

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PRESCHOOL TEACHER CULTURAL BELIEFS
AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

By

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To the passionate teachers who have dedicated their lives to the challenging and important job of educating our young children

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PRESCHOOL TEACHER CULTURAL BELIEFS AND
CLASSROOM PRACTICES

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School psychologists provide indirect services to students through teacher consultation and professional development. For these efforts to be successful, it is vital that psychologists understand the underlying beliefs from which teachers develop their classroom practices. Cultural beliefs are profoundly influential in all areas of life and may be particularly so for teachers given the unique demands of their profession. To date, limited research has specifically investigated the impact of teacher cultural beliefs on classroom practices. Furthermore, previous researchers who have identified culture as an important factor have relied primarily on race and ethnicity as markers of culture. Although these characteristics are salient and likely to influence individual beliefs and practices, they do not sufficiently reflect the complexity of this construct for purposes of understanding and changing behavior. Grid group cultural theory offers an alternative view of culture based on experience of external behavior prescriptions (grid) and group boundedness (group). Cultural type in this framework is independent of race and ethnicity and can be used to understand and predict behavior in a variety of settings and situations.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between preschool teacher cultural beliefs and classroom practices. Participants were 33 teachers in Head Start, for-profit, and faith-based center classrooms serving 4-year-old children as part of Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program. Cultural beliefs were assessed using self-report questionnaire measures relevant to grid and group constructs, including the Teacher Orientation Scale, Preschool Pupil Control Ideology Form (PCI), and Teacher Self-Construal Scale (SCS). Structured classroom observations utilizing a modified version of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) administered during target activities in the daily schedule (i.e., snack, centers, and circle time) were conducted as a measure of teacher practices related to (1) emotional support, (2) classroom organization, and (3) instructional support. Exploratory multiple regression analyses suggest that a humanistic teacher orientation may be related to use of emotional support practices and that identification with independent or interdependent beliefs may be related to instructional support practices (i.e., language modeling, concept development). Potential directions for future research and implications for consultation and professional development are discussed.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Professionals working in schools and classrooms are aware of how different individual classrooms and teachers can be. Preschool teachers in particular are a variable group, due in part to the variety of settings in which young children are cared for and educated (e.g., public schools, religious centers, private childcare centers, Head Start, home daycares) and the variability in education and training observed in early childcare teachers. For school psychologists working in the early childhood field, the diversity represented by preschool teachers as a group can make consultation and professional development an engaging, but also quite challenging, practice.

One factor that may account for this variability and provide a framework for working with and through differences is teacher culture (Cohen, 2009). Consultants are advised to tailor their approach to the teacher and classroom because “in an increasingly diverse society, consultants and collaborators may find that some consultees and collaborators prefer one model of consultation to another” (Brown, Pryzwansky, & Sculte, 2006, p. 13). If school psychologists are cognizant and accepting of teachers’ background and general cultural beliefs, they can provide services appropriate not only to the referring problem, but to the individual consultee as well. In addition to affecting teachers’ interactions with other professionals, culture has a significant impact on their beliefs and practices in the classroom (Court, 2009; Fuligni, 2009). Understanding teacher culture, therefore, may provide important insight into the why and how of teacher practices that define the everyday classroom environment, and this information may in turn be used to provide more targeted and effective consultation and professional development services.

What is Culture?

According to Williams (1976), culture is “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (p. 87). Indeed, few words have such ability to inspire emotion and yet are so little understood. Because of its complexity and contentiousness, there is no one agreed upon definition of culture. Researchers, theorists, and philosophers in numerous fields have long debated the exact meaning of culture, resulting in a wide range of definitions. While these definitions are distinct and it is not valid to collapse the various approaches to the problem of defining culture, they can be loosely grouped into three broad types of definitions, with important consequences for the measurement and assessment of culture in groups or individuals.

First, many definitions seem to place emphasis on sorts of evidence of culture, or cultural objects. For example, Griswold (1986) defines culture as a common significance embodied in form. Others offer physical experiences such as sport (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005), fashion (Crane, 2000), and literature (Becker, 1982; Beisel, 1993; DiMaggio, 1987; Griswold, 2008). Definitions relying on the creation, production, distribution, or consumption of such products lead to a conceptualization of culture as a “distinct and autonomous sphere of study, generally not reducible to or a reflection of society” (Ghaziani, 2009, p. 583). Although widespread, this category of culture definitions seems most prevalent in certain disciplines, such as anthropology or sociology, which may more often be interested in artifacts and other physical manifestations. The field of early childhood education, however, is concerned with the more general aspects of culture, including the following two types of definitions.

The second broad definitional category is the view of culture as more of a perspective. Following this approach, any attempt to understand social action has to

take into account the manifestation of social life through the agency of humans. In turn, humans act in accordance with their own meanings of life that they themselves have constructed. This conceptualization can be seen in definitions of culture as a way of life or a tool kit that individuals access as they move through life (Sewell, 1999). While this type of definition seems to be more in line with the general field of early childhood education, it poses problems related to lack of consensus and difficulty in assessment. In this light, culture “risks becoming at once everything and nothing” (Ghaziani, 2009, p. 582). Similar to a scientific theory that can be worked to incorporate all explanations or possibilities, culture in this sense loses its power as it loses specificity.

Finally, some researchers have defined culture within a classification framework that embodies the meaning of many of the other definitions, while providing enhanced structure to assist in understanding and application. One example of this approach is the cultural standardization model proposed by Wilhelms, Shaki, and Hsiao (2009). The authors conceive of culture as influencing behavior and beliefs, decision-making processes and outcomes, and overall worldviews. To provide structure to this seemingly endlessly broad conceptualization, the impact of culture on all these areas of human action is structured within a layered system of influence. This system, visualized as a sphere with multiple layers from the outside (global culture) to the inner core (individual), includes multiple classifications of cultures influencing and influenced by a person’s life. For example, the micro culture represents personal familial beliefs, while the global culture represents national and international concepts such as the dynamic development of societies.

Similar to ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), intermediary layers are proposed to represent the overlap and constant back-and-forth impact inherent within such a layered approach. Further, contents at all layers may be constantly changing and reciprocal relationships of influence are assumed. This approach to defining culture, and others like it, provide the benefit of the broad conceptualization of culture that seems implicit in the study of early childhood education along with the structure and relative ease of assessment characteristic of the more physical or visible ideas of culture. Given these strengths, this definition format appears to be the most applicable to the field of early childhood education. After a brief examination of traditional approaches to the assessment of culture and relevant issues, the framework for this study will be presented in relation to another conceptualization of culture with its basis in structure and classification.

In large part due to the complexity of the concept of culture, currently no measure purports to assess this actual construct in its entirety. Instead, researchers traditionally tend to rely on a variety of proxy indicators, generally reflective of socio-demographic characteristics that can be quickly determined. Although there are many examples of such qualities, this review will emphasize those most frequently used and debated. In addition to the factors discussed below, others offered as markers of culture include socioeconomic status (SES; Snibbe & Markus, 2005), geographic region (Griffin & McFarland, 2007), rural versus urban community membership (Willan, 2007), political orientation (Bjornskov, Dreher, & Fischer, 2008), religious affiliation (Gilligan, 2009), and sexual orientation (Parker, 2009). To complicate the matter, culture may be further

considered as the intersection of multiple factors, such as men who are members of both sexual and racial minority groups (Boulden, 2009; Henderson, 2009).

A thorough review of the literature related to the study of culture in education and the social sciences revealed that by far the most common characterizations of culture are race and ethnicity. Although the two constructs are often confused and interchanged, general definitions of each appear to be widely accepted in the literature. In modern usage, race refers to social group membership based on a mix of physical characteristics, while ethnicity refers to social group membership based on a shared culture (Dein, 2006). The latter definition is rather interesting given the lack of common definition of “culture” previously discussed.

An exploration of the ways in which race and ethnicity are commonly viewed and assessed in the literature demonstrates the numerous approaches used even for these two proxy indicators. For example, researchers following the lead of the United States census delineate the two by including a series of questions asking respondents to first indicate whether they are Hispanic or non-Hispanic (an indicator of ethnicity) and then whether they are black, white, etc. (an indicator of race). Furthermore, throughout the studies examined, two qualities – breadth and depth – appeared to differ with respect to the measure of the constructs of race and ethnicity. Breadth varied according to the options afforded to respondents within the item. For instance, some studies limited responses to black, white, and Asian, while others allowed many other choices. Depth related more to choices within those initial options (e.g., can only choose Asian vs. then being given choices among Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, American Native). Further, many studies ignore the distinction entirely, either combining them into one

categorization (e.g., race/ethnicity as one response) or including one term regardless of what the question is addressing.

In some cases, culture may be “assessed” according to even more distal characteristics related to an individual’s race or ethnicity, such as acculturation. As with those previously mentioned, this concept is difficult to define and measure. Assessment of acculturation is multi-faceted, including factors at both the individual (e.g., age at migration, attitudes about traditional values, preferred language) and neighborhood (e.g., violence, immigrant concentration) level (Hunt, Schneider, & Comer, 2004; Kimbro, 2009; Lara et al., 2005). While this description barely scratches the surface of the measurement literature related to the acculturation construct, it demonstrates the additional complexity encountered when researchers attempt to go beyond mere demographic characteristics to examine culture. Further, although this construct may provide more detailed information than labels such as white or Southern, it is similarly limited in scope and application.

Given the lack of an operational definition of culture (Ghaziani, 2009; Wilhelms et al., 2009), it is difficult to validly measure such a broad construct. Without really knowing what it is we are attempting to measure and for whom and what purposes, how can we purport to be measuring anything appropriately? Although the limitations of the traditional approach of using race or ethnicity as the proxy for culture are evident, it is no wonder researchers and practitioners rely on this approach, given the lack of more appropriate and precise measures. While many authors have arrived at this same conclusion, few have offered functional solutions for overcoming the problem. In his treatment of the issue, however, Chick (2009) advocates for an approach focusing on

the cognitive aspects of culture (e.g., beliefs, consensus), which allow for easier and more accurate assessment and application.

Another major issue in the traditional assessment of culture is the content of measures used. For example, one problem is the lack of clear and accurate distinction between race and ethnicity, as well as no definition of race variables (Strom, Lee, Trahan, Kaufman, & Pritchett, 2009). As mentioned previously, many researchers include questions and response possibilities that ignore or blur the important differences between the two, thus further reducing the power of this indicator of culture. When moving beyond race and ethnicity, another issue is the generalizability of item content to individuals from different cultural backgrounds, which is particularly important when a measure is based upon the ability to inform sound conclusions regarding cultural beliefs (Naguchi, 2007). Thus, traditional assessment and discussion of culture is limited in scope and applicability, a problem that could be mitigated by utilizing measures based on a clear operational definition, including items addressing broad conceptualizations of culture, and ensuring that the underlying theory, as well as the actual items, are applicable to persons of all cultural groups.

Theoretical Framework: Grid-Group Cultural Theory

To bridge the disconnect between the way in which culture is experienced and expressed, on the one hand, and the manner in which it is often conceived by professionals and researchers on the other, the limitations just presented must be addressed in efforts to define and measure culture. Grid-group cultural theory provides one theoretical lens through which this aim can be accomplished. Originally developed to aid in the examination of risk perception among differing groups in a community, grid-group cultural theory proposes to identify a number of cultural types based on

endorsement of key underlying beliefs for the purpose of explaining and predicting group or individual beliefs, values, and behaviors (Mamadouh, 1999). Importantly, culture in this context is not determined by commonly used socio-demographic markers such as race or ethnicity, gender, religion, country of origin, language spoken, etc. While these characteristics will necessarily impact life experiences and are therefore relevant when considering culture in this theoretical framework, they do not define or predetermine cultural values. As such, they are insufficient for purposes of explanation or prediction (Grendstad & Sundback, 2003).

Grid-group cultural theory is premised on three basic assumptions (Mamadouh, 1999). The first and perhaps most important claim is that culture matters. Everything that people do, including their social relations, is influenced by culture, making it a vital consideration in any sort of analysis involving human beings. Second, grid-group cultural theory holds that a limited number of cultural types exist and that these types can be identified by examining different ways of life determined by the viable combination of cultural biases (i.e., shared values and beliefs) and patterns of social relations (i.e., patterns of interpersonal relations) (Thompson & Wildavsky, 1990). Lastly, constructs within this framework are considered universal, allowing them to be applied anywhere anytime to, “deduce preferences, attitudes and behaviors regarding all types of topics for each ideal type” (Mamadouh, 1999, p. 397). At its basis, the theory essentially provides the basis for helping individuals answer basic social questions, such as “How does the world work?,” “What are humans really like?,” and “How are persons held accountable?” (Wildavsky, 1994).

Conceptualization of cultural beliefs

Culture can be categorized according to the interaction of two key qualities: grid and group. Group refers to the extent of an individual's incorporation into a bounded group, while grid reflects the extent to which an individual's life is governed by externally imposed restrictions (Douglas, 1982). Both dimensions are considered polythetic scales in that they include a series of elements that may be applicable, but are not necessarily present in all cases (Mamadouh, 1999). For example, considerations of grid might include insulation, autonomy, control, competition, entitlement, accountability, and reciprocity. Significant aspects of group include frequency of interaction, transitivity, mutuality, scope of activities, proximity, boundary, and impermeability. An individual's cultural type, then, can be ascertained by locating the intersection of group boundedness and external prescription. The four possible types are shown in Figure 1. While cultural type itself will not be assessed in the present study, endorsement of cultural beliefs related to both grid and group will be; it is, therefore, relevant to consider how those beliefs might interact to influence culture and, in turn, behavior, as conceived in this theoretical framework.

The hierarchical way of life, with strong group boundaries and binding role prescriptions, is characterized by set division of labor, differentiated roles, and hierarchical social relations (Mamadouh, 1999). There are many ways in which members may be controlled (Thompson & Wildavsky, 1990), which are justified by the importance of the whole over the parts and the collective over the individual. To the hierarchist, fairness is equivalent to equality before the law and blame is assigned to deviants who do not follow established protocol. Individuals who identify with this cultural type may be vulnerable to misplaced trust.

