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Prekindergarten Educators' Perspectives on Professional Development About Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Children

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Walden University

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Danita Marie Norris McCray

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2020

Abstract

Prekindergarten Educators' Perspectives on Professional Development About

Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Children

by

Danita Marie Norris McCray

MS, Walden University, 2015

BS, University of Phoenix, 2012

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

July 2020

Abstract

Young children start to develop an understanding of gender and gender identity in prekindergarten. Early childhood educators require professional development in creating safe, supportive learning environments for transgender and gender nonconforming children. Limited research has focused on prekindergarten educators' knowledge, skills, and dispositions about supporting transgender and gender nonconforming children in their classrooms. Framed by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory and Derman-Sparks antibias early childhood concepts, the purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives on professional development about transgender and gender nonconforming children. Data were collected using semistructured, in-depth interviews with 12 prekindergarten educators in the Western region of the United States. Data analysis consisted of organizing data, coding phrases, and identifying themes to answer the three research questions. Results revealed that the early childhood educators interviewed have never had professional development or teacher preparation courses that specifically focused on transgender and gender nonconforming children. Results suggested that professional development and teacher preparation courses for preservice and in-service teachers need to add specific content on appropriate ways to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in early childhood programs. Potential social change implications of this study include discovering appropriate strategies to support transgender and gender nonconforming children; improving guidelines for teacher preparation courses to include specific content; recommending improvements in professional development for early childhood programs; and adding to current literature on transgender and gender nonconforming children.

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Dedication

At the beginning of my journey to pursue a doctorate degree, I discussed it with my husband James. We both agreed that it would be a lot of hard work and sacrifice. I must say, I did not realize how much sacrifice it would be for James; he has been through the ringer and back with me. However, he has been awesome throughout the whole process. I could not have earned my degree if not for his love, support, and understanding. I am dedicating this dissertation to James, the love of my life. I also want to thank my family, especially my sister Jocelyn, who always inspired me with encouraging words. Thank you to James and my family with all my love. Dr. Danita Marie Norris McCray

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I want to give an enormous acknowledgment to my amazing committee. Dr. Barbara Trube, Dr. Donald Yarosz, and Dr. Nancy Williams who were supportive, dedicated, and committed to helping me complete this journey.

I would like to give a special thank you to my colleagues at Walden University for their faithful endless support throughout this amazing journey. I want to give a thank you to Dr. Angéle Carson who supported and motivated me and always had words of encouragement. I would like to acknowledge the HS educators who graciously participated in this research. I humbly thank you for being part of my study and for being early childhood educators. You continuously share your enthusiasm and knowledge with the young children you serve and lay the foundation for later learning. I want to give a thank you to future HS educators who as a result of this study will guide young children on a positive journey to lifelong learning. I want to give a special thanks to my community partner and the participants without whom I could not have earned my degree.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This basic qualitative study with interviews addresses a gap in the research on practice regarding professional development (PD) for prekindergarten educators to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in early childhood (EC) settings. This study adds to the body of research on practice by specifically including Head Start (HS) educators (teachers, curriculum specialists, administrators) who work with children and families in the Western region of the United States. This study has the potential to contribute to positive social change by informing HS educators about effective PD to prepare staff to support transgender and gender nonconforming children. Chapter 1 presents the problem, purpose, and research questions of this study. It also includes a brief description of the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and significance. Additionally, I introduce the conceptual framework, which was constructed using Bronfenbrenner's (1977) bioecological systems theory, and Derman-Sparks (2015) antibias EC concepts for educators. Chapter 1 concludes with a summary of the main points.

Background

EC educators have a moral and ethical responsibility to create safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments for all children (Mangope & Mukhoopadhyay, 2015; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011; National Head Start Association [NHSA], 2018). However, research has shown that EC educators fail to act regarding anti-lesbian, gay, and transgender bias and are ill-equipped to address these issues (Payne & Smith, 2018). Payne and Smith (2018) noted that several studies found

that EC educators inconsistently or never intervene when hearing negative remarks about transgender expression in schools. Teachers enter the profession without adequate preparation on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) issues from their educator preparation programs (Case & Meier, 2014; Payne & Smith, 2014, 2018); PD would be an effective way to increase educator's knowledge and proactive behaviors regarding LGBTQ issues. Coulter and Miller (2018) researched PD to improve school practices and LGBTQ health in United States schools noting that only 13% of teachers received training and PD related to LGBTQ. Coulter and Miller (2018) also revealed that many teachers expressed that their lack of training is a barrier to implementing positive LGBTQ practices in their schools and classrooms. Also, Goodrich and Luke (2014) and Coulter and Miller (2018) found that few school professionals have adequate training or PD related to effectively supporting transgender or gender nonconforming students in their schools and programs. Therefore, there is a gap in the research on practices surrounding PD for EC educators to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in their classrooms (Coulter & Miller, 2018; Goodrich & Luke, 2014; Payne & Smith, 2014, 2018).

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study is a scarcity of research regarding prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children (Case & Meier, 2014; Cimpian & Herrington, 2017; Coulter & Miller, 2018; Goodrich & Luke, 2014; Mason, Springer, & Pugliese, 2018; Rowan, Kline, & Mayer, 2017). Therefore, it is important to learn prekindergarten educators'

perspectives on PD to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings (Coulter & Miller, 2018). PD is acknowledged to be an effective way to increase educators' positive actions regarding negative transgender issues; however, many schools fail to provide PD opportunities for educators to address these issues (Case & Meier, 2014; Coulter & Miller, 2018; Goodrich & Luke, 2014). Further, researchers confirm there is a lack of teacher education programs that contribute to preservice teachers' knowledge, understanding, and competence in their future roles for supporting transgender and gender nonconforming children and youth (Cimpian & Herrington, 2017; Mason, Springer, & Pugliese, 2018; Rowan et al., 2017), making in-service PD for prekindergarten educators important to address gaps in preservice preparation. Researchers indicated that prekindergarten teachers' perspectives on gender identity development are influenced by a lack of pedagogical knowledge (Chapman, 2016). Chapman (2016) revealed that preschool teachers treated children differently based on their genders. Further, preschool teachers expressed they were unsure about how they perceived gender identity in young children, had a sense of fatalism about their competence to address gender equity issues, and felt helpless in trying to create change in their classrooms to accommodate gender equity issues (Chapman, 2016). Additionally, Smith and Payne (2016) indicated teachers expressed a sense of fear and anxiety having transgender students in their classrooms. Cloughessy and Waniganayake (2014), Leung and Hue (2017), and Payne and Smith (2014) suggested future research is needed to explore how PD resources, programs, and policies prepare educators to create safe spaces for LGBTQ children in school settings, which includes EC education settings. Further,

researchers specified the need for PD focusing on teachers' attitudes toward transgender and gender nonconforming children, as well as children representing all diversities (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children. Researchers have demonstrated that teachers require awareness and a deeper understanding of gender identity to effectively develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014; Rowan et al., 2017).

