SUPPORTING SOCIAL CONCEPTS IN THE PRESCHOOL PLAY ENVIRONMENT: PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER DECISION MAKING

By

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To my loving family, without whom I would have never completed this project.

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Given the need to find out information on how preschool teachers with expertise using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum make decisions regarding the support of social concepts and skills outside of the actual lesson and in the natural play environment; the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of what the decisions look like, what events triggers the decisions, and how the teacher's personal and professional knowledge play a role in the decision making process. The main research question driving my study was: How does a preschool teacher with expertise in using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum make decisions regarding the support of social concepts in the play environment? Three sub-questions that lend support to answering the main question are as follows: (1) What does decision making regarding the support of social concepts look like from the teacher's and researcher's perspective? (2) What situations/events trigger the teacher to make decisions regarding supporting social concepts in the play environment (what is happening during the decision making episode? (3) How do professional knowledge/skills influence the teacher's decision making regarding support of social concepts? Since this research focused on trying to understand teachers' decision making (with regards to concepts espoused by the Second Step

Curriculum) as they occur in the natural environment, each sub-question brought together pieces of information that help describe the "essence" of the decision making process as a whole.

A qualitative instrumental case study was adopted; and single-subject case was used for data collection and analysis. Multiple data sources including: initial background information interview, general observations of the site and climate, video recordings of decision making episodes, video-stimulated recall interviews, and a post-collection interview were used to answer the research questions and present a holistic picture of a preschool teacher's decision making for the support of social concepts. Data gathered were analyzed through the constant comparison method of data analysis to emerging patterns and themes.

More than 80 of the participant's decision making episodes were captured through video observation and twenty-three episodes, which met the criteria of decisions that support social concepts in the play environment, were chosen to prompt video-stimulated recall interviews. The themes that emerged from the data fell in accordance with the three research sub-questions: decision making type (proactive/reactive and routine/thoughtful) and process (structure of decision making episode), trigger of decision making episode (external, internal, or decision revisited), and influence of teacher professional background and personal belief system. Discussion of the findings and suggestions for future research yielded implications for the development of effective in-service professional development in the area of teacher reflection through three approaches: 1) Using video stimulated recall as a tool for teacher reflection and support for supervision and evaluation, 2) Focusing on reflection of a single developmental domain or content area, and 3) Using cooperative interactions to practice and enhance reflection.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

"Academic, social-emotional learning, student assessment, teacher performance, quality, inclusion, 'No Child Left Behind', accountability, and school readiness': these terms represent a list of buzz words parents, policy-makers, educators, and media often use to describe the current issues and complexities of the early childhood care and the education field today. With the educational focus making a shift to a greater emphasis on quality early childhood education and school readiness, programs' effectiveness to prepare young children for school provides a challenging and controversial backdrop for educational research. As educational researchers strive to describe, assess, and breakdown the complexities of early childhood education, serious questions about what to research and how to go about doing it needs to be addressed. For example: On what questions should research in early childhood care and education focus? Whose voices should be heard? What should educators and researchers be trying to learn about the complex processes called teaching and learning? How do teachers decide what happens in the classroom and what is the nature and impact of those decisions? This later questions defines the conception of this research study. The goal of this investigation is to understand teachers' choices and decision making processes through close examination of their support of social competence skills in the natural environment.

When exploring teacher decision making, it is important to note that each teacher perceives their environment in a unique and individual way. Every day, and in countless situations, teachers develop ways of perceiving and interpreting information that enables them to understand and make sense of the events and environment within which they work. Surrounded by a myriad of cues, sights, sounds, and sensations, they select and interpret those which convey meaning and significance to them and their students. In so doing, teachers often routinely

anticipate events and predict future actions or identify unique situations where alternative strategies are needed and actions are not predetermined (Calderhead, 1984). Ultimately, teachers' understanding of their students and school/classroom environment will lead them to identify choices and make informed decisions regarding their instructional practices.

Teachers' decisions provide bridges between thought and action, linking professional knowledge and understanding of the students and context with action. But precisely what does the process of decision making involve? What do teachers do when they make decisions? It is difficult to find any one definition and true account of decision making. Models of decision making frequently outline stages of the process (such as identifying alternatives and predicting consequences) but often depict decision making as a linear and sequential activity. This view may not adequately represent the real-life mental experiences involved in the process. Allowing a teacher to examine some of her own decisions may provide evidence that she engages in different and multiple types of decision making and that her insight and understanding of the students, environment, and situation guides her actions in a variety of ways.

Purpose and Rational

The purpose of this research is to achieve an understanding of preschool teachers' choices and decision making processes as they support social competence concepts in the natural play environment. Teaching involves a series of ongoing subtle decisions (McNaughton & Williams, 2004) and the purpose of this research is to explore those decisions, as they are perceived by the teachers, in an attempt to uncover the internal and external processes of making decisions. Specifically, the thoughts, feelings, tension and awareness of the teachers' decision making and the events within which they occur will be explored.

The research regarding decision making requires both depth and breadth to understand the lived experiences of the teachers involved. Virginia Richardson (2001) espouses that exploration

of teaching action in all its interesting formations and complexities must be intentionally viewed by the educational researcher through many different lenses and a variety of methodologies. Therefore, it is not only important to create meaningful audiences for teachers' voices as they talk about their instructional decisions; it is also important to add a systematic evaluation of the phenomenon to the descriptions of the decision types, choices, and processes.

Kirchler (2001) reminds those studying life processes that the description of the constantly changing and complex everyday incidences, experiences, and behaviors of teachers is never completed and that there is still a great and on-going need for "naturalistic, empirical research" (p. 162) to learn about lived experiences; thus is the purpose of the study. This study went beyond a simple description of decision making or a surface list of the "types" of teacher decisions. Rather, was directed towards learning more about what is involved in the experiences of making decisions for the reinforcement of social concepts in the play environment. This information can be used (along with existing empirical information) to inform the practices of early childhood educators, teacher educators, and curriculum designers of the essence and processes of the decisions involved in fostering the skills and concepts espoused by the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum.

Research Question and Significance of Study

The main research question driving my study is: *How does a preschool teacher with expertise in using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum make decisions regarding the support of social concepts in the play environment?* Three sub-questions that will lend support to answering the main question are as follows: (a) What does decision making regarding the support of social concepts look like from the teacher's and researcher's perspective? (b) What situations/events trigger the teacher to make decisions regarding the support of social concepts what is happening during the decision making episode? (c) How do professional

knowledge/skills affect the teacher's decision making for the support of social concepts? Since my research is focusing on trying to understand teachers' decision making (with regards to concepts espoused by the Second Step Curriculum) as they occur in the natural environment, each sub-question brings together pieces of information that will help the reader better understand the "essence" of the decision making process as a whole. The first sub-question illustrates the types and choices of social concept reinforcement decision making (i.e. are they proactive or reactive - routine or thoughtful?), as well as what the decisions look and feel like to the both the teacher making them and researcher observing them. The goal is to uncover the actual decision types and decision making processes a teacher goes through, including awareness and perception of the decision. The second sub-question attempts to identify what event or situation triggers the teacher to make social concept support decisions initially (i.e. are they external, internal, or reactive decisions? What is happening in the environment/context to stimulate the decision?). Finally, the third sub-question examines the type and extent of personal and professional knowledge associated with a teacher supporting social concepts (i.e. educational background, training, experience, etc.). In combination, these sub-questions helped the researcher to uncover the fundamental nature and nuances of the teacher's lived decision making experience.

Decision Making as the Topic of Research

Deciding on a research topic and selecting questions are pivotal acts in any research study. Often the topic of inquiry carries personal nuances, and subsequently may represent some aspect of the researcher's personal challenges or perplexity, particularly as she tries to understand how she fits into the practical and academic world of teaching. Thus, in this study, as in many studies, there is an autobiographical significance to the research topic and the researcher's

subjectivity regarding teacher decision making specific to the concepts espoused by the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum.

The formation of this topic began more than three years ago when, as a researcher in a state funded project, I was asked to help design and implement professional development workshops for preschool teachers mandated to use the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum in their classrooms. The intent of the workshops was to identify areas where teachers needed assistance and provide focused instructional strategies in an open-discussion atmosphere. Initially, the team interviewed the teachers to help decide the main areas of focus. The issue of transferring or reinforcing the skills and concepts associated with the Second Step curriculum beyond the actual lesson was the most frequently discussed topic. Drawing on my experience as a preschool teacher, teacher educator, and graduate student studying the development of social competence in young children, I helped to provide transfer of training techniques, model strategies, and lead discussions on what works and does not work in the classroom. As I thought about the direction and scope of this particular study, I began to realize (because of my experiences) that teachers often talk about and are asked about the effects or outcomes of their classroom decisions but rarely have opportunities to talk about the what, why and how of making decisions. In developing my research questions, I felt that talking with teachers about the decisions they make about how to implement the Second Step Curriculum, how they come up with on-the-spot strategies, and the internal processes they go through in making the decisions could provide personal and professional insight into the processes of teacher decision making and a better understanding of the lived experience of teaching.

Summary

In this chapter, a brief introduction to this study, including a statement of purpose and importance, as well as a succinct rationale for choosing preschool teacher decisions making as a

topic was presented. Having set the stage in this way, the remainder of this document includes four additional chapters: *Literature Review* - a review of literature and conceptual framework that provided the reader with a lens through which the study should be viewed and information regarding historical and current research on teacher decision making; *Methodology* - a description of the theoretical and methodological underpinnings that shape the design of this study, including a rationale for the instrumental case study design and data collection and analysis procedures; *Results and Presentation of the Case* - an account of the data analysis results through narrative description of the case, including a specific focus on addressing the research sub-questions in an attempt to answer the main research question; and *Discussion and Implications* – spotlighting the explanation of culminating results, researcher interpretations, and implications for future research and educational practice.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The thinking, planning, and decision-making of teachers constitute a large part of the psychological context of teaching. It is within this context that curriculum is interpreted and acted upon; where both teachers teach and students learn. Teacher behavior is substantially influenced and even determined by teachers' thought processes. These are the fundamental assumptions behind the literature that has been labeled researched on teacher thinking (Clark & Peterson, 1986). As a part of this broad research category, the topic of decision making is currently generating a lot of interest. The most prevalent research examining decision making includes: (a) teaching decision making strategies to students of all ages and within most curricular areas; (b) analyzing decision making strategies used by teachers and schools with special education assessments and placements; and (c) studying group decision making practices within school reform domains and site-based management concerns.

The present research study falls under the first category and the literature presented in this section will more narrowly focus on describing and understanding teachers' decision making processes in natural school environment. One stated purpose of the research is to help describe and understand the nuances and processes of the decisions preschool teachers make while supporting the skills and concepts associated with the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum in play environments and the major research question guiding this study is: *How does a preschool teacher with expertise in using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum make decisions regarding the support of social concepts in the play environment?* Therefore, this review focused on simplifying a broad view of the concepts uncovered in previous research on decision making and peel back of some of the layers to make them relevant

to the current discussion of preschool teacher social concept reinforcement decision making in the play environment.

This review follows a sequence for the design of this study, including the context and lens with which the readers should frame their thinking (i.e. the historical and current state of early childhood education, the importance of social and emotional learning in preschool as a part of early childhood education, and an overview of the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum), a specific type of teaching and intervention strategy that is used when supporting social-emotional learning and the Second Step concepts in the natural environment (i.e. naturalistic teaching), and the essence and processes of educational decision making (i.e. historical perspectives on general decision making and current research on teacher decision making). At the conclusion, all the components of the literature have come together to help the reader understand previous research on teacher decision making, connect decision making to the reinforcement of social and emotional learning, and identify gaps in the literature.

Context and Lens of the Study

Early Childhood Education: Past and Present

The development, care, and education of young children (birth to age 5) has been the focus of rapidly increasing public interest stemming from several factors: a sharp increase in mothers of young children in the workforce (Blau, 2001; Kamerman & Gabel, 2006), evidence that many young children enter public schools unprepared to learn (Zill & West, 2001), and pressure to improve achievement of children at risk for academic deficiencies and eventual school failure (Neuman, 2003). Research has shown that the quality of early childhood education significantly influences the academic and social development of young children in general and, specifically, those children who are at risk for school failure (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Espinosa, 2002). For

example, based on the quality of care and support received in the first year of life, some researchers have predicted dropout patterns even before children enter school (Shore, 1997).

Teacher quality and characteristics add an additional layer to the early education quality debate. Research indicates that overall, higher-quality programs are staffed by educators with a minimum of a bachelor's degree and with more specialized training in child development and the teaching of young children (Kantos & Wilcox-Herzog, 2002; Whitebrook, 2003); yet, national workforce studies estimate that less than 50% of early childhood teachers, birth through age eight, have a bachelor's degree of some kind (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). In accordance with the national standards set by National Board of Professional Teaching Standards and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, many states across the country are adopting standards for the operation of early childhood education programs. However, even with states pursuing efforts that support teachers' upgrade of professional credentials (e.g., financial assistance to pay for coursework, changes to the minimum pre-service training needed to work as a teacher), "…the fact remains that it will take some time for the workforce to be as qualified and well trained as the research base suggests in necessary" (Ryan, Hornbeck, Frede, 2004, p. 2). In the meantime, there is concern that the current systems of teacher preparation and professional development are not able to meet the growing demand for qualified professionals (Horm-Wingerd, Hyson, & Karp, 2000).

Social Competence and Social and Emotional Learning: A Component of Early Childhood Education

Social and emotional learning, sometimes called labeled social competence, is the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behavior (Elias et al., 1997). These key characteristics need to be developed for our

children to be successful not only in school but in life and those who do not possess these skills are less likely to succeed. They are particularly important for young children to develop because they are linked to a variety of behaviors with long-term implications (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007). Children, especially young children, exhibit a variety of social behaviors and skills but often do not acquire them at the same speed or level. Kostelnik, Whiren, Soderman, Stein, & Gregory (2002) identify a range of prosocial skills young children should develop and break them up into six separate but overlapping categories (see Table 2.1).

Typically, definitions of social competence and social-emotional learning vary from one society to another. In the US, we tend to view children as more socially competent when they are responsible, independent, friendly, cooperative, and purposeful. An expanded definition states that social competence involves the personal knowledge and skills children develop to deal with the many choices, challenges, and opportunities they face in life (Leffert, Benson, & Roehlkepartan, 1997).

Table 2-1. Social competence categories and associated skills.

Social Values	Positive Self Identity	Interpersonal Skills
Caring Equity Social justice Honesty Responsibility Healthy lifestyle attitudes Flexibility	Sense of competence Personal power Sense of worth Sense of purpose Positive view of personal future	Maintains friendly relationships Communicates ideas, needs, and feelings Expresses emotions Reads social situations accurately Resolves conflicts peacefully Gives and receives emotional support Asserts own ideas, accepts other's ideas
Self Regulation	Planning & Decision Making Skills	Cultural Competence
Reflects on feelings Controls impulses Delays gratification Resists temptations Resists peer pressure Monitors self	Makes choices Solves problems Develops plans Plans ahead Carries out positive actions to achieve social goals	Knowledge, comfort, & respect for people of varying ethnic or racial backgrounds Ability to interact effectively with people of varying backgrounds Recognizes unfair treatment Questions unfair treatment

The early childhood literature has stressed the importance of children's ability to engage in social interaction with peers, make successful social decisions, and regulate their behavior (Odom & McLean, 1996; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The ability of young children to manage their emotions and behaviors and make meaningful friendships is an important contributor to the quality of later relationships and social adjustments in school (Ladd, 2000; Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). The complex developmental task of building social skills in early childhood is an important one. It not only effects the development of affective domains, such as personality, emotional awareness and social skills, but also serves to encourage and support the progress of cognitive and communicative development (Rubin & Lollis, 1988; Hartup, 1992). The acquisition of social skills tremendously affects how children feel about themselves and how they are perceived by others. Research suggests that children who are more socially competent are happier than their less competent peers (Pellegrini & Glickman, 1990) and those children who create more successful relationships with peers have a greater success in school (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). In fact, children who enter kindergarten with few social and emotional skills are often plagued by behavioral, academic, and social problems that can persist into adulthood (Hartup, 1992; Shapiro, 1997; The Child Mental Health Foundations and Agencies Network [FAN], 2001).

With regard to school readiness, research indicates that young children who have more developed intrapersonal skills (i.e. self-regulation, perspective taking, emotional expression, cooperation, sharing, and problem-solving) and engage regularly in meaningful peer relationships are more likely to make an easier transition to school and to achieve academic success (Birch & Ladd, 1996; Ladd & Coleman, 1997; Raver & Zigler, 1997; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). The extent to which kindergartners make new friends and are accepted by their

classmates predicts cooperative participation in classroom activities and self-directed completion of learning tasks (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1997; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999). Friendship, a special form of mutual liking, predicts young children's adjustment to school (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1996) and can provide an important context for the refinement of some social competencies.

Researchers and practitioners describe key social-emotional skills that children need as they enter school, including self-confidence, the capacity to develop positive relationships with peers and adults, concentration and persistence on challenging tasks, an ability to effectively communicate emotions, the ability to listen to instructions and be attentive, and skills in solving social problems as critical competencies children need for a successful transition to school (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The consequences, both short-term and long-term, of not developing these competencies in early childhood are numerous. Children who are identified with a social or aggressive behavior in preschool have a high probability of continuing to have difficulties in elementary school and beyond; the correlation between preschool-age aggression and aggression at age 10 is significant (Kazdin, 1985). Young children with challenging behaviors are often rejected by their peers (Coie & Dodge, 1998), receive less positive feedback from teachers (Strain, Lambert, Keer, Stagg, & Lenkner, 1983), and are less likely to be successful in kindergarten. In addition, these children are at risk for school failure (Kazdin, 1993; Tremblay, 2000). It has been suggested that when aggressive and antisocial behavior persists past early childhood into adolescence, interventions have a poor chance of success (Dodge, 1993).

Whether children eventually become more or less socially competent is influenced by many factors. Among these are child development and childhood learning as well as the

contexts in which children function. A growing body of research suggests that habituated and ingrained social and emotional problems are highly resistant to change and are likely to intensify over time (Feil, Severson, & Walker, 1998; Squires, Bricker, Heo, & Twombly, 2001). This is supporting evidence that teachers of young children should focus on fostering social and emotional learning in their classrooms as a part of their curriculum and reinforce the associated skills throughout the day. Because increasing numbers of children spend time in early childhood settings (Lombardi, 2003), an intervention model or curriculum that can be implemented by teachers in any early childhood care setting has the potential to influence the social and emotional development of large numbers of children with diverse needs.

Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum: A Tool for Promoting Social and Emotional Learning

In exploring the impact of social-emotional education in schools, a broader understanding of the scope of the issues comes to light. Specifically, Merrell (2002b) points to the importance of recognizing that violence prevention and intervention requires not only crisis prevention and behavioral assessment, but also includes addressing key concepts such as emotional resilience, peer relationships, social competence, and antisocial behavior. The value of such programming is immeasurable, particularly when one explores the social and academic impact that aggression, anger control deficits, and poor peer interactions can have on students' academic and social performance.