The egalitarian type is defined by strong group boundaries but few external regulations. Internal role differentiation is minimal and the group is maintained through meaningful relationships among members. Egalitarians consider fairness to be equality of end result and blame is often put on the “system” that promotes hierarchy and tradition. This way of life is vulnerable to deadlocks.

Individualists, who experience weak group incorporation and weak external regulations, are free to enter into relational transactions with others when and how they wish (Mamadouh, 1999). For those who ascribe to this cultural type, boundaries are provisional and often subject to negotiation. This way of life is justified by the pursuit of personal rewards in a competitive environment and is vulnerable to a lack of cooperation. Fairness is considered equality of opportunity and blame is put on personal failure or lack of competitive edge.

Lastly, fatalists are not strongly incorporated into the group, but are held by binding prescriptions. While they are bound by the rules of others and have little choice in their lives, they are not afforded or do not seek membership in the controlling group. These individuals live at the margins of organized patterns, an isolation that may be imposed or chosen. Blame is often put on fate or bad luck, which leaves this way of life vulnerable to inertia and an unwillingness to plan ahead. For those in this cultural type, fairness is not considered possible in this world.

By assessing and understanding cultural beliefs of an entity, common group, or individual, researchers and practitioners can predict and attend to their preferences, values, and actions. However, an additional level of analysis, behavior, is needed to account for individual free will. Although the combination of cultural biases and

interpersonal relations that impact individuals' way of life is highly influential in determining the choices they make, each person retains the freedom to choose a behavior that matches the social environment, the cultural bias, or both, or to choose a behavior that disrupts one or both (Mamadouh, 1999). For example, an individual who has been raised in the Mormon faith is likely to endorse strong beliefs related to both grid and group such that he is highly bounded to both church and family and is held to strict external prescriptions. Based on these beliefs, this individual is likely to remain in the group and to behave in accordance with group rules. Though less likely, the individual also has free will to leave the church and marry someone who is not Mormon.

Cultural Beliefs in Context

An area lacking clarity in the literature is whether an individual's cultural beliefs represent a fixed trait or a temporary state. According to Douglas and Ney (1998), a defining characteristic of the grid-group framework is that synthesis, or the adherence to some select beliefs from multiple cultural types, is not possible. Thus, they argue that individuals cannot simply merge beliefs held by rival worldviews to achieve a way of life that is personal and reactive to the immediate experience. This tenet is relevant to the state vs. trait question, as it suggests that if individuals encounter an event or belief counter to their cultural beliefs, they must necessarily dismiss it or somehow completely alter their way of life to accommodate the inconsistency.

Thompson and Wildavsky (1990) suggest that because individuals identifying to varying degrees with cultural beliefs are forced to constantly interact with each other, leading to conflict and disequilibrium, they may move from one way of life to another in response to competing experiences and beliefs. This move, however, does not happen easily or at random, as events that do not fit current cultural beliefs are initially

explained away. Rather, a transfer to a different way of understanding life is realized in the face of the cumulative impact of numerous incongruent events, particularly if they are life altering or painful.

Douglas (e.g., 1978) agreed that individuals could move to a competing way of life, but considered cultural beliefs to be rigid in the sense that, once committed to, they were constant in all aspects of a person's life. In contrast, Thompson and Wildavsky (e.g., 1986) believe that individuals may adhere to somewhat divergent cultural beliefs, or similar beliefs to varying degrees, in different contexts. The latter view appears to prevail in modern research utilizing this theory. For instance, parents are described as being likely to espouse varying ways of life within the family dynamic and in the workplace (Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005). It is important to note that authors writing from this perspective, however, do not suggest that individuals hold completely opposite views in different contexts; the distinction appears to be one of degree.

The debate as to the stability of cultural beliefs serves to highlight the importance of experience in determining culture. Early experience is incredibly informative and forms the foundation for an individual's lifelong cultural beliefs. However, later experiences are equally significant in that they serve to either reinforce the current worldview or push the individual to move to another way of life. Thus, identification with specific cultural beliefs can be considered a state, albeit one that is resistant to change and relatively stable over time and across context. The alterability of culture has important implications for application of this theoretical orientation. For example, professionals working to influence teacher behavior through consultation or professional

development may ultimately be able to change deep-rooted cultural beliefs, but such change will be challenging and is unlikely to happen quickly.

While this theoretical framework is grounded in the fields of risk-perception and community analysis, grid group cultural theory has been widely applied to varied topics across disciplines, using diverse methodologies (e.g., policy analysis, telephone survey, literature synthesis), and pertaining to multiple units of analysis (e.g., geographical region, interest group, individual). Relevant to the field of early childhood education, grid-group cultural theory has been used to explain parenting practices related to child discipline. Giles-Sims and Lockhart (2005) analyzed family relations, predict patterns of disciplining children, and indicate methods that interventionists might find useful for working with various families. For example, the authors suggest that because of their reliance on clear boundaries and internal stratification, those with strong beliefs related to both grid and group tend to believe that there is a right way for doing everything, which must be taught to children, and that children should want to follow the circumscribed path simply because it is right, views that lend themselves to disciplinary practices focused on threat and application of punishment. This hypothesis is supported by previous anthropological findings that heavy reliance on corporal punishment is associated with gender hierarchy and societal complexity, including concern for conformity (Levinson, 1989, as cited in Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005).

For the purposes of the current study, the most significant conclusion of the parent discipline article is that culture is deep-rooted and influences individual members, as well as group functioning. Thus, if professionals intend to alter parenting practices or beliefs, their relationship with culture must first be understood. This study is premised

on the assertion that those attempting to understand and ultimately affect change in the practices of preschool teachers must make similar considerations. While grid-group cultural theory provides a framework through which to conceptualize the cultural beliefs of any given type of people, its link to the early childhood education field through measurement and application has not been established. However, several constructs related to the measure of culture and consistent with the tenets of grid-group cultural theory do have support in the literature for use with teachers.

Individualism-Collectivism (Independence-Interdependent Self-Concept)

The individualism-collectivism framework, one of the more popular ways in which researchers attempt to measure and understand culture, relates to the manner in which individuals view themselves and their relationships with others, particularly those within the groups to which they belong (Brewer & Chen, 2007). Traditionally, these constructs have been linked with geographical and historical place. Whereas in Western cultures, including the United States, self-definition is generally based on autonomy and separation from other people, in Eastern cultures self-concept is primarily based on embeddedness and interdependence within social groups (Brewer & Chen, 2007). As a result, worldview dimensions of individualism and collectivism have been found predictive of self-concept, emotion, attribution style, and relationality (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002).

Although the individualism-collectivism framework has been effectively applied to an understanding of personal values in a variety of contexts, the reliance on a dichotomous variable may be problematic. Indeed, there are benefits and limitations to this approach. The most common issue raised by critics is the danger of oversimplification (e.g., Greenfield, Suzuki, & Rothstein-Fisch, 2006; Voronov & Singer,

2002). Although identification with one of these belief systems is certainly significant, a great many other variables are important in defining overall beliefs and values. Furthermore, individuals face a contextually diverse world and may react differently depending on the situation or people involved. A second frequent criticism is that researchers tend to over-rely on constructs of individualism and collectivism as measures of culture, making them “conceptually fuzzy” (Earley & Gibson, 1998) and a “catch-all” for any cultural difference (e.g., Bond, 2002; Earley & Gibson, 1998; Oyserman et al., 2002). However, as Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, and Garcia (2009) argue, the individualism-collectivism framework provides a concise and generative base from which an understanding of the importance of cultural differences can be developed, thus encouraging reflective conversation.

A third criticism of the individualism/collectivism framework is that the constructs as conceived are more applicable to groups of people. In effect, individualism and collectivism represent complex and historically situated group standards for interpersonal relationships (Raeff, 1997). These standards take the form of interplay between independence – ideally regarding group membership and social relationships in terms of choice and mutuality – and interdependence – the view of social relationships ideally as connections that establish reciprocal obligations (Raeff, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2000). Responding to this third criticism and in line with this definitional trend, Singelis (1994) developed a set of two scales designed to assess ascription to independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal, seen as the individual equivalents to individualist and collectivist beliefs, respectively. Since the unit of interest in this current study is the individual teacher, these two scales will be used to

measure teachers' cultural beliefs related to this domain. As measures of preference toward group embeddedness, these scales are considered relevant to the concept of group in the grid-group cultural theory orientation.

The individualism-collectivism construct has been used in a variety of ways to explore cultural differences in the school setting. Several researchers have documented the helpfulness of this framework in explaining conflicts or miscommunications between teachers and either parents or students (Greenfield, Quiroz, & Raeff, 2000; Raeff, et al., 2000). Rothstein-Fisch et al. (2009) found that providing elementary school teachers with professional development that included an explanation of these cultural variables, implications for their practice, and methods for bridging the gap improved their understanding of students and families, as well as home-school collaboration. The authors also predicted an effective downward extension to the preschool context and presented ideas for making this new application. Specific teacher beliefs related to developmentally appropriate practices, behavior management, parenting, child learning, and disability have been linked to more global beliefs related to membership in a collectivist cultural group (McMullen, Elicker, Want, Erdiller, Lee, Lin, et al., 2005; Shin & Koh, 2007) and individual relatedness to independence or interdependence (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003).

Authoritarianism (Teacher Orientation)

Another indicator of cultural values frequently seen in the parenting literature and extended to application with teachers is the construct of authoritarianism. Baumrind (1978, 1991) examined parent-child dyads and determined that two qualities were highly significant in defining these relationships: demandingness (firm behavioral support, autonomy support, expectations) and responsiveness (warmth and care,

provision of resources, adaptation to individual needs). The various combinations of these dimensions form at least three distinct parenting types. A parenting style characterized by high demandingness and high responsiveness is considered *authoritative*. In Baumrind's studies, children who experienced this parenting style were the most competent and highly socialized. In contrast, children experiencing an *authoritarian* parenting style, characterized by low responsiveness and high demandingness, or *permissive* parenting style, characterized by high responsiveness and low demandingness, continued to experience less academic and social success. Other researchers have extended these results, further demonstrating the negative consequences of authoritarian caretaking, particularly on preschool children (e.g., Casas, Weigel, Crick, Ostrov, Woods, Yeh, & Huddleston-Casas, 2006; Nair & Murray, 2005; Querido, Warner, & Eybeg, 2002).

Extending this work to the field of education can be a helpful way to understand the basis and impact of teacher practices on the overall classroom context and may serve to connect research related to important developmental arenas for young children – the home and school (Walker, 2008; Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2006). The literature supports that the use of firm control and responsiveness to student needs, a combination that is similar to the authoritarian parenting style, is effective in promoting positive student outcomes (e.g., Cornelius-White, 2007; Emmer, Evertson, & Anderson, 1980; Pianta, Belsky, Houts, Morrison, & The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2007). A recent study examining the transfer of the parenting style framework to the teaching context revealed students experiencing authoritative were more academically and socially competent,

while children who were exposed to authoritarian teaching exhibited disengagement from academic setting and limited ability beliefs (Walker, 2008).

Teacher orientation, a parallel to the parenting style approach, has more direct utilization in the education field. This construct has been used to understand teacher beliefs related to classroom practices and the teacher role (Rydell & Henricsson, 2004) and is theoretically based in pupil control ideology, which emphasizes the need for control inherent to a school setting while differentiating approaches for conceptualizing and achieving that control (Hoy, 2001). According to this theory, schools and classrooms are unique service environments because they serve “clients” (i.e., students) who have little or no say in their membership because they are required to attend by their parents or the law. Further, schools and especially individual teachers have equally little input as to the particular students on their rosters. This mutual involuntariness creates a situation in which control is a central concern. Control, however, can be attained through different means, represented at their extremes by teacher orientation characterizations.

Two possible teacher orientations are defined and considered to be opposite poles on a continuum (e.g., Barfield & Burlingame, 1974; Lunenburg, 1991). Humanistic teachers create a classroom climate with open and reciprocal interaction, value close relationships with students, encourage student initiative, and view students as responsible and capable of self-discipline. Teachers with a custodial orientation, on the other hand, believe that the teacher should direct classroom activities, emphasize the maintenance of order, employ punitive sanctions, and favor impersonal teacher-student relationships. Clear similarities can be seen between the custodial teacher orientation

and the authoritarian parenting style. In fact, custodial teacher orientation has been related to preference for authoritarian strategies to handle externalizing classroom behavior (Rydell & Henricsson, 2004).

Research with both parents and teachers has shown that an authoritarian style is often related to cultural context. For example, authoritative parenting is more closely related to school success among European and Hispanic students than among Asian and Black students (Chao, 1994; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991). A recent study revealed that the school setting itself might contribute to an authoritarian approach to classroom management, with teachers altering their practices to become less democratic after entering an urban elementary school (Higgins & Moule, 2009).

There has also been criticism of the education system as a whole, and the push for developmentally appropriate practices in the early childhood field specifically, for their reliance on educational ideologies that may reflect a certain cultural stance that discourages beliefs and practices that could be considered authoritarian (Bailey & Pransky, 2005; Delpit, 1996; McMullen et al., 2005). Given these arguments, that there is a cultural basis to the construct of authoritarianism seems evident. This study uses teacher orientation as a means to understand underlying teacher cultural beliefs. As an indicator of belief in the relative importance of factors related to external prescription, autonomy, competition, reciprocity entitlement, and accountability, this measure is considered relevant to the concept of grid in the grid-group cultural theory orientation.

Teacher Beliefs

The teacher belief literature is relevant to an understanding of the potential link between cultural beliefs and teacher practices. Experts in this area of study consider

two common tracks of investigation: teacher self-efficacy (i.e., beliefs about their own ability as a teacher) and beliefs about specific areas of ideology or content (Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). This study will focus on the latter.

Further, teacher beliefs have been examined in relation to a great number of educational belief systems. Pajares (1992) argues that researchers must make the distinction between teachers' broader, general belief system, which in turn affects educational beliefs, or educational beliefs themselves. In this study, the construct of culture will be used to explore the first of Pajares's possibilities. This approach of linking teacher cultural beliefs to practice is informed by definitions such as that of Clark and Peterson (1986), who describe teacher beliefs as a contextual filter through which to view, analyze, and adapt classroom experiences, and Spodek (1988), who asserts that teachers' decisions and behaviors are fueled by their perceptions and beliefs, which are used to create a unique and particular conception of their professional world.

