinese culture and motivation.

With a tradition of valuing the intellectual over all other endeavors, Chinese culture always emphasizes acquiring knowledge. Many parents assumed that early childhood education programs were supposed to teach children knowledge and skills necessary for later schooling. Three of the participants mentioned that, responding to parents' desires, many programs put their greatest efforts into academic learning, including math, English, memorizing Chinese characters, and reciting poetry. In most of the centers, structured group activities were still the main form of learning for children, while the areas of station time or play were supplementary. Giving the emphasis on knowledge acquisition rather than on children's interests, the question of how to motivate children to learn is always a concern.

Some participants also mentioned the need to instill the Chinese traditional ideals of diligence and persistence in children, as these were the characteristics necessary for being successful in learning. One of the participants, Yang, referred to the story of Li, Bai, one of the famous Tang Dynasty poets. When Li was young, he wandered around wasting his time. Then one day he saw an old lady by a stream trying to grind an iron bar into a needle. He realized that one would eventually succeed from being persistent and working hard.

Pressures from parents and society.

As mentioned above, traditionally, the intellectual had the highest respect in

Chinese society. Some participants pointed out that no matter what kind of education their parents had, they believed that the only way for children to succeed was to have a higher education. Parents' expectations for academic achievement for their children were high, which created tensions between teachers and students.

Some participants also believed that in the past parents cared more about children's physical needs and their health, and relied on the teacher to discipline the children and to take care of their learning. Now, many parents are interested in their children's education. Some of them believe in individualism and do not want their children to be restrained. Six participants mentioned that most of the parents love their children so much that they have unreasonably high expectations for teachers and want the teachers to give extra attention to their children.

Six out of the ten participants pointed out that tension also comes from the education system itself. Currently, China's education system continues to have tests for students from elementary school through high school, preparing them for the ultimate exam, the college entrance exam. This system has a strong influence on teaching and learning in the schools of China. Under the pressure of exams and the grade promoting system, it was hard to maintain an equal, harmonious, and mutually respectful relationship between the teachers and students starting in elementary school. Some of the participants felt these tensions even in early childhood education programs when reading, writing, calculating, and English learning were integrated into the curricula.

Some participants also discussed the increasing gap and the social differences among people in Chinese society. Parents' social status had its impact on children's self-esteem. For instance, when there was a field trip, most of the parents had their own cars. Those whose parents had no car felt unhappy as they rode in someone else's car.

Table 12 below summarizes the economic and ethnic backgrounds of the children and their families in the centers involved in this study.

Table 12. Economic and ethnicity background of the Shenzhen centers (10 total)

Economic background of the families	Frequency	Percent	Ethnicity background of the centers	Frequency	Percent
Middle-class (including government employees)	5	50.0	Mostly Han	8	80.0
Upper-middle class	3	30.0	Minor differing ethnicities	2	20.0
Low income	1	10.0	Very diverse	0	0.0
Mostly small business owners	1	10.0			
Total	10	100.0	Total	10	100.0

However, there were no striking differences between programs in Shenzhen in terms of the economic or ethnic backgrounds of the families. Every center accepts children from the families in neighborhood with differing social or economic statuses, while only small numbers of programs aim to serve children from upper-middle and upper-class families, which means their tuition is only affordable for wealthy parents. The latter are attractive to parents from different areas of the cities. Nevertheless, some residential areas have higher quality or higher tuition childcare programs than the others due to the real estate values. In these areas, therefore, a higher income is required to

move in. One of the participants mentioned that the center where she worked had recently moved to a residential area where 80% of the families were small business owners, which means these parents originally came from small towns or the countryside around Shenzhen, and were successful in earning money with small businesses in the city. Nonetheless, most of them were without higher education.

In regard to ethnicity, the majority people in Shenzhen are Han people. Although there are families belonging to various minority ethnic groups in China, they hardly can be counted by percentage in a big city like Shenzhen. However, as many worldwide companies have their branches in Shenzhen, some employees of these companies come from different countries. Although there are schools set up especially for the children of these employees, some of the parents prefer a normal Chinese childcare. Two of the centers, which offer a bilingual program with English immersion curriculum, have children from other countries enrolled.

Summary

In summary, six out of the ten Shenzhen participants expressed their concerns about the problems of children in the current society. There were also six participants who expressed opinions departing from Chinese tradition with respect to honoring authority rather than encouraging autonomy, valuing academic achievement rather than play, and imposing many restrictions on children's behaviors. Two of them intended to advocate freedom for children to explore and learn from their own experiences. More

than half of the participants were concerned about parents' high expectations, both for their children and for the teachers as regards academic curriculum that overemphasizes the results of children's learning. This, they asserted, caused tensions in the teacher-child relationship. Some participants also recognized China's culture of caring for others, and they sensed the necessity of educating children to receive care and also to care for the people around them.

Teachers' Understanding of the Role of Culture (Portland)

Many Portland participants believed that the cultural background and personal experiences of teachers would affect the ways they dealt with children and their families. On the other hand, the cultural background of the children and their families would also affect how teachers approached them and provided care and support.

Cultural background and teachers' personal experiences.

Some participants displayed a strong awareness of who they were and where they came from. One participant felt that her own personal experience affected the way she works with children. She talked about how the loss of her father when she was little made her concerned about what happened at the homes of the children, and how she tried to provide them a caring, loving, and affectionate environment in the classroom. She made sure the children had the affection they needed by giving them hugs and attention, especially children who seemed to lack attention from their families. She felt her religious background also helped her be positive and encouraging with children.

Another participant pointed out that teachers brought the influence of the culture of the society in which they were raised, including the way they talked, presented themselves, and formed their expectations for the children, into their classroom. The teachers' cultural and educational backgrounds, as revealed by their pronunciation, language, the hobbies they brought into the classroom, and the stories they chose to tell or chose not to tell, would influence the children. As for her own case, she felt that the schools she went through were too rigid and authoritarian. She wanted to create a classroom environment opposite from what she had experienced, and to provide more freedom for children.

Children's cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The majority of the Portland participants talked about how the cultural and ethnic background of the children and their families affected the way they dealt with the children in their classrooms. Five out of the ten participants described their centers as *very diverse* in terms of the ethnicity, language, and cultural backgrounds of the children, their families, and the staff. Two of the participants stated their centers had some children from different cultures and ethnic groups. They had put effort into learning to be more accepting and tolerant of the differences in other cultures and ethnicities. They were also aware of the different perspectives and different methods of communication of people from other cultures. Drawing on participants' descriptions, the cultural and social backgrounds of the centers where the participants worked are summarized in the table

below.

Table 13. Economic and cultural background of the Portland centers (10 total)

Economic background of the families	Frequency	Percent	Ethnicity background of the centers	Frequency	Percent
Low income	4	40.0	Very diverse	5	50.0
Middle-class	4	40.0	Mostly Caucasian	3	30.0
Upper-middle class	2	20.0	Some differing ethnicities	2	20.0
Total	10	100.0	Total	10	100.0

Many participants recognized that children's cultural background and heritage affected the way they approached the children, communicated with them, or established a relationship with them. Even children who were not ethnically or socially different from the teachers still had different families than did the teachers. Part of a teacher's job was to get to know the children, including their background, their home environment, and their relationships with the adults in their life at home. Some participants found that consideration of these factors had shifted the way they thought about the children and how to interact with them.

Being in a multicultural environment, many participants found themselves constantly trying to figure out and make sense of others' forms of communication that could be very different from their own. Differing cultural backgrounds, including ethnicities, religions, or family dynamics, could affect children's communication styles. For instance, one of the participants, Debbie, talked about how a teacher might expect children to look her in the eye when she was talking to them, though that might not be

something that a child was used to doing at home, or it might not be one of their typical forms of communication. Keeping or dropping eye contact and establishing what distance should be kept between each other's bodies so that a child from a certain cultural background to be comfortable were issues a teacher should always keep in mind. She emphasized that if a teacher thought she had been communicating her expectations to the children, but they were not receiving it, then she needed to think about the way she had communicated.

Some other participants mentioned that they had tried to accommodate every culture that the children came from in the centers by planning a variety of activities that incorporated units about different cultures. They believed doing so conveyed the message to children that their cultures were important and being utilized in school. Food, music, clothing, and items that reflect different cultures were shared and used in the classroom.

In addition to inviting parents to school to introduce their cultures, three participants also engaged in home visiting to learn from the children and their families about their cultures. Two mentioned that they learned from their colleagues or assistants who came from other countries and were raised in societies with different concepts of child rearing. That helped them to be more sensitive and tolerant toward different cultures.

In addition to ethnic and cultural differences, there were also economic and social

differences among people in the society. Often working with children from low income and single parent families, three of the participants were concerned about the possible negative influence upon the children of the struggles and stresses endured by their parents at home. They tried to provide children a comfortable and enjoyable atmosphere in which to release their stress, and also worked on providing help for the parents.

Four participants also tried to make sure that the children who did not speak English were included in the classroom. They tried to find an adult in the center who could speak the children's language to get them to feel there was someone in the classroom that they could communicate with. If that was impossible, they had the parents write down phrases that they as teachers could use to communicate with the children. Two participants, Debbie and Irene, mentioned that they would hold the hands of the children, smiling and assuring them of their safety, and show them physically where things were in the classroom and how to do things.

Many participants realized that people were used to doing things their own way, and therefore they needed to remind themselves of the different ways of other cultures. Two argued that the most important thing was to respect the requests of the parents. For example, one participant mentioned that some parents from particular cultures had restrictions for their children on attending certain activities. Another found that some parents from other cultures were concerned about keeping their children warm when going outside for recess. Although the teacher did not feel cold, she honored the parents'

and the children's choices of clothing. She understood the importance of children having part of their culture with them.

Participants found that the cultures the children brought with them enriched the environment. They viewed different cultures as learning tools for everybody in the center. Children who came from different cultures changed the way the teachers thought and taught. They alerted teachers to how they could do things differently. They also brought useful knowledge to the teachers regarding realizing what they had to do to overcome obstacles in communication with a child who came from another culture, as well as what to do to promote the understanding of other cultures.

All of the participants said they tried to honor the other cultures, values, and traditions in the classroom as much as they could. This was true even for three of the participants who described their centers as *mostly Caucasians*, serving middle or upper-middle class families in neighborhoods, and without much in the way of economic or racial diversity other than several children adopted from other countries or some racial differences among the staff members. One of them, Joy, mentioned conducting a family survey to learn about the families and their traditions, rituals, routines, and the objects that were special to them. The teachers in her center also took children on a city walk to learn about the cultures outside of the immediate community.

Summary

In summary, Portland participants reflected on the personal experiences and

cultural and social backgrounds that might influence the ways they interacted or established relationships with children. They were fully aware of the different social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds of the children in their classrooms. They had made efforts to understand and honor these differences, and to find effective ways to communicate with the children and their parents.

Compare and Contrast

Based on the societies' differing economic and political dynamics and the social and cultural background the participants came from, their focus on culture and the teacher-child relationship in some ways differed.

With more and more diverse cultures and ethnicities in their society, Portland participants displayed an increasing awareness of the differences between their own cultural assumptions and the cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds of the children and their families. There was also awareness of the differences in communication and understanding between cultures. They expressed their respect and made attempts to understand these differences.

Living in a society undergoing rapid changes in the economy and in many aspects of people's lives, Shenzhen participants showed a growing awareness of the impacts on child rearing of the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the growing numbers of single parents, the increasing incidence of domestic violence, and the impact after thirty years of the One Child Policy. They also acknowledged the challenges these changes

pose to educating a caring person, as well as the pressures placed on children by their parents, schools, and the society.

Summary of Chapter Four

This chapter presents participants' views about caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation, as well as the changing of social conditions and cultural influences in the early childhood education program where they worked. The reasons participants chose to work in early childhood education programs varied, from affection for children, to personal preference, to the circumstances in a transitional moment of their lives. Most of their decisions were associated with both their personal and the social, including cultural and political, situations in the society in which they lived. Participants from both cities shared an understanding about the importance of establishing caring relationships between teachers and children and among the children, as well as building a positive and supportive social environment in the classroom. Their understanding of their role as a teacher; the characteristics of caring; and the importance of trust, mutual respect, and acceptance were similar to some extent. Similarities also exist in what they described as effective strategies for establishing caring and sharing among children, such as modeling, recognizing children's caring actions, encouraging children to make friends and to obtain social skills for communicating, sharing, and taking turns.

The participants' understandings of autonomy and motivation differed somewhat in accordance with cultural, social, practical, and philosophical differences. For example,

under the guidance of constructivist or social constructivist theories, the majority of Portland participants reported applying play-based curriculum. Some claimed working under the guidance of Reggio Emilia or Montessori approaches, or Emergent Curriculum, created a learning environment in which children had more freedom to explore and to make autonomous decisions about what to learn or how to learn. According to these participants, intrinsic motivation was observed in children, thus was not a major concern for them. The western educational philosophies and innovative teaching approaches described above were also recognized and valued by many participants in Shenzhen. However, in Shenzhen the guidance and approaches introduced from other cultures were still only tentatively applied, and were regarded as being in an experimental period. While recognizing the importance of autonomy and creativity in learning, teachers reported limited choices for children in a predominant structured learning environment, as knowledge and skill acquisition were still valued the most by people in Chinese society. Researchers, educators and early childhood practitioners might need to work together to find a way to adapt these theories and practices to fit into Chinese culture, educational practice, and societal needs.

In the next chapter, a further discussion will focus on connections between the perspectives of the participants, the current research, and theories about caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation in learning. The results of the study will also be addressed as regards the way they answer the research questions and reflect the cultural

differences of the participants. Recommendations for future inquiry, as well as the importance of the findings to early childhood education in both cultures, will also be discussed.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

This study has explored perspectives of early childhood teachers (N=20) working within two different cultural contexts, Shenzhen, China and Portland, Oregon. The inquiry was focused on participants' understanding of caring, of the relationships they claimed they had established with children, of their self-reported experiences in fostering autonomy and motivation in the children in their classroom, and of the ways that cultural and social influences from their society were reflected in their perspectives and their practices. The study has also examined participants' understanding of the relationships among the children, as well as their perceptions of autonomy and motivation. By doing so, the researcher intends to shed a light on their varying perspectives on the values of fostering caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation.