With increasing concern regarding the school's ability to maintain the safety of students in the public school, educators have taken an active interest in pursuing opportunities to enhance students' social and emotional well-being. During the past twenty years, a great deal of progress has been made in the development of effective programming to address social skills deficits and behavior problems observed in students. Originally, school psychologists were encouraged to

address these types of deficits through direct service to the individual student. However, in recent years, the emphasis has shifted to providing preventative programming to all students in an effort to build academic proficiency and school-wide behavioral competencies (Committee for Children, 2001; Merrell, 2002b). A few of the programs that specifically target prosocial skill development in young children are: Anti-Bias Curriculum (Sparks et.al, 1989), I-Care Curriculum (see icarenow.com), Kindness Curriculum (Rice, 1995), and Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum (Committee for Children, 1992). These tools allow educators to work towards enabling all students to demonstrate problem-solving skills, employ anger management strategies, and resolve conflict using a variety of preventative and systematic methods.

Preventative programming in public schools has primarily targeted decreasing aggression as a means of responding to the growing concerns raised by educators and communities. However, over time, a greater understanding has been reached for the need to decrease aggression and increase socially appropriate response patterns. Therefore, programs that are utilized often attempt to improve interpersonal problem-solving skills by training children in cognitive processing, such as identifying and evaluating situations and generating non-aggressive solutions (Grossman et al., 1997). The Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum supports this idea by offering teachers multiple ways to target children's social knowledge generation and to help them produce and practice appropriate solution and responses to social dilemmas.

Description and overview of the second step violence prevention curriculum

The Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum is a successful and widely used universal violence prevention program (Committee for Children, 2008; see their website for program awards and recognitions by Federal and private organizations). This curriculum concentrates on the advancement of children's social skills in the area of empathy training, impulse control, emotion management, and social problem solving. This program underlines

empirical theoretical foundations that provide support for reducing aggression and promoting social competence (e.g., empathy, impulse control, problem solving, and anger management) from early childhood through adolescence. This fact is based on research suggesting that poor skills in these areas are seen as contributing risk factors for future violent behavior and poor school adjustment (Frey & Sylvester, 1997; Hawkins, Farrington, & Catalano, 1998). More specifically, the developers of the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum have focused their intervention efforts on improving young children's social and emotional abilities (Committee for Children, 2008). A general goal of the curriculum is for the teachers to provide support and skill development to all children in the class while also guiding more social competent children to model prosocial behaviors for children exhibiting problem-behaviors (Frey et al., 2000).

Foundation of the second step curriculum

The Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum is primarily grounded in social learning theory (Bandura, 1986). It also draws from other theories including social information-processing (Dodge, Pettit, McClaskey, & Brown, 1986), cognitive-behavioral theory (Kendal & Braswell, 1985), and Luria's (1961) model of self-regulation through verbal mediation. Each of these theories contributes to the rationale for universal and early prevention of aggression and promotion of prosocial skill development. The authors of Second Step (Committee for Children, 1992) describe the areas of empathy training, emotion management, and social problem solving as essential for intervention and prevention efforts.

Empathy training. The creators of Second Step (Committee for Children, 1992) describe competence in the area of social-emotional and social cognitive development as the ability to understand and appropriately respond to others' feelings. This is closely linked with the concept of empathy, which is defined as the capacity to experience and share the emotional state of

another (Eisenberg, 1986; Feshbach & Feshbach, 1987). Empathy is an important skill for children to develop as it has been shown to predict prosocial classroom behaviors, such as compassion, generosity, and cooperation, and it is negatively correlated with aggression (Feshbach & Feshbach, 1987; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). It typically includes skills such as identifying feelings in the self and others, perspective taking and realizing that not everybody feels the same in the same social situations. It is typical for children with aggressive tendencies to misinterpret the intentions of others and to lack the ability to look at a situation from another person's perspective. Therefore, an unintentional act may be viewed as provocation for an aggressive response due to this inability to accurately read and interpret social cues and the meaning behind others' behaviors.

Emotion management. The authors of Second Step emphasize that emotions play a large role in the relationship between thought and aggressive behavior. Children who are able to control their emotions are less likely to be aggressive than children who are deficient in this area (Underwood, Coie, & Herbsman, 1992). These children are also more likely to behave in socially competent ways when compared to peers who lack emotional control. Therefore, it follows that emotion management techniques, especially ones dealing with impulse control and self-regulation, would be employed with violence prevention programs that are focusing on problem solving and behavioral skill development.

Social problem-solving. The authors of Second Step assert that children with a tendency toward problem behavior typically show deficits in the area of social problem solving. These children often generate more aggressive and inappropriate reactions to social problems than children who are not considered aggressive (Rubin, Beam, & Rose-Krasnor, 1991). They also typically expect that aggressive solutions to social situations with result in the most positive and

acceptable outcomes for themselves (Crick & Ladd, 1990). Aggressive children often ignore social cues and make assumptions regarding hostile intent in situations where most children interpret the meaning as ambiguous. In addition, children with aggressive tendencies are lacking in the behavioral skills needed to achieve appropriate responses in problem situations (Dodge et al., 1985) such as perspective taking and strategies to help themselves calm down. Interestingly, children who are targets of aggressive behavior on a frequent basis are likely to display markedly similar deficiencies in their ability to resolve conflicts.

Effectiveness of second step violence prevention curriculum

The most comprehensive evaluation of the Second Step program, conducted by Grossman and colleagues (1997), analyzed the implementation of this curriculum with elementary school children to assess the extent of reduction in children's aggression as well as the increase in prosocial behavior. Twelve schools from both urban and suburban areas were paired with similar schools and half of the schools were randomly assigned to implement the Second Step program. Classroom teachers taught the curriculum from the program twice a week during a 4-5 month period and data were collected three times. The data consisted of teacher and parent ratings as well as direct behavioral observations by trained observers. The observers recorded physical and verbal aggression as well as neutral and prosocial behaviors. The observations suggested that the greatest reduction in physical aggression were found in the environments that were the least structured (e.g., playground and lunchroom). Friendly behaviors and neutral interactions increased in the intervention classrooms but not in the control classrooms. The results were maintained at the six-month follow up data collection as well. These results offered promising evidence that use of Second Step reduces children's aggressive behaviors and increases prosocial behaviors. In spite of these promising observational results,

the ratings completed by the teachers did not differ significantly between intervention and control subjects.

In more current research, studies have examined the effects of the program on students' behavior, cultural identity, facilitation of peer relationships, and teacher's role in implementation (Batey, 2002; McMahon, Washburn, Felix, Yakin, & Childrey, 2000; Nicolet, 2004; Han, 2007). In her study examining Head Start children's social competence and social cognitions after participating in the Second Step Curriculum, Wojtalewicz (2004) focused her attention on the degree of association among children's characteristics including gender, age, ethnicity, language ability, pretest measures of social competence and social cognitions, and intervention outcomes including posttest measures of social competence and social cognitions. In addition, her study explored the degree of association between teachers' characteristics, including age, years of education, years of experience, years in current position, and treatment fidelity, and intervention outcomes, including children's posttest measures of social competence and social cognitions, while controlling for socioeconomic status. Results suggested that young children made significant gains in social competence, social cognition, language ability, and overall development resulting from participation in the curriculum. In addition, and most relevant to this study, teacher characteristics played a significant role in the implementation of the program, resulting in child gains.

Using Naturalistic Strategies to Reinforce Social and Emotional Learning

There are many ways teachers can support the development of social skills throughout the school day. They can arrange the physical environment and emotional climate of the classroom to support their general social goals, they can utilize naturalistic strategies including incidental and on-the-spot- teaching to support these skills in the natural environment, and they can facilitate more specific and intentional interventions for children who need extra practice.

Because the focus of this study is to explore teachers' social concept support decision making processes in the natural play environment (i.e. inside free-choice playtime), I have decided to limit the scope of my construct to include only decisions within the "naturalistic intervention strategies" category.

Naturalistic interventions are used for improving young children's skill development in many developmental domains. For three decades, naturalistic strategies such as spontaneous and incidental teaching have been used to promote young children's language development (for reviews see Hart, 1985; Kaiser Yoder, & Keetz, 1992), and improve young children's social skills and behavior (Nordquist, Twardosz, & McEvoy, 1985; Brown, McEvoy, & Bishop, 1991). Naturalistic strategies are those that are integrated within the natural flow of the school day and can be easily embedded in ongoing routines and activities. They require minimal adult effort and time and are primarily used to support concepts and skills being taught at that time. Interventions that are implemented by teachers during routine school activities can help overcome two major problems that are often associated with more direct and structured social interventions: lack of generalization of social behavior to other contexts, and lack of teacher implementations (Brown, Ragland, & Fox, 1988; McEvoy et al., 1988).

For young children, social skills are learned and practiced primarily through interactive processes. Interventions offered by teachers in a natural context provide children the opportunity to interact with something meaningful to them, while in the presence of an adult who is available to suggest social strategies and responses appropriate for that specific situation or event (Katz & McClellan, 1997). On-the-spot support, including spontaneous and planned incidental teaching, is conducted during unstructured activities for brief periods of time, typically within the context of children's involvement in self-initiated activities. Spontaneous teaching happens when the

teacher observes an event that provided as opportunity to guide children through a difficult social dilemma that they cannot handle independently. Planned incidental teaching on the other hand, happens when the teacher has identified a particular social competence goal for an individual child or children and then uses a support intervention strategy when an opportunity presents itself.

The majority of research on naturalistic teaching has established it as a recommended practice for facilitating children' language and communication skills (Barnett, Carey, & Hall, 1993; McLean & Woods-Cripe, 1997). A series of classic studies documented the effectiveness of incidental teaching for increasing preschool children's use of adjectives (Hart & Risley, 1968), requests for materials (Hart & Risley, 1974), and use of labels and compound sentences (Hart & Risley, 1975). In a later study, Haring, Neetz, Lovinger, Peck, and Semmel (1987) evaluated a package that included four procedures: (a) giving children choices, (b) blocking access to materials, (c) placing desired materials out of reach, and (d) offering materials that were out of context for children's actions. These strategies increased children's independent communication with adults. Most recently, Venn, Worlery, Werts, and Morris (1993) used a progressive time delay to facilitate children's imitation of peers in both training and generalization setting. Finally, Alpert and Kaiser (1992) taught six mothers to use milieu teaching to facilitate the language of their preschool children. Each child made significant gains in mean length of utterance, as well as the number and novelty of words used during conversations with mothers.

Fewer studies, but growing in number, have examined the utility of naturalistic teaching for promoting the social behavior of young children; most in the area of early childhood special education. Studies examining naturalistic interventions for children with autism found that

spontaneously intervening while the child was playing successfully was important because they did not rely heavily on adult prompts, directions, and praise to promote the social interaction (Strain & Odom, 1986; Koegel & Koegel, 1995; Kohler & Strain, 1990). Other researchers suggest that routine early childhood activities involving learning centers, outdoor play, meals, and transitions have provided excellent contextual conditions and opportunities for incidental teaching of social behaviors for both children with and without special needs (Conroy, Langenbrunner, & Burleson, 1996; Kemple, Duncan, & Straingis, 2002). Brown and colleagues (1991) found that during incidental teaching episodes, teachers who promote children's peer interactions by providing adult models of social behavior or by encouraging peers to model appropriate social responses most successful. In addition, educators have supported children's peer interactions by systematically prompting children to elaborate their social behavior (e.g., when the educator observes a child physically comforting a peer who is upset and prompts the child to also verbally express empathy or concern). It is generally accepted in the early childhood field that episodes of incidental teaching of social behavior represent additional opportunities for children to learn new social responses or to practice and possibly elaborate previously acquired social behaviors during common school activities (Brown et al., 1991).

The information presented in the previous two sections aimed at drawing the reader into the construct of the study and providing them with a context through which to view the decision making literature to follow. Presented next are the foundations and research associated with decision making in general, teacher decision making, and the factors that affect teacher decision making. The goal for the following section is to give the reader some insight into teacher decision making so they better understand the scope and design of this study.

Decision Making

One place to begin is to define the term's *decision* and *decision making*. Jason Baron (2000), one of the leading researchers on thinking and decision making, very simply states, "A decision is a choice of action – of what to do or not to do" (p. 6). Yates, Veinott, and Patalano, (2003) add more complexity to the definition by stating "A decision is a commitment to a course of action that is intended to produce a satisfying state of affairs" (p. 15). These definitions emphasize the generally understood meaning of decision making (i.e. that a process of some kind is occurring; it is a deliberative act - either conscious or subconscious; and that it leads towards some solution). In addition, Mullen and Roth (1991) include that "All important decisions arise in the middle of living one's life" (p.2). They suggest that living one's life includes engaging in a set of more or less routine actions, as well as using some very well-established values and goals for which there is already a direction or present course. A decision "event" occurs when information presents itself that indicates a situation, directions or "present course" might worsen or a goal might not be met unless something is done.

In continuing to present a clear picture of this term, Baron's (1994; 2000) research has indicated that decisions, and therefore the processes that generate them, have a number of clear characteristics. (a) They always involve some kind of hypothesis testing. This hypothesis testing is viewed as an active part of the search and inference process that is fundamental to thinking and deciding (especially open-minded thinking), since it requires being open to the possibility that the search and inference process will reveal other options, better choices. (b) Decisions may fall any place along the continuum, from a simple choice between two options with an obvious goal in mind, to the far extreme of selecting among multiple layers of options, all of which may be many levels removed from broad and evasive, or even, changing goals. (c) Decisions are based on personal beliefs about how goals are best achieved and are also are strongly affected by

the values and expectations of others, especially those with influential power (Mullen & Roth, 1991; Baron, 2000; Schneider & Stanteau, 2003b). Fulcher (1965) describes decisions as having definite processes and characteristics and prescribes four basic categories all decisions fit into.

- (a) **Impulsive decisions** are essentially emotional reactions to situations often solved without much reflection.
- (b) **Routine decisions** involve decision making within familiar situations relying on habits, customs, or familiar rules.
- (c) **Casuistic decisions** are those resolved by a reliance on accepted ethical, moral, or religious principles or values.
- (d) **Thoughtful decisions** are those made after deliberately attending to such pertinent factors as the problem situation, alternative courses of action, and the probable consequences of each.

What he is attempting to show is that in the general sense, decisions and decision making most likely range from "quick fire" emotional responses to thoughtful multi-step solutions.

Another way of defining decision making is by describing the anatomy of the processes involved. Summaries of previous research in this field generally agree that the decision making process can be described as having *distinct parts* and *phases* (Byrnes, 1998; Baron, 2000; Lipshitz et al., 2001; Beach & Connolly, 2005) . In spite of the theoretical orientations that commonly describe the decision making process, the process itself seems to follow these commonly accepted phases: (a) a diagnosis of the uncharacteristic event or problem, (b) a selection or choice of an action response and finally, (c) an attempt at implementation. Simply stated, decision making may start with doubt or imbalance or a recognition that events are not moving along smoothly, progress to thinking about options and alternatives, and then move towards action that will bring back balance or create an effective solution.

Byrnes (1998) emphasizes the importance of the first phase and points out that individual differences among decision makers are quite evident here, since different people select different cues as worthy of response. The same is true for the process of interpreting the cues, since the manner of clarity of interpretation will greatly affect the response (Mullen & Roth, 1991; Byrnes, 1998; and Beach & Connolly, 2005). For example, if a teacher interprets a child's inattention during group time as developmentally appropriate, she may read his fidgeting as a cue to end the group time. On the other hand, if the teacher reads his behavior as deliberate misbehavior, she may feel an intervention is needed or a punishment is called for. In addition, Mullen and Roth (1991) suggest that during this period, at the very time they are trying to understand the situation, peoples' confidence may be disturbed by their feeling of uncertainty, thus affecting the rationality of their cognitive processing of options and outcomes.

Beach and Connolly (2005) suggest that the need for teachers to engage in decision making processes arises when a unique event, something out of the ordinary, occurs. This event is usually due to one or more of three situations: (a) changes in *internal wants* – "I want to develop more of a sense of classroom community," (b) changes in *external demands* – "the class routine calls for transition to the next activity," and (c) the realization that *previously made decisions are not yielding the wanted results* (Ex. Jack does not seem to have the skills to work cooperatively with peers, so practice opportunities must be available until he "gets' the intended concept). Therefore, the process begins with an evaluative judgment, moves towards recognition of the problem, and ends in taking an action (Mullen & Roth, 1991; Byrnes, 1998; and Beach & Connolly, 2005)

Beach and Connolly (2005) also suggest that identifying triggers involves comparing the current situation to other problems the decision maker has experienced. This puts the problem

into a context or frame, thereby allowing the person to call upon solutions used in the past. Currently, many researchers espouse that people go through a "framing" process at this stage. That is, they put the problematic situation into a context that helps them to make sense of it, but just how the framing process is accomplished is still debated (Lipshitz et al., 2001; Hutton & Klein, 1998 and Beach & Connolly, 2005). Baron (2000) also supports this view by stating that judgment is an essential aspect of this "framing" process. Judgment is defined as the "…evaluation of one or more possibilities with respect to a specific set of evidence and goals" (p.8). Of course, making a judgment involves committing oneself to a stand, so the clarity of one's values and beliefs greatly influences this step and the choices that will be available in future steps of the process.

Immediately, the decision maker is involved in the next phase, that of finding and evaluating options and choices. As noted above, people tend to find their options by comparing current problems to previous ones. Mullen and Roth (1991) claim that this phase of gathering information about possible alternatives or choices, is often done grudgingly, since changing "…an already decided upon course of action threatens the comfort of the behavioral inertia established by the efficiency of past routines" (p. 3). These researchers suggest that this step ends with narrowing the choices by evaluating them against the cost of dealing with the unfamiliar while comparing them to each other or to some external criteria.

Many researchers (Mullen & Roth, 1991; Byrnes, 1998; Baron, 2000; Beach & Connolly, 2005; Byrnes, 2005) describe a fundamental split as happening at this point in the process. Based on the seriousness or importance of the decision, their interest in the problem, and their time frame, people seem to opt for making the best possible or "optimal" decision. If the process becomes too complex and if the choices start to feel overwhelming, people tend to find a choice

that will “do” to satisfy the minimum requirements. In either case, the evaluation of options seems to stop when a choice fulfills some personally determined criteria of acceptability. Mullen and Roth (1991) suggest that individuals seem to decide upon a decision rule and use it. A decision rule is a way of integrating the information we have gathered concerning goals, choices, states (those outside influences or matters beyond our control that may affect the outcome), probabilities of states, outcomes and values of outcomes. This is done in such a way as to consider which choice is “best” and which choice will meet the satisfying criteria (p. 4). The final stage of a decision making process concerns the implementation of the plan. One aspect of this period is forcing one’s self to stay with the decision long enough to enact the plan (Mullen & Roth, 2001). They suggest that implementation takes time and new information is often added that confounds the decision, when this happens incentives to stay with the decision made may be needed or the decision maker may find it necessary to start the process again.

Mullen and Roth (1991) provide a succinct description of people’s reaction to the results of their decision making processes. If this occurs smoothly, it reinforces people’s perception of themselves as “good” decision-makers. Good decision makers are likely to have a realistic view of (a) reasonable choices that are available choices; (b) the emotional, social, and financial cost of their choices; and (c) the probable impact of outside influences on the decisions as well as reasonable assessment of their own ability to deal with those forces. People who generally make “good” decisions (those with favorable outcomes) tend to develop a trust in their abilities and to continue to make decisions and to seek out opportunities for decision making. On the other hand, people whose decisions tend to be negative (due to their poor judgment or overwhelming external forces) will often question their abilities and become more reluctant to engage in the more costly and intensive optimizing process in future decision-making situations.