I explored educators' perspectives on PD for prekindergarten educators to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. HS programs require that educators have knowledge, understanding, respect, and responsiveness to all diversities (Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center [HSECLKC], 2018; NHSA, 2018). However, Fitzgerald (2014) reported that HS has trouble maintaining an effective and efficient nationwide PD system that supports HS classrooms. This basic qualitative study with interviews addressed a gap in research on practice by identifying HS educators' perspectives about PD that prepare them to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in HS classrooms. Conducting this study confirmed the importance of preparing HS prekindergarten teachers so that they have the capacities (knowledge, skill, understanding, sense-of-self) to work effectively with

children of all diversities (HSECLKC, 2018; NHSA, 2018), including children who have transgender or gender nonconforming identities and expressions.

Research Questions

Three research questions (RQ) guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of prekindergarten HS teachers regarding PD to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of HS administrators' on providing PD for HS educators to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

RQ3: What are HS curriculum specialists' perspectives regarding PD to help the support HS teachers in their classrooms to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) bioecological systems theory, which puts the child at the center of the systems, as presented in Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994); and antibias EC program concepts, which are inclusive of children who are transgender or gender nonconforming, proposed in the research of Derman-Sparks (2015). This study was grounded in two of four levels of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory, the microsystem and the mesosystem, and further supported by antibias EC program criteria to ground the problem statement, purpose, and significance of the study.

In the first layer of the bioecological system, identified as the microsystem, the child's immediate surroundings provide opportunities for the child to have relationships and interpersonal interactions with close family members, neighbors, and caregivers, or educators. An objective of HS educators is to build positive relationships (microsystem) with children and provide safe spaces for all children to learn. Therefore, this study looked at HS educator's perspectives on how PD prepares them to build their capacities to promote safe places in school settings that support all children. From the perspective of the current study, each child has relationships with close family members and caregivers who are HS educators. Interactions in the microsystem contribute to the child's knowledge and attitudes about gender and gender identity formation and expression. In the second layer, identified as the mesosystem, relationships among family members and educators and relationships among educators within the EC setting influence the development of the child. A more detailed analysis of bioecological systems is presented in Chapter 2.

Antibias programs exist in both the microsystem and mesosystem by promoting a school-wide approach that fosters positive relationships with the child and the child's parent/family/caregiver based on acceptance of all people regardless of their diversities, and the relationships that exist among educators that influence the development of children. When the concepts presented in the antibias curriculum are practiced in prekindergarten classrooms, children experience acceptance and positive regard in the microsystem. In the mesosystem, antibias EC programs take a school-wide view by looking at curriculum and resources, professional learning in antibias issues, and PD

leadership training to prevent bias, along with activities that promote a culture of antibias behaviors (Derman-Sparks, 2015). A more detailed analysis of the concept of antibias behaviors is presented in Chapter 2.

The conceptual framework guides this basic qualitative study with interview methodology by focusing on the microsystems and mesosystems and the concept of antibias practices. The conceptual framework related to the study approach by placing each child at the center of HS educators' practices. The three research questions were based on the microsystem, mesosystem, and antibias concepts to examine perspectives of prekindergarten HS teachers (RQ1), administrators (RQ2), and curriculum specialists (RQ3) regarding PD needed to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children in the program.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children. Meyer (2015) explained that qualitative research studies specifically focus on the ideas and points of view of participants on specific topics. I conducted semistructured interviews to explore HS educators' perspectives from two different HS centers. All interviews were conducted after work hours in a public facility agreed upon between researcher and participants. Twelve HS educators—one administrator, one curriculum specialist, and ten teachers—participated in audio-taped interviews that included 6 questions and follow-up questions that resulted in rich, thick data collection (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016; Meyer, 2015). Rubin and Rubin

(2012) explained that the process of interviewing allows the researcher the opportunity to gain the perspectives of others. The key phenomenon being investigated in this study was HS educators' perspectives on PD to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender-nonconforming children in urban EC settings in the Western region of the United States.

I used a qualitative approach using purposeful sampling that included experienced HS prekindergarten educators as the method for this study. I collected the data from interviews following an interview protocol. Data analysis consisted of open coding to identify categories and subcategories and thematic coding to identify emergent themes to answer the research questions (see Burkholder et al., 2016, Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Definitions

Antibias education (ABE): An approach to teaching that supports children and their families as they develop a sense of identity in a diverse society. ABE focuses on individuals embracing their differences as well as differences of others, developing authentic communities, and identifying bias to advocate for positive change (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Derman-Sparks, 2015).

Educator capacity: An educators' perceived knowledge, skills, dispositions, sense of self, and a strong commitment to improving student learning (O'Day, Gertz, & Floden, 1995).

Gender binary: The assumption that there are two distinct and opposite genders, male and female. This idea is limiting, is biased, and does not take into consideration the

full spectrum of gender identities and gender expressions (Human Rights Campaign, 2018).

Gender expression: A person's external appearance of gender identity, it can be expressed through behaviors, clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms, body language, or voice, and it may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine (Human Rights Campaign, 2018).

Gender identity: An internal, deeply emotional, felt sense of being male, female, a combination of both or neither, and how individuals perceive themselves and identify who they are. A person's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth (Olson, Durwood, DeMeules, & McLaughlin, 2015).

Gender nonconforming: A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not adhere to society's list of prescribed behaviors, responsibilities, or phenotypic characteristics (Olson et al., 2015).