The results of the study show strong consistency in teachers' understandings of caring, which indicates that caring is a cultural value shared among the participants from the two cultures. The consistency of teachers' understanding of caring across cultures reflects the emphasis on caring in the field of early childhood education in general, and this understanding appears to be aligned with theories and the literature on caring to some extent. However, social and cultural differences greatly influence their understandings and practices regarding the concepts of autonomy and motivation. Although there were

similarities among the participants from both cultures in their interpretations of particular concepts, individuals' assumptions about encouraging autonomy were also dissimilar to some extent. Their senses of the role of intrinsic motivation in children also varied depending on the social, cultural, and educational contexts and individual perspective.

Results show that the play-based curriculum and constructivist approaches applied by most of the Portland participants permitted certain degrees of autonomy for children in their classrooms. These teachers did not view motivation as a concern since children exhibited intrinsic motivation within such learning environments. However, Shenzhen participants found it difficult to encourage intrinsic motivation in children in a structured learning environment. This finding may offer guidance for further exploration of the meaning of learning and for rethinking of the recent increase in academic emphasis in education in both cultural contexts.

In this chapter, the discussion focuses on the similarities and differences between participants' understandings of caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation in the two cultures from which this study drew samples, as well as on how these understandings answer the research questions and reflect theories in the field and prior research. The significance, in terms of what revealed by this study, the possible implications of the study, and the possible directions for future investigation, as well as the limitations of the study, are also addressed. Based on the research questions, the discussion is organized as follows:

1. Teachers' understandings of caring relationships;
2. Teachers' perspectives on autonomy and cultural assumptions;
3. Social, cultural, and educational contexts and motivation;
4. Significance of the study;
5. Possible implications;
6. Future investigation;
7. Limitations of the study;
8. Conclusion.

Teachers' Understandings of Caring Relationships

The first task of this study was to find out how preschool teachers in each cultural setting understood and constructed caring relationships with and among children in their classrooms. When comparing the two groups of participants' responses, the many similarities in their perceptions of themselves as caring teachers, their work, and their relationships with children are striking. Despite pronounced cultural differences, both groups described in similar ways their understandings of caring relationships, their practice of building such relationships, the importance of establishing trust and strong bonds between teachers and the children, and the importance of creating a positive and supportive social environment in the classroom. Many participants emphasized their attentiveness to children by providing physical care and emotional support. They agreed that it is critical to demonstrate respect to children in order to be trusted and accepted by

them. Participants from both groups also recognized the importance of fostering caring and sharing among children, as many of them were concerned about the difficulties faced by only children. Similarities also emerged in their concerns about the obstacles they faced in building caring relationships with children. Furthermore, the perceptions of the participants from both cities are to some extent consistent with theories and research on caring.

Nevertheless, despite the consensus about the value of caring relationships, a supportive environment, and several other aspects of caring, differences exist in some of the underlying assumptions of participants from the two cities that may be culturally based. For instance, emphasizing mutual respect or equality between teacher and children reflects to some extent the different social-cultural beliefs and educational practices of the two contexts.

The major ideas guiding participants' understandings of caring, as well as the social and cultural influences reflected by their understandings, are discussed below:

- (a) physical care and emotional support,
- (b) respect, trust, and acceptance,
- (c) fostering caring and sharing among children,
- (d) the multiple roles of a teacher,
- (e) obstacles in building caring relationships with children, and
- (f) mutual respect or equality.

Physical care and emotional support.

The importance of caring and attentiveness to children's physical and emotional needs were emphasized by participants from both groups. They viewed caring as a long-term commitment, as the majority described their love of children and of their work. They believed that loving children is the most important aspect of their job. As a loving teacher they commit to meeting children's needs, and ensure that children will be cared for, will be loved, and will feel comfortable in the classroom. They considered caring relationships and a supportive environment essential for children's well-being and sense of security in the classroom.

Participants stressed the importance of being approachable under any circumstances, with both groups making similar remarks such as: "They know they can count on me," "They can come to me," and "They will tell me whatever problems they have." Many participants felt the necessity of providing physical contact, such as hugs or pats on the back, in order to express care, particularly since younger children often need such contact in order to feel assured of the care of the teacher (Vogt, 2002).

Many participants interpreted this love and their relationships with children as similar to the bond between mother and children, and their roles as similarly caring as a mother or a family member, whether an aunt, sister, brother, or grandmother. They claimed that they treated the children in their classroom as their own. They intended to provide the children a sense of family by establishing a classroom environment that was

like a family unit or “a home away from home” (Portland participant, Holly).

This notion of fostering caring relationships echoes the theories and research regarding teachers' beliefs about caring (e.g. Mayeroff, 1971; Vogt, 2002; Martin, 1992; Noddings, 2002; Nieto, 2003; & Johnston, 2006). Noddings (1992) posits that caring consists of great attentiveness from the one caring to the one cared-for. When one cares, one is attentive to the other's needs, and can hear, see, or feel what the other tries to convey. According to Vogt (2002), elementary teachers interviewed from two different cultures extended this attentiveness by interpreting teaching as parenting or mothering, and teaching as based on caring relationships between teachers and children. The six elementary teachers Johnston (2006) interviewed in Northeastern America also had the feeling they were mothering their students, or the desire to develop a sense of family in their classroom to instill understanding and tolerance in students. Johnston (2006) contends that the relationship of mother to child is one that many of us understand as deeply loving and responsible. With the lack of other better terms to describe the sense of loving and responsibility a teacher feels toward students, the term *mother* was the easiest word for people to use to interpret this kind of affection. Caring was perceived by teachers as an integral part of teaching and their commitment to the students, as the nature of working with young children demands and fosters an ethical orientation towards care (Vogt, 2002). According to Vogt, there were no gender differences regarding the interpretation of caring as commitment or as parenting, nor were there striking cultural

differences described in his results from the 32 elementary school teachers from both England and Switzerland. The current study's finding is, thus, consistent with previous research.

Respect, trust, and acceptance.

Many participants in the current study agreed that to love is to respect, to understand, and to accept children for who they are. Respect and acceptance were referred to as ways of receiving other peoples' ideas and seeing goodness in them. Participants demonstrated their respect either by seeing children as competent, or by finding out underlying reasons and purposes for their actions through observing, listening, and talking with them. They emphasized knowing children's concerns, their strengths, and their weaknesses in order to meet their needs. The sense of being cared for, trusted and accepted was also important for children who lack such emotional support at home.

These points of view are consistent with theories and prior research on elementary teachers in different cultures. Samples in Vogt's (2002) study contend that a caring teacher is approachable and interested in the personal situation of each individual child. According to Johnston's (2006) study, teachers believe that a teacher who does not know his/her students will not be able to teach them. They learn about their students by paying attention to them, watching and listening to them, and giving every student a chance to tell the teacher what they think, as being heard allows each child to feel worthwhile (Johnston, 2006). In this way, teachers establish connections with their students, so the

students may develop a sense of trust and respect in a caring relationship.

Many participants from both groups also mentioned the importance of caring and developing a sense of acceptance for children who came from disadvantaged family backgrounds, such as low income, single parent families or families where domestic violence exists. They sensed the stresses in these families and the possible impacts on the children, or the lack of respect, love, and attention children might be receiving from their parents. They considered it critical for the teachers to provide love and a positive influence for these children as compensation for their emotional needs. They would have liked to play a vital role in the children's lives by providing support, allowing these children to grow healthy both physically and psychologically. Their understandings echo the opinions of many researchers (e.g. Birch & Ladd, 1998; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; Noblit & Rogers, 1995) who conclude from their research that caring from a teacher in a supportive environment is especially important for children coming from difficult life circumstances or demonstrating aggressive behaviors.

Fostering caring and sharing among children.

Participants from both cities also shared similar ideas about fostering caring and sharing among children. Besides expressing similar concerns about only children, they described techniques such as modeling and encouragement to promote social interaction and pro-social behaviors among children in their classroom.

The concerns about only children.

Thirty years after the implementation of the one-child policy, most of the Shenzhen participants expressed concerns about the problems of only children. They were concerned that these children depended on adults to take care of them, but lacked the concept of caring for people around them or sharing with their peers. They sensed the urgent need to foster caring and sharing among children. Some of the Portland participants also expressed such concerns about children who had no siblings at home and their problems with sharing and taking turns. Participants from both groups agreed with using such techniques as helping children to make friends, assigning them classroom duties, and creating opportunities for children to care, to share, to cooperate with others, and to respect and learn to listen to each other.

Modeling and encouragement.

In the context of talking about fostering caring and sharing among children, participants from both groups expressed similar ideas regarding modeling. They were fully aware that what they say and what they do, and how they interact with children and the other adults in the classroom, would be picked up quickly by the children. They claimed that they were committed to caring for the children, to collaborating, and to supporting each other in the classroom. Similar ideas also arose when participants talked about being positive, such as by giving children positive feedback and encouragement while recognizing their caring actions in the classroom. With their recognition of

children's caring actions, teachers not only reinforced children's desire to care, but also set peer models for others in the classroom.

These understandings agree with Noddings's (1992) ethic of care, as she posits that a teacher must be one who shows students how to care by creating caring relations with them, but not one who tells students how to care, since children learn how to care by being cared for. Johnston (2006) also asserts that teachers need to teach, practice, and model the behaviors they would like to see from students, and even from other teachers themselves, in social relationships. Teachers must care for the children so the children can learn how to care for others. Encouragement from teachers is also effective in increasing students' sense of belonging, positive self-esteem, acceptance of self and others, autonomy, and willingness to explore (Evans, 1996).

The multiple roles of a teacher.

Participants from both cities also described their multiple roles in relation to children in various circumstances, and the necessity of having rules and boundaries in a classroom.

A friend, yet a teacher.

The majority of Shenzhen participants saw themselves as having multiples roles depending on differing circumstances. They claimed that a teacher should take care of children as a mother figure, while providing physical care, but play with children as their friend to gain trust, acceptance, and understanding. However, they should return to the

teacher's role to provide guidance or to give instructions during structured group learning activities. Many of them expressed similar ideas suggesting that a teacher should not be an authority figure, yet rules and boundaries are necessary. With an understanding of the rules, children can concentrate on learning, and also be relaxed while playing.

A disciplinarian trusted by children.

Some Portland participants also had the feeling of being a mother figure while spending long days with children, sensing an increased need for providing physical care. In contrast, on a short day shift they took on more of a teacher's role and concentrated more on teaching. Many also mentioned the necessity of maintaining boundaries and discipline, as they described how they discussed with the children and set up rules and consequences for the class to follow at the beginning of the year, and then revised them together during the year. One referred her role as that of a disciplinarian who was trusted by the children to provide guidance and redirection for those whose behaviors might not be acceptable.

These views, shared by participants, appear to be consistent with the constructivist view of rules and discipline in early childhood education (Castle, 2004; DeVries & Zan, 2003). There should be necessary norms, rules, and boundaries in a constructivist classroom, but constructivist teachers should cooperate with children in rule making, encouraging and fostering children's abilities in decision making and problem solving, and teachers should minimize the use of external control as much as

possible (DeVries & Zan, 2003). Johnston (2006) contended that in the creation of self-control it is not necessary for teachers to abdicate their authority, leaving children without the protective guidelines of clear boundaries, limits, or strategies. What matters the most is that the rules are not just coming from the teachers as an external control, but that they are established as a result of the cooperation between the teacher and children.

Obstacles in building caring relationships with children.

Participants from both cultures mentioned that high stress from work, or pressures to carry out certain curricula, objectives, or assessments for academic accountability, created tensions that affected their relationships with children. With concerns about classroom management, or having the children fulfill tasks or work on attractive projects enforced by administrators, teachers' time and energy to think about the children and their needs decreased.

Shenzhen participants specified that class size impacted their ability to have real conversations with each child and to understand them better. Responding to market pressures, either for reasons of survival or making profits, the class size had increased in many private programs. Many participants mentioned that having 35 to 40 children in one classroom kept teachers busy with classroom management and dealing with conflicts, but allowed for less attention to individuals' needs.

Mutual respect or equality.

Participants from both cities considered mutual respect and equality between

teachers and children important. They also expressed in similar ways that this respect should be based on understanding the children and seeing the good in everyone via observation, listening, and one-on-one communication. They understood that a relationship is not dictated by the desires of only one person in the relationship, but that all those involved make a difference in the direction the relationship takes (Johnston, 2006; Noddings, 1992). However, based on the different curricula and educational emphasis, Portland participants emphasized mutual respect as necessary for collaboration in a learning community, whereas Shenzhen participants referred to their relationships with children as that of friends, with the intention of emphasizing the equality between teacher and the children within collective groups.

Mutual respect within a learning community

Portland participants used the expression “mutual respect” to describe their relationships with children more consistently than did their counterparts in Shenzhen. One of the participants defined mutual respect as building a collaborative learning community in the classroom which includes all of the children. Within this learning community, the teacher and children respect each other, collaborating with each other and working together on things that interest them all. The teacher cares for the children by trusting that they are competent, and engaging them in activities that interest them and are necessary for their development. The classroom settings are accessible and dedicated for the children’s use, so they are encouraged to explore independently and have control

of their learning by knowing where they can find materials. Children feel secure in the classroom environment, as the teachers are there to help them when they need it. Limits and boundaries are also necessary to keep everybody safe. The mutual respect in this learning community appears to be based on constructivist views of the child and his/her learning which encourage collaboration among learners and also allow them to have a degree of control over their own learning.

Equality within collective groups.