Throughout this linear explanation of the phase of decision making, it is important to note that the process itself is not linear. In other words, although the process of decision making is described has following a straight-line and in a sequential format, this is not what happens in real life situations where complexities of the context and situation add a more cyclical dimension. This process nicely describes those decisions teachers might have time to think through; for many other decisions, these apparent steps happen simultaneously, and often without apparent pre-reflection, again emphasizing the need for clear beliefs and values since they influence the very first step of the process.

Teacher Decision Making

Historical and Current Research

Traditional research on teacher decision making focuses on attempting to understand teachers' thought processes, to determine what teachers focus on and the context of teacher's decisions. Philip Jackson (1968) was credited with changing the conceptual understanding of research on decision making and teachers' thought processes with his descriptive portrayal of life in a few classrooms during the 1960s through his book, *Life in Classrooms,* and his description of the pre-active and interactive phases of teaching, the importance of understanding the planning activities of teachers, as well as the interactive decisions teachers make while in the classrooms, became more evident to researchers. These phases are often used to distinguish two contexts of teacher activity which are characterized by different types of decision-making. In the pre-active phase, before lessons begin or at the end of the school day when children go home, teachers are involved in planning and evaluation processes which require them to make reflective decisions of a problem-solving nature. In the interactive phase, when teachers are in a face-to-face interaction with their students, events generally come and go too rapidly to permit such reflection, and teachers usually rely upon immediate, intuitive or routine decision making. This

process is well described in a simple model of interactive decision-making proposed by Peterson & Clark (1978) based on an earlier model by Snow (1972). While in the decision making process, teachers are viewed as constantly selecting and interpreting cues from the classroom environment. If the cues go beyond a certain acceptable threshold, teachers have to decide whether there are alternative strategies available to them to enable the classroom situation to be brought back on course. Furthermore, if alternatives are available, teachers must then decide how to act. Since the development of these ideas, much research has been completed on decision making and a large knowledge base has been created noting the many sub-topics within this larger theme of decision making.

Current research suggests that teaching practice is significantly influenced by teacher thinking and teacher judgments (1995National Institute of Education, 1975; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Isenberg, 1990; Sardo-Brown, 1990; Calderhead,; Richardson & American Educational Research Association, 2001). Secondly, it is understood that pre-teaching moments, or the planning aspects of teacher thought processes, often involve creating or reviewing mental scripts of possibilities. Such scripts enable teachers to focus on their knowledge of the context, use of materials, goal and objectives, and activities (National Institute of Education, 1975; Borko et al., 1979; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Isenberg, 1990; Sardo-Brown, 1990; Calderhead, 1995; Richardson & American Educational Research Association, 2001). During the teaching moment, teachers make active decisions based on the interactive cues they receive from children or from the environment. Considerable differences between experienced teachers and novice teachers in their ability to respond to interactive cues while teaching have been noted. That is, experienced and novice teachers respond to different types of cues, make different kinds of decisions, and have different degrees of awareness concerning the decisions they make (Bond, Smith, Baker, &

Hattie, 2000; Berliner, 2004; Laverick, 2007). One particular difference is that experienced teachers tend to make more decisions, are more aware of their decisions, and respond to a greater number of cues from the students (Byra & Sherman, 1993; Cleary & Groer, 1994).

Teachers' decisions vary in their nature, some are gradual (requiring extended thought process and reflection) and some are immediate (requiring quick action). Decision concerning the selection of appropriate teaching methods and curriculum content may be made over a fairly long period of time, require consultation with other staff, and involve considerable thought evaluation. Other decisions are rooted in the everyday happenings of the classroom where teachers meet a variety of unexpected situations: lessons do not go as well as expected, children experience unforeseen difficulties, or the activities of the class are interrupted by sudden events. Such situations demand immediate and appropriate responses in order to minimize classroom disruption, student's loss of interest and failure to learn. Still other decisions have become such a common aspect of classroom practice that they are made automatically (or routinely). In coping with recurrent issues in classroom life, teachers employ a repertoire of established teaching routines based on gradual or immediate decisions previously made. During periods of intensive interpersonal interaction, teachers may be heavily reliant upon these routines.

Experienced and Novice Teachers as Decision Makers

When discussing teacher decision making in any educational setting, one must take into account the pedagogical and psychological differences between an expert teacher and a novice teacher. While ''teaching'' may be considered by some to be the equivalent of following a ''recipe'' or a scripted program, the variables that teachers experience on a daily basis makes the educational setting a complex and challenging environment to navigate. This supports the need to recognize the importance of expertise within the teaching profession and acknowledge the role expertise plays when teachers make effective decisions. Generally defined, expertise refers to

‘‘…the psychological mechanisms underlying the superior achievement of an expert and the social forces that designate the status of being an expert’’ (Ericsson & Hoffman, 2003, p. 765). Understanding expertise begins with an awareness of the progression a person goes through from novice to expert. Berliner (1994, 2004) describes this progression for teachers and details associated personal and professional characteristics:

- (a) **Novice:** General rules are followed; context-free (student teachers and first-year teachers).
- (b) **Advanced beginner:** Teaching experience is blended with knowledge to affect behavior.
- (c) **Competent:** Experience and motivation to succeed is evident.
- (d) **Proficient:** Intuition and know-how are prominent; patterns among events assist in making predictions and decision-making (achievable around the fifth year).
- (e) **Expert:** Displays automaticity in accomplishing goals; sensitivity to the task demands and social situation when solving problems; is opportunistic and flexible; recognizes patterns quickly and accurately; perceives meaningful patterns; and uses personal sources of information to solve problems.

This definition of levels and characteristics of novice and expert teachers is important to my study because it provides a framework for my participant selection criteria and data analysis schema.

Pedagogical Knowledge

The professional knowledge context shapes effective teaching, what teachers know, and what knowledge is seen as essential for teaching (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Research in educational psychology indicates that the ways expert and novice teachers represent and access information in their memory differs considerably (deGroot, 1966; Chase & Simon, 1973). Overall, expert teachers are better able to recall relevant information, recognize meaningful situations and patterns, and organize their existing knowledge better than novices because they know more about child development, educational practices and specific subject domains (Byra &

Sherman, 1993). This extra knowledge increases their schema of concepts and enables them to link concepts together in different ways (Sherman, 1983; Berliner, 1985; Leinhardt & Greeno, 1986; Griffey & Housner, 1991).

Complexity of thinking is another way to examine the issue of pedagogical knowledge, in that expert teachers are touted with a more complex thought process and wider range of educational and professional experiences to draw upon when making instructional decisions. The way teachers interpret and understand their setting, students, and professional knowledge is a major factor in shaping how they respond in a decision making situation. According to Sameroff and Feil (1985), complex thinkers (often associated with having more expertise in their field) think in a perspectivistic way, while nominal thinkers (often associated with having less expertise in their field) tend to think more categorically. For example, a categorical thinker might have the singular idea that 'young boys have more behavior problems than young girls', while a perspectivistic thinker would view behavior problems as shaped by multiple factors (e.g. temperament, characteristics of the setting, patterns of behavior, etc.). The perspectivistic teacher acknowledges the unique relationship between child characteristics and particular environments and how this relationship shapes a child's behavior in a dynamic way and the categorical thinker simply considers misbehavior as part of the child's personality.

Beliefs, Values, and Attitudes

As was previously described, teachers' decision making is a recursive process of acquiring information and cues and forming inferences about children's abilities, needs, and interests; filtering these inferences through a personal system of beliefs, values, and attitudes; and then interacting with individual pedagogical knowledge, skill, and dispositions about teaching strategies and content subject matter. The aspect of decision making that concerns the role of

attitudes, values and beliefs is supported in this statement by Rimm-Kaufman and Sawyer (2004):

> Our starting premise is that teaching is an intensely psychological process and that teachers' ability to maintain productive classroom environments, motivate students, and make decisions depends on their personal qualities and ability to create personal relationships with students. (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004, p. 322)

The notion that quality instructional decisions depend on the personal attributes of teachers is a wide and encompassing idea; therefore this concept will be narrowed to focus mainly on agency and self-efficacy for the purpose of this study. Shepard (1995) reinforced the understanding that teachers' decision making efforts are influenced by their beliefs, especially their beliefs about their main responsibilities; the abilities of the students; and the way in which they perceive student learning to be achieved. He also suggested that the source of teachers' decision making may be based more on their perspectives about their agency than on the cues derived from the classroom. Therefore, a teacher's agency, or 'what they are about' may play the largest role in classroom decision making.

In addition to this idea, the body of research on the influence of beliefs on teacher decision making often considers the role of teachers' sense of self efficacy as being instrumental in decision making. According to Posnanski (2002), "Self efficacy refers to a person's perception of their ability to perform a task and the belief that they have the skills to perform certain behaviors that produce desired results" (p. 190). This concept, built upon the work of Bandura (1997), considers two aspects of efficacy. The first is expectancy -- the belief by teachers that they can successfully implement the behaviors needed to produce the desired outcomes and second, the conviction that the "…behaviors performed will indeed lead to the desired outcomes" (Posnanski, 2002, p. 191). Bandura (1997) showed that self efficacy beliefs affected teachers' performance in the following ways: (a) a teacher's choice of activities, (b) the effort expended on

developing the activities, (c) the length of time a teacher persisted when confronted by obstacles and difficult situations, and (d) a teacher's development of coping skills.

Since an increased sense of self efficacy means having a "high internal locus of control and positive attitude toward overcoming difficult situations"(Posnanski, 2002, p. 191), research consistently notes that teachers with high efficacious feelings about themselves tend to make decisions that create stable and effective means of maintaining order and discipline within their classrooms (Guskey & Passaro, 1994). Their decisions also include effective strategies to deal with difficult situations in calm and consistent ways. In addition, they tend to have clear strategies for routine procedural events, and they do not get so overwhelmed by the disharmony of classroom events (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004). These factors have been shown to improve student performance, thus ensuring that the bidirectional cycle continues. Self efficacious teachers tend to have students who are more likely to trust their own abilities to accomplish difficult tasks and to use the behaviors that will allow them to do so (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004).

Summary

How do teachers make decisions during the school day? What does it look like? How do they make effective decisions with the many demands that arise in a school context? Historically, such questions have attracted research interest, and have involved a variety of research approaches, from sociological to curricular to psychological, originating from different disciplinary backgrounds and involving the use of different theoretical models and research methods with which to conceptualize and investigate (Doyle & Ponder, 1977; Hargreaves, 1978; Peterson & Clark, 1978; Woods, 1979; Olsen, 1980). In this review of literature, the researcher has tried to present a holistic view of teacher decision making by connecting definition and descriptions with theoretical perspectives and current research and set the groundwork for this

study by presenting a lens (information on early childhood education, description of social and emotional learning in early childhood, and teaching strategies and tools used to promote social concepts) through which the reader should process the information. The introduction and literature review previously presented make up the "foundation" for this research study. The following chapter, methodology, will provide the "framework" for how the study will be constructed and implemented.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research provides a way to capture the complexity and richness of educational experiences and activities by exploring interactions, dialogue, and action over time (Patton, 2002). Because my research question required detailed exploration of teachers' decision making processes resulting from the need to support the skills and concepts espoused by the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum, a qualitative interpretative framework was used to build a complex holistic picture by analyzing the participants' experiences and interactions through observations and detailed interviews in a natural setting. In this chapter, the over-arching paradigm of qualitative research is explained as an appropriate structure for investigating preschool teachers' decision making, with naturalistic and interpretive methodologies providing the theoretical underpinning. A rationale is then presented for the instrumental case study research strategy. The data generation, collection, and analysis procedures are described and the ethical issues related to the study are addressed. In the last section of the chapter, issues concerning trustworthiness and transferability of the research findings are discussed.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Ideally, the research methodology used in a study should serve a deep and purposeful connection between the questions being asked and the way one seeks the answers (Merriam, 1998). A set of philosophical beliefs and abstract principles shapes how the researcher sees the world and acts upon it. Ultimately, a researcher must identify what constitutes valuable knowledge and the subsequent epistemology should serve as the foundation for which the research methodology selection and implementation will be grounded (Crotty, 1998). This study is theoretically grounded in the constructivist paradigm. This paradigm believes multiple realities exist and are constructed from individual perspectives and the unique experiences of those

individuals. In this paradigm, the researcher and participants are in the process of co-constructing reality (Hatch, 2002). As Moustakas (1994) stated,

> The challenge facing the human science researcher is to describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection. The process involves a blending of what is really present with what is imagined as present from the vantage point of possible meanings; thus a unity of the real and the ideal. (p. 27)

In addition, the researcher is bound within constraints which contain her epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises that may be termed a paradigm, or an interpretive framework. This study, exploring the nature of preschool teacher decision making is specifically situated in what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) refer to as:

> A constructivist-interpretive paradigm which assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), subjectivist epistemology (the knower and the respondent co-create understanding), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures. (p. 21)

Qualitative Research

The methodology used to pursue this constructivist theoretical perspective is qualitative research. Qualitative or naturalistic research is a general term that includes a number of fields such as ethnography, case study, phenomenology, and hermeneutics (Schwandt, 1997; Glesne, 1999). An important aspect of qualitative research is that it builds inductively instead of testing concepts, hypotheses, and theories (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Merriam, 1998). In education, qualitative research is frequently called ‘naturalistic’ because the researcher frequents the places where the events her or she is interested in naturally occur, and the data are gathered by people engaging in natural behavior (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The natural setting for this study is the preschool classroom where, as the researcher, I have studied the experience (or phenomena) of a teacher making instructional decisions as she supports social skills and concepts during free-play time in the classroom. The context is particularly important in the interpretivist research design

because it is in the natural setting that the qualitative researcher "attempts to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3). The researcher also becomes an integral part of the research process because the individual's behavior being examined can only be understood by the researcher sharing their frame of reference and experiences (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

In their listing of characteristics of naturalistic or qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified several factors that helped guide the design of this study. In their opinion, the qualitative researcher sees reality in wholes and does not think that reality can be divorced from the context in which it takes place because there are multiple constructed realities and they must be studied holistically. Qualitative research also views the researcher as the primary data-gathering instrument. This type of research recognizes that the researcher is essential to the identification of biases and acknowledges that the researcher and respondents have mutually shaping effects on each other. Qualitative research allows the negotiation of meanings and interpretations because of the human sources from which the data are drawn. This type of research is hesitant to make broad generalizations of findings because of the particular settings and interactions in which data are gathered (Patton, 1985).

While the qualitative study addresses the question "what is happening here?" (Creswell, 1998), the goal of the researcher is not to discover but to construct a clear reality (Stake, 2000). The purpose of the interpretive inquiry then, is to find meanings that yield insight and understanding (Cohen, et al., 2000). This intension provides further reason for choosing qualitative approach and interpretive orientation for my study. As is usual in such research, experiences and understandings are not reducible to simplistic interpretations and therefore "thick descriptions" are necessary. The data are accordingly reported in a detailed descriptive

form that presents everything the reader may need to know to understand the research findings. Ultimately, as Stake (2000) observes:

> The interpretations of the researcher are likely to be emphasized more than the interpretations of the participants studied, but the qualitative researcher tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictive views of what is happening. (p. 12)

All of these characteristics were part of the rationale for selecting the qualitative research methods used in this study. This exploratory study was done on-site to ensure the participants were not divorced from the setting. The study sought to look at a specific situation and the interactions within that situation. It was not an attempt to test pre-existing theories or ideas, but was an endeavor to understand certain aspects of one case study, an expert preschool teacher's decision making processes as she reinforces social concepts in the natural play environment.

Instrumental Educational Case Study: A Qualitative Research Strategy

A case study can either be qualitative or quantitative or a combination of both, although most lie within the realm of qualitative methodology. Case study has been generally defined as a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence (Robson, 1993; Yin, 2003). Stake (1995) defines it as "…the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). The most important characteristics of case study, whether it is a program, individual, or innovation, is that it is bounded (Merriam, 1998). A bounded system is rooted in space and time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). A researcher studies the case because she would like to understand it fully. A particular case may be chosen because it is either different or has some unique qualities that can help the researcher gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon.

Stake (1995) suggested that "…the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization" (p. 8); therefore, there is emphasis on uniqueness. Donmoyer (1990) also

considered uniqueness as an asset in a single case study. So, what is the value of a single case study if the findings cannot be generalized to other cases? Emphasis on the uniqueness of the case may prevent the results from being generalized, but this does not mean that the results are not applicable in other cases or research areas. Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to this type of generalization as "transferability". The results of a single case study may or may not be repeated when the same study is conducted in other populations. However, through the thick description of the case, the experience of the participants, and interpretations of the researcher, the readers can have access to the case as if they are a part of it and construct their own meanings to be transferred to their own experiences. Stake (1995) suggested a similar posture related to the generalization issue in case studies and stated that naturalistic generalizations are more relevant to case studies rather than statistical generalization. Naturalistic generalizations are "…conclusions arrived through personal engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to them" (Stake, 1995, p. 85). In this sense, generalizability of the findings of a single case study can be viewed more in psychological terms rather than in terms of mathematical probability (Donmoyer, 1990).

The case is not studied to understand other cases and the priority is to understand the case itself. However, sometimes a case can be studied to gain insight on a research question or puzzle and in this situation it serves as an instrument for general understanding of the issue at hand; it is called "instrumental case study" (Stake, 1995; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). In instrumental case study, the researcher starts and ends the study with his or her theoretical question or research issues. The case is a means for the researcher to gain an understanding of the issues or to answer the question. The researcher is also selective in which contexts she will explore within the case because only the contexts that are related to the research questions can help optimize

understanding of the research issues (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Therefore, in this study, my focus was answering the research questions and gaining insight on expert preschool teachers' decision making processes as they support social concepts in during free-play time in the classroom. In order to do this, I examined the actions, processes, and perceptions of a preschool teacher who has expertise, training, and documented effectiveness in using a specific social skills curriculum as she made instructional decisions in her classroom. The teacher's process of making decisions that relate to facilitation of social concepts in the classroom, as well as her attitudes and perceptions of the process through video recall interviews, served as instruments for answering my research questions.

Rationale for Selection of Topic and Design

Researcher Interest and Bias

After working with preschool teachers in professional development workshops designed specifically to enhance the use of the Second Step Curriculum and facilitating discussions about the teachers' difficulty in supporting the key concepts throughout the day, I became curious about how expert teachers (i.e. teachers who have successfully implemented the Second Step Curriculum in their classrooms for over five years) make these decisions in the preschool environment (natural settings such as inside and outside free play time, transitions, and meal times) outside of the actual time allotted for the curriculum lesson. Not unlike the larger population of preschool teachers, these expert teachers encompass different perspectives and experiences associated with teaching young children and working with the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum, and I became interested in what their decisions look like, how and why they made certain decisions, and what factors (internal and/or external) contributed to their decision making process.

In an effort to optimize rapport with teachers and to engender a better understanding of the decisions they make regarding support of social skills, I confined myself to the learning area with which I am professionally most familiar, namely preschool teaching and the social development of young children; and participants with whom I have previously developed relationships. Having been a preschool teacher of children ages 2-5 myself, and having worked with many preschool teachers and early childhood student teachers on skills and strategies associated with the social and emotional development of young children, I am very passionate about this area of research and feel compelled to expand the educational community's understanding of preschool teachers' decision making processes.

Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum: The Focus of Teacher Decision Making

Before describing the phases of data collection and analysis procedures, it is important to remind the reader of the area of social-emotional development and concept/skills encouraged by the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum. This information will provide a lens through which the teacher's social concept reinforcement decision making and the overall design of the study should be viewed.

The preschool and kindergarten version of the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum is made up of three main categories: empathy training, impulse control/emotion management, and social problem solving. The program gives teachers and students a common vocabulary to discuss social concepts and behaviors while connecting personal experiences to scenarios presented on 25 scripted picture cards. Following the 15-30 minute lessons, the teacher models the skills and the class can practice techniques through activities such as role play, puppet shows, songs, and group discussions. The following table presents the social and emotional concepts associated with each category in the curriculum (see table 3.1). These

concepts will be illustrated through the transfer of training decisions teachers make in the natural environment.

Table 3-1. Scope and sequence of the second step curriculum. (Committee for Children, 2007)

Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum	Scope and Sequence for Preschool/Kindergarten Program
Unit I: Empathy Training	
Lesson Titles	*Lesson Topics*
Lesson 1: Setting the Stage for Second Step	Introduction of the program and establish rules for listening
Lesson 2: Feelings	Using physical clues to identify other's feelings
Lesson 3: More Feelings	Using situational clues to identify other's feelings
Lesson 4: We Feel Things in Our Bodies	Using physical clues to identify our own feelings
Lesson 5: Feelings Change	Understanding that people's feelings about a situation can change
Lesson 6: Same or Different	Understanding that others can have different feelings about the same situation
Lesson 7: Accidents	Understanding that some actions are accidental
Lesson 8: I care	Using words and actions to show that you care
Lesson 9: I Help	Understanding that helping is a way to show that you care
Unit II: Emotion Management	
Lesson 1: Strong Feelings	Understanding that feelings vary in strength
Lesson 2: Calming Down Strong Feelings	Applying the ways to calm down to manage strong feelings
Lesson 3: More Ways to Manage Strong Feelings	Understanding more ways to manage strong feelings
Lesson 4: Dealing with Waiting	Identifying calming-down strategies
Lesson 5: Dealing with Not Getting What You Want	Applying ways to calm down to deal with disappointment
Lesson 6: Am I Angry?	Identifying how anger feels in the body, and recognizing the need to calm down
Lesson 7: Dealing with Being Hurt	Finding ways to calm down and understanding what to do when you are accidently hurt
Unit III: Social Problem Solving	
Lesson 1: Dealing with Losing Something	Introduction of the problem solving steps
Lesson 2: Dealing with Distractions	Using problem solving to deal with distractions
Lesson 3: Interrupting Politely	Demonstrating polite interruptions
Lesson 4: Fair Ways to Play	Understanding solutions to promote fair play
Lesson 5: Dealing with Having Things Taken Away	Using calm-down and problem solving skills to deal with having something taken away
Lesson 6: Dealing with Name-Calling	Using problem solving to deal with name-calling
Lesson 7: Learning to Have Fun with Our Friends	Understanding that fair ways to play promote fun
Lesson 8: Joining In	Understanding and applying the joining-in steps

Table 3-1. Continued

Lesson 9: Keeping Second Step Skills Going	Reviewing the Second Step Program

Connection to the Research Questions

Research using qualitative case study methodology focuses on asking the question "what" rather than "why", so as to explore the experience or action as it is described and understood by the individuals living the event. This form of research attempts to understand human nature and the world by encouraging participants to describe specific events rather than asking for their reflection upon the meaning of some event (Polkinghorne, 1989; Valle, 1989; Pollio et al., 1997). This particular investigation attempts to understand the internal (i.e. teachers' awareness of their decision making, processes involved in their decision making, and reasons for their decisions) and external factors (i.e. environment, climate, and activity) of a preschool teacher's decision making as she supports the concepts of the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum in the natural environment. Coming to understand the essence of these decision making experiences implies coming to understand the particular structural connections that form each experience. Dilthey (as cited in Van Manen, 1990, p. 37) identifies these connections as the "structural nexus" or the patterns and units of meaning that are explicated from the events through a process of reflection on their meaning. Gadamer (1975) states, "If something is called or considered an experience, its meaning rounds it into the unity of a significant whole" (p. 60). Thus, in this particular research, it is known that expert teachers using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum make many effective social concept reinforcement decisions every day (Wojtalewicz, 2004), yet the particular structure and nuances of the decisions making experience is not known.

The main research question driving my study is: *How does a preschool teacher with expertise in using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum make decisions regarding the*

support of social concepts in the play environment? Three sub-questions that lend support to answering the main question are as follows: (a) What does decision making regarding the support of social concepts look like from the teacher's and researcher's perspective? (b) What situations/events trigger the teacher to make social concept support decisions (what is happening during the decision making episode? (c) How do professional knowledge/skills affect the teacher's social concept support decision making? Since my research was focused on trying to understand teachers' decision making (with regards to concepts espoused by the Second Step Curriculum) as they occur in the play environment, each sub-question attempts to bring together pieces of information that will help the reader better understand the "essence" of the decision making process as a whole.

Procedures

This research is cast in a qualitative frame, in keeping with Woods' (1996) advice that the best way to investigate the subjective experiences and thinking of teachers is through and in-depth, interpretative design. I opted for a qualitative instrumental case study approach because of its ability to richly describe the activities and context wherein teachers operate, as well as the connections the researcher makes to theories and the research question through interpretations. My data collection and analysis procedures were divided into three phases, with phase two (stimulated recall interviews) and phase three (data analysis) continuously overlapping throughout the completion of the study.

Phase One: Data Generation (IRB, BII, Environmental Observations)

Acquiring participants and setting. Selection of participants for this research study was done through purposive sampling taking into account Patton's (2002) contentions that:

> The logic and the power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry. (p. 230)

Detailed information-rich data was very important to the intent and integrity of this investigation into preschool teachers' decision making processes and teachers with a specific skill-set were targeted. The strategy that was employed to purposefully select the sample was criterion sampling (Patton, 2002).

Several criteria were established for choosing the sample. (a) The participants were to be preschool teachers, teaching young children 3-5 years of age, (b) They should be experienced teachers, working as a 'lead teacher' for more than three years, (c) They should be proficient in and currently using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum in their classrooms, and (d) Each teacher must have an established record of *effectively* implementing the Second Step Curriculum in the classroom for a minimum of five years. The main goal of setting the criterion was to choose teachers who have had success teaching and reinforcing social concepts and skills in both instructional and naturalistic settings within the classroom environment. It is also important to note that due to the nature of the chosen data collection instruments, in which it was anticipated could be time consuming and potentially threatening to some teachers, consideration was given to be able to gain regular access to classrooms and the ability to achieve a level of trust between researcher and participant.

I sought out three teachers, involved in the Second Step Curriculum professional development workshop I helped conduct, who met the specified criteria and showed initial interest in the study. Upon initial contact, all three teachers expressed a verbal willingness to be involved in the research project. After further conversations, I chose one teacher and obtained written consent (see Appendix A) after acquiring permission from the director of the center. The teacher who participated in my study met my specific criteria because she currently teaches young children ages 3-5, has 9 years of experience as a "lead teacher", uses the Second Step

Curriculum in her classroom on a weekly basis, and was rated as *effectively* using the curriculum with young children through her participation in a previously conducted state-funded research study.

Background information. Acquiring background information describing the participant in detail is important when trying to understand her lived experiences since any differences between the participant and the researcher will influence how the data is perceived. A Background Information Interview (BII, see Appendix B) was conducted with the participant prior to the first observation and recall interview. An assumption I initially made was that the teacher will have distinctive life and teaching experiences that will lead them to implement and interpret their individual decision making process uniquely. The acknowledgement and description of their background, therefore, is crucial component of this study because it aids the researcher and reader in better understanding the participant and the experiences that shape their actions and perspectives.

Initial observations of the environment. Following the initial meeting with the participant to discuss the study, sign consent paperwork and complete the background interview, I began general observations in the teacher's classroom and around the school to obtain general descriptive information and become familiar with the setting, schedules, and routines. I spent two hours each day over a three day period taking written and video records of the environment to assist with my recall during the analyzing and writing stage of this study. Even though I have previously worked with this teacher, developed a friendly rapport and visited her classroom, this initial observation of the environment served as an opportunity for the teacher and students to get used to a researcher being with them and videotaping them throughout the day.

Phase Two: Data Collection

Since the medium of understanding a phenomenon is language and dialogue, face-to-face dialogic interviews tend to provide the most powerful format for obtaining precise and systematic descriptions of experiences (Pollio et al., 1997). The case study interview, which may take many forms, is often regarded as a conversation or dialogical discourse that involves an interpersonal engagement between the researcher and the participant (Merriam, 1998). The meaning of the experience emerges in the give and take of the descriptive conversation and the clarification that happens between two people, one who tells of the lived experience and the other who seeks to understand and clarify it as an experience of importance. Typically, the interviewer is the researcher since the rapport and nuances of the interview are such a vital part of the process and need to be understood by the researcher. In trying to better understand the choices, processes, and teacher perspectives associated with decision making when reinforcing social skills in the natural preschool environment, I chose to use video-stimulated recall interviews (Bloom, 1953) as my primary source of data. Observation records, in the form of a modified running record and memos, were used to record additional information not captured by the video recorder and initial interpretations by the researcher.

Collecting the video data. Initially, when the study included three teacher participants, each teacher was to be observed, recorded, and interviewed on four separate occasions, once a week, over a one month time period. But to gain a more in-depth picture of this single case, I spent 2-3 hours a day, three days a week, over a 6 week time period collecting video recorded data to use as prompts for the stimulated recall interviews. After familiarizing myself with the classroom schedule and environment and allowing the teacher and students in the class an opportunity to get used to the video recorder, I reviewed my initial observations and decided to confine my study to examining the social concept reinforcement decision making occurring

during free-choice play in the classroom. This playtime occurred in the morning for one hour and 15 minutes and the afternoon for 45 minutes. The bulk of video recorded data came from those two play times.

Stimulated recall interview. A very effective data gathering technique, which has been used quite extensively in the field of education, is video stimulated recall. It is a valuable methodology for gaining insight into the implicit theories and beliefs of teachers, and the relationships between beliefs and action (Calderhead, 1991; Meade & McMeniman, 1992; Dunkin et al., 1998; McMeniman, 2000) as well as capturing the complexity and specificity of classroom interactions (Lyle, 2003). Cognitive processes can be examined by inviting interviewees to recall, when prompted by a video replay, their concurrent thinking during a particular event.

The stimulated recall interview (Bloom, 1953) has its foundation in the field of information process tracing. Process tracing refers to a verbal report method that attempts to obtain information on the "…intellectual processes used by subjects as they render judgments and make decisions or solve problems" (Shulman & Elstein, date, p. 4). Although process tracing has been used to refer to a variety of methods, it most commonly describes research in which a subject is asked to (a) "think aloud" or "talk aloud" while performing a task, (b) recall thoughts after completing the task, or (c) think aloud while viewing a video tape or listening to an audio tape of herself performing a task. The first method is usually referred to as the "think aloud method"; the second is called the retrospective interview; and the third is called stimulated recall. Each method produces a verbal protocol (and sometimes accompanying written material). The protocol is interpreted as a series of mental operations that the researcher selects and the subject then uses to reach a judgment, decision, or problem solution. It may serve as the basis of

verbal characterization of a subject's thought processes or as data for content and thematic analysis (Shavelson, Webb, & Burstein, 1986).

Because of the nature of teaching, it is often difficult for teachers to "think aloud" while performing their classroom duties such as facilitating learning centers, managing behavior, or assistant individual students. To study teachers' thought, judgments, and decisions during interactive teaching, which reinforcement decisions belong to, these classroom interactions must be captured and stored until the students have left and/or the teacher can think aloud while reviewing the events recorded earlier. Stimulated recall interviews are often used to access this information. According to Bloom (1953):

> The basic idea underlying the method of stimulated recall is that a subject may be enabled to relive an original situation with vividness and accuracy if he is presented with a large number of cues or stimuli which occurred during the original event… Which cues such as these to furnish the framework, a great many associations will return. Since the individual is a participant in an event… this type of investigation can be carried out in such a way as to have only minimal effect on the nature of the original situation. (page number)

For this study, stimulated recall interviews using a video recording of a previously recorded free-choice play episode and descriptive information from the observational records serves as the stimuli to elicit the teachers' feelings, perspectives, and thought processes associated with their social skills reinforcement decision making. The video tape was replayed as soon as possible after the free play session, usually at naptime or afterschool, but within the day the events occurred. At the beginning of the interview session, the teacher and researcher watched the recorded tape once to elicit memories and select the decision making episodes later used to prompt the interview. For the interview, both parties watched the video recording together and the tape was stopped (either by the teacher or researcher) directly after a decision making episode was detected. Using a dialogue format and a series of loosely structured prompts (see Appendix C), the teacher and researcher explored the triggers, choices, and

processes of her decisions on the reinforcement of social concepts. Eight hour-long video stimulated recall interviews were conducted and all interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

Phase Three: Data Analysis

Stake (1995) stated that "…there is no particular moment when data analysis begins" (p. 71) and Merriam (1998) summed it up by stating that analysis is simply the "…process of making sense out of the data", the goal of qualitative data analysis being "…communication of understanding" (p. 192). However you look at it, data analysis in a qualitative case study can start as early as the formation of research issues. Even during review of literature, the researcher may come across certain notions that initiate the data analysis procedure, which is subject to modification at any point throughout the study. Similarly, initial data analysis and data collection can co-exist since the researcher is constantly in pursuit of meanings and patterns and how they are connected to the research issues or questions. Consistent with the qualitative interpretive methodology used in this study, data analysis proceeded concurrently with the data collection.

In order to record my observations and organize my field notes until the data collection was over, I made use of memoing. Memoing is recording reflective notes about what the researcher is learning from her data, as she gathers data through her observations (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In memoing, researchers write memos to themselves concerning ideas and insights and then include those memos as additional data to be analyzed. When all the data were gathered, I made use of the constant comparison method of data analysis for the interview data. The constant comparison method is used to generate thematic connections or categories from the data gathered. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) defined the constant comparison method as a method of analyzing qualitative data which combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. As each unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is

compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped (categorizing and coded) with similar units of meaning. If there are no similar units of meaning, a new category is formed. In this process, there is room for continuous refinement; initial categories are changed, merged, or omitted; new categories are generated; and new relationships can be discovered. In order to organize the findings around thematic categories, the transcriptions of the interviews were read line by line to identify the emerging patterns of similar meanings. These patterns of meanings were coded through open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss, & Corbin, 1990). In open coding, the data were examined, compared, and categorized. The categories that resulted from open coding were put back together by making connections between each category in axial coding. Finally, each category was organized around a core category through selective coding. This procedure was repeated until achieving theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is achieved when no more relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category or variable (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is a sense of closure that the researcher gets when he completes all levels of codes and when no new conceptual information is available to indicate new codes or the expansion of existing ones. The information obtained from the initial background information interview and the post-study interview, both semi-structured, were also analyzed through the constant comparison data analysis method. These results were then used for supporting or refuting themes that emerged from the video stimulated recall interview data.

Trustworthiness

To promote the validity of the research, two main strategies were used: triangulation and participant feedback. Triangulation is cross-checking information and conclusions through the use of multiple procedures or sources (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The background information interview and post-research follow up interview helped me to triangulate the data that I gathered through the video-stimulated recall interviews. Throughout the study, I elicited participant feedback as member checking to make sure that her perceptions and my

interpretations were coherent. By allowing the participant to comment on my data collection and analysis throughout, I had the chance to verify the validity of my interpretations, as well as creating the opportunity to gather additional data to strengthen or optimize my findings. In addition, I utilized my initial observations of the context and observational records (including my initial interpretations) to provide additional points of references for triangulation.

Summary

Given the need to find out information on how preschool teachers with expertise using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum make decisions regarding the support of social concepts and skills outside of the actual lesson and in the natural play environment, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of what the decisions look like, what events triggers the decisions, and how the teacher's intrinsic skills play a role in the decision making process. A qualitative instrumental case study design was employed to provide a way to capture the complexity and richness of the teachers' reinforcement decision making. In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical and methodological framework for the study as well as the overall design; and introduced the reader to the participant selection, data collection, and data analysis procedures. I concluded the chapter by addressing how I attended to trustworthiness in my research methods.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS: ALLISON'S CASE

This chapter begins with an introduction of the preschool teacher who participated in this study by describing her background, experiences, and professional knowledge. It continues with the presentation of the analysis of her video-stimulated recall interviews which are organized into responses for each of the three research sub-questions. The conclusion completely synthesizes the data in order to ascertain the answer to the main research question: *How does a preschool teacher with expertise in using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum make decisions regarding the support of social concepts in the play environment?*

Who Is Allison? Background, Experiences, and Professional Knowledge

Allison is an easy going 50 something pre-kindergarten teacher, who has been working in early childhood education since 1997. She has been teaching children ages 3-5 at the same school for nine years, and prior to employment at her current school she worked for the Alachua County Head Start Program for two years. Allison's love for children stems from her love for her own children and her passion for educating young children comes from a history of elementary and early childhood teachers in the family.

> I really like being around young children. My love for children started when I would watch my family interact with their students in Egypt, but really developed after I had kids of my own… The children in my class make my day, you know, they make me happy. The days that I don't come to school to work I feel so sad. I really feel bored when I'm not here…sort of unfulfilled.

Allison describes her job responsibility as developing young children in all domains and that there is interplay between the challenges she faces with the children in her class and the rewards she gets from watching them learn and change.

> Well, my job as a teacher is to nurture my students' developmental areas like physical, social, emotional, and academic. It is my job to teach within these areas, but it all depends on each one of my children's individual needs…The challenge comes when you have a difficult child with some behavior problems. You know you work with the child and you

> see him changing his behavior and he listens to you and he works with you and grows. Then the challenge becomes the reward. It's the best part about teaching.

Allison has a well developed teaching philosophy that is clearly observed throughout her interview. She states, "I believe that in order for young children to learn, they have to be stimulated and cared for. That's all…it's that simple". She goes on to include references and examples of the importance of individualized learning and developmentally appropriate practice in many of her interview responses (examples in sub-question #3).

Allison's story so far is not unlike a lot of early childhood educators. She is passionate about educating young children and knowledgeable about general early education practices. Where her story shifted dramatically away from other early childhood teachers is in the explanation of her educational background, current educational goals, and pedagogical beliefs about social and emotional learning. Allison describes her educational background:

> I started with my bachelors in engineering in 1974 in Egypt. I graduated second in my class and went looking for a job, but at that time companies didn't hire women. I took the next several years off to start my family – I have two children. I still couldn't find the job I wanted in Egypt so I went for my Master's and Ph.D. in coastal engineering here in the United States at the University of Florida. I was here from 1984 to 1987 and I completed my Master's and two years of my postgraduate degree work in oceanography and coastal engineering. Our visa ran out, so we went back to the Egypt and I completed my Ph.D. I did find a job then, I became an assistant professor but my husband and I wanted to come back to the States so he put our name in a lottery and we came back here a few years later
>
> When we got to the US, I couldn't find a job in engineering because it was really hard at that time. I came here [her current preschool] to do some volunteering. Through my volunteering I met the teachers and director and they liked me and offered me a job as an assistant teacher. Because I didn't have any experience teaching young children, only college students, I decided I needed to continue my education in early childhood education.
>
> I completed in an Associate's degree in child development at Santa Fe and then I moved into Elementary Education at St. Leo's University. It was very hard to complete my practicum requirement because I was teaching fulltime and they wouldn't let do it in my own classroom. So I wound up only completing four courses in Elementary Education. I still wanted to continue my education so I decided to switch to Psychology because I felt it was the most closely related to education. I finished my Bachelor's degree in Psychology two years ago, but I still wanted to do more, so I went to the EPI program and I'm almost finished - I only have one course left.