Head Start: A federal program that provides support to children of low-income families from birth to age 5. The program promotes school readiness through education, health, nutrition, and social services, addressing the mental, social, and emotional development of young children (HSECLKC, 2015).

Professional development: A method for increasing teacher knowledge, dispositions, skills, and practices to expand learning opportunities for young children and to effectively change educator attitudes and beliefs that will result in improved learning and outcomes (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

Social transition: The process for some individuals to strive to align their internal knowledge of gender with its outward appearance. This may include changing names, adding pronouns, changing hairstyles, and clothing to be socially recognized and accepted as another gender (Olson et al., 2015).

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and so forth (Human Rights Campaign, 2018).

Assumptions

I assume that the HS educators I interviewed answered all questions honestly and provided answers that represented their true perspectives based on their experiences as HS educators of diverse prekindergarten students and as participants of PD and training. I assumed that each educator was a representative of experienced EC prekindergarten educators who worked with children ages 3 to 5 years across the National HS system so that the findings of this study can be useful in understanding the impact of PD to support transgender and gender-nonconforming children in HS nationwide.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the research included HS prekindergarten educators in the Western region of the United States. Prekindergarten educators were invited to participate because they work with prekindergarten students. It is the PD opportunities that lay a foundation for increasing teacher knowledge and skills or changing teacher attitudes and beliefs that

improves student learning. In other words, PD builds teachers' capacities, which include knowledge, skills, dispositions, and sense-of-self (O'Day et al., 1995). Burkholder et al. (2016) suggested researchers include no more than 10 to 12 participants in qualitative research studies; therefore, this study included 12 educators from HS programs; HS programs may also be in Title 1 elementary schools and/or state-funded preschool programs. Participants were from two HS programs in the Western region of the United States, who after being recruited and presented with information about the study, volunteered to participate in audio-taped interviews.

Limitations

Three limitations existed in this study. First, the small sample size limited the experiences and opinions of a small subgroup of the population of HS prekindergarten teachers, curriculum specialists, and administrators. However, the small sample size is typical of qualitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A second limitation of this study was the location in a single geographical region in the United States. Third, all participants were HS prekindergarten educators representing the Western region of the United States. To add to the generalizability of the findings; future research can include different regions and include suburban and rural areas.

Significance

Research has consistently demonstrated that children's first 5 years of development and learning are critical years that have a profound impact on their later years in life (Derman-Sparks, 2015; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Gender studies have revealed that young children start developing their views about gender and forming

their gender identities at 3 years of age (Chapman, 2016). Therefore, HS prekindergarten educators must recognize their roles and have competencies to positively support all young children in developing healthy gender identities and expressions (NHSA, 2018). Such competencies can lead to a support system that fosters inclusive practices benefitting all children. This study has the potential to influence positive social change by encouraging educators to provide safe spaces and responsive, inclusive strategies and activities appropriate for transgender and gender nonconforming children.

A few studies have looked at supporting children's LGBTQ needs in EC programs and classrooms (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992; Britzman, 1995; Kumashiro, 2002; Payne & Smith, 2014; Stafford, 2013; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Thorne, 1993); researchers also suggested further studies are needed (Chapman, 2016; Cimpian & Herrington, 2017; Rowan et al., 2017). However, none of the studies investigating the support of LGBTQ issues have focused solely on transgender and gender nonconforming children in HS prekindergarten programs or on PD or other professional learning experiences to build educators' capacities to meet the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming children. The significance of this basic qualitative study with interviews was in addressing the scarcity of studies regarding PD for prekindergarten educators to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. The study adds to the body of research on practice by specifically including HS educators in the Western region of the United States. This study has the potential to contribute to positive social change by informing HS educators about effective PD to prepare staff to support transgender and gender nonconforming children.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore HS prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children. Research is scarce regarding PD for prekindergarten educators to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) bioecological systems theory and Derman-Sparks (2015) antibias practices frame this study, which addressed HS educators' roles in developing their capacities through PD to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in their program and classrooms. This study assumed that the participating HS educators provided honest answers that represented their true perspectives regarding PD to support transgender and gender nonconforming children. The small sample size may create a limitation for the ability to generalize the findings. The significance of the study included the potential to positively impact social change by potentially adding and/or increasing PD opportunities for HS educators to support transgender and gender nonconforming children. In Chapter 2, I review relevant literature on PD that illustrates why the study was needed. I reveal a gap in the literature on practice. I provide support for basic qualitative study with interviews methodology.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 includes the literature search strategy, the conceptual framework, and the literature review related to the variables of this study. Literature was drawn from acceptable peer-reviewed journals from the past 5 years and some seminal literature. I discuss current literature on PD, ABE, and transgender and gender nonconforming children in this chapter.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming gender. I investigated relevant literature regarding PD for prekindergarten educators to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children during the EC years in HS programs. The literature review was the foundation of the study. This study addressed a gap in the literature on practice regarding PD to develop HS educators' capacities in supporting transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC classrooms.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review search strategy was driven by the research questions:

RQ1; What are the perspectives of prekindergarten HS educators regarding PD to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of HS administrators' on providing PD for HS educators to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

RQ3: What are HS curriculum specialists' perspectives regarding PD to help support HS teachers in their classrooms to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

I conducted a literature review using Walden University's online databases, which included a wide range of peer-reviewed journals, book chapters, government reports, articles, and studies. I examined Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), PsycINFO, Google Scholar, Childcare and Early Education Research Connections, Children's Defense Fund, Child Stats, and Education Research Complete to find literature related to preschool teachers' perspectives regarding PD from years 2014 to the present. My strategy was to divide the search into various key components related to the topic: *Head Start, early childhood education, prekindergarten teachers, professional development, perspectives, transgender and gender-nonconforming, support, inclusion, fostering positive gender identities, develop capacities, and antibias education.*

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) bioecological systems theory as presented in Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) and antibias EC program concepts proposed from the research of Derman-Sparks (2015). This study was grounded in two of four levels of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory, microsystem, and mesosystem, and further supported by antibias EC program criteria to ground the problem statement, purpose, and significance of the study.