The majority of the Shenzhen participants preferred to describe their relationships with children as those between friends. The underlying assumption here is that although there are situations that require them to be in charge, they wanted to be equal with the children so as to gain their trust. This understanding reveals changes in teachers' perceptions of their role as a teacher from that of the traditional authority figure, one who transmits knowledge, to one willing to be a friend to his/her students. As some participants mentioned, traditionally, Chinese people perceive the teacher as a moral and intellectual model who has absolute authority and respect from students (师道尊严 *shi dao zun yan*), despite a Confucius quotation which indicates that a teacher is not necessarily better than his students both intellectually and morally. A teacher (or anyone) should learn from others who have good ideas. There is a story that once Confucius heard about a very intelligent nine year old boy, so he traveled for several days to visit him. As he found that the boy answered his questions with extraordinary wisdom, he said:

“When traveling and joining two other travelers on the road, at least one of them must know something that I can learn from” (三人行, 必有我师 *san ren xing, bi you wo shi*). Confucius’s principles emphasize the moral aspects of humanity and the cultivation of the qualities of a person, especially a teacher. A teacher should care for his student because “he who is cared for by his teacher, will believe in his teacher” (亲其师, 信其道 *qin qi shi, xin qi dao*). Nonetheless, this care is what DeVries and Zan (1994) describe as a combination of an authoritarian attitude with affection, from which students can still feel the effects of coercion. The prevailing image of children is they are young, naïve, and “a blank slate,” and it is up to the teachers to transmit knowledge, to cultivate character, and to *shape children’s lives into beautiful pictures* (Chinese Saying).

However, with the opening of the country over the past three decades, Western educational philosophies, theories, and practices have been rushing into the country and have been eagerly welcomed by Chinese educators. Teachers are being gradually awakened from the limits of the traditional views about teachers and children, as illustrated by one participant’s remark that she and her colleagues had been working on their relationships with children in recent years. Teachers sense the urgent need to minimize the authority of the teacher and to see children as individual human beings, though conflicts and confusions remains regarding traditional views, the reality of the society, and the theories they would like to apply. They sense the importance of the individual’s needs, but they also value the collective and work on establishing children’s

sense of being a member of a group, as early patriotic education began with loyalty to the group unit, to the class and the center, to the city, and finally the country. Instruction in collectivity emphasizes a harmonious atmosphere, sharing, and helping others in the group. As a member of a collective unit, children should take pride in being part of the group, work together, and take care of their peers.

In short, what teachers from both cities emphasized regarding caring reflects the social and cultural realities they came from. The terminology such as *mutual respect* and *equality* may be similar in some extent, but participants' underlying assumptions were distinct. The mutual respect most of the Portland participants emphasized focused on developing children's social skills and working collaboratively to create a learning community. Shenzhen participants' emphasis on equality reflects the current philosophical changes in Chinese education, and their efforts to minimize the use of traditional authority in their practices and to foster a sense of collectivity among children.

Summary

To summarize the discussion above, participants from both groups expressed similar conceptions about caring and the relationships they intended to foster with children. The consistency in teachers' understandings of caring indicates the importance of caring in early childhood education in the different cultures. While these understandings appear consistent with theories and research about caring, teachers' assumptions and some of their practices reflect the influence of the social and cultural

contexts where they came from. These findings may help us to reflect on our own assumptions about caring, as well as to further define the meaning of caring in education in both societies.

Teachers' Perspectives on Autonomy and Social and Cultural Assumptions

Another focus of this study was exploring preschool teachers' understanding and practice of fostering autonomy in preschool children in the two cultural settings. Further differences between participants from Shenzhen and Portland came to the fore when examining teachers' understanding of autonomy in children's lives and learning in their classrooms. Participants' understanding of autonomy and its manifestation in their classrooms differed somewhat, despite some similar ideas that children in early childhood education settings cannot be totally autonomous. They believed that at an early age children are not mature enough to control their own behavior, and thus there are limits and boundaries children have to follow in a classroom setting where group activities are predominant. The major divergence appears when Shenzhen participants emphasized children's abilities to self-help and self-control so as to fit into collective groups, while their counterparts in Portland stressed the importance of choices for children, the accessibility of classroom materials, and the critical need for fostering social skills in children in order to form a community. These views and practices, as well as the social and cultural assumptions that help shape them, are discussed further below:

- (a) self-help and self-regulation,
- (b) choices, accessibility, and community, and
- (c) various understandings of autonomy.

Self-help and self-regulation.

Generally, participants from Shenzhen used terms such as independence to refer to children's self-help skills, their ability to do things for themselves, and self-regulation for following the rules in the classroom and being able to fit into the collective group.

Autonomy was defined as having the ability to think for oneself and have one's own ideas for taking initiative, which many believed was an advanced stage of development for this age group. They aimed at helping children increase their abilities in self-reliance and self-regulation (or self-control), so they could fit into the norms of the class. For most of the Shenzhen participants, the class size, the traditional views of education, and the problems of only children seem to shift the focus away from autonomy in their classrooms.

Class size.

According to Shenzhen participants' description of their working environment, they worked with a large group of children. With a large class size and limited materials for children to use in play (compared with what children have in Portland), following the rules is important, and the ability to control oneself is highly valued. Although many participants expressed their willingness to provide children choices so as to develop their

competence in decision making and to encourage independent thinking, with a large class size and structured group activities being the predominant learning activities, the teachers had to be in charge most of the time, with the rare exception of free play periods. The degrees of autonomous decision making, or opportunities for children to make their own choices, were limited. Further evidence of these limitations was revealed when some participants declared that there should be no choices for children regarding participating in the structured learning activities necessary for carrying out the educational goals, or regarding consuming food for their nutrition.

Chinese traditional views of education.

Shenzhen participants' understandings reflect the social assumptions in the society and the traditional views of education to some extent. Traditionally, Chinese culture suppresses autonomy. For instance, the practice of the *Tiger Mom* serves as an extreme but well know example of Chinese traditional views of children and their education. According to Chua's (2011) memoir *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, there were many rules for her daughters to follow, including not being allowed to "be in a school play" or even "complain about not being in a school play," as well as not being allowed to "choose their own extracurricular activities," and "get any grade less than an A." Many Chinese parents may agree with her, since coercion was a common practice in the old days, and was believed to be *good* for children, as it would pay off later for them. Tiger Mom's strict rules reflect a traditional view of the child as dependant on or property

of the parents, and as expected to obey adults, especially parents and teachers.

Autonomous thinking was suppressed instead of encouraged. Tiger Mom's rules also reflect the social assumption that "academic achievement reflects successful parenting" (Chua, 2011).

The only children.

Nevertheless, the many only children in the society are also an important factor that influences the dynamics and practice of child rearing in the society. There were concerns voiced by the teachers about only children, as most of them were described as pampered, spoiled, selfish, self-centered, and tending to be more rebellious than the older generations or those in overseas Chinese families. They have their every need met, and everything done for them by the adults around them, especially the grandparents. They lacked the basic self-help skills, not to mention the ability to think of or care for others, share, or make friends.

Ultimately, despite teachers' understanding of the importance of autonomous decision making, opportunities for children to make choices are limited. For children in early childhood educational programs, following instructions and obtaining self-help skills are the most important tasks. To learn to interact with peers in a group and to share with others are other important characteristics to instill in children.

Choices, accessibility, and community.

While talking about autonomy, or the independence of the children, as some

participants referred to it, some of the Portland participants emphasized allowing choices for children and the importance of the accessibility of the classroom materials. Others stressed the importance of fostering social skills in children to build community in the classroom.

Choices and classroom materials accessibility.

Most of the Portland participants emphasized the importance of children having choices and control over part of their day, as well as having the skills to do things for themselves and not be dependent on another person. In allowing children to have their own choices, it is equally important that a classroom environment is accessible for children, where children have opportunities to work on their own. As the majority of the participants adopted play as the major learning activity in their classroom, they stressed the importance of the accessibility of the classroom materials that allowed children have control over their own learning. Participants specified that it is critical for a teacher to recognize the different interests and different capabilities among children so as to tailor curriculum to each individual's needs. To allow children's own inner creativities to be developed and to allow them to become the person they need to be, teachers should provide children the choice to work on what interests them, rather than requiring them to learn what they are not interested in learning and pushing them to become somebody that they are not.

Social skills and community.

Some Portland participants emphasized fostering children's social skills and promoting community. They believed that no one in the society could be totally autonomous, even as adults, but that having some choices and opportunities to be oneself is important. They focused on fostering children's social skills, as children need to learn how to act in a group, how to take turns and share, and how to be respectful of others. They stressed the importance of fostering children's abilities to use their words to communicate, negotiate, and interact with others in an appropriate manner so that they can become increasingly independent as their ability develop.

Various understandings of autonomy.

As mentioned previously, some participants referred to autonomy as a sense of oneself in relation to other people, acquired by knowing that one is unique from the others. Another focused on the importance of a child being able to make moral decision, such as saying no to things that are against one's will and not always doing what everybody else does. However, some participants did not consider autonomy as part of their terminology in preschool. Discussions with many participants in both cities depict autonomy as individualism, as being all-by-oneself, totally separated from others, or being totally free of control from adults. These understandings of autonomy differ from the constructivist views of autonomy. The present findings seem consistent with Castle's (2003) proposition that the term autonomy means different things to different people, and

mixed definitions are also given in the professional literature in education. From a constructivist's view, autonomy is self-regulation implying separateness within a broader community (DeVries & Zan, 1994; Castle, 2003), or the ability to make good choices through considering the best interests of all (Kamii & Housman, 2000). Autonomy does not mean separation from others at all, but rather continued integration and coordination within the social realm (DeVries 1997; Castle, 2003). Children develop the ability to make moral and intellectual decisions through interactions in relationships that are mutual and reciprocal, and in relationships in which children feel affection and trust. Children's autonomy can be undermined by adults who exert too much control over them, or encouraged by adults who reduce their own authority in cooperation with children (Piaget, 1932/1965). Autonomy appears only when there is no unnecessary external pressure, and in the context of self constructed rules (Piaget, 1932/1965). To foster autonomy in children, teachers must reduce their adult authority by providing opportunities for children to make decisions, cooperate with others, think on their own, solve problems, and create rules. The ability to understand another's perspective through cooperation is crucial for autonomy. Autonomous children can think for themselves, reflect, and learn from the negative consequences of their poor choices (DeVries & Zan, 1994).

To encourage children to be independent, there must be reasonable opportunities for choices and controls, with consistent, firm, reassuring limits set by caring adults

(DeVries & Zan, 1994). Within such an environment, children possess high self-esteem, are confident, and are able to take others' opinions into consideration so as to adjust their own behaviors. In a child-centered learning environment, the teacher interacts with children in a warm and responsive way that establishes a caring and secure relationship between teacher and children; such a caring relationship helps children to self-regulate (Baldwin, DaRos-Voseles, & Swick, 2003). Within such a learning community, children also have access to all of the materials, make their own decisions of what to use and how to use it, communicate and negotiate with each other, and have greater degrees of autonomy.

Summary

In summary, the Shenzhen participants' understandings of autonomy reflect the cultural and social tradition in their society. Many of them focused on children's abilities to self-help and self-control in order to deal with the problems of only children. They sensed the children's needs for decision making and control over their own learning, yet choices for children were limited due to large class sizes, material limitations, and the norms of the society. Portland participants generally stressed the importance of choices for children and the accessibility of the classroom materials, with some sensing a critical need for fostering social skills to promote a community in the classroom. Although some Portland participants did not use the term autonomy, or did not think children could be totally autonomous in a classroom setting, what they described in their practices reflected

to some extent the constructivist view of autonomy. These various views of autonomy call for further reflection on our assumptions about autonomy. It suggests a need for further explorations regarding the meaning of autonomy, and in particular its meaning in early childhood education in various social and cultural contexts. A better understanding of autonomy may help teachers and teacher educators improve their practices and achieve the common goals of education, such as meeting the developmental needs of young children.

Social, Cultural and Educational Contexts and Motivation

To explore preschool teachers' understanding of intrinsic motivation in the two different cultural contexts was another important task of this study. As mentioned previously, the results found that participants' perspectives on motivation were shaped by the social, cultural and educational contexts of the societies they lived in. Specifically, Chinese cultural beliefs regarding teaching and learning influence parents' expectations of education and the current educational system, which in some extent limits what a teacher can do in terms of subject matter, learning content, teaching methods and many other aspects of education. Under pressures from the heavy academic emphasis in education and prevalent instructional learning activities in the classroom, Shenzhen participants did not see the possibility of intrinsic motivation in children, but emphasized external means by which teachers can motivate children to be engaged in such learning. However, the majority of their counterparts in Portland expressed no concerns about

motivation since play was incorporated in their curriculum, which is related to a decentralized educational system and the possible influence of constructivist approaches. The discussions below focus first on the Chinese cultural and educational system and its influence on Shenzhen participants' understanding of motivation, and then present the influences on and understandings of participants in Portland:

- (a) social and cultural beliefs regarding teaching and learning in China,
- (b) the impact of the educational system in China, and
- (c) educational contexts and teachers' beliefs about motivation in the U.S.

Social and cultural beliefs regarding teaching and learning in China.

As mentioned previously, Chinese traditional understandings of teaching and learning were strongly influenced by Confucius's philosophy and his principles of education. In this traditional view, learning was limited to certain subjects, such as literacy, math, science, skills, and memorizing what had been passed down through history. Through learning, a person understood his position and relations, as well as his own responsibilities in the society. Intellect, knowledge, and diligence were highly valued.

This tradition viewed the child as a miniature adult, and his learning as preparation for adulthood. The teacher's role was to transmit knowledge, provide instruction and reasoning, and clear up doubts. Teachers should have absolute authority, dominate the learning process, and be respected. Although efforts have been put toward

educational reforms, and although teachers welcome new concepts and innovative ideas in education as well as the opportunity to change their roles from transmitters, leaders, and instructors to observers, facilitators, and participants, they are still expected by the parents and the society to transmit knowledge and provide instruction to children for academic purposes.