As with the construct of culture, a variety of terms and definitions have been applied to the study of teacher beliefs, with the core confusion resulting from failure to distinguish between beliefs and knowledge. To address this issue, Nespor (1987) identified four features as being characteristic of belief. First, he suggested that beliefs are affected by *existential presumptions*, which are personal, not universal, and cannot be undone by persuasion. Importantly, they may be created as a result of chance, a single particularly intense event, or the sum of several events. Existential presumptions include beliefs about "what oneself and others are like" (p. 309). For example, teachers may believe that parents do not care enough or that certain students misbehave because they are bad children. Second, beliefs may be vulnerable to alternativity, or the

searching to create an ideal or alternative that differs from reality. An example of this principle might be a teacher who strives to create the perfect classroom according to her ideals, but fails to recognize that these ideals are inconsistent with best practices or administrative reality.

Third, Nespor held that beliefs are influenced more heavily than knowledge by affective and evaluative components and that the affect of beliefs operates apart from the cognition of knowledge. An analogy can be drawn with the distinction between self-concept, representing knowledge of the self, and self-esteem, representing feelings about the self. Because beliefs are so deeply held, the distinction between knowledge and beliefs may be difficult to tease apart in some instances. For example, a teacher may “know” that boys are better at math than girls are or that Asian-American children will be great students. Further, factual knowledge may also be affected by belief, as in the case of a teacher who interprets a child’s difficulty paying attention as confirmation of her belief that he is lazy rather than considering other potential explanations.

Fourth, beliefs take their strength from early experiences that in turn color the comprehension of later experiences. As such, they do not require consensus, expert support, or judgments of validity in order to be followed. This factor is particularly important when considering the beliefs of teachers, who likely all spent considerable time in the school context throughout their young lives and thus have experienced critical events helping to shape their beliefs about education, teaching, and children. In sum, Nespor asserts that beliefs are distinct from knowledge because they are held as personal and incontrovertible truths, may serve as ideals or alternatives in comparison

to reality, have strong affective and evaluative components that work independently of cognition, and are defined by early experiences.

Kagan (1992) also addresses the link between knowledge and beliefs by subsuming beliefs as one of three major contributors to teachers' professional knowledge. Specifically, she presents teachers' knowledge of their profession as being situated in (1) context (i.e., specific students and classrooms), (2) content (i.e., particular academic material), and (3) person (i.e., embedded within teachers' unique belief systems). From a professional development or consultation perspective, a teacher's knowledge cannot be addressed without considering the impact of all three of these areas.

While cultural beliefs likely affect the professional beliefs and behaviors of individuals in any job, certain characteristics of teaching make it particularly vulnerable to their influence. Kagan (1992) argues that the uncertainty, isolation, and need to maintain control inherent in the practice of teaching essentially requires the development of some unique belief system to inform pedagogical decisions. These characteristics also create the need for teachers to be problem finders as well as problem solvers; they must define problems in light of their beliefs in order to effectively solve them.

Furthermore, the intimacy and routine of childcare leads many early childhood professionals to fall back on personal experience and cultural values during their daily work, despite their professional training (Hsueh & Barton, 2005). Finally, identity has been found to be influential when discussing and analyzing teacher practices (Enyedy, Goldberg, & Welsh, 2006). These researchers, along with the teachers they

interviewed, considered cultural beliefs to be a salient underlying factor among the five aspects of identity posited by Wenger (1998) and used as a guiding framework for their study: (1) personal history, (2) experience as negotiated within the context of existing cultural practices, (3) membership in communities, (4) the nexus of membership in multiple communities, and (5) an in-the-moment interaction between local and global contexts.

In addition to the factors above, several researchers have pointed to the decision-making aspect of teaching as an area that leads to reliance on underlying beliefs. The field of education is full of ideas and theories, but there are few long-standing “truths” or undeniably correct answers to important questions (Kagan, 1992). This ambiguity requires that teachers choose between a variety of alternatives when faced with a practice decision and these personal judgments are informed, at least in part, by their experiential and cultural beliefs. The complicated decisions faced by teachers on a daily basis are especially difficult and value-laden when they must be made in response to some socio-moral dilemma (e.g., a student monitor marking her friend as present when she was really absent). Maslovaty (2000) found that teacher behavior in such situations is the result of a decision-making process heavily influenced by teachers acting in accordance with their own distinct personal, social and cultural belief systems.

In her review of research on teachers’ thinking and beliefs, Isenberg (1990) discredits attempts to treat teachers as “technicians” who deliver standardized curricula without question, instead describing teachers as, “active, engaging and rational professionals who make both conscious and intuitive decisions in school contexts” (p.

324) substantially based on underlying beliefs. Such decisions are made throughout the teaching process, including times of preparation and reflection, but are particularly dependent on inherent thoughts and beliefs *during* teaching, when teachers are often faced with split-second interactive decisions involving complex situations.

Unique characteristics associated with the practice of teaching also help to explain the inconsistencies sometimes found in teacher behaviors. In Spodek's (1988) exploration of the implicit theories of early childhood teachers, preschool, kindergarten, and first grade teachers articulated a number of values and beliefs underlying their practices, further elucidating the complexity and variability of teacher thought processes, including both cultural and specific beliefs. The author also argues that teachers must often react to conflicting implicit theories, which requires further reliance on underlying beliefs. In Spodek's study, preschool teachers reported the greatest breadth and depth of implicit theories, suggesting that this effect may be especially true for those working in early childhood settings, who have to react to a greater variety of situations and may feel less pressure to act in a certain way than teachers at the elementary school level. Likewise, Pajares (1992) blames apparent inconsistencies on the manner in which teacher behaviors and specific practice beliefs are conceptualized, arguing that it is unproductive and misleading to see them as detached from some broader belief system. By viewing them in conjunction with deeper underlying beliefs, apparent inconsistencies are likely to be made more clear and meaningful.

The current study will focus on teachers' underlying cultural beliefs as informed by grid-group cultural theory; specifically individualism/collectivism will be examined as a measure of group and authoritarianism will be examined as a measure of grid.

Consideration of teacher beliefs at the level of individual culture is important because these core beliefs have been found to impact specific beliefs related to teaching, as well as actual classroom practices. For example, worldview beliefs are linked to teachers' epistemological beliefs (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006) and are included (i.e., as *cultural views about relationships with others*) as one of six influential cognitive and affective systems related to teachers' personal epistemology (Schommer-Aikens, 2004).

Teacher beliefs have also been studied with respect to specific areas of practice. For example, teachers receiving professional development to enhance their understanding of individual learning differences reported stronger interventionist beliefs about working with students (i.e., believing they could help a student experiencing difficulties), which in turn improved their effectiveness in actual teaching of various students (Rosenfeld & Rosenfeld, 2008). Jordan, Glenn, and McGhie-Richmond (2010) found key relationships between the underlying beliefs of elementary school teachers about the ideal role of teachers and the nature of learning and their specific beliefs about disability. These secondary disability beliefs were found to influence actual practices, particularly with regards to emphasis on teacher-led versus student-led work. Similarly, activity choice and structure in preschool classrooms has been found to differ according to teachers' stated beliefs about children's motivations, need for direction, and ability to benefit from various types of activities and teacher interactions (Blay & Ireson, 2009). Finally, beliefs may affect the overall environment created by teachers for their students, with relationships identified between specific beliefs related to the nature of academic ability and a classroom climate supportive of student autonomy (Leroy, Bressoux, Sarrazin, & Trouilloud, 2007), as well as teacher beliefs about influence over

the curriculum and use of developmentally appropriate practices (Buchanan, Burts, Bidner, White, & Charlesworth, 1998).

Although cultural beliefs defined broadly as in this study have not yet been studied in relation to classroom practices, the impact of teachers' cultural and experiential background on beliefs and practices has been well established. Several cross-cultural studies reveal important differences in the beliefs of teachers from different countries (e.g., Correa, Perry, Sims, Miller, & Fang, 2008; McMullen et al., 2005). While these results are perhaps not surprising and seem to fall into the categorization of culture based on demographic qualities, the underlying reasons for the differences can be tied to unique cultural and historical influences rather than the simple fact of living and working in separate nations.

Evidence for the impact of socio-cultural background on teaching practice can be found in studies comparing teachers from different countries. For example, differences in personal epistemology and conceptions about teaching and learning between Hong Kong and American teachers were explained as reflecting the influence of traditional cultural values emphasizing effort and hard work as the basis of ability, as well as respect for authority (Chan & Elliott, 2004). These values, attached to the ideals of collectivism and Confucianism, have also been used to understand conflicts in behavior management, explanations of and reactions to disability in young children, and communication styles between teachers in the United States and individuals of Korean and Southeast Asian descent (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003; Shin & Koh, 2007).

Furthermore, it has been argued that the current best practices in the field of education are based on assumptions and perspectives informed by mainstream

American culture and may not necessarily meet the needs of all students (Bailey & Pransky, 2005; Delpit, 1996; McMullen et al., 2005). This supposition supports the underlying cultural basis for educational decisions, whether at the individual or systems level, as well as the need to consider culture separate from nationality.

Teacher background, which in the theoretical framework underlying this study is posited to contribute to cultural beliefs and, therefore, classroom practices, has also been linked to specific classroom beliefs. For example, preservice teachers' reports of their personal experiences with punishment in their families of origin have been found to be predictive of their selection of classroom management strategies (Kaplan, 1992). Specifically, participants who reported that they experienced an authoritarian upbringing were more likely to select punitive strategies, even after receiving an intensive 2-week training module emphasizing the effectiveness and appropriateness of nonpunitive techniques. This finding confirms the significant influence of early experience and resulting beliefs on teachers and their practices.

Additionally, McMullen and Alat (2002) found that preschool teachers with four or more years of college held stronger beliefs related to developmentally appropriate practices than those who did not. This finding was true regardless of area of study, suggesting that the difference in beliefs was due to something unique to the college experience or the two groups of participants themselves rather than simply more advanced knowledge about working with young children. Similarly, teachers working in Head Start and non-Head Start settings reported much different reactions to videos of actual classroom routines, a finding the authors attribute to experiences with higher education and disparate sociopolitical and cultural beliefs (Hsueh & Barton, 2006). The

present study will extend the literature by expanding this base to encompass culture and experience without relying on demographic markers like country of origin, race, ethnicity, or educational attainment.

The impact of teachers' cultural beliefs, broadly defined, stands even when compared to other significant factors such as teaching context or superficial personal characteristics (e.g., seniority, exposure to mass media). When all three variables were considered, Maslovaty (2000) found that belief system (i.e., indices of interests, values, standpoints and satisfaction with pedagogical and social issues) most effectively explained the variance in teachers' choice of teaching strategies. The author concluded that, "...the teacher's belief system, crystallized through various cultural contexts, results in the development of different educational ideologies...In terms of the teacher's educational worldview, the beliefs paradigm determines teacher behavior" (p. 440).

Despite the oft-cited and seemingly common sense relationship between teacher beliefs and classroom practices, consensus has not been fully realized, with some studies finding an inconsistent or nonexistent link between the two (e.g., Charlesworth, Hart, Buurts, Thomasson, Mosley, & Fleege, 1993; File, 1994; Kontos & Dunn, 1993; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). In her discussion of this contradiction in findings, Wilcox-Herzog (2002) suggests that methodology may be to blame. Specifically, she argues that many researchers rely too heavily on measures of developmentally appropriate beliefs, which may not be applicable in all cases and may result in a lack of measurement specificity, especially when the cultural beliefs of researchers and practitioners differ. This argument supports the use of measures examining underlying cultural beliefs, which in turn may be related to practice beliefs and behaviors.

Additionally, the author remarks on the “in the moment” decision-making required of teachers, concluding that observation of actual teacher behavior is necessary to truly examine the hypothesized link between beliefs and practice. This argument supports the current study’s use of a structured classroom observation tool to examine actual teacher practices and behaviors, in addition to questionnaire measures of the above-mentioned selected cultural beliefs.

Grid-Group Theory's Dimensions and Cultures

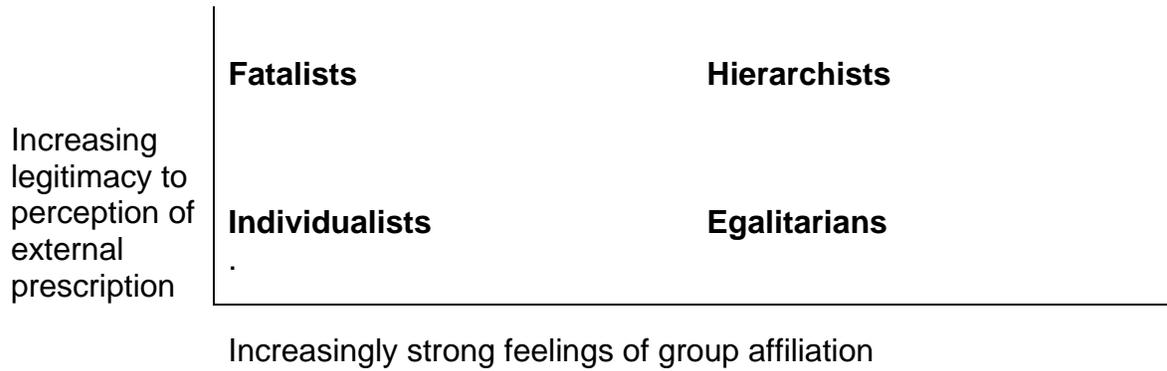


Figure 1-1. Grid-group cultural theory's dimensions and cultures (Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005)

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine potential relationships between preschool teacher cultural beliefs and their actual classroom practices. The following research questions, measurement tools, data collection procedures, and statistical analysis plan guided this effort.

Research Questions

The following research questions informed the current study and were addressed using quantitative observation and questionnaire data from the entire study sample:

1. Is there a relationship between the cultural beliefs of preschool teachers and their classroom practices related to emotional support?
 - a. Is there a relationship between independent beliefs and classroom practices related to emotional support?
 - b. Is there a relationship between interdependent beliefs and classroom practices related to emotional support?
 - c. Is there a relationship between teacher orientation beliefs and classroom practices related to emotional support?
 - d. Is there a relationship between a combination of independent/interdependent and teacher orientation beliefs and classroom practices related to emotional support?
2. Is there a relationship between the cultural beliefs of preschool teachers and their classroom practices related to classroom organization?
 - a. Is there a relationship between independent beliefs and classroom practices related to classroom organization?
 - b. Is there a relationship between interdependent beliefs and classroom practices related to classroom organization?
 - c. Is there a relationship between teacher orientation beliefs and classroom practices related to classroom organization?
 - d. Is there a relationship between a combination of independent/interdependent and teacher orientation beliefs and classroom practices related to classroom organization?