In the first layer of the bioecological system, the microsystem, the child's immediate surroundings provide opportunities for the child to have relationships and

interpersonal interactions with close family members, neighbors, and caregivers or, educators. An objective of HS educators is to build positive relationships (microsystem) with children and provide safe spaces for all children to learn. Therefore, this study looked at HS educators' perspectives on how PD prepared them to build their capacities to promote safe places in school settings that support all children. From the perspective of the current study, each child has relationships with close family members and caregivers who are HS educators. Interactions in the microsystem contribute to the child's knowledge and attitudes about gender and gender identity formation and expression. In the second layer, the mesosystem, relationships among family members and educators, and relationships among educators within the EC setting influence the development of the child.

Antibias programs exist in both the microsystem and mesosystem promoting a school-wide approach that fosters positive relationships with the child and the child's parent/family/caregiver based on acceptance of all people regardless of their diversities, and the relationships that exist among educators that influence the development of children. When the concepts presented in the antibias curriculum are practiced in prekindergarten classrooms, children experience acceptance and positive regard in the microsystem. In the mesosystem, antibias EC programs take a school-wide view by looking at curriculum and resources, professional learning in antibias issues, and PD leadership training to prevent bias with activities that promote a culture of antibias behaviors (Derman-Sparks, 2015).

This conceptual framework guided the research questions and methodology of this study in the following ways. The research questions were based on the microsystem, mesosystem, and antibias concepts to discover perspectives of prekindergarten HS educators regarding PD needed to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children in the program.

Tudge, Vargas, Liang, and Payir (2016) discussed Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a framework to use in EC education. Bronfenbrenner (1977) believed that children's growth and development must be considered in each child's environment, which includes the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. For HS prekindergarten educators, the classroom is the most significant microsystem. The microsystem is a child's immediate environment where they build relationships and interactions that include family, school, teachers, and friends. The mesosystem includes the relationships and interactions of children's neighborhood and community. Tudge et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of using the microsystem and mesosystem in EC settings. Children develop in more than one microsystem; the relationships and interactions between two or more microsystems are what Bronfenbrenner (1977) termed as the mesosystem.

EC educators should provide children with opportunities to engage in activities or interactions that become progressively more complex, as increasingly complex activities or interactions are beneficial to children's development (Tudge et al., 2016). Further, Becker, Gallagher, and Whitaker (2015) explained that EC teachers must be

knowledgeable about children's developmental levels, needs, culture, and familial contexts, and purposefully provide a safe environment for children to learn. Safe environments in the microsystem and mesosystem follow antibias curriculums and practices that support all children (Derman-Sparks, 2015), including children who are transgender and gender nonconforming (Leonardi & Staley, 2015). The quality of relationships EC teachers create with young children offers a key predictor of their academic achievement and social-emotional competence (Becker et al., 2015).

ABE is defined as an approach to teaching that supports children and their families as they develop a sense of identity in a diverse society. It focuses on embracing an individual's differences as well as differences of others, developing authentic communities, and identifying bias to advocate for positive change (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Derman-Sparks, 2015). ABE provides a framework that helps EC educators develop equitable learning communities where all children thrive, no matter their cultural differences (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). "The heart of anti-bias work is a vision of a world in which all children are able to blossom, and each child's particular abilities and gifts are able to flourish" (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, p. 2).

ABE has four overarching goals:

- Goal 1: Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
- Goal 2: Each child will express comfort and joy regarding human diversity, use accurate language for human differences, and develop deep, caring human connections.

- Goal 3: Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have a language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
- Goal 4: Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions. (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010, pp. 4–5).

Antibias work is ongoing, and as contextual elements change, so should thinking, theorizing, and contesting ideas (Gibson, 2018). Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, and Nimmo (2015) believed that antibias EC care and education programs place equity and diversity goals at the center of their practices. Derman-Sparks et al. (2015) stated, “Antibias teachers are committed to the principle that every child deserves to develop to their fullest potential” (p. 2). Madison (2018) suggested it is also essential that EC educators be allowed to develop to their fullest potential while meeting the needs of all children. Hooven, Runkle, Strouse, and Woods (2018) adopted an antibias framework taking cues from the National Association for the Education of Young Children and Derman-Sparks's educational concepts into their EC preschool programs. The focus was on implementing race-conscious approaches along with gender identity into their EC setting (Hooven et al., 2018). The four essentials of their programs included:

- Essential 1: To promote the development of children’s positive social identities.
- Essential 2: To help children learn an accurate language to describe human differences and develop caring, respectful relationships with others (including

those who differ in terms of race, gender identity, family structure, religion, socioeconomic class, and ability).

- Essential 3: To recognize unfairness and understand that it is hurtful.
- Essential 4: To empower children to respond to situations that are unfair (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Hooven et al., 2018).

Having conversations about the topics of race and gender identity is challenging with young children; however, these conversations are essential, and concepts learned are part of children's learning processes (Hooven et al., 2018). Incorporating antibias into EC programs can be challenging and rewarding at the same time. Hooven et al. (2018) reported learning five valuable lessons about teaching ABE in EC: (a) try not to jump to conclusions; preschool children are very literal, so do not read more into what they say; (b) look for subtle cues and nonverbal behaviors; preschool children often express their curiosities in nonverbal ways, so in turn, EC educators should learn how to observe children's behaviors around sensitive issues; (c) adapt to the age group; EC educators need to choose age-appropriate words, the words and concepts should be calibrated to fit the age group you are teaching; (d) build community; talking about issues such as race reiterates the importance of raising racially literate children in our communities and stresses the value of antiracist, and ABE; and (e) be patient with colleagues; working with colleagues who support each other's professional growth is an essential part of teaching ABE (Hooven et al., 2018). ABE practices assist EC educators in recognizing and understanding their own biases (Derman-Sparks et al., 2015).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

This section includes current literature on PD in general. Specific literature about PD for LGBTQ and evidence of a scarcity of PD for LGBTQ are provided. A brief history of HS introduces sections on the professional learning of staff and teacher-child relationships. The section ends by presenting literature about transgender, gender nonconforming children, and gender.