> (Researcher asks: Will that give you a teaching certificate?) Yes, I need a teaching certificate because think I may want to teach kindergarten for a change. It's funny but, I'm even thinking about going back to get my Master's in Early Childhood Education at UF. (Researcher says: Wow you're really an education person aren't you?) Yes, education is what I love to do. All of it. I love to take classes and learn and I love to teach. I really like to work with the kids in the morning and study in the afternoon.

In addition to her extensive educational background, Allison has some well developed ideas about teaching young children social concepts which were made evident through her interview in a discussion about some of her unique training and professional development experiences. Allison states:

> I have very high expectations for my children socially. From the first day of school we talk about and practice social concepts like following rules, expressing emotions, problem solving, and controlling our bodies. I know they have to practice and practice until they understand them…We practice these concepts first because we need a peaceful classroom where we can work and learn. But we practice these secondly because I know that they [the social skills] are important for them to learn. (Researcher asks: How do you know all of these things?) Well, I have had lots of education and special training in a social curriculum call Second Step. (Researcher asks: what kind of training?) A long time ago I was trained with some other teachers to learn about the program and how to teach it. I started using it in my class and really liked it…it was easy to teach. A few years ago I took part in a professional development workshop that helped us teachers still using the program to better use the ideas away from the Second Step lesson…in other parts of our daily routine.

The following sections briefly discuss the educational setting of pre-kindergarten and more specifically describes Allison's school and classroom environment. It is followed by an analysis of Allison's data and general conclusions.

Allison's School and Classroom Environment

The School Context

Allison works for a child development and education center that is situated on the campus of a community college and offers a comprehensive developmental program for children, ages 14 months to 5 years. The program provides toddler and preschool care to young children of all races, ethnicities, and socio-economic status and is open to the community. The center's main

educational goal for children is to help them learn "how to learn" by providing the emotional foundations of school readiness that encourage children to become increasingly responsible for their own behavior. The over-arching curriculum at the center is in concert with modern early childhood concepts with an emphasis on language and creative abilities and it is highly diverse in its student and teacher population. The school's context provides children with a positive multicultural environment and actively celebrates varying cultures and backgrounds. It also provides children a multitude of experiences in practicing creative thinking and cooperative behavior through play-based activities. In addition, teachers are encouraged to focus on fostering a positive attitude about the school experience so that children develop a love for learning.

Allison's Classroom Context

Pre-kindergarten. For this study, pre-kindergarten refers to school or center-based programs that serve 4-5 year olds, have an explicit goal of improving school readiness, and are funded fully or partially by the state. Within a brief span of time, overall investment in early childhood education has increased exponentially. State funds allocated to pre-kindergarten programs increased from 200 million dollars in 1988 to 3 billion dollars by 2004. By 2007, as many as 43 states were offering some form of pre-kindergarten including Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten, Head Start and Early Head Start programs. However, states vary dramatically in such key areas as: which children in their state are eligible to participate, where the programs are housed (in schools, private and public community centers), how many hours per week the classes meet, teachers' education and training requirements, amount of funding provided by the state and the ways in which providers blend funds from non-state sources, and the ages of children who can receive services.

Along with continuing state funded Head Start school readiness programs, which primarily serve the educational needs of low-income children; the state of Florida has instituted the voluntary pre-kindergarten program (VPK) which is free to families and available to any child meeting the specified criteria. The goal of VPK is to provide all children a jump start by preparing them for school and enhancing their pre-reading, pre-math, language and social skills. This is supported by the premise that by developing the skills children need to become strong students at an early age, children are more likely to be successful in school. In order to participate, children and teachers must meet specific criteria. Children must turn 4 years-old prior to September 1st of year of participation and have not been previously enrolled in a complete year of VPK. All VPK teachers must hold a child development associate certificate (CDA) or an Associate's degree in an unrelated field with 6 additional credit hours of coursework in child development or early childhood education.

Allison's classroom. Allison's classroom is a fully funded voluntary pre-kindergarten classroom and is organized for learning and exploration. The classroom is housed in a small portable building that includes vegetable and flower gardens out front and a deck leading to the playground out back. The interior of the classroom is light and bright with many windows on two of the four exterior walls. Allison shares her space and materials with another VPK teacher, but they are rarely in the classroom at the same time. They have worked out a schedule that rotates the two classes between computer time (housed in another building) and outside play (on the playground) and circle time instruction and free-play (inside the classroom). Allison has arranged the room in large activity centers (i.e. art and creativity, blocks and manipulative, dramatic play, computer and listening stations, science and emergent literacy, and fine motor) around the inside perimeter of the building and has included space for a large circle-time rug and

instructional table in the center. It is obvious that Allison takes pride in her students' work, as it is displayed on the walls around the room along with other aesthetically pleasing items (i.e. posters, pictures of children, drapes, etc.).

Allison's class consists of 10 students, 6 girls and 4 boys ranging in age from 4 to 5 years. As this data was collected in the later part of the school year, 7 out of the 10 students had already celebrated their fifth birthday. Of the 10 students; 6 were Caucasian, 1 was African American, 2 were Asian, and 1 was South American. Six children's parents were students at the community college, 2 children's parents were faculty or staff at the community college, and 2 children's parents worked in the city. Four of the 10 students were labeled by the teacher as having "challenging behaviors" ranging from hyperactivity and aggression to developmental and speech delays – two of the 4 were officially diagnosed (one with speech delays and one with ADHD). For the most part, Allison's class appeared to be a typical group of pre-school age children. Throughout the day there were periods/situations where some of the children acted out (researcher observed evidence of aggression, selfishness, and disrespect), but the majority of the time everyone got along and the classroom operated harmoniously.

Using Allison's Case to Answer the Research Question

Because the research sub-questions were specifically written to address components that will help me answer the main research question, I have grouped Allison's analyzed data and experts from her interviews by sub-questions in an effort to organize the data for the reader and provide a descriptive and detailed picture of Allison's decision making for the support of social concepts. Throughout the study, 87 decision making episodes were collected through video observation and 23 were deemed by the teacher and researcher as decisions regarding the support of social concepts. Eight hour-long recall interviews were conducted with the teacher in order to talk about and analyze the 23 selected decision making episodes – the research and teacher

addressed between 3 and 5 episodes in each interview. Seventy-seven total pages of transcription were yielded from the data: 12 pages of notes and corresponding memos from the episode selection session with Allison, 23 pages describing the chosen decision making for social concepts episodes, and 42 pages from the 8 recall interview sessions.

Sub-Question 1: What Does Decision Making Regarding the Support of Social Concepts Look Like From the Teacher's and Researcher's Perspective?

I began to collect information to help describe what support decision making looks like by reading through the video-stimulated interview transcripts as they were completed. Directly, I noticed that each decision episode selected fell into one of two categories (or decision types): *Proactive* or *Reactive*. Proactive decisions occurred before the observed playtime (during pre-planning or reflection time) and reactive decisions occurred inside the playtime while the children were engaged in an activity. My choice to use these labels was based on Philip Jackson's (1968) decision making terminology "pre-active" and "interactive". Jackson espoused that the types of decisions teachers make fall into categories concerning the timing of the decision making episode. Pre-active decisions happen prior to classroom instruction and involve much thought process and reflection, while interactive decisions happen during classroom instruction or daily activities. In this study, I found that Allison's supportive decision making happened similarly, but that Jackson's terminology lacked description and a contemporary edge. For the purpose of this study, proactive decisions are ones made outside the teaching moment (during planning and/or reflection time), while reactive decisions happen "on-the-spot" as a reaction to a spontaneous event.

With the initial categories of decision type in place, I examined the data for additional related themes. I discovered that all of Allison's decisions could be further divided into two additional categories: *Routine* or *Thoughtful*. This terminology is taken directly from Fulcher's

(1965) descriptions of decisions fitting into one of four basic categories: impulsive, routine, casuistic, and thoughtful. Routine decisions involve decision making within familiar situations relying on habits, customs, or familiar rules, while thoughtful decisions are those made after deliberately attending to such pertinent factors as the problem situation, alternative courses of action, and the probable consequences of each. Fulcher (1965) indicated that all decisions must fit into one of the four basic categories; yet I espouse, after analyzing the data, that reactive decisions can fall into both the routine and thoughtful categories (further explanation in Chapter 5). Allison's video observations yielded 23 social decision making episodes. Five episodes consisted of proactive decisions and 18 consisted of reactive decisions. To better illustrate the decision types and their associated social concepts, a typology was created (see Table 4.1) and examples of proactive and reactive decision are provided.

Table 4-1. Typology of decision making episodes and associated social concepts.

Type of Decision Making Episode	Categories of Social Concept or Skill
Proactive 5 Proactive, Thoughtful	Communication Patience Problem solving Trading Turn taking
Reactive 14 Reactive, Routine 4 Reactive, Thoughtful	Cooperative play Communication Developing a plan Personal responsibility Problem solving Self-regulation and impulse control Turn taking

Proactive Decisions

<u>Example #1: Proactive, Thoughtful</u>

The teacher is at art table with four children. She begins pulling out colors of paint and asks the children what color they would like to start with. Teacher says to one child "would you like blue", Child says "no but I would like pink". Teacher responds "she is already using pink you can start with blue and then trade with her when she is finished... you know what trade means right? First we can use this color and switch when the other person is finished. Remember, we

talked about this yesterday ". Children continue to paint and ask each other if they are finished with one color and if they can trade.

Interview Response:
Researcher asks: So what made you decide to just start talking about trading?

Teacher responds: Because the lesson yesterday was about trading, so I just wanted them to learn more about trading and the painting activity was good for that.

Researcher asks: So you purposefully designed the painting activity to work on trading?

Teacher responds: Yes, since we talked about trading the day before, I thought I would set up an activity where children could either paint or color. I limited the art materials so they would have to share and trade. This forces them to problem solve and I designed it so that trading was the strategy they used.

Example #2: Proactive, Thoughtful
On the rug next to the art center, five children were engaging in a new activity the teacher set up specifically to promote social concepts the children had been introduced to over the previous few weeks. The activity was based on fishing where the teacher created fishing poles with magnets on the end. She spread the fish (paper, with social skills written on them) on the floor and the children were to catch the fish, read the skill, and decide whether no not they use the skill regularly.

Interview Response:
Researcher asks: So, what made you decide to set up this fishing activity?

Teacher responds: Well, I have used it before with shapes and I thought since we are coming to the end of the school year and the end of our Second Step lessons, I would modify the activity to include some of the social skills we have been working on. Sort of like a recap of everything we have learned.
Example #3: Proactive, Thoughtful
The Teacher decided to set up a new reinforcement activity where the children could give themselves check marks on a large piece of chart paper when they caught themselves sharing. Throughout the free-play activity time, the kids could stop what they were doing and give themselves a check if they felt they deserved one.

Interview Response:
Researcher asks: So, how did you come up with this activity?

Teacher responds: We did a lesson on sharing the other day and I thought it would be fun if the children could chart how often they shared something during free-play. We have never tried this

before and I wondered if they could recognize when they were sharing or when their peers were sharing.

All of Allison's proactive decision making episodes were categorized as thoughtful and were characterized as being a product of thought and reflection of a prior topic or concepts presented in the class during instructional time. Allison described that after she taught a Second Step Lesson to the children; she would often develop follow-up activities for free-choice time that reinforced the concepts presented in the lesson. She repeatedly mentioned that one of her goals was to provide a lot of "practice opportunities" for her students.

Reactive Decisions

Example #1: Reactive, Thoughtful
When a child joins the group at the art center, the teacher asks what color she wants to paint with. The child responds "blue" and all the other children start asking for new colors. Teacher walks over to where the paints are mixed (children constantly asking for more colors) and responds to the children's requests with "you have to wait you, have to be patient... do you know what that word means - patient?"

Interview Response:
Researcher asks: Why did you decide to use the word patient?

Teacher responds: Because we have talked about waiting and being patient before and I thought it was a good time to reinforce that skill. It goes along with trading because children have to wait for their turn with the desired material.

Example #2: Reactive, Routine
As the children begin to respond, a loud conflict breaks out across the room in the dramatic play area. Two children are arguing over a toy. Teacher immediately gets up from the art center and moves to the dramatic play area.

Interview Response:
Researcher says: So the children never really got a chance to respond to your question about patience because a loud noise from children across the room by your attention.

Researcher asks: So what made you decide to go over to the dramatic play center?

Teacher responds: Because of the noise at first. There should never be that level of yelling in the classroom. When there is, it usually means something is wrong and if I don't intervene, it will probably get worse. I know my children well enough that when there is a problem somewhere I need to be there.

Researcher says: So the first thing that happens after you enter the dramatic play area is you ask "so what's happening here?" Why did you decide to ask that?

Teacher responds: Well, I needed to know what was going on right away.

Researcher asks: What happened next?

Teacher responds: Well I notice they were fighting over a toy, so I took the toy away so I could get the children's attention. Removing the toy makes them stop fighting, focuses their attention, and lets me try to understand what is going on.

Researcher says: Do you think that strategy worked?

Teacher responds: Yes, I think it worked. The kids stopped arguing and they both looked at me. I had to make them stop or they wouldn't be able to tell me what the problem was. So I asked them again "what's happening here?" and Mia responded “he took my toy”. Payton was getting distracted and wasn't looking at me, so I gently put my hands on his chin and turned his face towards me so he could focus his attention.
Researcher asks: Why did you decide to do that?

Teacher responds: Because Payton is a child who needs face-to-face interaction. He loses his attention very easily and I have to refocus him either verbally or physically. It's a strategy I use often with children who cannot focus very easily.

Researcher responds: So after you found out Payton snatched Mia’s toy, what did you ask them to do?

Teacher responds: I asking Payton to apologize to her, and he did in a frustrated sort of way. But she didn't buy it, and just walk away.

Researcher asks: So then what did you ask him to do?

Teacher responds: I asked him to follow her and talk to her.

Researcher asks: Is this something that you commonly do?

Teacher responds: Yes, it is a strategy I commonly use in the classroom. I want the children to communicate with each other and explain why they did something or how they feel or even what they could do to make the other child feel better. Communication is a skill that is very important in my classroom. The children need to talk to each other instead of me always talking for them.

Researcher asks: Do you think the strategy of communication worked in this case?

Teacher responds: Yes, I think it worked. In this case, I remember he talked to her and came up with his own solution. He gave her a suggestion of how to play with the toy, where he got to play first and then she got to play second. He looked at me and I encouraged him to ask her. She says she didn't like the idea and that's okay because she had the right to say yes or no to the suggestion. He looked at me again, I think for reassurance, and he gave the toy back to her and started playing with something different. In the end, the conflict was resolved because he communicated his idea and when it was rejected came up with another solution that solved the problem. They played in the same center for the rest of the activity time without any other conflicts.

While Allison's proactive decisions were easy to categorize, her reactive decisions were more complicated. Initially all were categorized by the researcher as thoughtful according to the characteristics they exhibited. However, upon discussion with Allison, 14 were classified as routine decisions and 4 as thoughtful decisions. After reading the data multiple times and reviewing the actual video recordings of the episodes, I noticed that Allison's version of a routine decision had a very thoughtful process behind it. For example: Allison often responded to a child conflict quickly based on the need to interrupt the pattern of behavior. The decision to intervene initially would fall into the routine category because she handled similar situations the same way every time. In all the episodes except two, Allison went on to make additional thoughtful decisions regarding the reinforcement of certain concepts. The interesting finding here is that when I followed up with Allison during member checking, she felt that most of her reactive decisions should be classified as routine instead of thoughtful. I asked her why she thought that way and she simply answered: *"because that's just what I do…I make these kinds*

of decisions every day, multiple times a day…it is habit to respond to them[the children] the way I do when they are in need." I found this group of statements perplexing and wondered if she did not realize the thought process that was going into her reactive decisions. When I asked her how she makes decisions "in the moment" she responded: *"I know my kids personalities and needs…I know what will help them…that's how I make my decisions"*. Through our continued discussions, we determined that Allison's reaction decisions were routine to her, but had thoughtful characteristics because they required information about the child, his needs, and the most effective way to intervene – information that Allison was cognizant about at all times.

Decision making process

What is actually occurring in Allison's decisions systematically? Examining the decision making process in its linear form helped add detail to the case and provide another component for describing what a decision for the reinforcement of social concepts looks like. I chose to use the commonly accepted phases of decision making: (a) a diagnosis of the uncharacteristic event or problem, (b) a selection or choice of an action response and finally, (c) an attempt at implementation (Byrnes, 1998; Baron, 2000; Lipshitz et al., 2001; Beach & Connolly, 2005) as a schema to analyze the data. I simply looked for evidence that each decision episode went through the same process; starting with a doubt or recognition that events are not moving along smoothly, progressing to thinking about options and alternatives, and then moving towards action that will bring back balance or create an effective solution. Below are examples from Allison's data that illustrates her decision making process and the phases are noted in parentheses.

<u>Example #1:</u>
Two children were independently playing in the kitchen area and the teacher enters the area to facilitate cooperative dramatic play.

Interview Response:
Researcher says: Why did you stop at this episode?

Teacher responds: Well I saw them playing in the kitchen, but not really playing with each other and I decided to see if I could get them to play together. (Recognition of the Problem and Selection of Action)

Researcher asks: What happened? Describe for me how you facilitated the play.

Teacher responds: I just walked over, asked if I could sit down in the kitchen and asked them about the kinds of foods they were making. They both started telling me about their foods and I pointed out that they were both making types of desserts and that I love dessert. (Attempt at Implementation)

Researcher asks: Why was it important to you to come over and interact with them.

Teacher responds: For the language and communication. So they can know I'm here for them and interested in what they are doing. For their self-esteem. A lot of reasons, really. I also wanted them to play together. So many times they just hang out in the kitchen, each doing his own thing. So I asked them to cook me a dinner together and we all talked about what they could make. It was great because the decided to make me a cake and then got sidetracked on making food for the pretend dog that lives in the kitchen. In the end, I left the center and they were playing together creating dog food for the dogs in the neighborhood – or something like that. (Attempt at Implementation)

Example #2:
Five children were engaged at the art table mixing colors and one child was having so much fun looking through two colored plastic pieces that another child walked across the room and quietly asked to have a turn.

Interview Response:
Researcher asks: Why did you stop the tape at this episode?

Teacher responds: I noticed Bonnie, who rarely asks anyone for anything, asked for a turn with the plastic pieced and Payton ignored her. (Recognition of the Problem)

Researcher asks: Tell me what happened.