3. Is there a relationship between the cultural beliefs of preschool teachers and their classroom practices related to instructional support?
 - a. Is there a relationship between independent beliefs and classroom practices related to instructional support?
 - b. Is there a relationship between interdependent beliefs and classroom practices related to instructional support?
 - c. Is there a relationship between teacher orientation beliefs and classroom practices related to instructional support?
 - d. Is there a relationship between a combination of independent/interdependent and teacher orientation beliefs and classroom practices related to instructional support?

Measures

Teacher orientation. Teacher orientation, included as a cultural belief representative of the grid group cultural theory construct of grid, was measured using two scales. The Teacher Orientation Index was originally created by Rydell and Henricsson (2004) for use with elementary school teachers (Appendix A). Teachers were presented with eight pairs of sentences, with one sentence in each pair reflecting a humanistic style and the other sentence representing a custodial style. The statements are designed so that four pairs address the personal vs. impersonal aspect of teacher orientation and four pairs address the teacher control vs. students' initiative/participation aspect. Teachers were instructed to select the statement in each pair that most closely aligned with their views. One score representing a teacher's orientation on the bipolar humanistic/custodial scale was calculated by subtracting the number of endorsements of custodial orientation from the number of endorsements of humanistic orientation. Thus, high scores indicate a humanistic teacher orientation and low scores indicate a custodial teacher orientation.

Validity evidence for this scale consists of relationships with other related variables (Rydell & Henricsson, 2004). For a sample of 86 first-grade teachers, a humanistic orientation regarding classroom practices was negatively related to evaluation of self-restraint as important, corroborating the assumption that teachers with a more humanistic orientation seek to create classrooms emphasizing open and warm relationships between teacher and students. With respect to preferred disciplinary strategies, humanistic teacher orientation was related to observed use of discussions with students, while custodial orientation was related to observed reliance on contacting parents and verbal reprimands. Further, a series of regression analyses provided considerable evidence to support the independence of teacher orientation and another key variable, perceived control, in predicting preferences for particular disciplinary strategies. Custodial teacher orientation at the time of the initial study predicted the use of limit setting and corrections even one year later.

The Pupil Control Ideology Form (PCI), a second scale designed to assess teacher orientation along the humanistic and custodial continuum (Willower, Edell, & Hoy, 1967), was also included as a more established measure of this construct. The 5-point Likert-type scale consists of 20 statements intended to tap into teachers' views related to student control, with higher scores indicating a custodial attitude toward pupil control and lower scores indicating a humanistic attitude. Given that the original PCI is an older measure containing some difficult and old-fashioned terminology (e.g., pupil) that may not be easily understandable by many preschool teachers and has previously been used in studies with only K-12 teachers, the language in several items was modified for use in this study to be more accessible and applicable to typical VPK

teachers. For example, the word “student” was substituted for “pupil” throughout the scale and *director* was added along with *principal* in items referencing a person holding an administrative role.

Validity evidence for the finalized 20-item PCI consists primarily of construct validity demonstrated through relationships between PCI scores and ratings of practicing elementary school teachers’ pupil control ideology by their principals. Statistically significant differences at the .01 to .001 level between PCI scores of teachers judged to be humanistic and those of teachers judged to be custodial were found in multiple studies (Willower et al., 1967). Similarly, teachers at schools known to favor humanistic practices tended to receive more humanistic scores than teachers at other randomly sampled schools. Multiple studies have demonstrated consistently high score reliability coefficients for the PCI (Packard, 1989; Willower et al., 1967). Specifically, split-half reliability using even-item subscores and odd-item subscores resulted in a Pearson product moment coefficient of .91. A corrected coefficient of .95 was reached using the Spearman Brown formula.

The PCI has been used as a measure of teacher orientation in more than 200 published studies, addressing such varied topics as school bureaucracy, instructional climate, discipline, teacher stress, socialization of student teachers, teachers’ theoretical orientations toward reading, and role conflict and ambiguity (Hoy, 2001).

Self-construal scale. The Self-Construal Scale (SCS; Singelis, 1994) is a measure of individual self-image beliefs related to cultural norms of individualism and collectivism and was included as a measure of cultural beliefs representative of the grid group cultural theory construct of group (Appendix C). The scale consists of two sets of

12 statements to assess independence and interdependence respectively. Teachers were asked to indicate their agreement with each item on a 7-point Likert-type format (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) scale. The completed measure results in two distinct scores for independence and interdependence.

A series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted with a diverse sample of 364 undergraduate students as evidence of the internal structure of these scales (Singelis, 1994). The initial exploratory factor analysis (EFA) resulted in Cronbach's alpha reliabilities of .69 and .73 for the independent and interdependent subscales respectively and suggested that the proposed two-factor model was appropriate. A follow-up confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was utilized to compare one-factor and two-factor models and assess the overall fit of the two-factor model. Results indicated better fit for the two-factor model than the one-factor model and divergent validity for the two factors was established. The authors note that although the two-factor model is clearly more appropriate than the one-factor model, it seems only adequate based on various goodness-of-fit indices. They report that an inspection of the modification indices reveals that this result is due to a small sample size and the large number of indicators per factor. To ensure the overall positive support for the two-factor model was not simply due to chance, the same analysis was performed using a second sample of 165 students from the same university population as the first study. The two-factor structure was replicated in this second attempt.

The authors report several additional sources of validity evidence for the SCS. First, face validity for the two subscales can be considered high given that the items are based directly on a range of characteristics that define the constructs. Second,

construct validity evidence was obtained by administering the scales with samples of Asian American and Caucasian American participants. As expected, Asian Americans scored higher on the interdependent subscale and Caucasian Americans scored higher on the independent subscale. Third, participants endorsing strong interdependent values tended to attribute more influence to context in a proposed situation than those endorsing strong independent values. This finding provides support for the predictive validity of the measure.

The SCS was developed using a sample of undergraduate students and some of the language used in the items is unique to that population. For the purposes of this study, the wording of several items was minimally altered to make them relevant for teachers. For example, the original scale includes an item stating “I would offer my seat in a bus to my professor.” This item was changed to “I would offer my seat in a bus to my director.” In the item “Speaking up during class is not a problem for me,” the word *class* was changed to *meeting*. Finally, the item “I should take into consideration my parents’ advice when making education/career plans,” read “I should take into consideration my family members’ advice when making education/career plans.”

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is a structured observation instrument designed to assess classroom processes in prekindergarten through third grade classrooms and was used in this study to measure actual classroom practices utilized by participating preschool teachers. The CLASS consists of ten scales, some of which were adapted from the Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment (NICHD ECCRN, 1996) and the Classroom Observation System (NICHD ECCRN, 1996; Pianta, La Paro,

Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002). The remaining scales were developed based on an extensive review of the literature related to teacher education and early education and care quality, in conjunction with observation research focusing on classroom dimensions relevant to child outcomes (La Paro, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004).

Three areas of classroom characteristics make up the CLASS: emotional climate, classroom organization, and instructional support. Emotional support includes positive climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspectives scales. Classroom organization includes behavior management, productivity, and instructional learning formats scales. Instructional support includes concept development, quality of feedback, and language modeling scales. The first CLASS included a separate student engagement scale, which was conceptualized by the author as a type of outcome measure. In the revised version used in the present study, however, this construct is included within the instructional learning formats dimension.

When completing the CLASS, researchers observe the typical classroom routine and take notes on the score sheet for 20 consecutive minutes and then take 10 minutes to code on a seven-point Likert-type scale. Administrators take notes relevant to specific areas of practice (e.g., classroom management, positive climate, language modeling) during observation periods and use detailed descriptions provided in the manual to make judgments about the appropriate categorical range (i.e., low, medium, high) and specific score from 1-7 to be assigned for that time period during the coding period. This entire process constitutes one cycle. Observations should take place throughout the school day and should include from four to eight cycles. The observer focuses on the teacher's actions and interactions, as well as the students' responses, behavior, and

engagement. Although designed as a measure of classroom quality, the emphasis placed on teacher behavior, student-teacher interactions, and the effect of that behavior on students and the classroom as a whole make the CLASS an appropriate tool with which to view teacher practices.

The typical CLASS procedure was modified in the following ways. First, a CLASS observation generally involves four observation cycles across whatever activities happen to be scheduled, with the exception of outside play and others that require students to leave the classroom. For the current study, three observation cycles were conducted during specific activities – circle time, center or free play time, and a snack or meal. Targeting these activities allowed teacher behaviors to be considered in a variety of everyday contexts (e.g., teacher-directed, student-led, daily routine). Further, these activities are generally typical of all or most preschool classrooms, thus providing for ease and relevance of comparison. Procedures for timing, note taking, and scoring within these three observation blocks followed those detailed in the CLASS manual. A second modification involves the use of scores. Whereas scores for each domain are usually averaged across observation periods, each of the three observations were considered both separately and as an averaged score in this study in order to explore the possible impact of activity context on teacher behaviors.

The CLASS has considerable psychometric integrity evidence (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008) gathered through several large-scale studies of preschool and kindergarten teachers in various states across the United States. Structural integrity of the theoretically proposed three major domains of classroom processes has been repeatedly supported by confirmatory factor analyses using data gathered from five

separate studies including more than 1,000 preschool and kindergarten teachers. These analyses also provided internal consistency evidence, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .85 to .94 for Emotional Support, .76 to .89 for Classroom Organization, and .79 to .90 for Instructional Support.

Face and construct validity of the CLASS is supported by the extensive literature review that serves as its basis and ongoing consultation and support of numerous experts in classroom quality and teaching effectiveness (Pianta et al., 2008). Expected associations between CLASS scores and scores on relevant portions of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition (ECERS-R) and the Emerging Academics Snapshot provides evidence to support the measure's criterion validity (Pianta et al., 2005). Predictive validity of the CLASS is established through the longitudinal National Center for Early Development and Learning Multi-State Study of Prekindergarten and State-Wide Early Education Programs Study, with associations found between classroom quality, as measured by the CLASS, and both outcome measures of children's performance at the end of the preschool and gains in performance across the preschool year (Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, et al., 2008; Mashburn, Pianta, Hamre, Downer, Barbarin, Bryant, et al., 2008).

CLASS user reliability is maximized by a detailed manual providing in-depth descriptions of domains, teacher and classroom characteristics or behaviors, and rating exemplars (e.g. what might be observed in a classroom rated in the low range for positive climate). Additionally, in order to use the CLASS, potential users must attend an official training emphasizing clear and comprehensive understanding of its purposes and procedures that utilizes practice coding and discussion with multiple videotaped

segments that have been consensus-coded by master CLASS coders. Participants must take a reliability test before completing training; average interrater reliability with master codes on these reliability tests is 87% (Pianta et al., 2008). General stability of CLASS scores across cycles, days in a week, and the school year was established using data collected as part of the National Center for Early Development and Learning Multi-State Study of Prekindergarten study and 4Rs Program research. Of most significance to the present study, internal consistencies for CLASS dimensions and domains in samples of 240 preschool teachers and 68 third grade teachers were comparable for three and four observation cycles (Pianta et al., 2008).

Demographic survey. Participants were asked to complete a brief demographic survey with items related to teaching experience, educational attainment, race, ethnicity, age, and gender (Appendix D).

Participants

Participants were 33 preschool teachers from early childhood programs in North Central Florida. Specifically, classrooms enrolled in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program were targeted. Florida's current VPK legislation was signed in January 2005 with the intention of creating a free and voluntary preschool experience so that all children in the state could be better prepared to begin kindergarten (Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe, 2012). Every child who will turn 4 years of age prior to September 1 is eligible to register for that year's VPK program, choosing either the school year or summer option. Parents are provided with a list of approved providers and are able to choose where their child will attend from among available programs. VPK classrooms can be located in any number of settings, including Head Start, faith-based centers, private for-profit preschools, and home daycares, providing they meet

the minimum criteria for inclusion. These criteria include 1:10 teacher-to-child ratio; class size of no more than 18 children during school-year programs and 10 children during summer programs; minimum teacher education standard of a child development associate for school-year teachers and a bachelor degree in education for summer teachers; an approved curriculum with a focus on reading, writing, and social skills; and compliance with state safety standards.

VPK teachers were chosen as the target study population in an attempt to ensure that the recruited sample balanced representativeness of the natural variability observed in early childhood education settings and curriculum-delivery models with sufficient program similarity to identify relationships among variables with confidence. Since VPK programs are included in public schools, private for-profit preschools, home daycares, religious centers, etc., as a group they encompass most of the settings in which young children may be educated and cared for. Given that such programs must meet specific criteria regarding teacher-to-child ratio, class size, teacher credentials, and curriculum focus, they can be considered sufficiently similar at a program level.

In order to obtain as representative a sample as possible, the full list of VPK classrooms ($n = 74$) in Alachua County was sorted into the following three general groups: for-profit, faith-based, and Head Start. Percentage of total VPK classrooms reflected by each group was calculated (63.5% for-profit, 23% faith-based, and 13.5% Head Start) and every attempt was made to recruit approximately the same percentage of the total sample size for each group. Final study participants included 19 teachers at for-profit centers, 8 teachers at faith-based centers, and 6 Head Start teachers.

Procedure

The Early Learning Coalition (ELC) of Alachua County was contacted for an updated list of early childhood programs offering VPK education. Center directors were first contacted via a mailed letter introducing the principal investigator and the study and requesting them to contact the principal investigator if they would be willing to recruit teachers to participate in the current study. Very few directors ($n = 2$) responded to this initial request. As a result, the principal investigator visited centers in person to request participation. During these visits, the principal investigator spoke with the director about the study and requested permission to recruit teachers. If the director agreed, the principal investigator met with interested teachers to explain the purpose of the study and what their participation would entail. Once participating teachers signed the informed consent form, they were given the questionnaire packet including the cultural beliefs self-report scales and demographic survey to complete independently and a mutually convenient time for observation was arranged. Completed questionnaires were collected at the return visit for CLASS observation. Elapsed time between giving teachers the questionnaire and returning to pick it up ranged from 1 day to 3 weeks and was primarily a function of ease of scheduling a day for observation.