Professional Development

The process of PD refers to how teachers acquire knowledge and apply what they learned into practice, which allows them to improve their practice and professionalism (Soto, 2018.) Ahmed, Nawaz, and Faize (2017) explained that research studies have disclosed that research is scarce regarding supporting teachers' needs through PD and that previous literature suggested inadequate PD results in teachers' lack of professional skills. Further, Nasser, Kidd, Burns, and Campbell (2015) explained that "there is a lack of clarity in the United States about the most effective forms of PD in EC education and the impact on teachers' development and improving practice" (p. 344). PD involves active learning which allows for the development of knowledge and positive impact on EC educators. It should be ongoing and include reflective practice in EC programs. Effective PD can promote positive social change for EC educators as they implement the material learned from PD into their curriculums (Soto, 2018). PD can have positive impacts on HS prekindergarten educators. However, PD must be high quality to produce high-quality outcomes, comprising purposefully selected elements as part of a successful short- term PD opportunity that has the potential to positively affect the quality of

programs and student outcomes (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2016). According to Early, Maxwell, Ponder, and Pan (2017) teachers are more prone to invest their time and energy in PD activities that will be beneficial to them in the long run. PD should focus on how EC teachers' strategies are planned for teachable moments and how to take advantage of them (Haug, 2014; Trawick-Smith, Swaminathan, & Liu, 2016).

Soto (2018) proposed that PD helps EC educators move from awareness of their abilities to practice improving their professionalism. Kearns, Kukner, and Tompkins (2014) and Leonardi and Staley (2015) noted that many EC educators expressed a need for practical strategies to help them create inclusive curriculums, confirming their gaps in knowledge surrounding how to address LGBTQ issues and support LGBTQ students. Vujičić and Čamber Tambolaš (2018) explained that PD for preschool educators is an individual process of professional advancement, and a process of changing the culture, which includes all participants in the EC field. Furthermore, changes are suggested for educational institutions about PD to achieve positive program cultures with the support of preschool educators (Vujičić & Čamber Tambolaš, 2018; Williford et al., 2017).

The scarcity of professional development. Payne and Smith (2018) found that LGBTQ issues are avoided in many kindergartens through grade twelve (K-12) school settings. Many school administrators will not provide PD opportunities for staff regarding LGBTQ issues outside of the antibullying curriculum (Payne & Smith, 2018).

Researchers also found that there are few PD opportunities provided for teachers to gain knowledge about LGBT issues (Payne & Smith 2014). Also, Payne and Smith (2018) concluded that future research for increasing LGBT content in leadership training is an

essential step towards convincing school leadership about the importance of LGBT competence for teachers. Educators need PD to support transgender and gender nonconforming students by creating positive school climates for all children (Case & Meier, 2014; Coulter & Miller, 2018; Payne & Smith, 2014, 2018). Goodrich and Luke (2014) examined PD as a teaching tool to educate teachers about LGBT issues; they found that few school professionals have adequate training or PD related to effectively supporting transgender students. There are significant knowledge gaps in K-12 schools surrounding the transgender population (Goodrich & Luke, 2014). Gorski, Davis, and Reiter (2013) found that “Heterosexism and homophobia permeate U.S. educational institutions. However, research heretofore has shown that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and queer (LGBTQ) concerns remain largely invisible in teacher education contexts” (p. 224). Leonardi and Staley (2015) explain that most teachers want to provide safe spaces for all gender and sexual identities; however, many teachers do not have training or skills to make it a reality. Furthermore, Leonardi and Staley (2015) recommend that educational communities support EC educators by providing high-quality PD focused on specific issues including gender and sexual diversity. Early et al. (2017) explained that the EC field still needs to advance PD, thus affirming the need for this basic qualitative study with interviews incorporating HS prekindergarten educator’s perspectives. EC teachers need to understand which components of PD are most associated with improvements in teacher-child interactions which can provide an opportunity to develop PD that is productive and allows for improving scalability (Williford et al., 2017).

Head Start History

HS was founded in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson's as a key strategy in his War on Poverty. Johnson focused on expanding preschool to include disadvantaged children living in poverty. HS began as a summer program and evolved into a nine-month program, with many programs operating year-round. The role of HS is to provide health, nutrition, education, dental, disability, and psychological services to low-income children and families (Hintz, 2014). Parent involvement and family engagement are an important part of the HS program, which was "envisioned as a vehicle to give families with low-incomes a voice, and for doing things with them rather than to them" (Hintz, 2014, p. 95). The Child Development Associate (CDA) credential is a PD component of HS established in 1972. The original goal of HS to enhance the social competence of children and families continues to remain an important goal today.

HS has founded several related programs including the Planning Committee (1964), Project Follow Through (1966-1996), Parent and Child Centers (1967), Home Start (1972), and Early Head Start (1998), many of which remain active today.

Bronfenbrenner was one of HS's original planning committee members.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is in alignment with HS philosophy, and consequently, the conceptual framework for this study is based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory.

Professional Learning of Head Start Staff

HS has been referred to as the leader of consistently providing PD to its educators; however, there is limited research documenting any HS requirements for

programs to provide PD (Fitzgerald, 2014). Research indicated that HS has had trouble crafting high-quality PD for its teachers (Fitzgerald, 2014). Fitzgerald (2014) noted the program lacks PD on many EC education and development issues facing educators today; thus, recommended updates “on behalf of each classroom learning environment, the theories, understandings, and expectations HS helped to create, and the quintessential moment of learning between the child and teacher that we better understand because of HS’s existence” (p. 117). HS educators expressed that they have limited training about how to integrate children’s diverse cultures into their classrooms (Gichura, Riley, Robertson, & Park, 2015). EC educators need training and support on how to embed children’s cultures into the curriculum, including PD on children's gender identities and expressions. Furthermore, EC educators need to develop their capacities on how to help children understand their own cultural identities (Gichura et al., 2015). Fitzgerald (2014) suggests that HS reconsider how they structure their PD design and the data systems that support their teachers. Furthermore, Fitzgerald (2014) indicated that HS should ask more qualitative questions about their PD to begin revising the program monitoring.