Teacher responds: After Bonnie asked to use the materials twice and was ignored, I knew she would probably just walk away and I wanted her to have a turn. This was a great opportunity for

Payton to practice sharing and for Bonnie to learn to speak up for something she wants. (Selection of Action)

Researcher asks: So this was a conscious decision to intervene.

Teacher responds: Oh, yes. When there is an opportunity to work on social skills with kids I know need the practice, I always try to help.

Researcher asks: What happen next?

Teacher responds: I directed Payton's attention to Bonnie by asking him to look at her and asking her to ask for a turn again. (Attempt at Implementation)

Researcher says: I see you using this technique of facilitating conversation through direct scaffolding a lot in your classroom.

Teacher responds: Yes, communication between children is very important to me. How can they learn to get along if they don't talk with each other?

Researcher asks: What happened to resolve the issue between Payton and Bonnie?

Teacher responds: Well, Payton came up with a solution on his own and held the pieces up to Bonnie's eyes so she could look through them.
Researcher asks: So he never really gave her a turn, right?

Teacher responds: No but he put it up to her eyes and she looked through it, they laughed and everything seemed to be fine. I didn't press the point of turn taking because Payton problem solved and Bonnie was satisfied with the outcome. (Recognition of the Problem, Selection of Action)

Researcher asks: So it was a conscious decision not to press the point?

Teacher responds: Yes. If they are problem solving on their own, I don't need to be in the middle of it. I can always revisit the concept at a later date or when another opportunity presents itself. (Attempt at Implementation)

<u>Example #3:</u>
The teacher notices that there is a large group of children milling around the chart paper and that some children have tons of check marks next to their names on the sharing chart.

Interview Response:
Researcher asks: What make you decide to stop the video here?

Teacher responds: I remembered that I had to address the class and talk about what was happening with the sharing chart. It wasn't going well. (Recognition of the Problem, Selection of Action)

Researcher asks: Can you tell me what happened?

Teacher responds: Well, I saw that there were too many check marks on the paper and I didn't feel like the concept of the activity was sinking in with the kids. I asked them "oh, wow! I see too many check marks". And the kids responded that they were doing a lot of sharing. I didn't feel so sure about that because I was helping the kids at the fishing activity and didn't see the sharing. I had a feeling that they were just competing to see who could give themselves the most checks. I said again "look at all these check marks, you are doing a lot of sharing. Can you tell me about the sharing you are doing"? None of the kids really responded, except to say they were sharing the crayons and paper. I wanted to praise them and acknowledge that they were doing a good job, but I was already noticing in my mind that some things about the task had to be modified. (Attempt at implementation, Recognition of another problem)

Researcher asks: So at that time, you were already thinking you needed to change something about the activity?

Teacher responds: Yes, but I didn't really think about what I needed to do to help the kids understand the concept of the activity right at that moment, just that I needed to remove the chart paper and give it some more thought after school. (Selection of Action, Implementation of action)

Researcher asks: So it was a conscious decision not to modify the activity then and there?

Teacher responds: Yes, I didn't have time to think about clarifying the activity and reinforcing what sharing is. It was busy in the classroom and we were almost out of play time. So, I just needed to remove the chart so it didn't cause any more disruptions and wait to address it another day.

These episodes present a sample of the findings that all of Allison's decisions followed the universal process of decision making. The pattern was even evident in her descriptions and explanations of her proactive decisions, of which none were cited as examples. It is important to

note that Allison made multiple reinforcement decisions within the majority of her selected episodes and all decisions followed the same process. For example: she may have been called to make an initial reinforcement decisions regarding turn taking because of a child's frustration with waiting in line. The recognition of the problem, selection of intervention, and implementation of intervention were all present. In the same episode, she may have noticed that the intervention did not work the way she intended, so recognition of a new problem, selection of intervention, and implementation of intervention happened again. As a note, even Allison's intentional act of not intervening was counted as a *selection of action* and/or an *action of implementation* in this process.

Sub-Question 2: What Situations/Events Trigger the Teacher to Make Decisions Regarding the Support of Social Concepts?

What is happening externally (within the environment) and/or internally (within the teacher) to cue the teacher to make a reinforcement decision? The following examples represent illustrations for the "need" to make a decision. Beach & Connolly (2005) suggest that this need arises when a unique event, something out of the ordinary, occurs. This event is usually due to one or more of three situations: (a) changes in *internal wants* – "I want to develop more of a sense of classroom community," (b) changes in *external demands* – "the class routine calls for transition to the next activity," and (c) the realization that *previously made decisions are not yielding the wanted results* – "It is evident that Jack still does not seem to have skills to work cooperatively with peers, so additional practice opportunities must be available to him until he "gets' the intended concept."

For this part of the data analysis, I have chosen to use Beach and Connolly's (2005) trigger situations as a framework for analyzing Allison's decision making. Each of the 23 selected decision making episodes was triggered by one or more of the previously state stimuli: internal

want, external demand, decision not working. Below are examples that illustrate some of the situations that triggered Allison's decision making process and the trigger type is denoted next to the example number.

Example #1: External Demand – Child conflict; Internal Want – Desire to reinforce the concept of patience

The teacher set up an art activity where children were mixing colors. They had the option to use play dough, paint or colored plastic pieces, but the materials were limited so the children would have to share, take turns, or work together. Two children at the art table began to fight over some colored plastic pieces you lay on top of each other to simulate color mixing.

Interview Response:

Researcher asks: Why did you stop the tape at this episode?

Teacher responds: Because two children were tugging at the art materials and I knew I needed to intervene.

Researcher asks: What happened in the episode that prompted you to make a decision related to social concepts.

Teacher responds: First, the children were fighting over the materials and I wanted to stop it before the conflict got out of hand. Second, I intended for the children at the table to share or at least take turns with the materials and I knew this would be a good opportunity to discuss patience and communication.

Researcher asks: Can you describe for me what happened in the episode?

Teacher responds: Payton was very frustrated because he wanted a turn with the plastic pieces and tried to grab them away from Emma. This happens a lot. I reminded him to relax, calm down, and take a breath because I know he can get out of control when he really wants something and can't have it. I said that he had to be patient and wait his turn, but I really wanted him to just stop and think about how he should act with his friends.

Researcher asks: So why, in this situation, did you decide to intervene with Payton the way that you did?

Teacher responds: Because I know he is an impulsive child and often he cannot wait. He needs to be constantly reminded to be patient and relax.

Researcher asks: What did you do next?

Teacher responds: After he sat back down and calmed himself, I asked him what he could do in order to have a turn next. He started to turn away from me, so I asked him again what he could do. I noticed that he was being a little stubborn so I prompted him with a solution. I said you could ask Emma if you could have it next. He didn't make ever contact with her but asked her is he could have a turn. She handed the pieces right over to him and I told him 'see that worked'. I then asked him what he could do for Emma. He said thank you to her.

<u>Example #2: External Demand – Child conflict; Previous Decision Not Yielding Desired Outcome</u>

While the teacher is working at the art table, children in the background (at the fishing activity) are getting increasingly louder and arguing over taking turns. The teacher recognizes the children's frustration and gets up from the art center to intervene.

<u>Interview Response:</u>

Researcher says: what prompted you to get up from the art center?

Teacher responds: I heard arguing at the fishing activity so I got up to see what was happening. I heard them saying 'it's my turn…no it's my turn". So I said hey, lets stand in a line to wait so we will know whose turn it is next.

Researcher asks: what made you decide to use the skill of waiting in a line over any other skill?

Teacher responds: Well it was common sense to me…the first thing that popped into my mind to get them more organized and reduce the conflict. It was on-the-spot and that's what was on my mind. You have to come at them with a strategy that works.

Researcher asks: Did it work in this case? What happened next?

Teacher responds: Well it didn't work right away. They couldn't get themselves organized without my help so I had to physically move them into a line and explain what waiting in a line means. I really thought they would know what to do without so much help, but they didn't and that's why I physically stepped in.

Researcher asks: How did it make you feel that you made a decision about a strategy to use and it didn't work?

Teacher responds: I didn't get frustrated or upset because I knew they would get it with a little more help. That's why I explained what to do, physically move them, and stayed close by to

help them. They eventually got it and everyone waited for a turn without complaining. I should have known better. It was the first time they tried this activity and everyone was excited to play.
Researcher asks: So what happened next?

Teacher responds: Another child entered the group and wanted to participate. She tried to grab the fishing pole, so I had to step in and explain that she had two choices: either she could go back to the kitchen (where she was playing before) and wait until the activity had less kids in line, or she could wait in line with the rest of the kids. And that's what she did.

<u>Example #3: External Demand – Child distress, Internal Want – Knowledge of child and desire to reinforce the concept patience</u>
While teacher is still at the fishing activity, Payton begins complaining and stomping his feet in line (obviously out of patience).

<u>Interview Response:</u>
Researcher asks: why did you choose to stop the tape here?

Teacher responds: Because I had to make a few interventions with Payton at this time.

Researcher asks: What triggered you to intervene with Payton?

Teacher responds: His physical and verbal cues were telling me that he was getting frustrated waiting and because he lacks impulse control I knew he could get really upset.
Researcher asks: So what happened?

Teacher responds: After I saw him getting upset, I looked him in the eyes and asked him to wait his turn. He didn't respond so I asked him if it was too long a wait for him. I know he is impulsive and cannot wait too long for some things. He told me 'yes, it is too long'. This is part of me training him to be more patient. I am always having to work with him on expressing his frustrations without getting upset and patience is a skill that I reinforce everyday with him.

Researcher asks: What did you do next?

Teacher responds: So I asked him if he wanted to go to another center. He said "no", so I knew I had to do something else. I noticed he was trying to pick up the fish, so I gave him the job of collecting the fish for his friends and spreading them out so other people could fish.

Researcher asks: Did that strategy work?

Teacher responds: Yes, he actually stayed their helping the other children for quite awhile. I

know Payton, and he really likes to help other people. If you give him a job like cleaning or helping, he is fine.

Researcher says: So with Payton, do you use that diversion technique a lot.

Teacher says: Oh yes, he constantly needs to be doing something.

Researcher asks: Because if he's not busy he gets in trouble?

Teacher responds: No, not really. It's not so much that he gets himself in trouble, just that he acts out in frustration. Really, Payton likes for people to see how good he is. So I always direct him to things that will make him proud of himself. I know him and I know what he needs are. I think it is helping him to make better choices when he gets frustrated or angry.

When describing the triggers that prompted Allison's decisions, it is important to note that all but three of the selected decision making episode yielded multiple sources. The three with only one trigger (internal want) were proactive decisions that stemmed from Allison's desire to reinforce a previously presented new social skill. The remainder of the episodes, usually but not always, were initially triggered by an external demand (child conflict or need to change the stimuli in the environment) and included extension reinforcement decisions triggered by Allison's internal desire to reinforce a skill or recognition that the initial decision did not achieve the desired outcome. The following table represents a comprehensive picture of the situations that triggered Allison's decision making episodes and their associated social concepts.

Table 4-2. Allison's decision making event, triggers, and associated social concepts

Decision Making Event	Trigger *(External, Internal, or Previous Decision Not Working)*	Associated Social Concept
1. Teacher initiated painting activity	Internal	Trading, Communication
2. Children all vying for teacher's attention	External, Internal	Patience
3. Child conflict in dramatic play are	External, Internal	Turn taking, Problem-solving, Communication
4. Teacher initiated "fishing" activity	Internal	Turn taking, Patiently waiting in line

Table 4-2. Continued

5.	Children's conflict at the fishing activity	External, Internal	Turn taking, Patiently waiting in line
6.	Child frustration at fishing activity	External, Previous decision not working	Impulse control, Turn taking, Positive expression of emotion
7.	Teacher initiated activity allowing children to record their sharing	Internal	Sharing, Communicating
8.	Children not responding well to sharing activity	External, Previous decision not working	Sharing, Self-regulation
9.	Child frustration at fishing activity	External, Internal	Turn taking, Impulse control
10.	Teacher initiated coloring mixing activity (multiple mediums)	Internal	Sharing materials, problem-solving, communication
11.	Child interaction about materials at art center	External, Internal	Sharing, Turn taking, Communication, Problem-solving
12.	Child conflict in art center	External, Previous decision not working	Turn taking, Impulse control, Communication
13.	Teacher initiated cooperative play in kitchen	External, Internal	Cooperative play, Communication, Setting social goals
14.	Child behavior after dropping a puzzle	External, Previous decision not working	Impulse control, positive expression of emotion
15.	Conversation with child at art center	Internal, Previous decision not working	Communication, positive expression of emotion
16.	Teacher initiated dramatic play activity	External, Internal	Cooperative play, Problem-solving, Communication
17.	Child conflict at computers	External	Impulse control and self-regulation, Cooperative play, Turn taking
18.	Child conflict at art center	External, Internal	Communication, Impulse control, Solution generation
19.	Child frustration at art center	External, Internal, Previous decision not working	Positive expression of emotion, Communication, Calming down
20.	Child play initiation at rice table	External, Internal	How to enter play groups effectively
21.	Teacher initiated art activity	Internal, Previous decision not working	Turn taking, Sharing materials
22.	Child conflict at rice table	External	Impulse control

Table 4-2. Continued

23. Child conflict at block area	External, Internal	Problem-solving, Communication

Sub-Question 3: How Do Teachers' Professional Knowledge, Practical Knowledge, and Beliefs/Values Affect Decision Making Regarding the Support of Social Concepts?

Do different types of professional knowledge and personal beliefs and values actually affect teacher decision making? Previously explored research supports the idea that every decision we make is in some way influenced by what we know and believe (Berliner, 1985). For teachers, the process of making decisions, especially about social concepts, is rooted in the professional and practical experiences and personal beliefs they have. A novice teacher's decisions, being based on less experience and expertise in planning and decision making, often look very different than those of an expert teacher. While a teacher with specialized knowledge in specific subject areas tends to make more informed decisions regarding planning and instructional practice (Carter, Cushing, Sabers, Stein, & Berliner, 1988). Research indicates that expert teachers, like Allison, view classroom events differently, employ instructional and managerial routines more often and more effectively, make more informed planning decisions, and recognize and rectify problem situations during interactive teaching more readily than novice teachers (Leinhardt, Weidman, & Hammond, 1987).

The previous analysis demonstrates that Allison is consistently producing multiple thoughtful social concept reinforcement decisions that are triggered by both external and internal demands; evidence of her complex thought processes. This section expands on the idea of how complex thinking, particularly in the form of ***reflection*** in and on practice, effects decision making when supporting the development of social concepts in the classroom. It also provides excerpts from Allison's interviews that illustrate her specific *expertise*, including her educational

background, professional training and development pertaining to the Second Step Curriculum, and personal values and beliefs.

Allison's descriptions about using her professional knowledge to inform social concept decision making

As Allison and I discussed her professional knowledge, including educational background and specialized training, I found that she spoke most frequently about how having an extensive knowledge base to draw ideas and techniques from and staying on top of current information was really important to her social concept decision making. During her initial interview she stated:

> You need to read a lot and stay on top of the current knowledge base. I am always reading something from my college classes or a teacher's journal or something to help me get information about teaching practices and child development. I read a lot about management skills, you know, like managing the classroom environment… Also, I go to conferences and meetings and listen to how other teachers help their children. I try and take the best information and advice back with me to the classroom. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. But I know it's important to try many things when something doesn't work.

During her final interview, she expanded on her initial statement by describing her education and experiences with regard to her learning about social concepts and skills.

> My education and experiences with learning about the social and emotional domain of development comes mostly from my core classes in child development and psychology and my training and professional development with the Second Step Curriculum. In the training I learned how to actually use the Second Step lesson cards and why it was important to specifically address social competence in the classroom. It was common sense information to me, but I like having a tool to use in the classroom. (Researcher says: You mentioned professional development experiences) Yes, I went to a few workshops on how to help reinforce the Second Step concepts outside of the lesson. They gave me good ideas on what to do and I learned a lot for listening to other teachers' experiences.

At the end of the initial interview, I asked Allison how she felt her education and professional experiences played a role in influencing her decision making. She responded:

> Well, I feel like I know a lot of information about this area and that guides my interventions in the classroom. When one of my children has a problem or needs work in an area, I think about everything I have learned and try to incorporate that in my decision making.

She also adds:

Researcher says: I hear you talk a lot about "thinking" about your knowledge base and how it applies to your teaching practices. Have you always been so thoughtful about your decisions?

Teacher responds: I have always seen myself as a thoughtful person, but learning how to think about your teaching is different. My course work required a lot of journal writing about my teaching practices and my goals for my students and myself. We reflected on everything – and having to really think about what you are doing over and over again helps to improve what you do and how you look at problems in the classroom.

The following episode provides an example of how Allison implements some of the knowledge and skills she obtained through her many professional education experiences and illustrates her use of reflection in her teaching practices and decision making.

<u>Example #1: Incidental Teaching - Teacher initiated group discussion about respect</u>

Over the course of the 1 hour and 15 minute free-play period (on a Friday) several conflicts regarding sharing arose (grabbing, whining, verbal arguments) – more than typically observed. Allison's exasperation with the children's behavior was visible by her facial expressions and tensed shoulders. At the end of the play period, Allison called the children to the circle rug and asked them to sit quietly. She retrieved some chart paper and wrote the work RESPECT at the top. She asked the children if they knew what the word meant and facilitated a group discussion about what respect is, why it is important, and who to show respect to friends in the class. She called on the children to answer and recorded their ideas.

Researcher asks: What made you decide to facilitate a group discussion?

Teacher responds: Well, the class was crazy today. Lots of fights and arguing, snatching and grabbing, and yelling. It's not the way our classroom runs and certainly not the kinds of behaviors I allow. I knew we had to talk about it and I knew that the class as a whole needed to be reminded of how we treat each other.

Researcher asks: So the discussion wasn't planned?

Teacher responds: No, nothing I did today to help seemed to stick. They listened at first and then started up (conflict) again. I knew they weren't respecting me, our class or each other, so I decided to have a discussion about it.

Researcher asks: What made you decide to use group discussion as your intervention strategy?

Teacher responds: Well, I have used it before and it works by helping them to calm down, remove themselves, and focus on what I'm trying to say.

Researcher says: I noticed that after you discussed what respect means, you allowed all of the children to respond to your question about what they could do to show respect for each other. Why?

Teacher responds: I ask each child to respond because I want everyone to have a turn and feel like a part of the conversation – especially the kids I know know how to play nicely but didn't that day.

Researcher asks: I also noticed that you kept returning to two children in particular to provide solutions. Why?

Teacher responds: I know that these children will have good strategies to share with the group because I see them use them every day. I figure that if the other children hear suggestions from their peers instead of me all the time, they might take it in better. I let them [the problem-solvers] provide the solution and then ask the other children, especially the ones I know have trouble, to give me more examples. They [the children who have trouble with social skills] can usually do it.

Researcher asks: How do you know what to do in a situation like the one today?

Teacher responds: I don't know…it just seems natural to talk to kids about problems in the class and problems with their behavior and let them come up with suggestions.

Researcher asks: Was it always natural?

Teacher responds: Umm no – I had to work at it before I got it right. Sometimes the discussions go well, like I think they will, and sometimes they don't.

Researcher says: Where did you learn your interviewing strategies. I mean you used group discussion, open-ended questions, and peer modeling.