Each classroom was observed using the CLASS, modified as described above, during targeted activities (i.e., circle time, free play/center time, snack/meal time) in the typical classroom routine. Due to variability in classroom schedules and time allotted to each targeted activity, observer time spent in each classroom ranged from 55 minutes to 3.5 hours. Specifically, because the three target activities had to be observed, the observer frequently had to wait for the next specified activity to occur in the schedule, thus increasing actual time physically spent in the classroom. No structured note taking

or coding was completed related to activities occurring during this wait time (e.g., small group activities, outside play, whole group instruction). Furthermore, length of target activities varied among teachers, but each activity was observed for a minimum of 10 minutes, per CLASS procedure requirements, and a maximum of 20 minutes.

The principal investigator, who successfully completed CLASS reliability training and has conducted at least 30 previous CLASS observations for multiple research projects, administered 31 of the 33 observations for the current study. The remaining 2 classrooms were observed by a fellow researcher who has also undergone CLASS reliability training and with whom the principal investigator has previously established inter-rater reliability on the pre-k CLASS for research purposes. Sufficient reliability of observer ratings is therefore assumed.

Data Analysis

First, descriptive statistics (e.g., means, ranges) were run for each of the measures, including each of the SCS subscales, the TOI, the Preschool PCI, CLASS scores in each of the three practice areas, and demographics. Second, Cronbach's alpha was used to establish score reliability for scales and CLASS score composites. Third, a correlation matrix was developed including all teacher measure variables to determine their independence from one another for the purposes of the regression analyses. Fourth, a priori power analyses were run to explore power allowed by the lower than anticipated final sample size with respect to planned multiple regression analyses. Fifth, three separate multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine the extent to which measures of teacher cultural beliefs are related to classroom practices related to emotional support, classroom management, and instructional support. Lastly, three series of three post-hoc multiple regression analyses

were conducted as an exploratory examination of differences in the relationship between cultural beliefs and classroom practices by activity type.

CHAPTER 3 RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between preschool teacher cultural beliefs and classroom practices. Specifically, the current study sought to determine the influence of teacher orientation, as a measure of the grid-group cultural theory construct of grid, and independence/interdependence, as a measure of the construct of group, on preschool teachers' behaviors and interactions with students related to emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support.

This chapter begins with an overview of descriptive statistics related to the study participants and centers, cultural belief measures, and CLASS scores. Next, score reliability data for cultural belief measures are reported. Finally, regression analyses used to address research questions and in post-hoc explorations will be presented. Referenced tables can be found at the end of the current Chapter 3. A summary of major findings and implications of those findings are discussed in Chapter 4.

Descriptive Statistics

Participants included 33 VPK teachers from 17 different centers or schools (Table 3-1). The majority of teachers ($n = 19$; 57.5%) worked at for-profit centers, followed by faith-based centers ($n = 8$; 24.2%), and Head Start classrooms located at public elementary schools ($n = 6$; 18.2%). This breakdown by center type is similar to that of the overall VPK classroom population available in this county (63.5% for-profit, 23% faith-based, and 13.5% Head Start). Participants reported a mean of 14 years teaching experience (range 2 to 40 years), with a mean 5 years at their current position (range 3 months to 17 years). All participants were female, with a mean age of 43 years (range 22 to 64 years).

Following the United States census treatment of race and ethnicity, participants were first asked to indicate whether they considered themselves to be of Hispanic ethnicity. Three participants answered in the affirmative, while the remaining teachers indicated that they did not consider themselves to be of Hispanic ethnicity. Respondents were then asked to indicate their race from a number of choices or to write in the race with which they most identify. Three teachers described themselves as biracial, two as black, and the remaining 28 as white. Participants were also asked to indicate their highest level of education. The majority of teachers in this sample ($n = 20$) have earned a Child Development Associate (CDA) or an Associate's degree. Ten teachers reported holding Bachelor's degrees and three held Master's level degrees.

Descriptive statistics for teacher cultural belief measures (i.e., TOI, PCI, SCS Independence, SCS Interdependence) are shown in Table 3-2. The TOI has a potential range of -8 to 8. In this sample of 33 teachers, the mean was 4.290, with a range of -2 to 8. TOI scores were shifted to a 1 – 17 scale for inclusion in regression analyses. PCI, SCS Independence, and SCS Interdependence scale administration resulted in mean scores of 45.738 (range 28 to 61), 62.931 (range 36 to 76), and 58.723 (range 31 to 77), respectively. Mean and range of CLASS scores by domain is similar to that reported by Pianta et al. (2008) in previous samples used for instrument design and validation. In the current study, the mean Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support domain scores were 6.092 (range 4.750 to 6.875), 5.188 (range 3.556 to 6.667), and 2.078 (range 1.111 to 3.333), respectively.

Score Reliability of Study Measures

Given that several of the scales used to measure cultural beliefs in this study were modified slightly to accommodate a sample of preschool teachers or have not

been used for research of this kind previously, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to confirm adequate score reliability for the SCS Independence scale composite, SCS Interdependence scale composite, and Preschool PCI scale. Cronbach's alpha for all three measures was at or above .70 (Table 3-3). Because TOI scores are reflected in a range, score reliability was not calculated for this measure.

Power Analysis

Because the final sample size was smaller than anticipated, a priori power analyses were run to determine whether existing data offered adequate power to continue. Results suggested that a sample size of 33 would achieve 25% power to detect an R-Squared of 0.10 attributed to four independent variables, using an F-Test with a significance level (alpha) of 0.05. Limited power for identifying statistical significance was therefore assumed. Post-hoc power values specific to each included regression analysis are reported below.

Statistical Assumptions

Visual inspection of probability plots revealed that the assumptions of conditional normality, linearity, and homoscedacity were met for each independent variable, thus supporting the use of linear and multiple regression analyses. Correlations among all variables included in regression analyses were examined before analysis began to examine independence (Table 3-4).

Regression Analyses

Three independent multiple regression analyses using the enter method with SCS Interdependence, SCS Independence, TOI, and PCI as independent variables and each of the CLASS domain average scores as dependent variables were utilized to answer primary research questions. Additionally, three series of three multiple

regression analyses using the same independent variables as above and CLASS domain scores for circle time, centers/free choice, and snack/meal time were used for post-hoc exploratory examination of the relationships between cultural beliefs and classroom practices by activity type.

Research Question 1: Is there a relationship between the cultural beliefs of preschool teachers and classroom practices related to emotional support? The first regression model ($F = 2.594$, $p = .057$; Table 3-5) revealed that a combination of cultural beliefs related to independence, interdependence, and teacher orientation explained approximately 26% ($R^2 = .264$) of the variance in average CLASS Emotional Support score. Power for this model was calculated to be .720 based on four predictors, observed $R^2 = .264$, $\alpha = .05$, and a sample size of 33. Examination of β weights and squared structure coefficients for the four independent variables suggests that teacher orientation, as measured by the TOI, is the most noteworthy of the factors included in this model to teachers' use of emotional support practices (Table 3-6).

Research Question 2: Is there a relationship between the cultural beliefs of preschool teachers and classroom practices related to classroom organization? The second regression model (Table 3-7) revealed that a combination of cultural beliefs related to independence, interdependence, and teacher orientation explained approximately 15% ($R^2 = .148$) of the variance in average CLASS Classroom Organization score, but was not found to be statistically significant at the $\alpha = .05$ level ($F = 1.259$, $p = .309$). Power for this model was calculated to be .391 based on four predictors, observed $R^2 = .148$, $\alpha = .05$, and a sample size of 33. Examination of β weights and squared structure coefficients for the four independent variables suggests

that teacher orientation, as measured by the TOI, is the most noteworthy of the factors included in this model to teachers' use of classroom organization practices (Table 3-8).

Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between the cultural beliefs of preschool teachers and classroom practices related to instructional support? The third regression model (Table 3-9) revealed that a combination of cultural beliefs related to independence, interdependence, and teacher orientation explained approximately 24% ($R^2 = .236$) of the variance in average CLASS Instructional Support score, but was not found to be statistically significant at the $\alpha = .05$ level ($F = 2.241$, $p = .089$). Power for this model was calculated to be .647 based on four predictors, observed $R^2 = .236$, $\alpha = .05$, and a sample size of 33. Examination of β weights and squared structure coefficients for the four independent variables suggests that independence, followed by interdependence, are the most noteworthy of the factors included in this model to teachers' use of instructional support practices (Table 3-10).

Post-Hoc Exploration of Relationships Between Cultural Beliefs and Classroom Practices by Activity Type. Three series of three multiple regression analyses were conducted as exploratory analyses of the relationships between cultural beliefs and classroom practices by activity type (i.e., circle time, centers/free choice, snack/meal) with regards to emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. To account for experiment-wise error rate, the Bonferonni correction (α/n comparisons) was used to adjust the alpha level needed for statistical significance within each family of hypothesis tests (i.e., emotional support, classroom organization, instructional support). As a result, an alpha level of .017 (.05/3) was required for any of the following exploratory models to reach statistical significance. This

reduced alpha level in conjunction with low sample size results in insufficient power to determine conclusive relationships between included variables and no models were found to be statistically significant at the $\alpha = .017$ level. Given the exploratory nature of the present study, however, results of these models were examined for purposes of identifying potential hypotheses for future research in this area.

With regards to emotional support practices, a combination of cultural beliefs related to independence, interdependence, and teacher orientation explained approximately 31% ($R^2 = .306$; $F = 3.195$, $p = .027$) of the variance in circle time practices, 14% ($R^2 = .135$; $F = 1.127$, $p = .363$) of the variance in centers/free choice practices, and 15% ($R^2 = .145$; $F = 1.229$, $p = .320$) of the variance in snack/meal practices (Tables 3-11, 3-13, and 3-15). Examination of β weights and squared structure coefficients for the four independent variables suggests that teacher orientation is the most noteworthy of the factors included in this model to teachers' use of emotional support practices during all three activity types (Tables 3-12, 3-14, and 3-16).

With regards to classroom organization practices, a combination of cultural beliefs related to independence, interdependence, and teacher orientation explained approximately 7% ($R^2 = .074$; $F = .577$, $p = .682$) of the variance in circle time practices, 10% ($R^2 = .095$; $F = .758$, $p = .561$) of the variance in centers/free choice practices, and 17% ($R^2 = .172$; $F = 1.502$, $p = .227$) of the variance in snack/meal practices (Tables 3-17, 3-19, and 3-21). Examination of β weights and squared structure coefficients for the four independent variables suggests that teacher orientation is the most noteworthy of the factors included in this model to teachers' use of classroom organization practices during all three activity types (Tables 3-18, 3-20, and 3-22).

With regards to instructional support practices, a combination of cultural beliefs related to independence, interdependence, and teacher orientation explained approximately 16% ($R^2 = .156$; $F = 1.341$, $p = .279$) of the variance in circle time practices, 19% ($R^2 = .189$; $F = 1.695$, $p = .178$) of the variance in centers/free choice practices, and 26% ($R^2 = .258$; $F = 2.520$, $p = .063$) of the variance in snack/meal practices (Tables 3-23, 3-25, and 3-27). Examination of β weights and squared structure coefficients for the four independent variables suggests that interdependence is the most noteworthy of the factors included in this model to teachers' use of instructional support practices during circle time (Table 3-24), while independence is the most noteworthy to instructional support practices during centers/free choice (Table 3-26). All four cultural belief factors are relatively equally noteworthy to instructional support practices during meal/snack (Table 3-28).

Summary

This study examined the relationships between cultural beliefs and classroom practices related to emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Three independent multiple regression analyses including SCS Independence, SCS Interdependence, TOI, and PCI as independence variables used to answer each of the primary research questions revealed no statistically significant models at the $\alpha = .05$ level. However, the first model had a p calculated value of .057 and explained 26% of the variance in average CLASS Emotional Support scores. Given the exploratory nature of the current study, β weights and squared structure coefficients were examined for each of these three primary multiple regression analyses and post-hoc multiple regression analyses used to explore relationships between cultural beliefs and

classroom practices by activity level. Across models, teacher orientation was identified as the most noteworthy independent variable to emotional support and classroom organization practices, while independence/interdependence was identified as the most noteworthy to instructional support practices. Insufficient power as a result of low sample size and experiment-wise error rate adjustment to alpha level needed for statistical significance requires that these results be interpreted with caution and considered as preliminary exploratory findings to inform future research.

Table 3-1. Descriptive statistics for participants.

Variable	%/Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Gender – Female	100%	-	-	-
Ethnicity – Hispanic	3%	-	-	-
Race – White	85%	-	-	-
Race – Black	6%	-	-	-
Race – Biracial	9%	-	-	-
Education – Associate's/CDA	61%	-	-	-
Education – Bachelor's	30%	-	-	-
Education – Master's	9%	-	-	-
Age			23.00	64.00
Years Teaching	14.18	10.84	2.00	40.00
Years at Current Site	5.15	4.57	0.33	17.00

Table 3-2. Descriptive statistics for cultural belief measures and CLASS scores.

Variable	Mean	SE	Minimum	Maximum
SCS Independent	62.931	1.453	36.000	76.000
SCS Interdependent	58.723	1.682	31.000	77.000
PCI Total	45.738	1.277	28.000	61.000
TOI Total	4.290	.460	-2.000	8.000
CLASS Emotional Support average	6.092	.102	4.750	6.875
CLASS Classroom Organization average	5.188	.119	3.556	6.667
CLASS Instructional Support average	2.078	.101	1.111	3.333
CLASS Emotional Support circle	5.859	.136	4.000	7.000
CLASS Emotional Support centers	6.296	.111	4.750	7.000
CLASS Emotional Support snack	6.059	.116	4.750	7.000
CLASS Classroom Organization circle	5.385	.179	3.333	7.000
CLASS Classroom Organization centers	5.677	.145	3.000	6.667
CLASS Classroom Organization snack	4.520	.128	2.333	6.333
CLASS Instructional Support circle	2.427	.186	1.000	5.000
CLASS Instructional Support centers	2.162	.152	1.000	4.333
CLASS Instructional Support snack	1.637	.099	1.000	3.333

Table 3-3. Internal consistency score reliability statistics for cultural beliefs scales.