Expectations of Chinese parents.

All Chinese parents hope their children will be successful and become science geniuses, math whizzes, or music prodigies later in their lives (Chua, 2011). There is a common saying that all parents “wish their son to be a dragon, their daughter to be a phoenix” (望子成龙, 望女成凤 Pinyin: *Wang zi cheng long, wang nu cheng feng*). With brain research and other sciences revealing the importance of early stimulation of the brain, eager parents rush to anyone who claims to use this or that “scientific method” to train children to reach their potential (Su, 2010b). To satisfy the parents’ desires, many early childhood programs offer reading, math, and English (sometimes called “bilingual” programs) (Jiang, 2010), or have associated their curricula and teaching approaches with many big names or experts (Su, 2010b). Many programs also offer arts skills learning as a feature of their extracurricular activities (Yu, 2010).

Montessori programs have been popular in recent years in China; no matter how high the tuition these programs ask, parents are still rushing to them. Research shows that the basic standards the Montessori approach requires, such as well trained teachers,

mixed age classrooms, and ongoing time for hands on activities, were not met in many programs that claimed to apply Montessori approaches (He, 2010). Nevertheless, as early childhood education operates on a free market, the successful program is the one that can sell what the parents want. These issues in Chinese early childhood education explain participants' concerns about pressures from parents, as well as an academic focus that may hinder children's intrinsic motivation in learning.

The impact of the educational system in China.

The expectations of Chinese parents and the issues described above also reflect the impact of the Chinese educational system. Despite years of governmental efforts to introduce educational reforms, Chinese education is still the “epitome of high-stakes testing” (Romanowski, 2006), as the College Entrance Exam dictates the curriculum and all aspects of the basic education in China. Starting as early as elementary school, students spend their school life preparing for this ultimate examination, which determines not only the content of students' education, but also the economic and social quality of their future lives (Rao et al., 2003; Romanowski, 2006). The exam not only limits students' opportunities to develop competence in autonomous and creative thinking, but also changes their attitudes towards knowledge and learning. As “students do not have opportunities to ask questions, and they are not encouraged to express their own ideas and perspectives,” many of them focus only on knowledge and skills that are covered in the exams, and on what can increase their scores (Romanowski, 2006, p.80).

As passing the college exams is the only way to ensure a better future, parents wish to have their children's cognitive potential developed to the utmost during their preschool and kindergarten years so they can be well prepared for schooling, possessing knowledge and skills such as how to read, write, and count. Under such pressures, intense knowledge and skills learning starts earlier and earlier, with less and less time for children to play or explore for themselves (Qin, 2010). Fostering students' creativity is an ideal of education in China, but it is hard to carry out in reality. The development of children's interpersonal understanding and sociomoral competence are also likely to be hindered by the heavily academic and teacher-centered programs (DeVries & Zan, 1994).

Tensions between teacher and students.

Because of the intense academic focus in Chinese education, there are tensions in teacher-student relationships. To implement the objectives of the curriculum, many Chinese teachers believed that coercion was necessary for the *good* of the students (China Educational Online Forum [CEOFF], May 2011). A middle school teacher who wanted to correct "bad" behaviors among students, such as cheating, not doing their homework, or not learning what they were supposed to learn, believed it was necessary to use spanking as a punishment for their irresponsible behaviors, and was upset by objections from the parents (CEOFF, May 2011). This kind of thinking reveals that some teachers care very much for their students, but they still hold the belief that they are the ones who know and who should have the authority to give instructions for what students are supposed to learn

and do. Such relationships lead to a lack of respect, trust, and equality between teachers and their students, eventually hindering students' intrinsic motivation in learning.

Limited support and material resources.

Although one of the participants pointed out that tensions between teacher and children are not as strong as those in grade schools, other barriers participants identified for Chinese early childhood teachers include a lack of support and resources, as well as large class sizes. These factors limit overall teacher-student interactions, opportunities for student creativity, and teachers' individualized attention to students. Some participants believed that children could discover their interests and be able to explore and actively engage in learning activities if there were ample materials for them to select from and to interact with. The result would be fewer aggressive behaviors, allowing teachers to focus on observing and collaborating in children's learning processes, and thus better facilitate their learning. Within such an environment, that encourages children to use their energy in an active and involved way to learn, their confidence would grow, their competency would increase, and motivation would not be a concern.

Based on China's cultural, social, and educational contexts described above, Shenzhen participants found it was difficult for children to be intrinsically motivated in a structured learning environment. Motivation is a big concern, even in the field of early childhood education from which the present study drew its participants.

Educational contexts and teachers' beliefs about motivation in the U.S.

The majority of the Portland participants did not consider motivation a concern for children in their programs. They believe that children were naturally motivated while engaging in activities or play to search for meanings relevant to their interests in the classroom, rather than while following the instructions of teachers in structured learning. Children are born with curiosity, and what teachers should do is develop projects based on children's interests, or provide materials that promote children's interest and curiosity to explore. This perspective, described by many participants as play-based curricula, and by others as associated with constructivist approaches, is applied in most of the early childhood education programs where the participants work in Portland. However, there were also programs in which curricula emphasize assessment and academic accountability, or knowledge development, and a large portion of the activities are teacher-centered, dedicated to recognizing letters or numbers, or to reading. Participants working in these programs did not see children as intrinsically motivated. They were concerned about motivating children, and sensed the need for using oral and material reinforcements to motivate children to work on tasks.

Summary

In summary, Shenzhen participants' understandings of motivation reflect Chinese cultural beliefs about education, the educational system, and current practices that focus heavily on academic knowledge and skills learning. Portland participants who utilize

play-based or social constructivist approaches, which involve developing curriculum based on children's curiosity and interests, were less concerned about motivation. Participants' perspectives on intrinsic motivation seem to align with motivation theory, which asserts that when children's needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness are satisfied, they will be intrinsically motivated. Intrinsic motivation seems difficult to observe in a teacher-centered learning environment where children are passive recipients, or where the contents of learning are irrelevant to their interests and developmental needs. These findings might be useful for early childhood teachers and teacher educators in rethinking the educational goals and curricula in both social and cultural contexts.

The Significance of the Study

As mentioned previously, this study intends to convey the perspectives of early childhood teachers from two different cultures regarding caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation. The results of the study present knowledge of different conceptions of these values, which reflect particular social and cultural influences of the societies they came from. The study's significance is that it provides opportunities for educators to learn from each other, and also to reflect on their own assumptions about education for young children.

As we all know, living in an era of increasing global cooperation and economic development, mutual understanding among nations is necessary. Teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning are affected by their increasingly international awareness and

changes in each society due to the influence of global trends in education. To achieve our common goal to improve education for children, it is critical to understand the role of culture in teacher beliefs and perspectives on education (Wang et al., 2008). It is also essential for teachers and teacher educators to acknowledge and to respect different cultural perspectives and practices so as to demonstrate caring appropriately to students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

As mentioned previously, cross-culture studies not only provide opportunities for educators to learn about theories and practices of teaching from the other cultures, and to understand both the commonalities and differences extended across countries and cultures, but such studies also allow educators to learn about themselves, to challenge their assumptions and question taken for granted beliefs (McMullen, 2004). With the goal of seeking to provide quality education to young children, cross-cultural studies could also open up honest dialogue about the successes and difficulties that nations around the world are confronting (Hayden, 2000; McMullen, 2004). Cross-cultural studies may also reveal the general principles that are valued in many different cultures, such as the concern for children, the desire to create the best situation for them, and the dedication of their teachers (McMullen, 2004).

In this section, further discussion will be focused on what we have learned from this study that could possibly be useful for early childhood teachers and teacher educators in the two cultures. One of the important details from the results is that there is strong

consistency in teachers' understandings of caring, which may indicate that caring is a general principle that is important in many different cultures. The inconsistency between the understandings of autonomy and the self-reported practices of Shenzhen participants is also worthy of further analysis. Another important finding regarding teachers' understanding of motivation is the major difference between the two contexts in whether motivation was a concern or not, which may challenge our own taken for granted assumptions about teaching and learning, the image of the child, and the current emphasis on academic learning in both cultural contexts.

The consistency in the understanding of caring.

Based on the results and discussions in the previous sections, one of the important findings is the strong consistency in teachers' understanding of caring relationships across the two cultures. Caring relationships are considered important in early childhood education for teachers from both cultural contexts. Both groups of teachers also expressed similar ideas about the relationships they intended to establish with children and the strategies they used to do so. In addition, they not only focused their concept of caring on physical care and emotional support, but they also recognized the importance of trust, acceptance, equality, and the demonstration of respect to children in their classroom. Similarities were also evident in their understandings of the importance of fostering caring and sharing among children. These similar understandings of caring across cultures convey a strong message that caring is a culturally shared value and is important

for children. Teachers' perspectives on caring are also to some extent consistent with theories and research literatures on these subjects.

Nevertheless, as mentioned in the previous discussion, several of the underlying assumptions of participants from the two cities were somewhat related to the social and cultural contexts they came from. For instance, emphasizing mutual respect or equality between teacher and children reflects to some extent the social-cultural beliefs and educational practices of the two contexts.

The finding of the consistency in valuing caring across cultures, and of the socially and culturally related understanding of caring, could be meaningful for early childhood teachers and teacher educators in different cultures, as this knowledge of teachers' understandings provides opportunities for others to reflect on their own assumptions about their beliefs and their practices regarding caring. It points to the importance of rethinking what caring really means, both in general and also as it is based on specific social and cultural contexts, as well as what it means to be a caring teacher under these contexts. Reflecting on our assumptions about the meanings of caring in our own cultures might deepen our understanding of the critical impact of caring on young children in early childhood education. To re-examine what caring really means to children in our society and what kind of caring relationship we are establishing with children might also help us to provide better education for young children. Most importantly, rethinking of our taken for granted assumptions about caring might generate

better understandings of what would be the most appropriate caring relationship for children in different cultures and the best for their development. Caring, in the sense of demonstrating respect to children and seeing them as competent individuals, might also provide a sense of autonomy, which could promote intrinsic motivation in their learning.

The inconsistency between teachers' understanding and practice of autonomy.

The results of the study show some individual differences in teachers' understanding of autonomy, and also major variation across the two cultures. What distinguished teachers' understanding of autonomy from the two cultural contexts is the inconsistency between their understanding and practice of autonomy. Although teachers from both contexts referred to autonomy using similar expressions, such as choices for children, opportunities for decision making and problem solving, and the need for independence and control over their own lives and learning in the classroom, what Shenzhen participants could actually accomplish in their classroom was somewhat different. They admitted that there were limited choices or decision making opportunities for children in a classroom setting where structured group activities were predominant and with an increasing academic focuses. In addition, the large class size and shortage of materials also limited the choices for both teachers and children.

Teachers in China who have been introduced to constructivist ideas about the need for autonomy in education expressed their willingness to be a friend of the children, to be equal with children, and to resolve problems from children's perspectives, which

indicates their efforts in trying to minimize the traditional view of the teacher as an authority figure who transmits knowledge. They recognized that it was important to demonstrate respect to young children by learning from them and giving them choices, decision making opportunities, and control over their own learning. However, Shenzhen teachers struggled to negotiate between what they believed they should do to foster autonomy in children and the actual situation in both the society and the early childhood programs, which in general were structured and teacher-centered. Such a situation generates conflicts and tensions between their understandings and their practices. In other words, the reality of education practice in China appears to contribute to the inconsistency between teachers' understanding and practice in terms of what they said they want to do and what they can actually implement.

This finding is potentially important as it indicates the need for explicit discussions about autonomy in early childhood education, especially among Chinese teachers and teacher educators. Such discussions could involve dealing with the various incoming Western ideas in education in China, resolving the conflicts between the Western views in education and Chinese societal needs and educational norms, confronting the various views of young children and their learning, and defining what autonomy really is and what it really means in early childhood education in China, as well as its relationship to intrinsic motivation. The findings also point to the necessity of explicit and thorough discussions about how to develop curricula and approaches that not

only capture the essence of autonomy or other new ideas that are generally important for child development, but also taking the social and cultural reality in China into account. These discussions should be helpful for both early childhood teachers and teacher educators in China.

The results of the study also show that Portland participants' understanding of autonomy varied. The majority of Portland teachers generally reported that they fostered social skills in children, and provided children choices in many aspects of their lives and learning in the classroom. Many of them mentioned that they ensured children had access to classroom materials so that they could have control over their own learning. Nevertheless, some of them admitted that autonomy was not included in their vocabulary, or that they did not think children could be totally autonomous in a classroom setting. There were also suggestions that autonomy means separation from others, being totally by oneself, or even individuality. What these comments indicate is also an inconsistency between their understandings and practices in a way that is opposite of their counterparts in China.

The findings regarding these various views of autonomy deserve further attention including teachers' assumptions about autonomy in the U.S. as well. Further discussions and explorations of the meaning of autonomy and its definition in early childhood education may help teachers and teacher educators in various social and cultural contexts to better understand the concept and its functions in learning. It may also be meaningful

to re-examine Piaget's (1932/1965) idea that autonomy should be the aim of education, thus exploring whether or not autonomy should be stressed in early childhood education in different social-cultural contexts and how to do so. Such reflections and discussions may not only help teachers and teacher educators improve their practice, but also improve education in general for future generations around the world.

Motivation being a concern or not being a concern.