Teacher responds: I would have to say that I initially learned these skills through my courses and training. My early childhood and child development courses taught me the importance of taking the time to talk with your students and have your students talk with each other. Some of my other training and reading helped me with the idea of using students to model for other students. I have had to try these strategies a lot in the classroom before I figured out the best way to use them. Now I just do it.

The above episode was one example of how Allison uses her education to guide practice. Throughout the 23 episodes chosen specifically for their reference to decision making for social concepts, I observed Allison using: pedagogical knowledge (knowledge of teaching and teaching strategies) such as *on-the-spot intervention strategies* like conflict mediation, facilitation of

conversation between two children for problem-solving and modeling social skills, and incidental intervention strategies through pre-planned activities specifically designed for her students' social needs and encouragement of peer mentoring (during play activities, she often encouraged a socially capable student to interact with a student having trouble with a particular skill). It was also very evident that Allison understands the importance of knowing her children and commonly uses that knowledge to make developmentally appropriate decisions. When asked why she made a particular decision, she repeatedly answered "*because I know my children's needs and what works for them*". In one interview, she stated "*knowing your kids and being able to make informed decisions based on what works for them is very important in teaching…I know that one strategy may work with one student and not work for another…I know each child's ability and also what is happening in their life, this makes a big difference on how I approach them*". It was clear from speaking with Allison, that the understanding she has of her students is embedded in her teaching practices.

The excerpts above clearly articulate the type of professional and educational experiences Allison has had and currently participates in. In addition, they show her ability to succinctly summarize how those experiences directly affect her classroom decision making. It is evident that she has considerable training in developing young children's social and emotional domains, but also possesses an extensive general educational knowledge base. Allison is unique in her professional expertise but her decision making illustrates that when a teacher is exposed to a professional knowledge base, either through pre-service programs or in-service professional development, there are increased amounts of skills and techniques she can call upon in her daily teaching practices.

Allison' descriptions about using her personal beliefs and values to inform social concept decision making

When asked directly during our final interview (see Appendix D) if Allison believes her values and beliefs system plays a role in helping her to make decisions related to the reinforcement of social concepts, she responded:

> Yes, I think so. I believe that having good social skills, especially being able to communicate and solve problems is really important in life. We focus a lot on the social and emotional areas in this class because I feel it is so important.

When asked to expand she stated:

> Because I just do…I feel it inside. I have seen too many children who have problems with behavior and communication in preschool, have problems in kindergarten… Being able to take care of themselves and come up with solutions to their problems is key to their learning. I believe that it is my job to get them ready for school next year and for life in general. If they can solve problems, all kinds of problems, on their own – then I have given them a great tool…Sometimes children don't get this information at home, so it is my job to make sure social skills are reinforced at school.

From her responses to the final interview questions, I felt that Allison's internalization for the need to help children become more socially competent grew out of a deeply ingrained belief system. Recollection of our discussion about her family background and personal upbringing lead me to the determination that her family's attitudes and practices shaped her thought processes about decision making from childhood. In one of her interviews Allison responded:

> Because all of the female members in my family are teachers, I learned from an early age how important education is. Not just the formal education of book knowledge, but the development of good social skills. We talked a lot in our family about being a good problem-solver and learned to be independent thinkers.

This excerpt provides evidence that Allison's belief systems about social concepts have long since been formed, but the following statement illustrates that her beliefs and values, coupled with her extensive professional knowledge supports the framework she uses for her current need to facilitate young children's social concepts .

> Supporting children in all domain areas is so important to me. It began with my own children and continues with my students. I just feel that way inside and I think I always have, but going through my child development and psychology classes and the Second Step Training and professional development, I realized that there are real documented benefits to helping children develop these skills early in life.

The Big Picture: A Summary of Allison's Decision Making for the Support of Social Concepts

Allison is a preschool teacher who consistently makes decision regarding the support of social concepts during play time in her classroom. Her decisions were categorized as being either proactive or reactive and all, even the routine decisions, were considered thoughtful. Allison's decision making always followed a distinct process: including problem recognition, selection of action or intervention, and implementation of action or intervention. Although the process appeared sequential - one phase happening directly after the next; the complexity of thought and action in her decisions allowed her to complete steps in the process simultaneously and at multiple times throughout each episode. It is also important to note that Allison did not confine herself to using one intervention technique when making her reinforcement decisions. She used a variety of naturalistic techniques including *planned incidental teaching* and *on-the-spot support*.

In addition to a keen awareness that her decision making, although sometimes automatic, was conscious in effort; she was also extremely adept at recognizing and articulating the various types of events that triggered her social concept decision making (as evidenced in the decision making episodes she selected for video recall). Most of her decision making episodes were initially triggered by an external demand (i.e. child conflict or frustration, need to change the environment or activity) and followed up by reinforcement of one or more social concepts due to internal beliefs (i.e. desire to help a child find a solution, knowledge of a child personal issues and needs) or recognition that a previously tried decision did not yield the desired outcome.

However, Allison's proactive decisions were all triggered by an internal desire to help her students become more socially competent and usually manifested themselves as opportunities for students to practicing particular social skills through preplanned activities.

Through her initial background information interview and her final interview, Allison provided insightful information into how her professional knowledge and personal belief system influences her decisions overall and her decisions to reinforce social concepts in her classroom. Her extensive educational background culminating in multiple degrees (including: PhD in Coastal Engineering, AS in Child Development, BS in Psychology, and BA in Early Childhood Education) and additional training through professional development experiences and conference attendance provides her with a wealth of content knowledge and instructional techniques to draw from. Also, Allison has an additional level of expertise relating to the social development of young children because she has been trained in the implementation of the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum and attended multiple development opportunities on the reinforcement of social concepts in the classroom. Allison's personal belief system also plays a role in influencing her reinforcement of social concepts. It is clear that she feels internally bound to help children develop socially. She frequently articulated her beliefs about the importance of social problem-solving and communication and her internal desire to see all of her children succeed. Through observation, video recall and data analysis, it has become apparent that Allison is a thoughtful and purposeful decisions maker who routinely supports social concepts with her students and consciously utilizes her expertise to inform her decisions. In addition, and most notable, I observed that the act of critical thinking and refection on her teaching practices were clearly woven throughout all of her decision making episodes. It was extremely evident that her ability to reflect "in action" (while she was teaching) and "on action" (after she finished

teaching) guided her success in decision making and linked her professional knowledge/skills and personal beliefs to her actions. The notion of preschool teachers more readily using conscious critical evaluation of their practices thus becoming more reflective teachers has huge implications for powerful professional development experiences specifically addressing working preschool teachers. The following chapter wraps up the paper by providing a recap of the study, discussion of the findings, suggestions for future research, and implications for professional development.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The goal of this chapter is to give the reader an overview of the study. It includes a summary of the statement of the problem, the methodology used, and the findings of the study. In addition, it includes the discussion of the findings, limitations and suggestions for future research, and implications for in-service preschool teacher professional development.

Statement of Problem

Given the need to find out information on how preschool teachers with expertise using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum make decisions regarding the support of social concepts and skills outside of the actual lesson and in the natural play environment; the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of what the decisions look like, what events triggers the decisions, and how the teacher's personal and professional knowledge play a role in the decision making process. With the complexities of effective teacher decision making and the lack of descriptive information regarding what reinforcement decisions actually look like, this researcher sought to uncover the essence of reinforcement decisions regarding social concept made by a preschool teacher with unique skills and exceptional educational and practical training; characteristics in distinct contrast from the general population of early childhood educators.

The main research question which drove my study is: *How does a preschool teacher with expertise in using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum make decisions regarding the support of social concepts in the play environment?* Three sub-questions that lend support to answering the main question are as follows: (1) What does decision making regarding the support of social concepts look like from the teacher's and researcher's perspective? (2) What situations/events trigger the teacher to make decisions regarding supporting social concepts in

the play environment (what is happening during the decision making episode? (3) How do professional knowledge/skills influence the teacher's decision making regarding support of social concepts? Since my research focused on trying to understand teachers' decision making (with regards to concepts espoused by the Second Step Curriculum) as they occur in the natural environment, each sub-question attempts to bring together pieces of information that will help the reader better understand the "essence" of the decision making process as a whole. The first sub-question illustrates the types and phases of social concept reinforcement decision making and examines the distinct process of each decision making episode. The goal is to uncover the actual decision types and decision making processes an experienced teacher goes through, including awareness and perception of the decision. The second sub-question identifies what event or situation triggers the teacher to make these social concept decisions initially and includes what is happening externally and internally in the complete process of the decision making episode. Finally, the third sub-question uncovers the type and extent of personal and professional knowledge that influences the teacher's support of social concepts. In combination, the answers to these sub-questions compile information to complete a detailed picture of how a preschool teacher with expertise in a specific developmental domain reinforces the associated concepts.

Review of Methodology

To answer the research questions in the study, a qualitative instrumental case study (Stake, 1994) was adopted; and Allison, a preschool teacher with expertise in the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum, was selected as the case. Multiple data sources were employed to capture the nuances of Allison's decision making for the reinforcement of social concepts in the play environment. They included: an initial background information interview, general observations of the site and climate, video recordings of decision making episodes, video-stimulated recall

interviews, and a post-collection interview. The background information interview and general observations of the context were used to ascertain specific information about the participant's professional and personal background and teaching practices, routines, and classroom climate. In addition, initial observations provided an opportunity for the teacher and students to become acclimated to having a researcher and video equipment in the classroom. The main data collection source consisted of video recorded observations of Allison engaging in decision making during free-choice play time and the subsequent examination of each episode through video-stimulated recall interviews. Allison's decision making was recorded for four to six hours a week for six weeks and each of the eight stimulated recall interviews were conducted on the same day the episodes were recorded. The follow-up interview was used primarily for member checking and to clarify any questions regarding the video interviews and succeeding interpretations of the data.

The data gathered were analyzed through the constant comparison method of data analysis. Each interview transcript was read first by decision making episode and second line by line to identify the emerging patterns and themes. These patterns of meaning were then coded and grouped by selective coding based on schemas provided by the literature. This procedure was repeated with every decision making episode until achieving theoretical saturation, which is a sense of closure a researcher gets when no more relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category (Glaser, & Strauss, 1967). Upon the completion of the video interview analysis, the initial background interview and follow-up interview were read and coded according to their relevance to the selected themes and categories and ability to provide additional description to the case.

Summary of Findings

More than 80 of Allison's decision making episodes were captured through video observation of free-choice play time over a six-week time period. Twenty-three episodes, which

met the criteria of decisions that support social concepts in the play environment, were chosen via teacher and researcher event selection to prompt video-stimulated recall interviews and the resulting data was analyzed using the constant comparison method. Upon completion of the interviews and initial data analysis of the transcripts, it was determined that the data would be analyzed and organized according to the research sub-questions which addressed the issues of decision making type and process, trigger of decision making episode, and influence of teacher professional background and belief system.

Of the 23 decision making episodes selected for evaluation by video-stimulated recall interview, five were categorized as *proactive* and 18 were categorized as *reactive*. This informs the reader that Allison makes both "in the moment" and predetermined decisions when it comes to reinforcing social concepts. The decision type categories were further classified according to the way the decision was made: *routine* or *thoughtful;* and it was determined that nine of Allison's decisions were thoughtful and 14 were routine. Allison and I differed on the interpretation of this categorization. I observed all of her decisions to be thoughtful, while she believed most were routine. In the end, I presented the data according to Allison's interpretation and added an amendment that her routine decisions all exhibited complex thinking and thoughtful criteria. In addition to identification of decision type, data analysis showed that all of Allison's decision followed the commonly accepted process (Brynes, 1998; Baron, 2000; Beach & Connolly, 2005): problem recognition, selection of action or intervention, and implementation of intervention.

Allison's decision making episodes were also analyzed to ascertain what situation or event triggered the reinforcement decision in an attempt to better understand what prompts a teacher to make reinforcement decisions in the first place. Using Beach and Connolly's (2005) trigger

situation categories, it was determined that all but four of Allison's decisions were triggered by a combination of external demands (triggered by environment), internal wants (triggered by teacher's desire for an outcome), or recognition that a previously made decision did not yield the desired outcome. Additional findings indicated that Allison's professional knowledge (educational and practical) and personal beliefs system influenced her decision making by allowing her to draw from an extensive knowledge base and ingrained sense of need to help her children become social problem-solvers.

Discussion of Findings

Main Research Question: How Does a Preschool Teacher with Expertise in Using the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum Make Decisions Regarding the Support of Social Concepts in the Play Environment?

My experience teaching preschool, pre-service early childhood education students and in-service preschool teachers for the past several years affords me great insight into the complex environment teachers work in and the sizeable number of decisions that teachers make on a daily basis. For the majority of the decisions made, there is no script to follow; however, a wealth of pedagogical knowledge, experiences, and insight into the academic, social, and familial contexts that influence the lives of children assists in the decision-making process. This section discusses the findings of this study and attempt to provide the reader with a comprehensive picture of an experienced preschool teacher's decisions regarding the reinforcement of social concepts. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to the preschool teacher population due to the nature of the research and the objective of deeply exploring one participant with unique expertise. Rather, the goal is to set the stage for additional research on preschool teacher decision making for supporting social concepts and provides suggestions for preschool teacher professional development by providing a holistic view that will have transferable applications. The picture of Allison's decision making was gleaned by analyzing three distinct areas of each decision making

episode: structure of decisions, events that trigger decisions and factors that influence decisions. The literature on teacher thinking and decision making provided a framework for which to analyze the data and supports justification of my findings in this section.

One of the most interesting finding from Allison's case was that although she perceived the majority of her decisions to be routine, I interpreted them as thoughtful. The literature states that all decisions fall into four categories according to certain characteristics (Fultchner, 1965) and Allison interpreted those characteristics differently than I did. I know that one aspect of making sense of a problem situation includes comparing the current situation to events from the past, thereby using information gained from those experiences to deal with the present dilemma (Hutton & Klein, 1999); and observed that Allison did go through those steps "in the moment". After many discussions about her decision making, Allison and I came to an agreement that her decisions were all thoughtful but the act of repeating them multiple times (sometimes multiple times a day) to address the same social issue or the same child, became routine. Researchers suggest that if the event is similar to past experiences and the solutions used in those situations were satisfactory, it is likely those solutions will be used again, thus becoming routine (Beach and Connolly, 2005). Because I observed only a snap-shot of Allison's decision making over the six weeks I was in her classroom, I was not privy to the experiences and decisions she had previously made. The stimulated recall interviews and subsequent conversations about each decision making episode allowed me to see her thoughtful decisions through a different lens. Therefore, I decided to use her interpretation of a routine decision when analyzing her data, but made a note that this would have implications for future research and professional development. This discovery demonstrates that the simple act of observation is not enough to ascertain the true nuance of a lived experience. In this case, if I had stopped the analysis process with my own

interpretations, I would have portrayed an inaccurate picture of how Allison viewed her own decision making; thus compromising the validity of the results. In addition, the act of making consistently thoughtful decisions, observed as routine or spontaneous, suggest that Allison's level of thinking and reflection on her decisions and decision making processes are complex and multi-layered.

Another interesting result of this study is illustrated by the types of situations that triggered Allison's decision making episodes and the high level of complex thinking it takes to respond to those triggers. The majority of Allison's reactive decisions were triggered by multiple events and included both external and internal components. Initially, I thought that her decisions would all be a reaction to stimuli in the classroom environment (i.e. child conflict, need to rearrange the environment, need to change an activity, etcetera) and did not take into account the influence of her internal desires (i.e. need to help children, desire to see a specific social skill developed, etcetera). On multiple occasions during the video interviews, Allison eluded to her internal "*need to help her children problem-solve and communicate successfully*" as a major factor in her decision making. Through deeper analysis, I discovered that her decision making episodes had several parts. The first decision in a reactive episode (which was the type classification of the majority of her episodes) was often prompted by an external demand and the subsequent reactive decisions (up to four in some episodes) were prompted by an internal desire to see her children succeed. She stated in one of her interviews:

> That is why it takes such a long time to solve a problem. I try and let the kids work it out first, just by prompting them a little. If that doesn't work, I have to reassess the situation and try another intervention, sometimes it's more directive…In the end, I really want my kids to succeed in social situations and it's my job to help them do that".

This is a powerful finding. It shows that Allison is motivated to make reinforcement decisions for multiple reasons and addresses the issue that effective decision making is a complex act often stimulated by the teacher's teaching philosophy.

The finding that is the most significant, and is congruent with the literature on expertise in decision making, is the great influence Allison's professional knowledge and personal belief system has on her decision making regarding the facilitation of social concepts. The idea that the greater the personal experiences and professional knowledge is, the more effective decisions teachers make is not a new one. In fact, research indicates that teachers with personal and professional expertise in their field, as well as subject specific training make better and more informed decisions than do novice teachers (Berliner, 2004; Laverick, 2007). Allison is atypical of the general preschool teacher population in that she possesses multiple degrees in a variety of educational fields (Coastal Engineering, Psychology, and Early Childhood Education). She has expanded her expertise in the area of social competence by acquiring training in a subject specific intervention tool (Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum) and has taken advantage of professional development workshops on supporting social concepts in the classroom. When analyzing her decision making episodes, it became apparent very early on that her educational background, professional knowledge, and personal beliefs greatly influence her decisions. During her recall interviews, it was common for her to respond to one of her decisions by making reference to a class she had taken, a conference she had attended, or an ingrained motivation. When prompted to expand on the influence of her knowledge base she stated "*it is part of who I am and what makes me a teacher. I know I make good teaching decisions partially because my kids respond well and partially because I have the tools to be successful.*" Not only did I see evidence of the influence of her professional and personal

knowledge through observation of her decision making, but I also saw it in her ability to recognize and articulate the multiple and complex components of her decision making. Through reflection of her decision making and teaching practices, Allison was able to connect ideas about successful teaching and reinforcement strategies with the knowledge she had of her students and their individual needs. Every time she made a decision, Allison drew from multiple sources of information – a knowledge base that was greatly expanded by her professional and personal background. Through observations of her decision making and interview discussions, it was extremely apparent that Allison links the actions that she takes in the classroom with her professional and personal knowledge through reflection. Her expertise not only lies in her experiences and knowledge, but in her practice of critically thinking about her teaching. This finding is important to the current literature base regarding teacher decision making, because it provides a detailed picture of how a preschool teacher uses her expertise prior to, during and after making a decision; qualitative descriptions that lack in the research. It also provides implications for developing and training the general preschool teacher population.

Implications for Future Research and Professional Development

Even though this study was a single-subject case study examining one preschool teacher's decision making as she supports social concepts in the classroom and the results cannot be generalized to the general preschool teacher population, significant findings regarding the description of the types, processes, and influences on decision making for the reinforcement of social concepts and skills can be transferred to implications for future research and professional development. Suggestions for future research will be discussed first and is followed by a proposition that professional development experiences should provide preschool teachers the opportunity to learn about and practice the skill of refection and its use to enhance decision making in the classroom.