Teacher-Child Relationships

Becker et al. (2017) examined the association between dispositional mindfulness and the quality of relationships between children and 101 HS teachers. Findings revealed that there is an association between dispositional mindfulness and teacher-child relationships. Mindfulness training can promote the overall health and well-being of HS teachers, which in turn improves educational outcomes for young children. HS teachers often work with children who are living in stressful situations such as homelessness;

single-parent households; limited literacy, education, and income. These factors may have a detrimental impact on children, which is manifest in children exhibiting disruptive behaviors due to emotional difficulties, poor self-regulation, and low coping skills.

Therefore, HS teachers must build positive teacher-child relationships with all children. Becker et al., (2017) recommend more dispositional mindfulness training for EC and HS educators.

Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Children

Fast and Olson (2018) and Sullivan (2014) explained that there is an increasing number of children between the ages of 3-5 years of age who are transgender or gender nonconforming. Smith and Payne (2016) noted that transgender children attend schools in the contexts where it is assumed that they are a boy or a girl and heterosexual, and many schools refused to honor or accept the name and pronoun changes, nor do they recognize or value transgender students' differences. Furthermore, Meyer and Leonardi (2018), and Garrison (2018) discussed that transgender and gender nonconforming children are becoming increasingly visible in EC classes. Researchers insisted that EC educators must be prepared and have the capacity to address and support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC programs (Meyer & Leonardi, 2018, Meyer, Stafford, & Airton, 2016).

Gender

Balter, Rhijn, and Davies (2016) and Lindsey (2016) noted that EC educator's attitudes and beliefs about gender, sex, and heterosexuality have an impact on how young children socialize sexuality. Balter et al (2016) described how EC educators in an EC

program in Ontario were concerned that the culture of families, and their beliefs and values about sexuality and gender can be a barrier to teaching sexuality in the classroom. The teachers also agreed that teaching sexuality is difficult to explain to young children and the reactions they anticipated receiving from parents were a big factor in their decisions not to teach sexuality (Balter et al., 2016). Furthermore, the lack of adequate training on sexual development was a deterrent for the Ontario teacher's willingness to teach sexuality. Balter et al. (2016) confirmed that "the domains of sexuality and gender are missing components of EC frameworks" (p. 39). Case (2016) and Case (2018) emphasized that future educators should have required trainings on gender identity and trans experiences to reflect on their own bias, acquire knowledge and skills to teach diverse students, and prepare to implement these strategies in the classroom. Sullivan (2014) and Dansereau (2015) argued that there is currently a gap in the literature about how pre-established rules and gender norms influence transgender children in the classroom.

Research has revealed that gender specialist believes that 1 in 500 children is gender nonconforming or transgender (Chick, 2014). Many transgender and gender nonconforming children experience great stress and a lack of support from their school experience, and gender diversity is not valued (Chick, 2014). Unfortunately, transgender and gender nonconforming children are subjected to hostile environments that include derogatory and homophobic remarks from peers and teachers. These students have reported that school personnel typically do not intervene when they witness verbal or physical attacks on children who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming

(Chick, 2014). Teachers must have the skills, attitudes, beliefs, and resources to allow children to be themselves. Sullivan (2014) reported that 89% of transgender students experience verbal harassment and 39% of these students have heard negative comments about their gender from school staff. Furthermore, more than 50% of these students have considered attempting suicide, and 25% have attempted suicide. Further, Sullivan (2014) emphasized that transgender children between the ages of 3-6 begin to struggle with their gender identity and physical sex characteristics as they enter EC programs; and these struggles impact students learning and success in the class.

Socially Transitioning Children

An increasing number of children between 3-5 years of age are socially transitioning to present their gender identities in their everyday lives (Fast & Olson, 2018). Fast and Olson (2018) noted that there are few studies on socially transitioned transgender children. Olson et al., (2015) suggested that socially transitioned transgender children should be included in gender development studies to expand knowledge and strengthen theories of gender development. Winter et al. (2018) referred to childhood social transition as a positive element that helps children, who identify as transgender, move toward a path of being fully free, and removing negative obstacles and stigma's that are associated with being transgender. Olson et al. (2015) examined the mental health of socially transitioned transgender children, and they found that transgender children, who are supported in their gender development, have less anxiety and depression compared to transgender children who are not supported in their gender development and identity.

Issues Facing Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Children

Hughto, Reisner, and Pachankis (2015) and Kearns, Kukner, and Tompkins (2014) confirmed that research has demonstrated that 95% of transgender students do not feel safe at school compared to 20% of heterosexual students (p. 62). Zeanah and Myint (2017) discussed how gender nonconforming children are at increased risk for depression, self-harm, anxiety disorders, and suicidality. Mental health professionals need to be involved in supporting gender nonconforming children and collaborate with educators on the best ways to support sexual minority and gender nonconforming students (Zeanah & Myint, 2017). Researchers recommend future research is needed to address the gap in practice based on the neurobiology of persistence and desistence, and gender dysphoria surrounding sexual orientation and gender conformity. Zeanah and Myint (2017) and Winters et al (2018) suggested that research does not depict the importance of supporting and accepting gender nonconformity.

Educator Preparation in LGBTQ Issues

Case and Meier (2014) and Payne and Smith (2014) indicated that educator preparation programs scarcely present LGBTQ issues nor prepare educators to competently serve the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming children. Researchers also noted that when EC teacher education programs did include LGBTQ issues as part of their diversity training, topics on transgender and gender nonconforming children are often not included (Case & Meier, 2014). Furthermore, Payne and Smith (2014) revealed that LGBTQ topics are given significantly less attention than other areas of diversity. Mason et al. (2017) and Meyer and Leonardi (2018), disclosed that there

needs to be more literature in teacher education about the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming students. School counselors can help foster inclusive environments for transgender students by helping to educate school personnel; educating school personnel is critical because there is limited literature on the needs of transgender students and teacher education (Mason et al., 2017). Rowan et al. (2017) acknowledged that there are concerns across the country about teacher knowledge and preparedness to teach diverse learners; therefore, teacher education programs must reflect upon how much of their program explicitly provides teachers with knowledge about diversity to ensure teachers have an understanding and capacity to effectively respond and support learners. Cimpian and Herrington (2017) described how legislation focused on targeting LGBT issues has improved school experiences for some students in this population; however, more research and teacher education needs to be done to recognize the diversity of experiences among LGBT students. Haggard (2014) disclosed that teacher education programs often require that students have PD that includes diversity and multiculturalism; however, LGBTQ issues are not included in these trainings, and consequently, teachers are not competent addressing LGBTQ issues. Furthermore, many EC educators expressed a need for practical strategies to help them create inclusive curriculums, they also confirmed their gap in knowledge surrounding supporting LGBTQ issues (Leonardi & Staley, 2015).