The most important finding about preschool teachers' perspectives on motivation is whether or not they considered motivation a concern. The majority of Portland teachers claim that children are actually naturally motivated in their classrooms, that motivation is not a concern. On the contrary, Shenzhen teachers found it difficult for children to be intrinsically motivated in a highly structured learning environment, and that how to motivate children to engage in learning is always a concern. These perspectives on motivation reflect the social, cultural, and educational contexts of the societies, and they could be meaningful for deepening cross-cultural understanding in education. As mentioned previously, the social and cultural beliefs and educational practices regarding teaching and learning in China, the educational system, and parents' expectations determine what a teacher can do in the classroom. Specifically, guided by an academic focus and test orientated educational system, teaching in general is structured, and inevitably teacher-centered. Nonetheless, Portland teachers reported intrinsic motivation observed in children as they integrated a play-based curriculum into

children's learning or were guiding by principles such as constructivist approaches, Emergent Curriculum, Reggio Emilia, or Montessori approaches in their classroom. Children in such learning environments were led by their curiosity, and had access to materials and the opportunity to make choices, all provided by thoughtful and observant teachers.

This finding appears meaningful for early childhood teachers and teacher educators in both cultural contexts. It may allow teachers to reflect on their own understanding and observations of intrinsic motivation in young children. Such reflections may include a rethinking of the image of the child, assumptions about the goal of education, traditional views of teaching and learning, the increasingly academic focuses in both cultures, and also the meanings of constructivist approaches in education.

The image of the child.

A fundamental question in education is how we view the child in society. The image of the child is a cultural convention, and is created by each society, because either focusing on what children have and can do, in terms of their power and capacity, or on what children do not have or cannot do, in terms of their needs, would determine the expectations a society has for children, as well as what kind of education a society might provide for children (Rinaldi, 2001). If the guiding principle and the cultural assumption in the society depict children as competent individuals and rich in potential, children will be respected and be given the right to take responsibility in a self-guided curriculum that

allows them control over the direction of their learning. Learning will be based on the interests of the children and will focus on what the children can do. Within such environment, children will be encouraged to take initiative, or will have choices in their exploration, and their curiosity will be prompted by questions raised by teachers. Children learn through experiences, collaboration, and interaction with other children and caring adults. They would likely be actively engaged in such learning, and motivation would not be a concern.

Assumptions of the traditional view of education.

Teachers' understandings of motivation discussed above merit further discussions about assumptions surrounding teaching and learning, and also the traditional view of education, which may still to some extent be reflected in teachers' understanding. People's assumptions about teaching and learning may be varied, and especially in countries such as the U.S. and China people belong to diverse social, cultural, and ethnic groups. It is not necessary that everyone in the U.S. agrees with constructivism or any other innovative educational principle or approach. However, if many in the society see education as the teachers' responsibility to transmit knowledge to children, and assume children are naïve and weak in character, education in this society may focus on what children can not do and what they need to learn, with be expected to prepare them to fulfill certain functions in the future society. Within such a learning environment, children may be passive recipients and may likely find it hard to be intrinsically

motivated.

Teachers' understandings of motivation could also point to the direction for re-examining the goals of education in our societies. Whether we emphasize knowledge acquisition, character emotional development, or the development of children's inner potentials as whole person; whether we intend to prepare children for their future lives or focus on their current experience as part of their lives, the focus of education will affect children, their future, and the future society.

Piaget (1932/1965) contends that preparing autonomous individuals who can make autonomous moral and intellectual decisions by following self-constructed rules is the goal of education. However, the learning experiences of young children must be socially, culturally, and developmentally appropriate. Whether we should emphasize autonomy in education in China or other cultures remains a question for further discussions. How to improve learning for young children and enable them to be intrinsically motivated in learning are also questions requiring further exploration.

The current academic emphasis in education.

Teachers' understanding of motivation also raises questions about the current academic emphasis in education in both cultural contexts. As mentioned in the previous section, motivation was a concern for Chinese teachers, mainly due to the academic focus and test oriented educational system, as well as the expectations of the society for teachers and the goals of education for children. Teachers were aware that children had

limited choices in terms of what and how to learn in this learning environment. They observed intrinsically motivated children at times when they could play freely, but not during structured academic lessons, when children have to follow teachers' instructions. However, play is not a primary means for children's learning in most of the preschools in China. Portland teachers claim that motivation is not a concern since children are naturally motivated in a learning environment where play is the main learning activity. Pedagogical purposes or educational goals were incorporated into children's play. Rather than following teachers' instructions, children have control over their learning in terms of what to play, how to play, and what materials to use in their exploration.

This finding may have meaning for teachers and teacher educators of both cultures. For example, Chinese teachers, who have struggled so much in using every means to motivate children to pay attention to what they are supposed to learn, may want to reflect on their own teaching and try to find out what are the real aims of learning, and how learning can be meaningful for children so they can be intrinsically motivated. As for the teachers and teacher educators in the U.S., they may also reflect on their own assumptions about teaching and learning while recognizing what Chinese teachers have experienced, that is, that children found it hard to be intrinsically motivated in a highly structured and academic focused learning environment. This might suggest the importance of rethinking the goals of education, what learning really means for children, and what academic achievement really means for students. Such reflections may be

especially meaningful, since recently, there were echoes of the same concerns in the U.S. in terms of the increasing push to emphasize academics in schools, even in preschools. It seems as if the academic focus is a universal issue, although it may be carried out differently in each context. In the U.S., discussions about the necessity to increase academic achievement in terms of students' scores in math, science, literacy and many other content areas are on the rise.

Teachers' understanding of motivation is to some extent aligned with cross-cultural research literature. For instance, Montie et al. (2006) found that children's language development and cognitive performance at age 7 are positively related to a child initiated learning environment where free choice activities predominated, and also to the frequency of teacher-child and child-child interactions. Whole group activities and adult-centered teaching methods are negatively associated to children's language and cognitive performance. Academic focus or a highly structured learning environment was also found to diminish the security score of teacher-child relationships in early childhood centers (Howes & Hamilton, 1992).

Therefore, questions such as whether merely adopting an academic emphasis could possibly hinder children's motivation in learning, or how to keep children intrinsically motivated while the academic focus is unavoidably increasing in education, warrant further exploration in education in both cultural contexts.

Constructivist approaches and cultural beliefs.

Teachers' understanding of motivation also raises questions about constructivist approaches in early childhood education. Portland teachers who claim children are naturally motivated describe learning in their classroom as play-based, emerging from children's interests, or under guiding principles such as Reggio Emilia and Montessori. These approaches are related to constructivist theories, although not every teacher explicitly related their teaching approaches to constructivism. These teachers were not concerned about motivation as they see children intrinsically motivated and actively engaged in such learning. What their understanding illustrated is the potential importance of constructivist approaches, which seem to allow children to have choices and a certain degree of control over their learning, thus stimulating their intrinsic motivation.

Like most of the Chinese teachers, the researcher herself was interested in intrinsic motivation in children. How to motivate children to engage in learning was always a concern. Constructivist theories in learning seem to open a door for rethinking of education. They provide a different way of thinking about young children and how they are intrinsically motivated in certain contexts, such as when they are allowed to make choices. Teachers in China have also been introduced to the theory and related approaches, and to their potential for fostering autonomy and intrinsic motivation in children. However, the inconsistency between teachers' understanding and their practice raises questions such as how can the theories and related approaches be socially and

culturally appropriate in the social and cultural context of China? Such questions deserve broader and deeper discussions among teachers and teacher educators in China. It is also important to really think about questions such as how do children see the world, how are that they interest in the world without teacher direction, and how can teachers provide guidance for children without jeopardizing their intrinsic motivation in exploring the world. These discussions may help Chinese people, or even teachers in the U.S., move toward being true to their own beliefs about children and their own perspectives on motivation, as well as about goal of education and questions of what kind of education should be provided for children in both societies.

Summary

Summarizing the discussion above, the findings of this study could be meaningful for teachers and teacher educators of both cultures, as they might benefit from obtaining knowledge of conceptions different from their own, which could help them to reflect on their own assumptions about education or, specifically, their own understanding of the meaning of autonomy and intrinsic motivation in education, and their own relationships with their students in their classrooms. Such reflections could potentially deepen understanding of teaching and learning, and improve education for young children.

The Possible Implications

The results of the study, regarding of preschool teachers' perspectives on caring relationships, autonomy and motivation, could possibly contribute to early childhood

practices and teacher education in terms of providing opportunities for teachers and teacher educators to reflect on their own assumptions about education.

Caring.

The striking similarities found in teachers' perspectives across the two cultures reflect certain global trends in early childhood education, indicating changes to the concept of the child and to common understandings in education. The consistency in teachers' understanding of the importance of caring suggests caring for children is becoming a common concern in the education of young children across cultures. More and more people in different cultures recognize that caring is important in children's lives and will affect their development in many respects.

The findings related to teachers' perspectives on caring can be used to help prospective or new teachers to reflect on their assumptions about caring. They raise questions such as what they think that caring means for themselves and what caring could mean to children. Do they think what is most important for children are physical care, emotional care, the need to be respected, be equal, or to be connected with people, and the need to collaborate or to interact with people? Do they think their role should be that of a mother, a friend, a disciplinarian, or a teacher? What are their opinions about coercion? For Chinese prospective or new teachers, discussions can be focus more on the meaning of mutual respect, collaboration, social skills, and a learning community, as well as what these could mean to children and to education, and what kinds of situations these

concepts may create in a classroom. For U.S. teachers, discussions or reflections could be focused on whether they think they should encourage sharing among children, how they will describe their roles, whether they think they would like to be a friend of the children, or a collaborator, observer, or researcher.

Autonomy.

The disagreement found in teachers' understanding in autonomy suggests that either teachers' understandings of autonomy are not totally clear, or there are gaps between their beliefs and practices, as the reality of their social context does not support such concepts. These findings suggest a need for explicit discussion and exploration of the concept of autonomy, what it really means and how to apply it in education in different cultural contexts. What supports do teachers need to have in terms of the environment and objectives of education in order to foster autonomy in young children? Knowing what others have thought and how others have adapted their practices may help teachers to re-examine their own assumptions about autonomy and rethink their opinions about what it would mean to emphasize autonomy in their own social and cultural contexts, whether autonomy is necessary, and also whether it can possibly be fostered in young children.

Chinese teachers may need to think about their own social and cultural assumptions about children and their education. Furthermore, while learning and accepting Western concepts or ideas in education, they may need to know clearly what

kinds of values or cultural assumptions they are bringing with them. In order to apply Western concepts, such as fostering autonomy in young children, what needs to have happened in the society and the educational system so that they can be accepted by the authorities, the administration, the parents, and also, the children.

Motivation.

The major differences found in teachers' perspectives on motivation could also be very helpful in starting discussions about social constructivist approaches and motivation in both cultural contexts. Whether or not teachers were concerned about motivation in children, the subject is related to our understanding of the children, what learning really means for them, what teaching really means, and also what intrinsic motivation really means. Constructivist approaches involve developing curriculum based on children's curiosity and interests, focusing on children's competence, providing a learning environment for children to interact with other children and adults, and giving children choices that allow them control over their learning. For children, to learn in such an environment means to discover and to explore. The point of teaching is to guide children's learning by providing materials necessary for meaningful interactions. It seems that social constructivist approaches, if applied appropriately, may hold promise for intrinsic motivation in learning.

The question is, should we be promoting social constructivism in early childhood programs in China? There might not be an easy answer for such a question as it will

depend on the social and cultural contexts. Problem may arise when the traditional ways of thinking and doing things conflict with this approach, since it was based on a culture different from Chinese society. Therefore, deeper and broader discussions and explorations of social constructivist approaches in both cultural contexts may help teachers and teacher educators better understand the concept and practice. It may also help them to better understand teaching, learning, and intrinsic motivation.

Future Investigations

The results of the study raise many questions which suggest directions that future investigation take in order to further our understanding of caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation. Obviously, further studies are needed into such issues as how to create a caring curriculum for teacher education programs, the possibility of fostering autonomy in young children, and what constructivism means to early childhood teachers in different cultures. These possible directions for future investigation will be discussed below.

A caring curriculum in teacher education.

The prior discussions indicate that the importance of caring is evidenced by the consistent understanding of this issue across cultures. This understanding may point to the need for a curriculum that focuses on caring in early childhood practice and teacher education in both cultures. Questions surrounding such issues as what it really means to be a caring teacher; what kind of caring relationship a teacher should establish with children; whether they should focus on physical care, emotional support, demonstrating

respect, or giving children autonomous choice, require further discussion.

Caring may have been addressed in teacher education as part of the ethics of the profession, yet it may not have been an explicit focus of the curriculum. One possible direction for future investigation could be to create a curriculum that focuses on caring for a teacher educational program. Such a curriculum may help both teachers and prospective teachers to better understand what caring is really about, what respect really means, and what caring can really do for children. It may also provide prospective or new early childhood teachers a theoretical foundation in caring to guide their future practice.

The possibility of establishing autonomy in young children.

The results of the study show that some participants believed that children in early childhood could not be totally autonomous, especially in classroom settings. Nevertheless, many researchers and educators (e.g. Castle, 2004; Kamii & Housman, 2000) contend that the young age of the children makes autonomy more critical than in general education because authoritarian teachers who insist on compliance and conformity hinder the developing of autonomy from the beginning. "Once children have become rule followers, it is very hard to get them to do their own thinking" (Castle, 2004, p.9, paraphrased from Kamii & Housman, 2000). These researchers tell us that it is critical to foster autonomy in the early age.

A line of inquiry that merits further investigation is the exploration of the

possibility of fostering autonomy in young children. Such study could be carried out in any social and cultural context. It also requires the further pursuit of the meaning of autonomy, what it really means to be autonomous, what autonomy means to young children, and how it is related to motivation in young children. The current study shows that Chinese teachers saw children's need of autonomy in both their lives and learning, yet they could not provide children choices for developing autonomy due to the structured teaching style in early childhood programs. Further discussion and research may be required to understand autonomy in cultural contexts other than the U. S.

What constructivism means to early childhood teachers in different cultures.