Limitation of Study and Suggestions for Future Research

My study has several interesting findings, but an analysis of its limitations must be discussed in order to shed light on suggestions for future research. The use of purposive sampling and low number of participants will keep the findings of this study from being generalizable to the overall population of preschool teachers. This choice and design was acceptable for my study because the goal was to provide a comprehensive picture of one specific case: an expert preschool teacher's decision making processes. However, it does incite some suggestions for future research. First, in order to gain additional descriptive data, more preschool teachers with expertise in the reinforcement or social concepts should be explored through video stimulated recall interview or other qualitative methods yielding similar result. This would provide support for the finding of this initial research and should include more in-depth studies on the types, triggers, and influences of preschool teachers' decision making. Second, in combination with the collection of additional descriptive data, cross-case analysis should be conducted to gain a more comprehensive picture that compares the teachers being observed. This would provide verification that preschool teachers with expertise in a specific content area (in this case, the development of social skills and concepts) make similar types of decisions and that their decision making processes are comparable. Third, expert preschool teachers should be studied in tandem with novice preschool teachers to help determine how their decision making for the reinforcement of social concepts compares and differs.

This is crucial, and currently lacking, information that would lend additional support to the already accumulating literature suggesting the more expertise a teacher has, the higher quality decision making and teaching practices she employs. Finally, because Allison's personal beliefs and values system influenced her social concept decisions making so greatly, future studies exploring teachers' beliefs about teaching in general and beliefs concerning specific content

areas should be explored – specifically documenting their influence on the classroom decisions teachers make. This data would provide great information for designing innovative professional development experiences addressing the identification and articulation of personal teaching philosophies, as well as assisting teachers in developing an awareness of how and why their personal beliefs affect their teaching practices.

Suggestions for Early Childhood Professional Development

Most early childhood educators do not have adequate skills to produce high quality outcomes, especially in the areas of teacher thinking, planning and decision making, instructional practice, and reflectivity (Barnett, 2003a; Stott, 2003). Research states that less than 50% of all early childhood educators, people teaching children birth through age eight, have a Bachelor's degree in any field and are rarely afforded the opportunities for professional development. Consequently, there exists a serious need to improve the competencies of early childhood educators in order to improve these outcomes. Initial preparation is something early childhood administrators cannot control when hiring teachers (except for setting high standards for educational background in their hiring qualifications), but ongoing professional development is something that can be implemented routinely as part of the professionalization of the field.

One way of addressing professional development is to provide early childhood teachers the opportunity to learn and practice the critical skill of reflection and its application to classroom practice. Proponents for reflection and reflective teaching maintain that for much too long, "teachers have been considered consumers of curriculum knowledge, but not assumed to have the requisite skill to create or critique that knowledge" (Paris, 1993, p.149). Viewing teachers as reflective practitioners assumes that teachers can both pose and solve problems related to their teaching - that they can take action and, in turn, ask questions and critically evaluate that action.

In traditional pre-service teacher education programs, reflective teaching and the act of reflection itself is taught as a part of the curriculum – Allison confirms that many times over in her discussions about her approach to and action on classroom problems and how she modifies and adapts the solutions. This approach to teacher training is not often afforded to the typical preschool teacher. Therefore, they are at a disadvantage - gaining limited information on general child development and educational practices offered to them through on-line courses and lecture format professional development experiences.

Daily, hourly, and even minute-by-minute, teachers attempt to solve problems that arise in the classroom. The way in which they approach the solution to these problems is affected by how they frame the problem (context), how they react to the problem, and how they evaluate the problems and solutions (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Making changes to your teaching practices is considerably harder to do when you have limited knowledge and experience reflecting on and evaluating yourself and your work. Because of Allison's constant references to reflections on classroom problems, solutions, practices, children, and herself; and observable evidence that reflection was taking place "in-action" and "on-action", this study helps sheds light on the notion that reflection, and especially reflective teaching, is a critical component of effective decision making. Therefore, a natural implication brought about by this study is to provide non-traditional professional development experiences based on the skill of reflection and the action of reflective teaching. The following are three suggestions for how professional development and teacher reflection can be effectively combined.

One way to accomplish this is by the use of research validated techniques and tools to elicit information about a teacher's personal instructional and decision making practices. These tools, such as the video stimulated recall method, provide an opportunity for in-depth exploration

of teaching practices (decision making or otherwise). They allow a teacher, who might never have had the chance to watch herself teach, the opportunity to practice critically thinking through her practices. This "in-your-face" practice will help the teacher gain insight into what is actually happening in the classroom, whether or not a particular strategy was effective, and how the teacher's perspective influences the instructional choices that she makes. Ultimately, it will help her be able to process and articulate what she is doing in the classroom by focusing on the "underlying reasons" she made a decision or implemented a strategy instead of simply looking at the surface. Being able to watch and evaluate your teaching practices through video is a first step in learning how to reflect and become a more reflective teacher.

In this study, the most valuable information gleaned from the video recall was that Allison, by confronting herself in action through video replay, articulated recognition of instructional practices and patterns and talked herself through new ideas and strategies of intervention as she reflected on her decision making. She was particularly interested in observing her presentation and delivery of social concept interventions, often commenting in various forms that she was learning a lot about her teaching. Further evidence of the method's acceptance as a beneficial and constructive learning technique was Allison's repeated request for copies of the videotaped episodes so she could reflect on her teaching outside of the interview. In addition, she also asked me to compile excerpts from the videos to include in her teaching portfolio. Although time consuming and labor intensive, video recall is a very effective method for helping teachers identify the aspects of their teaching where they are competent and the areas in which they can improve. It is also extremely helpful in allowing a supervisor (usually an administrator conducting a teaching evaluation) to walk side-by-side through a teaching episode with the teacher in an effort to ascertain her perspective on instructional choices and implementation.

A second way to enhance reflection and create reflective teachers is by focusing specifically on one content area at a time. Research supports the notion that expertise in specific developmental domains or subject areas creates more effective teaching and decision making among teachers (Byra & Sherman, 1993; Berliner, 2004; Laverick, 2007). Allison focused her reflection (and sought out professional development experiences) on the importance of developing young children's social and emotional learning and learning and implementing effective teaching strategies that support the development of social competence. This is a key developmental area for preschool teachers to focus on for two reasons: 1) young children are social beings and preschool is a natural medium for teaching and practicing social skills and 2) a critical relationship exists between young children's social development and later social and academic outcomes (Hartup, 1992; Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Ladd & Coleman, 1997; Raver & Zigler, 1997; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). In combination, these are powerful reasons that there is a need for preschool teachers to expand their knowledge base and repertoire of teaching practices specifically related to introducing, supporting, and practicing social concepts and skills with their students. In this study, it was easy to see that Allison was well versed in professional practices associated with helping young children acquire and develop social skills and had a profound understanding of the importance of social and emotional learning in relation to later school success. On numerous occasions throughout her interviews, Allison eluded to the reasons she exhibited so many advanced skills in her decision making for the reinforcement of social concepts and attributed them to the professional development and training experiences she encountered throughout her teaching career. She specifically stated that she "gained her knowledge [about social development] through coursework, collaborative discussions with peers, conference attendance, and specialized training". In addition, Allison indicated that the reason

she felt so successful at making reinforcement decisions was because of the knowledge and understanding she had of young children's social development in general, implementation of strategies that support the development of social competence, and training in the Second Step Curriculum. Allison's case provides support that teachers, especially teachers of young children, need to be better informed and prepared to develop their students' social skills and concepts; and that the preparation can be delivered through effective professional development experiences.

The third approach encourages reflection on teaching practices and decision making by providing opportunities for teachers to share insight ideas through collaboration with peers and other professionals (Gable, Mostert, & Tonelson, 2004). A collaborative model of professional development utilizes teachers' collective expertise and experiences and allows them to participate in professional discourse about improving practice (Concoran, 1995; Hord, 1997; Moran, 2001; Carter, 2003) - teachers talk to each other, therefore forcing them to analyze their own teaching. This type of professional development is based on creating an opportunity in which participants can come together to interact, reflect on experiences, generate new insight, and dialogue with one another in-depth (Abdal-Haqq, 1996; Hord, 1997; Moran, 2001; Good & Weaver, 2003).

Developing high quality early childhood educators demands opportunities for them to engage in professional conversations about their teaching practices and decision making. Research has revealed that when teachers do collaborate, their learning and teaching is enhanced (Joyce, Showers, & Fullan, 2002). Additionally, through collaborative professional development, teachers take collective responsibility for the learning and development of all students they represent (National Staff Development Council, 2001b). Hence, as educators realize that they can learn from each other, they begin to "own" their choices because they have

effectively communicated, shared ideas, and reflected together to make the most of their collaboration. Confirming the strength of collaboration between teachers, Thousand and Villa (1990) stated:

> The power of collaborative teams lies in their capacity to merge unique skills of talented educators, to foster feelings of positive interdependence, to develop creative problem-solving skills, and to hold one another personally accountable for educational responsibility.

This type of professional development experience is beneficial for both expert and novice teachers. Being able to communally share experiences related to teaching strategies, effective decision making, and personal beliefs on teaching can potentially expand the critical thinking habits of novice teachers and introduce experienced teachers to new and inventive ideas.

Even if early childhood educators have the college degree and specialized training that research has associated with high-quality teaching outcomes, professional development is still needed to support teachers in obtaining new skills for enhancing and adapting their skills. In Allison's case, it became evident that she sought opportunities to expand her knowledge base and converse with peers about successful teaching practices and techniques. One of the things Alison liked so much about our video recall sessions was the opportunity to talk through and reflect on her decision making practices with someone else in the field. In her final interview she stated:

> I really liked the video recall. It not only gave me the chance to see myself in action, but to talk through my practices with another person…talking it [decision making episode] over with you helped me to see my teaching in a different light.

Professional development using a collaborative format can be implemented in many ways. Whether it is through teaming between teachers in one preschool, discussion groups of practitioners from multiple sites or dialogue with university researchers and other professionals

in the community; collaborative efforts provide a way for teachers to use each other as resources to gain different perspectives.

In conclusion, helping preschool teachers learn the skill of reflection and strategies involved in reflective teaching through specific professional development experiences such as video recall, subject specific training, and cooperative interactions can enable teachers whose usual methods are not working or need improvement to reframe and take a more critical look at their decision making. This would provide a new approach to reconceptualizing the comfortable and familiar routines and strategies of teacher often fall into. The act of thinking back and evaluating both “in action” and “on action” allows the teacher to notice, examine, and rethink the tacit understandings that have developed around their familiar practices. Specifically designed professional development experiences forcing on teacher reflection can help teachers make new sense out of situations and uncertainties and respond successfully to challenges.

APPENDIX A
TEACHER AND CHILD INFORMED CONSENTS

Teacher Informed Consent

Project Title: Reinforcing Social Concepts in the Preschool Play Environment: Perspectives on Teacher Decision Making

Please read this document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this project is to achieve an understanding of the "essence" of preschool teachers' decision making processes as they reinforce social and emotional learning concepts in the natural environment (i.e. inside and outside free-play time, meal-time, and transition times).

What you will be asked to do in this study:

Phase One: (once, prior to video-data collection)

1. You will participate in a 30 minute background information interview to help the researcher ascertain your background and beliefs about social development and teaching for social and emotional learning.
2. You will be asked to give the researcher access to you classroom to conduct general observations of the site and environment in order to gain a better understanding and description of the setting and daily routines and help the students become accustomed to having a researcher present in the classroom throughout the day.

Phase Two: (four times, once a week, over four weeks)

1. You will be asked to allow the researcher to video-tape you teaching and decision making in various naturalistic environments such as inside and outside free-play time, transitions, and mealtimes (30 minute segments). This will be done via tripod mounted video recorder and wireless microphone to capture decision making events and teacher speech.
2. You will be asked to participate in four video stimulated recall interviews, each on the same day as the videotaping. The teacher and researcher will view the previously recorded video segments and certain episodes pertaining to reinforcing social concepts will be used to prompt the interviews.

Time Requirements:

Indirect participation time: The researcher will be observing and video recording decision making episodes in your classroom over the course of four weeks.

Direct participation time: You will be asked to participate in a background interview (30 minutes), four stimulated recall interviews (1 hour each), and a wrap-up interview (30 minutes).

Total time: 5 hours

Risk and Benefits:

There are no immediate risks or benefits for participants in this study. However, I anticipate the results will provide a better understanding of how preschool teachers make decisions and information that will help further in-service preschool teacher professional development.

Compensation:

Upon completion of this study, you will be compensated $200 for your involvement.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number and the list connecting your name to the code number will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's office. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used on any reports.

Voluntary participation and right to withdraw:

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you are free to ask any questions concerning the study and to discontinue participation at anytime without penalty.

Whom to contact if you have any questions about the study:

Stacy M. Ellis (Principle investigator), Graduate Student, School of Teaching and Learning, College of Education, Box 117048, Gainesville, FL 32601-7048; phone 392-9191 x. 249.

Kristen M. Kemple (Supervisor), PhD, School of Teaching and Learning, College of Education, Box 117048, Gainesville, FL 32601-7048; phone 392-9191 x. 250.

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in this study.

IRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; phone 392-0433.

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and I have received a copy of this description for my records.

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Principle Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Child Informed Consent

Project Title: Reinforcing Social Concepts in the Preschool Play Environment: Perspectives on Teacher Decision Making

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to allow your child to participate in this study.

Dear Parents or Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the School of Teaching and Learning at the University of Florida, conducting research on preschool teacher decision making practice in naturalistic environments. The purpose of this study is to gain as much knowledge as I can about how preschool teachers make decisions as they reinforce social and emotional learning concepts during free-play time, transitions, and mealtimes. The results of this study will provide teacher educators with better insight into how and why preschool teachers make the instructional decisions they do and will be extremely helpful when developing future professional development activities. This study may not directly help your child, but may indirectly help him by allowing his/her teacher to focus on self-awareness and reflection of her teaching and decision making practices.

The easiest way to examine teacher decision making is to video record her interactions with her class and then play back the tape during a recall and reflection interview. The nature of this study requires the teacher to be followed with the video recorder (set on a tripod in t he corner of the room) and your child may be captured on film. This consent for is a request for permission to allow your child to be videotaped. During the study, the video will only be viewed by the teacher and researcher and your child's actions will not be the main focus. Your child's identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law and his/her name will not be recorded. At the end of the study, the tapes may be used as teacher decision making examples during in-service training for teachers. The tapes will be securely archived for seven years and then destroyed.

You and/or your child have the right to withdraw consent for participation at any time without consequence. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study and no compensation will be provided. If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at 392-9191 x. 249 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Kristen Kemple, at 392-9191 x. 250. Questions concerning your child's rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB02 office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL, 32611-2250; 392-0433.

Thank you for your attention to this matter!

Stacy M. Ellis

Please sign here: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B
BACKGROUND INFORMATION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Can you please state your name, teaching position, and years of teaching experiences?

2. Could you tell me about your educational background? How did you become an early childhood teacher?

3. What was your EC certification process like? Do you hold any specific certifications?

4. How did you make the decision to become a preschool teacher?

5. How does it feel to teach young children?

6. What are the challenges and rewards to teaching young children?

7. What do you feel your job is as a preschool teacher? Do you have any specific goals in what you want your students to learn? If so, please explain.

8. What are your feelings about the social development of preschool age children? Are there key concepts you feel they need to learn? If so, what are they?

9. How is the teaching content regarding these concepts selected in your classroom? Do you chose what to teach or is the curriculum chosen by administration?

10. Are there common social problems in your classroom? If so, what are they and when do they typically arise?

11. How do you address (instructionally) students' needs when trying to develop their social skills? That is, what kind of teaching practices do you use when trying to develop their social skills?

12. How would you describe the effectiveness of these teaching practices? What typically works and what doesn't?

13. Is there anything about the teaching practices you use to reinforce your students' social skills that you would like to improve?

14. Do you ever think about the decision making that goes along with choosing and implementing instructional practices? What do you think is involved in the decision making process?

15. If professional and technical support was offered, what kind would you find most effective? What support do you think would be helpful in trying to build and improve your instructional practices?

16. Have you ever been videotaped teaching before? Did you have the opportunity to watch the tape? What was it like? How did it make you feel? Was it beneficial? If so, how?

This is the end of our interview session ☺ thanks so much for your time and attention!

Note to researcher: Questions may need to be separated when asking, allowing for complete answers…Ask for schedule of daily routine.

APPENDIX C
VIDEO STIMULATED RECALL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Episode Selection Protocol

1. Explain to participant the goal of episode selection

   Today we will be selecting decision making episodes from the video observations I recorded earlier today. Our goal is to select only the episodes that include decision making for the support or reinforcement of social concepts in the play environment. We will watch the tape together and stop the tape when either of us notices this specific type of decision making occurring. I will record the time and sequence of the episode so we can use it to prompt our video stimulated recall interview.

2. Make sure participant feels comfortable selecting episodes

   Do this by playing a short expert from the video recording and practice identifying and stopping the selected episode.

3. Researcher records and organizes the selected decision making episodes for the following interview

Video Stimulated Recall Interview Protocol

1. Watch previously selected episode in its entirety and stop tape

2. Ask loosely structured questions
   a. What prompted you to stop the tape at this decision making episode?
   b. What is happening in this episode?
   c. Can you describe to me your decision making process?
   d. Why did you make that decision?
   e. What were your goals for the child(ren)?

- Follow the participant's lead and ask open-ended questions about the episode

3. Repeat the process with the next selected decision making episode

APPENDIX D
FINAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Questions: Decision-Making Process

1. What do you think teacher decision making is? Can you define or describe it?

2. Do you feel there are specific skills preschool teachers need in order to make effective instructional decisions? If so, can you describe the most important ones to me?

3. Do you feel there is a process (thought process and/or action process) teachers go through when making decisions in the classroom? If so, what does the process entail? Can you describe what it might look like to someone no familiar with preschool teachers?

4. Do you believe all preschool teachers use this process when making decisions? Why do you believe that?

5. What skills and experiences do you believe help you (personally) make instructional decisions pertaining to social issues in your classroom? Are these different from the skills and experiences you use to make general instructional decisions?

6. How did you acquire these skills and how do you know they are important?

7. Do you believe that these skills (the ones you use to make decisions) are automatic/routine or conscious? Why?

Questions: Video Stimulated Recall Interview Process

1. What are your thoughts on the video interview process?

2. Do you think it helped you to better evaluate and reflect on your teaching and instructional decision making? Please explain.

3. Can you give me a few examples of how reflecting on your social decision making (through video recall) helped your instructional practices?

4. Do you feel that stimulated recall could be used with all preschool teachers? Why or why not?

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stacy Michelle Ellis was born in Gainesville, Florida on March 12, 1977. She grew up the oldest of five children and found her nurturing instinct early in life. Stacy's love of children came from mothering her four siblings and working many years with the youth in Gainesville. Her parents instilled in her the desire to do well in school, be kind to others, and always to pursue her dreams.

After high school graduation, Stacy attended the University of Alabama, where she earned an AA degree in Family and Youth Development. In December 1999, she transferred to the University of Florida where she received a Bachelor of Science degree in Human Resource Development. Upon receiving her degree, Stacy moved to Atlanta, Georgia to work for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team in Training Program. In 2001, Stacy returned to the "Swamp" to complete her Master's of Science degree in the Department of Family, Youth, and Community Sciences and stayed on to begin work on her doctorate in Early Childhood Education.

Stacy's research interests are in-service preschool teacher professional development, early childhood curriculum, and the development of young children's social competence. She is currently working as the Assistant Director of Educational Development at Baby Gator Child Development and Research Center on UF's campus. After graduating, Stacy plans to continue working at Baby Gator and will expand her family (including husband Bo Thomas) with the expected arrival of her first child in October.