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
Preschool PCI	.709	20
SCS Independence	.758	12
SCS Interdependence	.783	12

Table 3-4. Correlations among variables included in regression analyses.

	IND	INT	TOI	PCI	ES avg	ES circle	ES free	ES snack	CO avg	CO circle	CO free	CO snack	IS avg	IS circle	IS free	ISsnack
IND	1.000	.333	.034	-.153	.217	.253	.200	.059	.054	.012	.044	.061	*.420	.282	*.387	.193
INT		1.000	.168	.132	.211	*.352	.136	.116	.002	.019	.156	-.141	.274	*.362	-.039	.299
TOI			1.000	.033	*.390	*.430	.241	.284	.309	.204	.243	.313	.164	.083	.058	.247
PCI				1.000	-.266	-.154	-.213	-.232	-.238	-.190	-.127	-.216	-.188	.004	-.148	-.313
ES avg					1.000	** .817	** .841	** .896	** .620	** .496	** .570	** .479	** .466	.317	.300	*.411
ES circle						1.000	*.447	** .557	*.378	** .523	.141	.220	** .473	** .583	.007	*.349
ES free							1.000	** .731	** .616	.351	** .671	** .485	*.369	.121	*.370	.336
ES snack								1.000	** .611	*.361	** .677	** .518	.289	.041	.246	*.416
CO avg									1.000	** .781	** .798	** .839	** .495	.336	.248	** .530
CO circle										1.000	.348	*.447	** .559	** .602	.135	*.398
CO free											1.000	** .627	.334	.043	*.349	*.403
CO snack												1.000	.268	.073	.111	** .484
IS avg													1.000	** .616	** .684	** .609
IS circle														1.000	.228	.333
IS free															1.000	.162
IS snack																1.000

*significant at .05 level (2-tailed) **significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3-5. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS ES average.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	.008	.012	.111	.645	.524
SCS Interdependent	.009	.011	.153	.875	.389
PCI Total	-.022	.013	-.280	-1.703	.099
TOI Total	.086	.039	.354	2.191	.037

Table 3-6. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS ES average.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	.111	.207	.162
SCS Interdependent	.153	.211	.169
PCI Total	-.280	-.266	.268
TOI Total	.354	.390	.390

Table 3-7. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS CO average.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	.001	.015	.114	.075	.940
SCS Interdependent	-.001	.013	-.021	-.111	.912
PCI Total	-.023	.016	-.243	-1.371	.181
TOI Total	.087	.049	.304	1.751	.091

Table 3-8. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS CO average.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	.114	.054	.019
SCS Interdependent	-.021	.002	.0000270
PCI Total	-.243	-.238	.383
TOI Total	.304	.309	.645

Table 3-9. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS IS average.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	.023	.012	.336	1.909	.066
SCS Interdependent	.010	.011	.163	.914	.368
PCI Total	-.013	.013	-.162	-.967	.341
TOI Total	.030	.040	.126	.765	.450

Table 3-10. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS IS average.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	.336	.420	.747
SCS Interdependent	.163	.274	.318
PCI Total	-.162	-.188	.150
TOI Total	.126	.164	.114

Table 3-11. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS ES circle time.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	.011	.015	.122	.728	.473
SCS Interdependent	.020	.013	.265	1.563	.129
PCI Total	-.017	.016	-.171	-1.072	.292
TOI Total	.116	.048	.379	2.413	.022

Table 3-12. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS ES circle time.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	.122	.253	.209
SCS Interdependent	.265	.352	.405
PCI Total	-.171	-.154	.078
TOI Total	.379	.430	.604

Table 3-13. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS ES centers.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	.010	.014	.133	.709	.484
SCS Interdependent	.005	.012	.082	.432	.669
PCI Total	-.018	.015	-.209	-1.173	.250
TOI Total	.057	.045	.224	1.278	.211

Table 3-14. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS ES centers.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	.133	.200	.296
SCS Interdependent	.082	.136	.137
PCI Total	-.209	-.213	.336
TOI Total	.224	.241	.430

Table 3-15. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS ES snack.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	-.002	.015	-.028	-.150	.881
SCS Interdependent	.008	.013	.117	.620	.540
PCI Total	-.024	.016	-.260	-1.466	.153
TOI Total	.073	.048	.265	1.520	.139

Table 3-16. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS ES snack.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	-.028	.059	.024
SCS Interdependent	.117	.116	.093
PCI Total	-.260	-.232	.371
TOI Total	.265	.284	.556

Table 3-17. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS CO circle time.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	-.004	.022	-.031	-.159	.875
SCS Interdependent	.002	.020	.021	.108	.914
PCI Total	-.025	.024	-.191	-1.034	.310
TOI Total	.081	.073	.202	1.112	.275

Table 3-18. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS CO circle time.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	-.031	.012	.002
SCS Interdependent	.021	.019	.005
PCI Total	-.191	-.190	.488
TOI Total	.202	.204	.562

Table 3-19. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS CO centers.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	-.004	.019	-.038	-.198	.844
SCS Interdependent	.013	.016	.152	.785	.439
PCI Total	-.018	.020	-.159	-.870	.392
TOI Total	.074	.060	.221	1.232	.228

Table 3-20. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS CO centers.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	-.038	.044	.020
SCS Interdependent	.152	.156	.256
PCI Total	-.159	-.127	.170
TOI Total	.221	.243	.622

Table 3-21. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS CO snack.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	.008	.016	.088	.482	.634
SCS Interdependent	-.015	.014	-.200	-1.082	.288
PCI Total	-.019	.018	-.186	-1.068	.294
TOI Total	.102	.053	.331	1.931	.063

Table 3-22. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS CO snack.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	.088	.061	.022
SCS Interdependent	-.200	-.141	.116
PCI Total	-.186	-.216	.271
TOI Total	.331	.313	.570

Table 3-23. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS IS circle time.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	.022	.022	.179	.964	.343
SCS Interdependent	.031	.019	.293	1.569	.127
PCI Total	-.001	.024	-.008	-.046	.963
TOI Total	.011	.073	.026	.147	.884

Table 3-24. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS IS circle time.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	.179	.282	.510
SCS Interdependent	.293	.362	.840
PCI Total	-.008	.004	.000
TOI Total	.026	.083	.044

Table 3-25. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS IS centers.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	.045	.018	.439	2.418	.022
SCS Interdependent	-.017	.016	-.190	-1.035	.309
PCI Total	-.007	.020	-.057	-.329	.744
TOI Total	.026	.060	.074	.435	.667

Table 3-26. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS IS centers.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	.439	.387	.792
SCS Interdependent	-.190	-.039	.008
PCI Total	-.057	-.148	.116
TOI Total	.074	.058	.018

Table 3-27. Summary of multiple regression analysis – CLASS IS snack.

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	P
SCS Independent	.002	.012	.031	.177	.861
SCS Interdependent	.018	.010	.302	1.723	.096
PCI Total	-.028	.013	-.355	-2.148	.040
TOI Total	.049	.039	.206	1.271	.214

Table 3-28. Beta, r, and squared structure coefficients – CLASS IS snack.

Variable	β	r	Squared structure coefficient (r^2/R^2)
SCS Independent	.031	.193	.144
SCS Interdependent	.302	.299	.347
PCI Total	-.355	-.313	.380
TOI Total	.206	.247	.236

CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between the cultural beliefs held by preschool teachers and their classroom practices. This chapter will include a summary and discussion of key findings, guided by the three primary research questions, followed by consideration of implications for practice and theory, limitations of the current study, and potential directions for future research.

Research Question 1: Are the cultural beliefs of preschool teachers predictive of classroom practices related to emotional support?

According to the CLASS manual (Pianta et al., 2008), emotional support represents a teacher's support of positive social and emotional functioning in the classroom and includes the following dimensions: positive climate (i.e., extent to which student-teacher and peer interactions indicate emotional connection, respect, and enjoyment), negative climate (i.e., extent to which anger, hostility, or aggression is exhibited by teachers or students), teacher sensitivity (i.e., extent to which teacher is aware of and responds to student needs and expression), and regard for student perspectives (i.e., extent to which student-teacher interactions and classroom activities encourage and allow for student interests, motivations, and opinions).

Teacher orientation, a construct similar in foundation to Baumrind's (1978, 1991) parenting style concept and based on the theoretical underpinnings of pupil control ideology (Hoy, 2001), reflects teachers' beliefs about controlling their students and the means through which they achieve control in the classroom. Teachers holding custodial beliefs favor teacher-directed activities, strive to maintain impersonal teacher-student relationships, tend to use punitive sanctions, and emphasize order in their classrooms. Teachers holding humanistic beliefs, in contrast, favor open and reciprocal interactions,

value close relationships with students, support student initiative and expression, and view students as responsible and capable of self-regulation. Teacher orientation was included in the present study as a cultural belief related to grid group cultural theory's *grid* construct, which represents an individual's feelings or acceptance of having control exerted on oneself by external rules, constraints, and people.

Looking at the definitions of these two constructs, that teachers with more humanistic orientations may use more emotionally supportive practices across classroom activities is not surprising. Teachers rated highly on dimensions of emotional support were observed to engage in joint positive affect with their students, enjoy physical proximity with children in their class, know about students' lives and individual preferences, show affection verbally and physically, respond quickly to problems or distress, address child comments and sharing of stories or work enthusiastically and kindly, encourage and accept student expression and choice, allow flexibility in lessons and student movement when possible, and provide ways to support true student autonomy and leadership. Children in these classrooms frequently wanted to tell teachers stories, answer their questions, share their work and play, and be physically close to them. These teachers also refrained from exhibiting negative control through punitive actions, sarcasm, or raising their voice, and did not become obviously annoyed with students. Each of these teaching behaviors is likely to be influenced by beliefs that relationships are important, children should be allowed to have and express opinions and preferences, and that they are capable of some self-management.

Additionally, characteristics related to the measures themselves could help to explain the relative importance of teacher orientation, as measured by the TOI, as

compared to other cultural belief measures. While the SCS and PCI are Likert-type scales requiring participants to rate their agreement with statements related to ideological beliefs, TOI items each include two competing statements from which participants are asked to choose the one with which they most agree. While items are designed to assess an underlying ideology relevant to cultural beliefs, they are more directly tied to teaching practices and beliefs than are items on the other measures. Further, the forced-choice nature may have led teachers to think about items on this measure in a different way than was elicited by the SCS or PCI. Indeed, several teachers verbally expressed difficulty in making these choices to the principal investigator or wrote notes and explanations next to TOI items on questionnaires; this kind of participant response was not observed with regards to the other measures.

In post-hoc exploratory multiple regression analyses examining relationships between cultural beliefs and classroom practices by activity level and intended to elucidate potential hypotheses to inform future research directions, teacher orientation was identified as the most noteworthy of included independent variables, particularly in the model related to circle time. Circle time, chosen as an activity to be included in the current study because it generally occurs in all preschool classrooms on a daily basis, is a whole-group largely teacher-directed lesson consisting of a series of activities such as singing songs, reading a book, taking attendance, calendar, weather, job assignment, etc. and usually lasts 15-20 minutes (Reich, 1994). While preschool teachers view circle time as an opportunity to teach important academic skills, as well as social and behavioral skills (i.e., listening, turn taking), in a format seen as similar to that found in an elementary school classroom (Gould & Sullivan, 1999; Reich, 1994), preschoolers

themselves report circle time as one of their least favorite parts of the day because it lasts too long and is not interesting enough (Wiltz & Klein, 2001). Circle time, then, is an activity considered highly important for key instruction goals that will likely require strategic teaching practices to be effective and engaging.

In an exploratory study of activities and challenging behavior during circle time, Zaghlawan and Ostrosky (2011) found that many teachers reported using strategies that could be considered classroom organization practices to plan and structure their circle time and to manage challenging behavior. Variety was noted, however, in teachers' effective and supportive use of practices related to emotional support, including group discussion to encourage relationship building, responsive social interaction, and positive communication. Similarly, although all teachers included singing in their circle time plans, the content and perceived purpose of these songs differed, with only some teachers choosing songs designed to facilitate, model, or describe social skills or to encourage positive peer interaction. Such variation in circle time content, format, and intention may be explained in part by differences in teacher beliefs, particularly those related to teacher orientation, with humanistic teachers providing a circle time that is more supportive of relationship-building, allows for more reciprocal positive interaction and communication, and encourages sharing, cooperation, and student expression.

Zaghlawan and Ostrosky (2011) also noted that instances of challenging behavior increased during circle time discussions as compared to singing songs or other highly engaging and active tasks, recommending that teachers carefully monitor and structure group time to maintain desired behavior and attention. High occurrence of

challenging behavior itself may contribute to a negative climate, as would any resultant teacher frustration, negativity, or punitive control. Though it is certainly possible to manage challenging behavior in a positive and emotionally supportive manner, having to cope with repeated misbehavior would leave less room for relationship-building, student expression, responsiveness to student comments and needs, and positive communication generally, thus taking away from emotional support.

Additionally, if teachers experience difficulty when they do attempt to include open-ended activities that would allow for more emotionally supportive practices during circle time, they may be less likely to continue using them in the future. Such experiences are likely to be particularly frustrating for teachers who identify with a custodial teacher orientation, perceiving order, emotional control, and demonstrated understanding of factual material to be most important and favoring teacher-directed activities. Humanistic teachers, on the other hand, may have less strict ideals for appropriate and inappropriate behavior and be more willing to tolerate differences in student behavior, thus increasing their likelihood of choosing and continuing to engage in these open practices.

These suppositions are corroborated by observations conducted for the present study. Teachers receiving high emotional support scores during circle time showed joint positive affect and sat in close physical proximity to students, demonstrated knowledge of students' lives and interests during discussions (i.e., talking about new babies or pets at home, referencing a soccer game), responded to children's comments and stories warmly and helpfully, fostered a calm and open climate that led to students wanting to share, exhibited flexibility in routine and activity when necessary, and allowed some

wiggling and movement that did not distract peers, while teachers receiving lower emotional support scores during circle time ignored some student comments or did not respond warmly, showed visible frustration or used threats (i.e., “Do you want to miss all your outside time?;” “If you can’t sit still, we won’t have centers today.”) in response to even minor student misbehavior, moved through planned lessons regardless of student interest or engagement, seemed unaware of student interest, and spent most of the activity time talking at the children or directing their behavior, rather than allowing them to talk.