Teacher preparation programs must prepare teachers and give them opportunities to gain experience and knowledge about gender identity. If teachers can explore their feelings and bias about gender stereotypes, it is a starting point that can bridge the gap of

student teachers being prepared to meet the academic, emotional, and safety needs of all children (Chick, 2014). EC educators must prepare children to live in a diverse, non-sexist world (Turnhout, 2017). Rosenthal (2016) found that there is a gap in the literature regarding understanding transgender and gender nonconforming children.

Lee and Carpenter (2015) provided information from student teachers' stories about their perceptions about how well their initial teacher education (ITE) programs prepared them to talk about sexual diversity in the classroom. The findings revealed that many student teachers confirmed that diversity-related to sexualities diversity was scarcely mentioned or often neglected all together (Lee & Carpenter, 2015). Many of the teachers revealed that they would have appreciated more content and resources to help them support learning about LGBTQ families. Furthermore, the student teachers expressed a sense of concern for the lack of safety for LGBTQ students on many school campuses. Lee and Carpenter (2015) stated “Difference matters because justice matters; attention to the difference in education is important as a catalyst for social change” (p.178).

Chick (2014) explained how a teacher preparation program in Ontario helped future teachers meet children’s academic and emotional needs. The program included a course: Gender Issues in Educational and Family, which helped preservice teachers examine relationships between gender, education, and family (Chick, 2014). Further, the course provided valuable information on gender role development, gender identity, educational access, gender bias, sexual harassment, gender and children’s literature, and strategies on how to teach effectively in the classroom about these topics.

Sullivan (2014) recommended that EC educators reflect on their attitudes and biases regarding transgender children. Sullivan provided a list of questions for EC educators to reflect upon:

What can you do in your classroom to make transgender children feel safe and supported? How can you create an environment ideal for all to learn? What can you do in your family, school, and community to educate others about what transgender children need and have to offer? (p. 23).

Summary and Conclusions

Teachers of prekindergarten children require greater awareness and deeper understanding of gender identity to effectively develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings (Rowan et al., 2017). Antibias concepts proposed by Derman-Sparks (2015) concepts suggested that EC educators' roles include creating programs and classrooms that reflect all children, including social identities, communities, culture, and ecologies of children and families. The literature in this review indicated that prekindergarten teachers need PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children to effectively support all children in EC HS programs. Fitzgerald (2014) and Linder, Rembert, Simpson, and Ramey (2016) recommended further research needs to focus on the impact that PD has on teacher understanding about student dispositions, classroom environments, and instructional practices. The focus of the literature in Chapter 2 included PD, transgender, and gender nonconforming children, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory, and Derman-

Sparks antibiotics concepts. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the study's methodology, and data collection processes.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children. In the following sections of Chapter 3, I describe the research design and rationale. I also describe the role of the researcher and the methodology used in the study. I discuss the participant selection process, instrumentation, data analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures for the study. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary of this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The rationale for this basic qualitative study with interviews was to understand HS educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC programs. I followed a basic qualitative study with interviews approach to answer the research questions:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of prekindergarten HS educators regarding PD to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

RQ2: What are HS administrators' perspectives on providing PD for HS educators to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

RQ3: What are HS curriculum specialists' perspectives regarding PD to help them support HS teachers in their classrooms to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

A basic qualitative study with interviews was the design to address a gap in research on practice regarding PD for prekindergarten educators to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. I specifically solicited the perspectives of HS educators regarding PD. The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children. The problem involves a scarcity of knowledge regarding PD for prekindergarten educators to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children. For that reason, a basic qualitative study with interviews was appropriate to explore a system that may have relevance beyond HS educators' classrooms. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explained that researchers use basic qualitative studies for explicit interviews, which are used to gather data in the participant's own words to develop insights on their perspectives. Accordingly, I conducted interviews with one HS administrator, one HS curriculum specialist, and ten HS prekindergarten teachers to gather data on PD to address the research questions.

Role of the Researcher

I have been employed as an HS prekindergarten educator for 28 years. In my role as an HS educator, I have participated in PD training, which prompted my interest in exploring the perspectives of other educators who are not affiliated with my program. Because I am employed as an HS educator, I purposely did not interview prekindergarten educators from the school where I am employed. Teachers from my school were excluded from the study as described in the section below.

Methodology

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children in HS preschool programs. I used a purposeful sampling approach because only HS educators in the Western region of the United States were invited to participate in the study. Creswell (2012) described purposeful sampling as a strategy whereby the researcher intentionally selects individuals that have experience in the phenomenon to be studied. Furthermore, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explained that purposeful sampling is a method where the researcher selects specific individuals because they understand the issue. I acquired permission from the HS director to conduct the study at two HS centers. Possible participants were identified through HS e-mail accounts. Excluded from the list were HS educators from my school site, as well as HS educators with whom I have had past or current personal relationships. Of the educators who fit the criteria, I had hoped that a sample of 12 HS educators would volunteer to participate in this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that in qualitative research, it is important to have enough participants to reach data saturation as the participants will begin to provide the same stories. The purpose of data saturation is to maximize information; therefore, the recruitment can be terminated when no new information is forthcoming (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, Burkholder et al. (2016) explained "saturation happens when continued data collection does not add new themes or patterns but instead reinforces what has already been derived from prior data analysis" (p. 85).

Participant Selection

Using purposeful sampling, I focused this study on HS prekindergarten educators in one state in the Western region of the United States. The participants were chosen from the list of HS prekindergarten educators that I obtained from the HS director. I sent invitations to participate via e-mail. As the potential participants responded to my invitation, I confirmed that each individual fit the criterion of an HS educator currently working with 3- to 5-year-old children, having earned a bachelor's degree or higher, having been employed as an HS educator for between 3 and 10 years, and having attended 10 or more PD sessions that included a session on antibias curriculum, gender development, and gender diversity in EC. Each participant completed a questionnaire form. I communicated with each of the HS educators who volunteered to participate via e-mail or telephone to describe the timeline of the study. I anticipated 10 to 12 HS educators would volunteer to participate, and each were accepted into the study.