The different understandings of motivation appeared to be due to the different educational approach the teachers practiced in their classroom. Those teachers who described their classroom learning as play-based, or who used approaches related to constructivism, reported that children were naturally motivated. Children's curiosity led them to actively engage in learning projects that they were interested in. However, teachers who described learning activities in their classroom as academically oriented, dominated by instructional group activities, were concerned about motivating children to be engaged in structured learning. Western educational theories, especially constructivist approaches, have had widespread influence around the world, yet it may not be clear how they work in different cultures. Investigations into what constructivism really means to early childhood teachers in different cultures may help teachers and teacher educators

understand the process of how early childhood teachers in different cultural contexts are accepting and adapting to constructivist and other Western educational approaches, and how these approaches work in different contexts.

Limitations of the Study

This is an exploratory study intending to find out how early childhood teachers in different cultures perceive caring relationships, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation in their practice. The major limitations of the study include the researcher herself, and the focus on teachers' perspectives rather than on what they actually do.

Perspectives of the researcher.

The interpretation of the study comes from the perspective of a female Chinese, a former early childhood teacher with twenty years of experiences in teaching, several years in an administrative position, and who spent the past ten years as a graduate student studying and teaching in the United States. As a researcher, her role may be either enhanced or limited by who she is, where she came from, her experiences, and her understanding. The study is based on the assumption that caring relationships between teachers and children are important for the development and wellbeing of the children in early childhood education classrooms, and that teachers play important roles in establishing such relationships. Furthermore, since the researcher favors constructivist theory to test-oriented education, her perspective could be subjective and biased.

Gaps between teachers' beliefs and practices.

This study focuses on teachers' perspectives rather than on what they actually do. Inevitably, there are gaps between their understandings, their beliefs, and their practices. For instance, many Shenzhen participants believed that the best relationship between teacher and children was that of a *friend*. However, when asked if they could really be a friend of the children, many further elaborated that the term friend as they used it in this context was different from the meaning of friend in a general sense. Two of them felt that it would not be easy to actually be the children's friend as there were times they needed to be in charge. They considered being a friend to children their goal. In addition, although participants in Shenzhen believed that providing children choices and opportunities for decision making was important in fostering autonomy, they also recognized the limits imposed by the curriculum and the educational system.

The researcher is fully aware that teachers are not always able to practice in accordance with their beliefs (Stipek & Byler, 1997; Maxson, 1996; Charlesworth et al., 1993; Kagan & Smith, 1988). The inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and practices are probably caused by many structural or practical issues (Wang et al., 2008). In China, for example, under strong Western influences in urban areas, the early childhood education regulations implemented in 1996 reflect some of the principles found in the U.S. DAP statement (McMullen et al., 2005). Many Chinese teachers are aware of the importance of creativity and autonomy in education, and they share values

with teachers in the U.S. related to supporting an integrated curriculum and child-initiated learning. However, the application of these new ideas remains challenging to teachers in whose workplace there is lack of congruence between national or local program goals, evaluation criteria, or directors' beliefs; this is also true for those teachers faced with large group sizes, limited resources or materials, as well as pressure from parents who emphasize academic advancement (Wang et al., 2008).

Nevertheless, the focus of this study was on teachers' perspectives because their responses still reflected their understandings and what they believed was right. The possibilities regarding what can be applied in early childhood education are worth further attention and investigation in both the United States and China (Wang et al., 2008). One direction for future research would be to include an observational component in order to investigate teachers' actual classroom practices as compared with their self-reported beliefs.

Conclusion

This study has presented some early childhood teachers' perspectives on and cultural assumptions about the topics of caring relationships, autonomy, and motivation. The results show that early childhood teachers in both cities shared certain understandings about these values in an early childhood classroom. There are similar understandings that caring relationships, which involve mutual respect, trust, acceptance, and cooperation between teacher and children, support children's social and emotional

development and foster their ability to be autonomous individuals. Encouragement and attentiveness from caring teachers could also motivate children to observe, to explore, and to learn. These similar understandings about caring across cultures seem to provide answers to a question that many people may be asking: why should we be concerned about caring in education? These similar perspectives seem to confirm Noddings' (2002) notion that caring is one of the fundamental components of a successful education.

These results not only provide opportunities for teachers and teacher educators in both cultures to reflect on their own assumptions about the role of caring in their practices, but also raise questions that may help them to deepen their understanding of the meaning of caring, loving, and respecting children. Further emphasis on caring in early childhood education, such as by creating a caring focused curriculum in early childhood programs and teacher education programs, seems called for. This same necessity has been cited by Noddings (1995), who argues for organizing curriculum around the theme of care, and notes that having education aimed at the production of "caring, competent, loving, and lovable people is not anti-intellectual. Rather, it demonstrates respect for the full range of human talents" (p. 675) because caring implies a continuous search for competence. When people care, they may want to do their very best for the people and objects in their care (Noddings, 1995).

The results of the study also reveal many differences in teachers' understanding of autonomy and their concerns about motivation. Conflicts between their beliefs and

practices regarding these values are associated with the social dynamics, educational practices, and cultural traditions of the contexts where they came from. These results urge teachers and teacher educators in both cultures to re-examine their own assumptions about autonomy and intrinsic motivation, and to reflect on what these values really mean to young children and their learning in various cultural contexts. Further studies of the possibility of promoting autonomy in young children in different social settings, and the possibility of integrating constructivist approaches in different cultures to foster autonomy and intrinsic motivation, seem warranted.

The inconsistency between Chinese teachers' understanding and practice also raises questions for teachers and teacher educators in both cultural contexts about how teacher education programs in their society can help them to understand their own beliefs in education; their culture's assumptions about teaching, learning, and the image of the child; as well as educational philosophies and approaches originating in cultures other than their own. They might seek to understand what they are bringing with them while accepting and adapting to Western ideas in education; and what they need to confront and negotiate with reference to their own beliefs, Western philosophies, the traditional view of the child, and the educational practices in their society. The results also raise the question of whether or not they can possibly hold these various perspectives and integrate them in their practices without the necessity of choosing one over the others, particularly given the ever-present pressures from their society.

The study also shows us the interconnection between how we view children and what we pay attention to in early childhood, which will have a vital impact on children as learners in the future. Teacher's concerns about motivation seem to indicate that an over emphasis on academic learning may not yield the expected results, as an intensive academic focuses may pose an obstacle to building caring relationships between teacher and students, limit opportunities for fostering autonomy, and also hinder the development of intrinsic motivation in learning. Nevertheless, people "seem to believe that our educational problems consist largely of low scores on achievement tests" (Noddings, 1995, p. 675). According to Noddings, more should be expected from our educational efforts than adequate academic achievement, as overemphasizing achievement contributes to students' feeling that adults do not care for them. Furthermore, students may not achieve academic success unless they believe that they themselves are cared for and have learned to care for others.

The study anticipated that caring would be commonly recognized as important in educating young children, yet that cultural assumptions about caring might be quite differed. Surprisingly, participants from both cultures defined and constructed caring relationship in many similar ways. This result may due to the global communication, information exchange, and educational collaboration among nations, which has rapidly increased Western influences in China. It was expected that for Chinese teacher to talk about the problems of only children, and the traditional value of virtues such as loving

another's child as one's own. Surprisingly, some U.S. teachers also talked about problems faced by only children, and many also mentioned that they treated children in their classroom as their own. An exception was one teacher described her relationship with children as loving, but added, "I know we are not supposed to love them, we are here to teach them," with further explanation that by being with the children for long stretches of the day and providing physical care, teacher and children grow closer. Another expected finding is that teachers' understanding of autonomy varied. The surprise is that there are teachers who do not think children can be autonomous in a classroom setting, yet their practices seem to support children's autonomy. Inevitably, the results of the study cannot represent the two cultures, and are limited by focusing only on teachers' perspectives. Furthermore, cultural influences are in many respects indistinct. To conclude, the gaps between teachers' beliefs and practices, as well as the deviations in the practices of teachers who seem holding similar understandings in the two cultures, deserves further study.

As we all know, education is culturally constructed, and the goals of education are embedded in the social and political realms of each society. Nonetheless, common values such as caring exist in education across cultures. Whether fostering autonomy to promote intrinsic motivation can become a universal value appreciated by people across cultures remains an open question. A story shared by a Chinese teacher may provide us a useful context for this question. Once she tried to convince her 4-year-old daughter, who

refused to go back to school after having briefly attended, of the fun of preschool. She mentioned that there were many toys at preschool, but the child replied, "Yeah, but we are not allowed to touch them." She tried again, saying, "There are a lot of friends you can play with." Surprisingly, the girl said, "But we are not allowed to talk most of the time." From the child's perspective, to be required to sit quietly listening to a teacher is unbearable, and the toys are meaningless unless they are accessible. This story may remind us that opportunities for interacting with materials, peers, and for exercising control over learning are legitimate for children. Although this may not be a question for the majority of early childhood teachers in many cultures, their practices may still depart from the norm. Autonomy in education may also appear important when violence or group disturbances occur, such as the riots in Vancouver following the 2011 Stanley Cup. If the youths in the crowd had been educated as caring people and as autonomous thinkers, they could have thought independently and would have made better moral decisions by avoiding of joining in the destructive behavior that violated other people's rights and damaged public property. With such issues in mind, deciding whether or not caring and autonomy should be the aims of education in different cultural contexts calls for close attention and thorough discussion by policy makers, educational administrators, and researchers, as well as by teachers and teacher educators around the world.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Introductory Script

(e-mail communication with prospective participants)

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral student from the Graduate School of Education, Portland State University. I am contacting you to request for your participation in my dissertation research project, which is a study about preschool teachers' opinions regarding of their relationships with children in their classroom, and what will support children to be independent and motivated to learn. The purpose of this study is to understand preschool teachers' perspectives on caring relationship, autonomy and motivation in two different cultural settings. Your opinions about these topics may have the potential to improve the practices in the field of early childhood education, as well as to help early childhood teacher educators better prepare caring early childhood teachers for the future.

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed once for about 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted at a time and place of your convenience. What you say will be audio-taped, but your name and the name of your school will be kept off to protect your confidentiality. Your participation is voluntary. You can withdraw at any time. Please let me know if you are interested in participating in this project. If you want to learn more about this study, I can set up an appointment to meet with you and explain the study in more details. You can also contact me by phone at 503-453-6954 or by e-mail at xtian@pdx.edu.

Thank you for your consideration.

Xiaoling Tian

Doctoral Candidate
Curriculum & Instructions
The Graduate School of Education
Portland State University

Appendix B. Informed Consent for Interviews

Appendix B-1: Informed Consent for Interviews (English)

Curriculum and Instruction
Graduate School of Education
Portland State University

Title Preschool Teachers' Perspectives on Caring Relationships, Autonomy and Intrinsic
Motivation in Two Cultural Settings

You are invited to participate in a dissertation research project conducted by a doctoral student, Xiaoling Tian, from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Portland State University. Xiaoling Tian hopes to learn about your opinions about your relationships with children in your classroom, and what will support children to be independent and motivated to learn. You are selected as a participant in this study because you have worked with children ages 2– 6 for 3 years or more.

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed once for about 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted at a time and place of your convenience. What you say will be audio-taped. A follow-up interview may be arranged between you and the researcher if necessary.

Xiaoling Tian will keep what you say in confidential and avoid any potential risks. Your name, school and any other information about you will be left out from the tape recordings. Any information that can be linked to you or identified with you will be kept confidential. Numbers or pseudonyms will be used instead of participants' names for interview transcriptions. All of the material will be locked in fireproof cabinets. Tapes from the interviews will be labeled by date, city, and numbers of the participants and locked with other data, and they will be destroyed three years after the research is completed.

This study will be included as part of a doctoral dissertation, and may also be presented in conferences or be published. The results of this study may also help to increase knowledge of the issues that the researcher is trying to explore.

Your participation is voluntary. If you don't want to participate or you want to withdraw from the study at anytime it will not affect your relationship with your employer, your work place, nor will it affect your relationship with the researcher or Portland State University. Xiaoling Tian will offer you a gift certificate to compensate you for your time.

If you have concerns or problems about your participation in this study or your rights of participating in a research project, please contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee,

Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 111 Cramer Hall, Portland State University, (503) 725-4288. If you have questions about the study itself, please contact Xiaoling Tian at P. O. Box 751, Portland, OR 97201, xtian@pdx.edu or phone: 503-453-6954; or contact the committee chair Dr. Christine Chaillé at P. O. Box 751, Portland, OR 97201, chaillec@pdx.edu, telephone: 503-725-4675.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the above information and agree to take part in this study. Please understand that you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty, and that, by signing, you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your own records.

Name (Print) _____

Signature _____

Signature Date _____

Appendix B-2: Informed Consent for Interviews (Chinese translation)

访谈协议

波特兰州立大学教育研究生院课程与指导

课题：不同文化背景的学前教师对师生关系，儿童自主性和自发学习动机的见解

在我国当前的课程改革和新课程的推广过程中，师生关系是其中的一个重要的课题。为了了解当今幼儿教师对幼儿园师生关系的看法及对儿童自主性的建立和学习动机的发展的见解，促进我国幼教事业的发展，美俄勒冈州立大学博士生田小玲诚邀您参与有关此课题的访谈，为这项课题提供您宝贵的意见。

我们的访谈对象为幼儿园（2-6岁儿童）教师，有三至五年以上幼儿园工作经历，三年以上幼儿师范教育（或幼儿教育大专，学前教育本科学历）。访谈形式为一对一的面谈，需时约四十五到六十分钟。为确保访谈内容的真实性和完整性，将采用录音形式记录访谈过程。我们会妥善保管所有访谈资料，没有您的许可决不对任何人提及访谈内容。避免一切影响您或波及到任何个人及集体的利益的可能。如果有必要，我们会与您协商进一步的合作。为了表示对您无私参与及奉献您的宝贵时间的诚挚感谢，本人将提供¥50 薄酬，聊表谢意。

您的参与纯属自愿，如果您不想参与或者参加后想在任何时间退出，都不会影响您与您的工作单位，或您我之间及其学校的关系。如果您对参与访谈有疑问，可查询波特兰州立大学奎默厅 111 室研究与资助办公室人类对象研究审批委员会（503）725-4288。如果您想了解课题本身，请联系田小玲，俄勒冈波特兰 97201 751 信箱，xtian@pdx.edu，电话：503-453-6954；或者联系博士论文委员会主席克雷斯汀·雪莱博士，俄勒冈波特兰 97201 751 信箱，chaillec@pdx.edu，电话：503-725-4675。

您的签名表明您已读过并理解以上协议，同意参与课题访谈。不过即使签了名您也可以随时退出并拥有一切合法权益。本文一式二份，双方各存一份。

姓名（印刷体）_____

签名：_____ 日期 _____

Appendix C. Interview Protocols**Appendix C-1: Interview Protocols (English)**

Date and time of the interview: _____ City and interviewee code: _____

The presenting statement to begin the interview:

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. I would like to ask questions regarding of your perspectives on building caring relationships between you and the children, as well as among the children in your classroom. I would also like to know about your practices in creating a supportive environment to foster autonomy and intrinsic motivation for children's learning. There is no right or wrong answer. Your opinions are what wanted. Your answers will enable the researchers and concerned others to gain insights in the perceptions of caring relationships in your culture and improve the learning environment for future pre-school practices.