Research Question 2: Are the cultural beliefs of preschool teachers predictive of classroom practices related to classroom organization?

The CLASS classroom organization construct represents a teacher’s organization and management of student behavior, schedule, and attention across classroom activities and includes the following domains: behavior management (i.e., extent to which teacher effectively monitors and handles student misbehavior and manages proactively to prevent misbehavior); productivity (i.e., extent to which maximum time is spent in learning activities as a result of smooth routines, directions, and transitions); and instructional learning formats (i.e., extent to which students are engaged in learning activities as a result of teacher facilitation and provision of interesting materials). In the current study, the multiple regression model including average classroom organization score as the dependent variable was not found to reach statistical significance, though it was found to explain approximately 15% of the variance in classroom organization practices.

The finding that cultural beliefs were not associated with classroom organization practices has been supported by the literature. Wen, Elicker, and McMullen (2011)

found only a weak correlation between reported beliefs and observed practices, specifically stating that, despite advocating developmentally appropriate beliefs, two of the most frequent preschool teacher behaviors were giving directions to children and engaging in non-interactive classroom management activities. Such findings may suggest that basic management, organization, and scheduling practices represent something of a basis or foundation on which practices related to emotional and instructional support can be built. For example, even children in preschool classrooms rated as low quality based on overall day-to-day experiences and teacher use of developmentally appropriate practices, as measured by a combined score resulting from Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and Classroom Practices Inventory (CPI) administration, were able to accurately relay their daily schedules and routines to researchers (Wiltz & Klein, 2001). Children in high quality classrooms also demonstrated an awareness of their classroom routine, but were able to extend this information by vividly describing specific fun activities, materials, and choices; these latter characteristics reflect classroom practices more closely tied to emotional support and instructional support dimensions.

The lack of a statistically significant relationship between cultural beliefs and classroom organization practices could result from other variables not considered in this study. Specifically, it may be that this general area of practice is informed by the larger expectations, beliefs, philosophy, rules, available resources, etc. of the director and the center as a whole. For instance, while individual teachers in a given center may run their circle time differently, they all hold it at the same time per the schedule provided by their director. Teachers in a given center are also likely to be encouraged to use similar

discipline strategies and language. At one center observed in the present study, each of the four VPK teachers, regardless of CLASS scores or responses to cultural belief measures, placed children who misbehaved in the “thinking chair” and instructed children to “catch a bubble” to keep them quiet as they transitioned from one activity to another. Thus, the classroom organizational teacher practices observed might be governed by center policy or advocated by the center or director, and not the teacher herself.

The effect of administrative influence on classroom organization practices may be particularly high in this study sample given that participating centers and teachers are also held to the standards of the VPK program and the county’s ELC. To be a VPK provider, centers must use an approved curriculum, include specific activities in the daily schedule, and submit to evaluative classroom visits. Several teachers cited ELC feedback or guidelines in spontaneous discussion of their practices with the principal investigator during data collection for the present study, suggesting that this source of oversight is salient for teachers and does affect their classroom decisions.

In support of the idea that centers have a heavy influence on classroom organization practices, research examining the factors that influence preschool teachers’ strategies for managing challenging behavior found that, while teacher beliefs were significant, center characteristics were also highly influential (Kim, Stormont, & Espinosa, 2009). Similarly, in a qualitative study exploring implicit and explicit dimensions of classroom decision-making, the interviewed teacher specifically acknowledged the influence of trainings and information provided by her center as affecting her practice (Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000). When teachers’ beliefs do

not match actual practices, restrictions based on external factors, including those related to school or center, have been cited by the teachers themselves (Kim, 2004).

Finally, even though researchers generally recognize the necessity of personalized, practice-oriented, multi-faceted, and higher-order professional development when attempting to change practices related to teacher-student interactions (Fulgini, Howes, Lara-Cinisomo, & Karoly, 2009), use of language-developing strategies (Piastra, Justice, Cabell, Wiggins, Turnball, & Curenton, 2012), and use of instructional strategies to promote children's social competence (Han, 2012), professional development, even in minimal form (i.e., self-study) has been found to alter preschool teacher practices related to classroom management (Slider, Noell, & Williams, 2006),). These findings might suggest that classroom management practices are more malleable and influenced by training, center norms, or direct instruction for specific use than are other practices. Thus, that no noteworthy predictive relationship was found in this domain is not wholly unexpected, as these practices may be (a) generally less influenced by beliefs, (b) more reflective of administrative direction, and (c) more easily changed as compared to classroom practices related to emotional support and instructional support.

Research Question 3: Are the cultural beliefs of preschool teachers predictive of classroom practices related to instructional support?

According to Pianta et al., (2008), instructional support represents a teacher's use of specific ways of presenting information and interacting with students during activities to support cognitive and language development, regardless of lesson content or curriculum. This construct includes the following domains: concept development (i.e., extent to which discussions, lessons, and activities encourage higher-order thinking

skills rather than rote memorization or learning facts); quality of feedback (i.e., extent to which student learning is extended through teacher response and discussion); and language modeling (i.e., extent to which language is modeled and encouraged in the classroom). In the present study, the multiple regression model including average instructional support score as the dependent variable was not found to be statistically significant, likely the result of inadequate power. However, examination of β weights and squared structure coefficients for this model and additional post-hoc exploratory models included to examine practices by activity level revealed that independence was the most noteworthy independent variable with regards to instructional support practices generally and during centers/free choice, while interdependence was the most noteworthy with regards to circle time. While these findings cannot be considered evidence for such relationships, they do represent unique associations to be further explored.

The constructs of independence and interdependence stem from the traditional individualism/collectivism dichotomy, which relates to the manner in which individuals view themselves and their relationships with others, particularly those within the groups to which they belong (Brewer & Chen, 2007). In response to critique that individualism and collectivism are more applicable to groups than individuals and that caution should therefore be used when using these terms at the person level, Singelis (1994) developed a pair of complementary scales designed to assess ascription to independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal, seen as the individual equivalents to individualist and collectivist beliefs, respectively. Individuals with highly independent beliefs regard group membership and social relationships in terms of

choice and mutuality, while individuals with highly interdependent beliefs view social relationships as connections that establish reciprocal obligations (Raeff, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2000). A measure of independent and interdependent self-construal was included in the present study as a cultural belief related to grid group cultural theory's *group* construct, which represents an individual's feelings of group embeddedness, group belonging, and group importance.

According to Singelis (1994), self-construal is a reflection of an individual's feelings of self, beliefs that in turn can serve as a link between culture and behavior. As a result, it is expected that independent or interdependent beliefs would be related to teaching practice behaviors. Those who endorse an independent self-construal are likely to focus on individual abilities, attributes, characteristics, and goals when thinking about themselves or others, to perceive self-esteem as expression and validation of the self, and to value direct honest expression of thought and opinion.

A potential link between independent cultural beliefs and overall use of instructional support practices is consistent with the basic premise of the instructional support construct, as well as relevant previous research. Many of the practices included in this CLASS domain emphasize interactions that stimulate the development, problem solving, or expression of an individual child, though it is assumed that others will benefit by observing the process and having it modeled for them. This emphasis on individual expression and growth also underlies the widely accepted push for developmentally appropriate practices; this foundation is the source of some criticism that it is not generalizable or acceptable to all cultures or groups (Bailey & Pransky, 2005). An international examination revealed that the correlation between preschool teacher

beliefs related to developmentally appropriate practices and their actual practices was strongest in the most individualistic culture (the United States) and weakest in the most collectivist (China; McMullen et al., 2005).

Center or free play time, another activity that generally occurs daily in most preschool classrooms, is typically structured so that children can choose from a given set of available stations with different toys, materials, games, etc. where they can interact with materials and peers as they wish. Classroom differences in organization of this activity include number of available centers, children's ability to choose an initial center and to move from one center to another at will, degree to which play at each center is student- or teacher-directed, and teacher participation in center play. Although viewed by some as "just playing," center or free play time has been recognized as a significant means of developing higher-order cognitive and social competence (Howes & Smith, 1995; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997).

A key characteristic of centers is the independence expected of and afforded to children. Even in fairly structured and teacher-directed classrooms, children are generally given the freedom to choose what they will play with, how they will play with it, the peers with whom they will interact, and how long to engage in any given activity. Furthermore, because students are dispersed amongst several different physical areas and even more play themes and modalities, teachers cannot attend to all of them at once, thus requiring children to independently regulate their own behavior, make decisions, resolve interpersonal conflicts, solve functional problems, access materials, and extend their play.

Given this focus on independent behavior, it makes sense that teachers who tend to emphasize this kind of self-construal may be able to use more instructionally supportive practices during center time. Research suggests that free play can be a difficult time for teachers to manage effectively as a result of its emphasis on student choice and interest and that even good teachers who value openness and warmth struggle to facilitate play and learning during centers (Konig, 2009). Kontos (1999) found that teachers may attend to paperwork, cleaning, etc., or simply fill a monitoring role, watching students to ensure safety, appropriate behavior, and general engagement rather than directly interacting with children, while involved teachers generally manage student play or facilitate play through conversation and participation. However, the author noted that active participation and discussion was not necessarily rich or stimulating, often relating superficially to objects or actions.

In the present study, teachers who earned high instructional support scores during center time tended to ask many open-ended questions, share personal information to add depth to concept development or to model advanced language, present new scenarios or problems for children to think about, and to link spontaneous play to material previously discussed in class. Teachers who received low instructional support scores during center time frequently failed to interact with children at all or only to manage behavior and give directions. Similar to previous research findings, low-scoring teachers may have engaged in conversation or provided some feedback, but it tended to be superficial (e.g., simply descriptive, pat response to a child's comment or sharing of work, "good job") and did not extend learning or play in any way. Perhaps some of the variation in teacher approach to center time is explained by differences in

independent cultural beliefs. Teachers who believe in the importance of individual skills, interests, goals, and characteristics, and who value expression of opinion, may be more likely to engage in teaching practices that support and encourage students to develop those facets during center time, one of the few points in the daily schedule during which the individual child is allowed to truly shape his/her own learning.

Alternatively, those who endorse an interdependent self-construal are likely to emphasize the importance of situational factors, to value indirect communication and interpretation of others' unspoken thoughts and feelings, to perceive self-esteem as having harmonious relationships with others and the ability to adapt to changing situations, and to base regulation of behavior on other people, relationships with others, and contextual factors.

As discussed above, circle time is a whole class activity in which students are required or encouraged to participate as a collective group. This basis is apparent even when teachers support and respond to individual student expression. Such expression is generally provided in response to a comment, idea, or question put forth by the teacher or a peer and, therefore, is related to the whole group discussion or lesson. When student expression is not related to the topic at hand, teachers frequently ignore, question further to establish a link, or extend the child's speech to connect it. As a result, teachers who adhere more strongly to beliefs that emphasize the importance of the group over the individual may be more successful at effectively facilitating circle time activities using the interactional practices of scaffolding and feedback loops, language modeling, and a questioning/presentation style that supports analysis and reasoning.

Just as Zaghawan and Ostrosky (2011) found that select teachers were able to use discussion to promote a positive emotional climate, a subgroup of their sample teachers was able to integrate practices that may be considered instructional support, including talking about real world experiences, sequencing events in a story, and back-and-forth questioning. Perhaps an interdependent belief system helps to explain variation in the use of such strategies. In the present study, teachers scoring high on instructional support during circle time were observed to adapt their approach for the better of the collective understanding and engagement depending on children's comments, demonstrated comprehension of material, and synthesis of other material. For example, these teachers asked open questions and followed the lead of student responses related to a target topic, engaged in supportive scaffolding and feedback loops to assist children in reaching an answer or solving a problem, and used contextual factors to make connections. In contrast, teachers who scored low on instructional support during circle time spent more time talking at students to deliver information or directions and rarely varied their approach based on context or group engagement and understanding. They were likely to ask many closed questions with clear right or wrong answers, fail to provide feedback intended to facilitate continued thought processes when given a "wrong" answer, and to keep conversation fairly limited, superficial, or teacher-directed.

Implications for Practice

This study adds support to the literature suggesting that cultural beliefs and beliefs about teaching have implications for the actual classroom practices of preschool teachers, a conclusion that is especially significant for practitioners attempting to understand and change individual teacher behavior through coaching, consultation,

professional development, and teacher preparation. Specifically, it will likely be much more difficult to change practice if the reason behind it is an underlying cultural belief framework that is ignored.

Another way in which variance in cultural beliefs could impact attempts to change teacher behavior is in thinking about how specific familiar practices or activities may fit differently into teachers' underlying philosophies. For example, a common activity observed in many of the classrooms in the present study was some form of student journal writing. The manifestation of this kind of activity, however, varied widely from one classroom to the next. One teacher wrote a model sentence based on the morning's alphabet lesson and required all children to copy it exactly in their journals during center time. Another teacher also made the journals part of centers, but left them available on a table and allowed children to approach the activity voluntarily. She encouraged them to draw a picture and attempt to write about some event in their lives and then helped them write an accurate sentence when they were done and ready to share with her. A third teacher had students rotate through a writing station during structured small group time (not coded for this study, as it did not fall into the target activity categories) and facilitated a guided writing task in which children responded to a common prompt by illustrating their thoughts and telling the teacher what they wanted written on their paper about the scene.

Each of these variations creates different opportunities for the development of student skills and for key student-teacher interaction practices, including those related to emotional support and instructional support. Thus, the simple recommendation or requirement that a certain practice or task be incorporated into lessons may not achieve

desired results if it is incompatible with teacher beliefs and therefore not utilized or if it is used in a different manner than designed due to an individual teacher's interpretation based on her own unique underlying belief system.