All of your responses are valuable for the study and will be completely confidential. You may need to spend 45-60 minutes in this interview.

I. Demographic information

1. Gender: Female _____, Male _____;
2. Age: _____;
3. Ethnicity (or cultural background): _____;
4. Highest degree earned: _____, Major _____, Type of academic institution _____;
5. Years of teaching _____, teaching license: Yes _____; No _____;
6. Type of pre-school you are teaching: Private _____ government-run _____, community _____, enterprise/corporation _____, Charter _____, or Other _____;
7. Number of children in your class _____, age of the children _____;
8. Number of children in the center _____, number of classes _____.

II. Interview Questions

1. Would you tell me something about yourself? Just what you feel comfortable to share with me.
 - a) Why did you become an early childhood teacher? (Why did you choose to work with young children?)
2. Can you tell me about this center and the centers you have worked in before?
 - a) What is your classroom routine?
 - b) How many children are in your class? What are their ages?
 - c) To what kinds of cultures do your children belong?
3. How would you describe the relationships between you and the children in your classroom?
 - a) You described your relationships with the children as _____, what does that mean to you?

- b) What do you see your role to be with the children in your classroom?
- 4. What did you do to establish such a relationship with the children?
 - a) What have you done to help children build relationships with each other?
- 5. In your experience, what kinds of relationships among teachers and children support children's development?
 - a) You describe the relationships that support children's development as _____.
What does this mean to you?
- 6. Is the social atmosphere in your class more important than other aspects?
 - a) Why? If not, what are the most important factors that affect child development?
- 7. What does independence mean to you? What does autonomy mean to you? Do independence and self-regulation mean the same as autonomy to you?
 - a) What choices do children have in your classroom? What kind of decisions do children want to make?
 - b) When and on what matters should children be allowed to make their own decisions?
 - c) Do you think it is necessary to foster autonomy in preschool? Why or why not?
What do you do to help children in decision making? (Or what have you done to foster children's autonomy /self-regulation?)
- 8. How do you know if a child is motivated or not? Please give examples of children who are motivated to learn and those who are reluctant to learn.
- 9. What does intrinsic motivation mean to you? Do you think it is important in preschool?
 - a) Do you reward or praise good behaviors and those who do well in learning? Can you give any examples?
 - b) How do you deal with "bad" behaviors, or those who seem unwilling to learn?
- 10. Are there any connections between children's social competence and their curiosity and ability to learn? Examples?
 - a) Do you think that children's ability to make friends and communicate with teachers supports their learning?
- 11. Do you think that caring relationships (or a supportive environment) have anything to do with autonomy?
 - a) If not, why not? If yes, what is the connection between the two?
- 12. Do you see any connection between your relationships with children and their intrinsic motivation in learning?
 - a) Please give examples to describe the connection.
- 13. Please describe an event that demonstrates how your support (direct or indirect) changed children's behaviors or influenced their decision making and their motivation to learn.
 - a) If you could change anything about your relationships with the children in your classroom, what would it be?
- 14. In your experience, what cultural factors have influenced the relationships between you and the children in your classroom?

- a) Do children's cultural heritages affect the way you approach them and their relationships with you, or their relationships with other children in the classroom?
15. Is there anything else (any story) you want to share or tell me more about?
- a) Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C-2: Interview Protocols (Chinese Translation)

日期和时间: _____ 城市和被访者编号 _____

非常感谢你同意接受采访。采访的目的是了解幼儿教师对幼儿园班级氛围, 师生关系的营造, 以及对师生关系, 幼儿的自主性和学习的主动性之间的关系的看法。回答没有对错, 重要的是你的真实的看法。

你所有的回答都会完全保密。我有十五个主要的问题。在采访的过程中我会根据你的回答跟进一些问题来确保我完全明白你的意思。整个过程大概需要 45 至 60 分钟。

I. 背景情况

1. 性别: 女____; 男____;
2. 年龄: _____;
3. 民族: 汉族____; 少数民族或其它 _____;
4. 教龄 _____; 教师证: 有 _____; 无 _____;
5. 受教育程度: _____, 毕业院校: _____, 专业 _____; 学位 _____;
6. 所在幼儿园性质: 私立____; 教育局办____; 企业____; 政府(区, 市等) _____; 其它(请注明) _____;
7. 班级幼儿人数: _____; 幼儿年龄 _____;
8. 幼儿园规模: 共有 _____ 个班, 共有幼儿: _____ 人。

II. 采访问题:

1. 你能否介绍一下你自己, 讲一讲有关你的背景情况和你工作的幼儿园的情况?(是什么因素或原因是你成为幼儿园教师?)
2. 你是否能介绍一下你所教过的幼儿的文化背景情况(或他们的生活环境, 父母社会背景)?
3. 你和班上幼儿之间的关系怎么样? 这是一种什么样的关系, 可以用什么词语来概括?(您用 _____ 来概括您和班上幼儿之间的关系, 你如何理解此词?)
4. 根据你的理解, 什么样的师生关系表现出关爱? 为什么(例子)?
5. 根据你的经验, 什么样的班级氛围, 或者说什么样的师生以及学生之间的关系能够促进幼儿的发展和成长?
 - a. 你是否认为班级氛围对学生成长的影响比其他方面的因素都要大? 如果是, 为什么? 如果不是, 什么是影响孩子成长最重要的因素?
 - b. 你认为 _____ 关系能促进儿童发展, 请说明 _____ 指的是什么。

6. 你如何理解儿童的自主性？你怎样理解自制力和独立性？你认为有没有必要在幼儿园时期培养儿童的自治的能力？为什么？
 - a. 你认为什么是培养儿童自主性能力（自制，或你的定义）的最适当的方法？
 - b. 你班上的儿童会要求让他们自己做什么样的决定？什么时候可以让幼儿自己做什么样的决定？为什么？
7. 你怎么知道幼儿有没有学习的愿望？请举一个有学习动机的例子和没有学习动机的例子。根据你的经验，在什么情况下幼儿有主动学习的愿望？
 - a. 你是否奖励或表扬好行为或者学习好的幼儿？你会用什么样的方式奖励？结果如何？
 - b. 你如何处理幼儿所谓的不好的行为？或者不愿意学习的行为？
8. 你如何理解自发性学习动机？你觉得在幼儿园自发的学习动机是否很重要？为什么？
9. 儿童的社会性能力（即与教师和其他幼儿沟通和交往的能力）与儿童的好奇心和学习能力有没有联系？请举例说明这种联系。
10. 你认为关爱（或一个相互支持协作的班级氛围）与培养幼儿自主性有没有联系？如果没有，为什么？如果有，这两者之间是一种什么样的联系？
11. 你认为在你与幼儿之间的关系和自发的学习动机之间有没有联系？如果有，请举例说明这种联系。
12. 根据你的经验，什么样的民族文化因素影响你和班上幼儿之间的关系？
 - a. 儿童的文化背景如何影响你和他们的关系以及幼儿之间的关系？
13. 你能不能举一个例子说明你对你班上孩子的支持（直接或间接），使孩子的行为，学习态度或能力发生变化？
 - a. 你用什么方法来建立与儿童之间的关系？
 - b. 你用什么方法来帮助儿童建立他们相互之间的关系？
 - c. 如果你与幼儿之间的关系有什么是需要改变的，那会是什么？
14. 你还有什么需要补充的吗？或者还有什么故事可以分享？
15. 你有什么问题需要问我吗？你觉得有哪里不明白或者需要改进吗？

Appendix D. Pilot Study Instruments**Appendix D-1: Interview Questions (English)**

Date and time of the interview: _____ City and interviewee code: _____

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. The purpose of the interview is to learn about your opinions about the social atmosphere in your classroom as well as your perspectives on the connection among teacher-child relationships, autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Social atmosphere here refers to the relationships between teacher-child and the relationships among the children in the classroom.

There is no right or wrong answer. Your opinions are what wanted and are valuable for the research. All of your responses will be completely confidential. I have about 12 questions and some follow up questions if necessary. You may need to spend 45-60 minutes in this interview.

I. Interview questions

1. Would you please tell me about your background and the background of your working place?
2. How do you describe the relationships between the children and you in your classroom?
 - a. What have you done to build relationships between you and the children?
 - b. What have you done to help children to build relationships with each other?
 - c. You described your relationships with children as _____; what does that mean to you?
3. In your experience, what kind of social atmosphere or relationships will support children's development?
 - a. Is the social atmosphere in the classroom more important than other aspects? Why?
If no, what are the most important factors that affect child development?
 - b. You describe the relationships that support children's development as _____, please help me to understand what that means to you?
4. Are there any connections between children's social competence (confidence in communicating with teachers, making friends with peers) and their intellectual competence?
Examples?
5. What does autonomy mean to you? What accurse to of self-regulation and independence? Do you think it is necessary to foster autonomy in pre-school? Why or why not?
 - a. What kind of decisions do children want to make in the classroom?
 - b. About which things should children be allowed to make decisions in the classroom?
Why?
 - c. How do children in your classroom solve conflicts or problems in learning? Under what circumstances do children come to you for solutions?
6. Do you think caring relationships (or a supportive environment) have anything to do with autonomy? If no, why not? If yes, what is the connection between the two?
7. In your experience, under what circumstances are children willing to learn?

- a. How do you know if a child is motivated or not? Please give examples of children who are motivated to learn and those who are reluctant to learn.
 - b. Do you reward or praise good behaviors or those who do well in learning? Examples?
 - d. How do you deal with "bad" behaviors, or those who seem unwilling to learn?
8. What does intrinsic motivation mean to you? Do you think intrinsic motivation is important in pre-school? Why?
9. Do you see any connection between your relationships with children and their intrinsic motivation in learning? What is that connection?
10. In your experience, what cultural factors have influenced the relationships between you and the children in your classroom?
 - a. To what kinds of cultures do the children in your class belong? Or what kinds of cultural influences do the children seem to exhibit?
 - b. How do children's cultural heritages influence their relationships with you and the other children in the classroom?
11. Please describe an event that demonstrates how your support has influenced children's attitudes and competency in learning?
 - a. How does your influence compare with the influences of the families, media and the cultural environment?
 - b. If you could change anything about your relationships with the children in your classroom, what would that be?
12. Is there anything else you want to say more about?

II. Demographic Information (check or fill in appropriate blanks):

13. Sex: Female___; Male ___;
14. Age: Under 18___; 18-21 ___; 21-25 ___; 25-35___; 35-45___; 45 or above ___.
15. Years of teaching ___; teaching license: Yes___; No ___.
16. Years of education completed: 12 or Less than 12 ___; 14___; 15___; 16___; 17 or more___.
17. Type of academic institution graduated from: Secondary school___; Community college___; University___; other___; Major___; Degree(s) earned:___.
18. Ethnic background: Asian___; Africa American___; Hispanic___; Native American___; White___; other (specific): _____.
19. Type of pre-school you teach: Private___; government-run___; community___; Charter ___, enterprise/corporation___; Other_____.
20. The number of students in your classroom:_____; age of the students_____; size of the pre-school (how many children) _____; how many classes_____.

III. Feedback:

21. what question do you have about this study? What do you think missing or in need of improvement?

Appendix D-2: Interview Questions (Chinese translation)

日期和时间: _____ 城市和被访者编号 _____

感谢你同意接受采访。采访的目的是了解幼儿教师对幼儿园班上的社会氛围的营造, 以及你对师生关系, 幼儿的自主性, 和学习的自发性之间的关系的看法。社会氛围在这指的是教师与幼儿, 幼儿与幼儿之间的关系。回答没有对错, 重要的是你的真实的看法。

你所有的回答都会完全保密。我有十二个主要的问题。在采访的过程中我会根据你的回答跟进一些问题来确保我完全明白你的意思。整个过程大概需要 45 至 60 分钟。

I. 采访问题:

1. 你能否介绍一下你自己, 讲一讲有关你的背景情况和你工作的幼儿园的情况?
2. 你和班上幼儿之间的关系怎么样? 班上幼儿与幼儿之间的关系?
 - a. 你如何与幼儿建立这种关系?
 - b. 你如何帮助幼儿之间建立这种关系?
 - c. 如果你与幼儿之间的关系有什么是需要改变的, 那会是什么?
 - d. 你描述你与幼儿之间是一种 _____ 的关系, 请你解释 _____ 的意思。
3. 根据你的经验, 什么样的社会氛围, 或者说什么样的师生以及学生之间的关系能够促进幼儿的发展和成长?
 - a. 你是否认为社会氛围对学生成长的影响比其他方面的因素都要大? 如果是, 为什么? 如果不是, 什么是影响孩子成长最重要的因素?
 - b. 你描述影响儿童成长的社会氛围是 _____. 请说明 _____ 你指的是什么。
4. 儿童的社会性能力 (即与教师和其他幼儿沟通和交往的能力) 与幼儿的学习能力有没有联系? 请举例说明这种联系?
5. 你如何理解自治或儿童的自主性? 你认为有没有必要在幼儿园中班时期培养儿童的自治的能力? 为什么?
 - a. 中班儿童会要求让他们自己做什么样的决定?
 - b. 教师应该让幼儿做什么样的决定? 为什么?
 - c. 你班上的幼儿如何解决纠纷和学习上的困难? 在什么情况下他们会自己解决或找你解决问题?
6. 你认为关爱与培养幼儿自主性有没有联系? 如果没有, 为什么? 如果有, 这两者之间是一种什么样的联系?
7. 根据你的经验, 在什么情况下幼儿有主动学习的愿望?
 - a. 你怎么知道幼儿有学习的愿望或没有? 你能不能举一个幼儿被激发了学习愿望的例子? 或幼儿没有被激发学习愿望的例子?
 - b. 你是否奖励或表扬好行为或者学习好的幼儿? 怎么奖励?
 - c. 你如何处理幼儿所谓的不好的行为? 或者不愿意学习的行为?
8. 你觉得自发学习动机是什么意思? 你觉得在幼儿园自发的学习动机是否很重要? 为什么?
9. 你觉得在关怀和自发的学习动机之间有没有联系? 如果有, 是怎么样的一种联系?

10. 根据你的经验, 什么样的民族文化因素影响你和班上幼儿之间的关系?
 - a. 你班上的幼儿属于什么样的一种文化背景(家庭, 社会环境, 民族等)? 他们表现出一种什么样的文化?
 - b. 幼儿的文化背景如何影响你和他们的关系以及他们和其他幼儿的关系?
11. 你能不能举一个说明你对你班上孩子的帮助改变了孩子的学习态度和能力的例子?
 - a. 你对孩子的影响力和家庭, 社会, 传媒以及社会文化氛围的影响力相比怎么样?
 - b. 你觉得你与孩子们的关系及你的做法有什么需要改进的吗?
12. 你还有什么需要补充的吗?

II. 背景情况

13. 性别: 女____; 男____;
14. 年龄: 18 岁以下____; 18-21 ____; 21-25 ____; 25-35____; 35-45____; 45 或以上 ____.
15. 教龄 ____; 教幼儿园中班教龄 ____; 教师证: 有 ____; 无 ____.
16. 受教育程度: 少于 12 年 ____; 12-13 年 ____; 14 年____; 15 年____; 16 年____; 17 或以上____.
17. 毕业院校: 高中____; 幼师____; 师范学院(三年)____, 师范大学(四年)____; 其他大学____; 专业____; 所取得学位____;
18. 民族: 汉族____; 少数民族或其它(请注明)____;
19. 所在幼儿园性质: 私立____; 教育局办____; 企业____; 政府(区, 市等)____; 其它____;
20. 班级幼儿人数:____; 幼儿年龄____; 幼儿园规模: 共有____个班, 其中有中班: ____个.

III. 反馈

21. 你有什么问题需要问我吗? 你觉得有哪里不明白或者需要改进吗?

Appendix D-3: Questionnaire (English)

Teachers' Perspectives and Practices on Relationships Survey

Purpose:

- To understand your perceptions of the social environment in the classroom, and
- To learn about your perspectives on the connection among teacher–child relationships, autonomy and intrinsic motivation.

There is no right or wrong answer. Your opinion is what is wanted. All of your responses will be completely confidential. Completion of this survey assumes your voluntary informal consent to use this data in a dissertation pilot project. I will inform you of the results of this survey if you leave an e-mail address. You may need twenty to thirty minutes to finish this survey. Thank you for your participation.

PART I: DEFINITIONS

Following are statements defining social environment in the classroom. Please indicate your degree of agreement with each statement by checking the block as strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Dis-agree	Strongly Disagree
1). Caring is the demonstration of affection.				
2). Caring is the appreciation of the independent existence of others.				
3). Caring by emotionally supporting children and building connections among children is a teacher's responsibility.				
4). A caring relationship refers to a cooperative and responsive interaction between the one caring and the cared-for.				
5). Caring includes establishing limits.				
6). Autonomy is the right to do what you want.				
7). Autonomy is self-regulation.				
8). Autonomy is self-governed and making decisions independently.				
9). Autonomy is the ability to make intellectual and moral decisions independently.				
10). Intrinsic motivation is a drive to learn with no expectation of rewards				
11). Autonomy is one of the basic needs of children.				
12). Satisfaction of the need of autonomy motivates children to learn.				
13). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are important for learning.				
14). I believe that the knowledge of subject matter and teaching skills are more important than a caring relationship in child development.				
15). I believe that children are more willing to learn when they are encouraged to make decisions about their learning.				
16). I believe that caring relationships provide children with a sense of responsibility of their own learning.				
17). I believe that caring relationships naturally happen between teacher and children in pre-school.				
18). I believe that building a caring relationship is energy-and				

time-consuming, therefore will get in the way of teaching.				
19). I believe that focusing on caring will privilege some and ignore others because it is hard to maintain a caring relationship with every child.				
20). I believe that my culture emphasizes caring more than other cultures.				

PART II: RATING

Important factors that contribute to positive social environment (circle the number):

Factors	Not at all Important 1	No so Important 2	Important 3	Very Important 4	Essential 5
21). The trust between adult and the children					
22). The safety level					
23). The feeling of belonging					
24). The feeling of being valued and accepted					
25). Children's interest levels in learning					
26). Children's social competence					
27). Concern and respect for each other					
28). Collaborative learning skills					
29). The use of reinforcement					
30). The use of punishment					
31). Rule making by children					
32). Decision making by children					
33). Observing and listening to children					

PART III: SELECTIVE ANSWERS

(check all the boxes in front of the statements that are match your perspective):

34. In teacher-child relationships

- ☐ a. children respect and learn from the adults.
- ☐ b. adults respect and learn from the children.
- ☐ c. mutual respect and cooperation should exist between adults and children.

35. Children in my classroom solve learning problems and conflicts

- ☐ a. mostly by themselves.
- ☐ b. sometimes by themselves.
- ☐ c. mostly with adults' help.

36. Children in the classroom should be allowed to choose

- ☐ a. what materials to use in their play.
- ☐ b. what games they want to play.
- ☐ c. what and how they want to learn.

37. Pre-school children

- ☐ a. are too young to make right or wrong and true or false answers.
- ☐ b. are too young to know what they need.
- ☐ c. should be encouraged to make decisions about and have control over their own learning.

38. Children are willing to learn

- ☐ a. when they are punished for reluctance in learning.
- ☐ b. when they are rewarded for doing well in learning.
- ☐ c. when they are allowed to set their own goals and evaluate their own successes.

PART IV: ADDITIONAL PERCEPTIONS

To help us better understand your perspective on caring relationship, autonomy and motivation, please answer the following questions: (use the back of the page if more space needed):

39. Some people say "There is a connection among caring relationships, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation". What do you think?
40. Is the value of caring relationship influenced by cultural values of your country? Please explain.

PART V: DEMOGRAPHICS (check or fill in appropriate blanks)

41. Sex: Female ___; Male ___;
42. Age: Under 18 ___; 18-21 ___; 21-25 ___; 25-35 ___; 35-45 ___; 45 or above ___.
43. Years of teaching ___; years of teaching in pre-school ___; teaching license: Yes ___; No ___.
44. Years of education: Less than 12 ___ years; 12 ___; 14 ___; 15 ___; 16 ___; 17 or more ___.
45. Type of academic institution graduated from: Secondary school ___; Community college ___; University ___; other ___; Major ___; Degree(s) earned: ___.
46. Ethnic background: Asian ___; Africa American ___; Hispanic ___; Native American ___; White ___; other ___.
47. Type of pre-school you teach: private ___; government-run ___; community ___; charter ___; enterprise/corporation ___; other ___.
48. The number of students in your classroom: ___; age of the students ___;
49. Size of the pre-school (how many children) ___; how many classes ___.

PART VI. FEEDBACK OF THIS STUDY:

1. What is missing or what should be improved in this study?
2. Time taken to complete this questionnaire (circle one):
- 60 minutes or more 45 minutes 30 minutes or less

Thank you for completing this survey. If you have any questions, please email Xiaoling Tian at xtian@pdx.edu or telephone at 503-453-6954.

Appendix D-4: Questionnaire (Chinese translation)

幼儿教师观念和实践问卷

目的:

- 了解幼儿教师对幼儿园班级氛围及师生关系的态度和看法。
- 了解教师对师生关系, 学生自主性, 以及自发的学习动机三者之间的关系的看法。

答案没有对错。请写下您的真实看法。所收集的资料会绝对保密。完成此问卷表明您自愿同意该问卷数据用于一研究的初期试验。你大概需要 20 至 30 分钟来完成此问卷。

第一部分: 定义

以下是对一些观念及看法的陈述。请选择你赞同 (或不赞同) 这些陈述的程度(在相应的格内打勾)。

陈述	强烈 赞同	赞同	不赞 同	强烈 不赞同
1). 关怀是微笑, 拥抱等爱的情感的表露。				
2). 对幼儿的关怀就是承认他们的独立人格。				
3). 关怀就是带着责任感的支持和联系。				
4). 关怀不是单方面的给予, 它是被关怀者和关怀者之间的相互回应和相互推动的关系。				
5). 关怀就是严格要求。				
6). 自治 (自主性) 就是有权做想要做的事。				
7). 自治 (自主性) 就是自我调节 (自制) 的能力。				
8). 自治 (自主性) 就是自我管理和自己做决定。				
9). 自治(自主性)就是有能力独立地作智力和道德上的判断。				
10). 内在自发的学习动机就是一种不期待奖励的学习动力。				
11). 满足自主性的需要可激发自发的学习动机。				
12). 外部 (精神或物质) 强化的学习动机与内在自发的学习动机同样重要。				
13). 我相信学科知识和教学方法比关怀对学生的成长更重要。				
14). 我相信当儿童得到鼓励决定自己的学习时学习积极性更高。				
15). 我相信关怀能使儿童对自己的学习更有责任感。				
16). 我相信关怀是自然而然地在幼儿与教师之间产生的。				
17). 我相信建立关怀的关系需要太多精力和时间因而影响教学。				
18). 我相信关怀会偏重一部分孩子而忽略另一部分, 因为老师很难关注所有的孩子。				
19). 我相信我的民族文化特别注重关怀。				
20). 我相信我的民族文化不太注重关怀。				

第二部分：打分

建立积极的班级环境的重要因素(圈一个数字):

因素	一点也不重要 1	不太重要 2	重要 3	很重要 4	必备条件 5
21). 成人与幼儿之间的信任程度					
22). 幼儿的安全感程度					
23). 归属感					
24). 被器重和被接受的感觉					
25). 儿童对学习的兴趣					
26). 幼儿的社会能力					
27). 相互关心和尊敬					
28). 幼儿合作学习的技能					
29). 使用物质和精神强化良好行为					
30). 对不良行为使用惩罚					
31). 儿童自己定规矩					
32). 儿童自己做决定					
33). 观察倾听幼儿					

第三部分：选择题

选择符合你的情况的答案，在括号内打勾（可选择多项）。

34. 幼儿园的师生关系应该是:

- ☐ a. 幼儿尊敬教师，学习教师传授的知识。
- ☐ b. 成人尊重幼儿并向幼儿学习。
- ☐ c. 成人与幼儿相互尊重合作，共同学习。

35. 你班上的幼儿如何解决纠纷和学习上的困难？

- ☐ a. 大部分自己解决。
- ☐ b. 有时自己解决。
- ☐ c. 大部分找成人解决。

36. 在班上可以允许幼儿做什么样的决定？

- ☐ a. 使用什么玩具和材料来玩游戏。
- ☐ b. 玩什么游戏。
- ☐ c. 学什么和用什么方法来学。

37. 中班幼儿:

- ☐ a. 还太小，不能分辨对错和好坏。
- ☐ b. 还太小，不知道他们需要什么。
- ☐ c. 应该鼓励他们决定自己的学习和控制自己的行为。

38. 在什么情况下幼儿愿意学习?

- () a. 不爱学习会受惩罚。
() b. 学得好会受到奖励。
() c. 被允许设立自己的目标和评价自己的成绩。

第四部分: 简答题

为了帮助我们更好地了解您的对关怀, 自主性, 学习动机相互关系的看法, 请回答以下问题。(如需要请用背面):

39. 有人说关怀能培养学生的自主性, 进而激发学习动机, 你的看法如何?

40. 你的民族文化如何影响教师对关怀的看法?

第五部分: 背景情况 (打勾或填空):

41. 性别: 女____; 男____;
42. 年龄: 18 岁以下____; 18-21 ____; 21-25 ____; 25-35____; 35-45____; 45 或以上 ____.
43. 教幼儿园中班教龄 ____; 其他教龄 ____; 教师证: 有 ____; 无 ____.
44. 受教育程度: 少于 12 年 ____; 12-13 年 ____; 14 年____; 15 年____; 16 年____; 17 或以上____.
45. 毕业院校: 高中____; 幼师____; 师范学院 (三年) ____, 师范大学 (四年) ____; 其他大学____;
专业____; 所取得学位____.
46. 民族: 汉族____; 少数民族或其它 (请注明) ____.
47. 所在幼儿园性质: 私立____; 教育局办____; 企业____; 政府 (区, 市等) ____; 其它 (请注明) ____;
48. 班级幼儿人数: ____; 幼儿年龄____;
49. 幼儿园规模: 共有 ____ 个班, 共有幼儿: ____ 人。

反馈: 1. 您认为本问卷有什么不清楚或需要改进的地方?

2. 完成问卷所需时间: 超过 60 分钟____, 45 分钟____, 30 或更少____.

非常感谢你完成此问卷! 请速交回发放问卷人。如有任何问题或想知道问卷的结果, 请留电子邮件地址或发电子邮件到: tianxiaoling@hotmail.com.