Researchers and practitioners have consistently noted that professional development efforts geared toward changing teaching practices, particularly those that target fundamental behaviors such as student-teacher interactions and support for higher-order thinking, are most effective when they are comprehensive, responsive, and individualized (Domitrovich, Gest, Gill, Bierman, Welsh, & Jones, 2008; Fuligni et al., 2009; Han, 2012; Piasta et al., 2012). While there are many likely reasons that such intensive interventions show success, one possibility is that they tend to include a mentoring or practice application piece that would allow the provider to recognize and address each teacher's individual teaching philosophy and the cultural beliefs that influence it. For example, researchers examining the effectiveness of a training program designed to improve child-teacher interactions cited fundamental beliefs about the role of a teacher, the nature of the child-teacher relationship, and the purpose of play as a moderating factor and emphasized the importance of small group supervision in the provision of individualized feedback for teachers, especially in response to taped practice sessions (Sepulveda, Garza, & Morrison, 2011). Similar individualized practice and observation feedback has been found to be successful in the provision of consultation services to preschool teachers by school psychologists in a Response to Intervention (RtI) model (Gajus & Barnett, 2010).

A key component of such comprehensive professional development and consultation efforts should be helping teachers learn about their own belief systems and

how they influence daily decisions made in the classroom. Critical reflection of one's own practices and potential factors affecting those practices has been effective in helping teachers become more aware of their behaviors, the effect those behaviors have on children, and their underlying individual belief systems; this deeper self-understanding may be an important first step in improving classroom practices (Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000). Further, learning about the existence of varying cultural beliefs specifically related to individualism/collectivism and becoming more cognizant of their own beliefs, as well as those of the children and families with whom they work, reduced misunderstandings between preschool teachers and important stakeholders and led to improved relationships (Hwa-Froelich & Westby, 2003).

Moving beyond simply creating awareness of personal cultural beliefs, relevant professional development efforts may also be effective in altering key underlying beliefs to better align with those that are more supportive of desirable practices. Teachers who participated in training designed to help them work with challenging youth endorsed significantly more humanistic beliefs than did control teachers (Forthun & McCombie, 2007), suggesting that professional development not only was effective in improving actual teacher behaviors, but that it led to general teacher orientation beliefs found in the current study to be predictive of the overall use of highly emotionally supportive classroom practices.

Theoretical Implications

One way in which this study extended the literature is the use of each of the cultural and teacher belief measures with the unique population of preschool teachers. While the broader constructs of teacher orientation and individualism/collectivism have been applied in an educational context and, to a much lesser extent, to kindergarten

and preschool, these specific tools have not previously been used to explore preschool teacher beliefs directly. While teachers generally are often considered a homogenous group, early childhood teachers may represent a very different population due to differences in work setting, administrative oversight, differential requirements (or lack thereof) for higher education and training, pay, and the nature of the work itself (i.e., more emphasis on care routines, variable curriculums). To affect change in the early childhood education field, it is important to recognize such differences and to ensure that preschool teachers are included in research.

Another important extension of the literature provided by this study is the established link between teacher cultural and teacher beliefs and actual observed classroom practices. While this relationship between beliefs and practice frequently has been supported by research, there has been some inconsistency, with no relationship found in some cases. One critique of methods in this line of inquiry has been the use of teacher self-reported practices or responses to scenarios as measures of behavior or practice; this approach has been suggested as one potential reason for inconsistent findings regarding the beliefs-practice connection (Wilcox-Hezog, 2002). Another critique is that teachers are often asked about specific beliefs regarding teaching theory, models, or methods rather than their deeper cultural beliefs, causing researchers to miss the bigger, more important relationship between beliefs and practice (Pajares, 1992). The methodology used in the present study addressed both concerns. Given that teaching is an in-the-moment job in which professionals are constantly faced with decisions to be made instantly in response to new situations, a context that may lead to enhanced reliance on an underlying personal belief system (Isenberg, 1990; Kagan,

1992; Spodek, 1988), it is important to base research on actual behaviors and practice and to examine underlying cultural beliefs rather than simply question beliefs about curriculum and teaching methods.

This study extends the grid group cultural theory literature in several important ways. First, this framework has not previously been used as a basis for understanding teacher cultural beliefs and has not been applied to an educational setting. This utilization provides additional evidence for the claim that the premises of grid group cultural theory have ubiquitous applicability. Second, while previous research has linked cultural type with behaviors assumed from literature reviews or policy papers, grid group cultural theory in any formulation has not been applied to actual individual behavior. Results of this study suggest that there is in fact a noteworthy relationship between cultural beliefs related to key grid and group constructs and observed teaching behavior at an individual level, again supporting the framework's broad usage in a variety of applied contexts. Finally, the inclusion of independent/interdependent self-construal and teacher orientation measures as representations of group and grid begins to establish a link between the often philosophical and removed grid group cultural theory and familiar constructs commonly used in educational research, helping to bring the framework into a more useful and practical context.

Limitations

A major limitation of the current study is the lower than desired power achieved for data analysis as a result of the small sample size. Power is the probability of rejecting a false null hypothesis (Cohen, 1988). Low power, therefore, results in a decreased probability that a statistically significant effect will be detected in a given sample. While sample size likely detracted from power in the current analyses, other

factors influencing power were adequate. For example, all scales included as measures of cultural beliefs had Cronbach's alphas higher than .70, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Power was determined to be minimally sufficient for the completion of the current study; however, identification of statistically significant results may have been more likely and accurate with an increased sample size and greater power. Despite low power, several noteworthy relationships were found between belief and practice variables that should be explored in further research.

Another potential limitation of this study is the generalizability of results to other populations. The study sample included only individuals qualified to teach VPK in the state of Florida who were fairly homogenous when factors such as race, education, and gender are considered. Thus, these findings may not accurately extend to a more professionally or personally diverse group. All centers were located in a fairly small town in North Central Florida in close proximity to a major university; perhaps a different context would yield varying results. Finally, it is possible that directors and teachers who agreed to participate in the study differ in some unknown but significant way from those who did not choose to participate and that results may not extend to this second group.

A final limitation is the necessarily narrow inclusion of specific cultural beliefs assessed in the current study. As previously discussed, the definition and measurement of culture has been traditionally challenging and contentious. While teacher orientation and independence/interdependence were determined to be the most appropriate cultural beliefs available for assessment given the theoretical framework of grid group cultural theory and the population of preschool teachers under consideration, their use

certainly is not immune to the many critiques often assigned to the measurement of culture (i.e., too reductionist, too broad or too narrow, overly simplified).

Directions for Future Research

Further study of the impact of teacher cultural beliefs on classroom practices would be more deeply informed by the addition of teacher interviews. While collection of questionnaire data allowed for analysis exploring relationships between beliefs and practices and for the inclusion of more teachers than would have been possible in a qualitative study, it did not permit much first-person explanation of personal beliefs or the perceived effect of those beliefs. Many teachers in the current study spontaneously narrated their classroom decision-making or offered commentary on the questionnaires, providing fascinating background and suggesting that there would be a general willingness to share this type of information with researchers.

The following example illustrates the depth of information that could be gained by including qualitative interviews in future research. Although interviews were not conducted formally as part of data collection procedures, the referenced teachers shared their perspectives openly. In the current study, two teachers in different schools each structured her center time so that children could play with a variety of available materials completely independently, with no teacher participation. Each teacher monitored the classroom for safety and mediated conflict, but neither engaged in play with her students or facilitated work with materials. Both teachers received moderate emotional support scores and low instructional support scores for this activity period. Simple observation might suggest that these teachers have comparable teaching practices and that they might both benefit from similar training or consultation if change is desired.

In speaking directly with the teachers and examining their responses to the cultural beliefs measures, however, it became quite apparent that they were operating from very different frameworks. One teacher, who worked for a program that heavily emphasizes the learning and production of academic skills, endorsed a custodial teacher orientation along with more independent than interdependent self-construal beliefs. She arranged many centers that included letters and numbers and felt that children should learn to regulate their behavior and complete tasks on their own because that is what would be expected of them when they transitioned to kindergarten. She also saw her role as an overseer, making sure they interacted with peers and with materials in the ordered manner she intended when she planned the centers. In contrast, the other teacher, who worked for a Waldorf program, endorsed a humanistic teacher orientation along with more interdependent than independent self-construal beliefs. She felt that children needed time to interact freely with peers and natural dramatic play toys without the interference of adults or the imposition of academic tasks and saw her role as ensuring safety and adequate materials while allowing students to be creative and solve problems together as a peer group. Clearly each teacher would require a unique approach if a consultant or provider of professional development wanted to alter her practices in any way.

The current study utilized the CLASS as a measure of classroom practices. While this measure was in fact informative as such a measure, future research may benefit from the consideration of specific targeted behaviors rather than an overall picture of quality. For example, one finding of this study was that greater identification with a humanistic teacher orientation was predictive of overall use of emotionally

supportive practices. However, it is not clear exactly how this connection plays out in the classroom or which specific practices (e.g., demonstrating joint positive affect with students, consistently responding to their individual needs, allowing for student expression) are affected.

Related research in this area might extend the proposed link to consider the effect preschool teacher cultural beliefs exert on any number of individual or classroom-wide child outcomes, either directly or as mediated through classroom practices. If the ultimate goal of improved consultation, professional development, and teacher preparation is to positively impact the lives of children, it is important that we understand how that impact might be felt. The current study and others like it provide the early framework for that next step.

Finally, an underlying goal of this study was to inform and extend the way in which culture is understood, measured, and utilized in research and in practice. Future research should build on this effort by further exploring the application of beliefs related to teacher orientation and independence/interdependence, as well as other significant cultural beliefs. Additionally, this study was the first to apply grid group cultural theory to the field of early childhood education and to link related established measures to the theoretical constructs of grid and group. This area of research could be continued with other relevant linkages and the potential creation of a more direct measure.

APPENDIX A
TEACHER ORIENTATION INDEX

Teacher Orientation Index

Directions: For each set of statements, please circle the one that best reflects your classroom practices.



- | | | |
|---|----|---|
| 1. stay objective and in control | OR | be personal with students |
| 2. touch a child once in a while | OR | always maintain a verbal, matter-of-fact contact |
| 3. express feelings also when angry or irritated | OR | keep feelings of anger and irritation back |
| 4. give more attention and support to children who need more | OR | all children should be treated the same |
| 5. let students try out ideas even if I think other solutions are better | OR | plan and direct all classroom activities based on my professional expertise |
| 6. point to mistakes to teach students what is wrong | OR | praise students for what they do right |
| 7. students should learn from adults | OR | students must be allowed to try their own solutions |
| 8. students should be taught what they are not allowed to do (i.e., limits) | OR | students should be taught what they are allowed to do (i.e., liberties) |

□

Please continue to next page

APPENDIX B PRESCHOOL PCI SCALE

Preschool PCI

Directions: Following are twenty statements about schools, teachers, and students. Please indicate your personal opinion about each statement from **strongly disagree** to **strongly agree**. Your answers are confidential.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5
It is desirable to require students to sit in assigned seats.	1	2	3	4	5
Students are usually not capable of solving their own problems.	1	2	3	4	5
Making sarcastic remarks toward a defiant student is a good disciplinary technique.	1	2	3	4	5
Beginning teachers are not likely to maintain strict enough control over their students.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers should consider revision of their teaching methods if these are criticized by their students or their students' parents.	1	2	3	4	5
The best directors and principals give unquestioning support to teachers in disciplining students.	1	2	3	4	5
Students should not be permitted to disagree with the statements of a teacher in class.	1	2	3	4	5
It is justifiable to have students learn many facts about a topic even if they are not directly relevant to students.	1	2	3	4	5
Too much student time is spent on playing and development and too little on academic preparation.	1	2	3	4	5
Being friendly with students often leads them to become too familiar.	1	2	3	4	5
It is more important for students to learn to obey rules than that they make their own decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
Student participation is important but should not have much influence on school rules or policies.	1	2	3	4	5

Continued on back

APPENDIX C
TEACHER SELF-CONSTRUAL SCALE

Teacher Self-Construal Scale

Adapted from Singelis, 1994

Directions: Please circle the number that best reflects your views.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Completely Disagree	Very Much Disagree	Partly Disagree	Neutral	Partly Agree	Very Much Agree	Completely Agree
I have respect for the authority figures with whom I interact.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would offer my seat in a bus to my administrator (e.g., principal, director).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I respect people who are modest about themselves.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am in.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I often have the feeling that my relationships with others are more important than my own accomplishments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I should take into consideration advice from my family members when making career decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is important to me to respect decisions made by the group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I will stay in a group if they need me, even when I'm not happy with the group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If my brother or sister fails, I feel responsible.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Even when I strongly disagree with group members, I avoid an argument.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Continued on back

Directions: Please circle the number that best reflects your views.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely Disagree	Very Much Disagree	Partly Disagree	Neutral	Partly Agree	Very Much Agree	Completely Agree

I'd rather say "No" directly, than risk being misunderstood.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Speaking up during a meeting is not a problem for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Having a lively imagination is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am the same person at home that I am at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Being able to take care of myself is a primary concern for me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I act the same way no matter who I am with.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel comfortable using someone's first name soon after I meet them, even when they are much older than me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer to be direct and forthright when dealing with people I've just met.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My personal identity, independent of others, is very important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I value being in good health above everything else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please continue to next page

APPENDIX D
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

General Information

How long have you been teaching preschool? _____

How many years have you been teaching at this center? _____

What is the highest degree you have completed?

High School

Some College

Masters

Major:

Associates Degree

Bachelors

Doctorate

Major:

Major:

Child Development Associate
(CDA)

Some Graduate School

Other Professional Degree

What is your gender? ___ Male ___ Female

In what year were you born? _____

Are you Spanish/Hispanic/Latino? ___ No ___ Yes, I am (e.g., Cuban) _____

Please circle the best description of your racial background

Black/African American

White

Caribbean of African Descent

Asian (Please specify nation of
origin)

Pacific Islander (Please specify
nation of origin)

American Indian or Alaskan
Native

Other (Please specify, e.g., biracial)

Thank you for your participation!

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sally Moore was born and raised in Tampa, FL. A career Gator, she earned a B.S. in Psychology in 2005 and a M.S. in Family, Youth and Community Sciences in 2007 from the University of Florida. Sally was admitted to the doctoral program in School Psychology in 2007. She is passionate about the field of early childhood education and development, completing a doctoral specialization in Early Childhood Studies and working as a preschool teacher and an early intervention provider. Sally completed her pre-doctoral internship with Virginia Beach City Public Schools during the 2011-2012 school year and plans to pursue a post-doctoral position and licensure following graduation.