I intended to recruit 10 to 12 HS educators from a pool to participate in the study. Burkholder et al. (2016) noted “you cannot always predict the number of people to be interviewed; you should, though, provide an estimate of the number of people” (p. 74); until data saturation is reached recruitment can continue as data are collected. Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that when determining sample size, it is significant to have enough participants that the data provided will begin to tell the same story. Once data saturation has occurred, the sampling is terminated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I selected participants by accepting the first 12 participants who responded to the invitation.

Instrumentation

The data collection instruments I used for this study included an interview protocol and an audio recorder. I used the interview protocol to guarantee that each participant was asked the same question in the same way. I used the audio recorder to record the participant's words during the interviews. I used handwritten notes for reflection and further questioning. The interview protocol was a researcher-developed instrument (see Appendix). To establish the sufficiency of data collection instruments to answer research questions, I invited an expert in the field of EC education, including antibias curriculum and gender equity, to review the researcher-developed instrument. The expert reviewed the interview protocol and determined that the content of the interview questions was valid for answering questions related to the study's purpose.

The interview protocol included 6 semistructured, open-ended questions designed to gather HS educators' perspectives. I used a limited number of questions and followed-up with prompts as needed to involve prekindergarten educators in providing rich data. The interview questions reflected the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) microsystem (relationships and interpersonal interactions children have with EC educators) and Derman-Sparks (2015) antibias concepts (fostering positive relationships and acceptance of all people, and the relationships with EC educators that influence the development of children). Some interview questions were cross-referenced to the research questions to ensure that research questions were aligned and would be addressed. Additional topics, ideas, and probing questions were forthcoming in the interviews; Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated that "the researcher is looking for rich and

detailed information” (p. 40); for this study, that entailed detailing the prekindergarten educators' experiences of PD. The interview questions focused on EC educators' perspectives on promoting and supporting transgender and gender nonconforming children in their classrooms. The NVivo software was the data collection instrument I used to analyze the audio recordings.

Table 1

Alignment of Research and Interview Questions

<p>RQ 1: What are the perspectives of prekindergarten HS teachers regarding PD to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What experiences do you have working with children who are perceived to be transgender or gender nonconforming? What are some concrete strategies you use to support these children? If you have not had any experiences, what specific strategy would you use to support these children? • Have you had any professional development training that specifically addressed transgender or gender nonconforming children and how to support them? If you have not had any professional development on this topic, how do you support these children in your class?
<p>RQ 2: What are the perspectives of HS administrators' on providing PD for HS educators to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel administrators should provide professional development regarding transgender and gender nonconforming children to early childhood educators? If yes why, and if not why? • Administrators, what is your rationale for providing professional development that specifically addresses transgender or gender nonconforming children, and how teachers can support them?
<p>RQ3: What are HS curriculum specialists' perspectives regarding PD to help the support HS teachers in their classrooms to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum specialists, how will professional development regarding supporting transgender and gender nonconforming children help you support teachers in their classrooms? • Have there been any experiences in your life that influenced your understanding of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals?

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After receiving approval of my proposal from IRB on November 5, 2019 (approval #11-05-19-0475611), I sent invitations to HS prekindergarten educators via e-mail. As each participant volunteered to participate, I contacted them via text, e-mail, or telephone (depending on their mode of communication), to set up specific dates, times, and location for the interview process. I met with each participant at a mutually agreed-upon time, date, and location. Along with the participant invitation letter, all participants were sent via e-mail an informed consent form disclosing the purpose of the study, their role, benefits, and risks, the option to opt-out at any time without any repercussions, and confidentiality. Participants were asked to reply with the words “I Consent” stating that they understand and agree to participate in the study. To protect the participant's identity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym, such as P1 and P2 to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of their personal information.

All interviews occurred when the HS educators were not working, nor on school grounds. We met at various locations such as coffee shops, restaurants, and public libraries for the privacy, safety, preference, and convenience of each participant. However, I suggested the local library for a meeting place; also, I reserved a meeting room to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of each participant. The duration of most of the interviews was approximately 30 minutes. After the interview process, each participant was invited via their private e-mail to review a summary of their interview transcription for the accuracy of the draft results.

At the beginning of each interview, I thanked the participant for volunteering and confirmed employment as an HS prekindergarten educator. I explained the process and expectations of the study; as each participant states that he/she understands the expectations and is willing to continue with the interview I informed the participant of the right to terminate participation at any time during the study if he/she so chooses. I sent each participant a summary of the transcription as a follow-up e-mail after the interview. In the e-mail, I thanked the participant for their contribution to the study and asked if they noticed any discrepancies in the draft results to please forward to me immediately. None of the participants reported any discrepancies; therefore, no changes were made to the drafts.

Data Analysis Plan

I began the data analysis process by first manually transcribing the interview transcripts. The next step is to analyze the transcripts using NVivo software. The NVivo software begins by identifying relevant information by using a specific coding method (open) called nodes; the nodes are labeled, and the researcher will see categories and themes emerge; Burkholder et al., (2016) explains “ in open coding, your goal is to look for common themes that are emerging and what kinds of categories emerge from their organization” (p. 85). The next step is where models and illustrations are done, and lastly an interpretation of the findings. As the interviews are analyzed and aggregated, a visualization of HS prekindergarten educators’ perspectives about PD emerged. Each to check for accuracy and the participant was emailed a preliminary summary of findings validity of data.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness means that the data has been collected, analyzed, and then interpreted rigorously and ethically (Mirriam & Tisdell, 2016). To validate trustworthiness, Mirriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested using triangulation, member check, adequate engagement in data collection, and peer-review. I used triangulation, which means collecting data from multiple sources to cross-check data and compared the results. I collected data from the interview protocol and member check. The triangulation process consisted of collecting data from interviews with HS teachers, curriculum specialists, and administrators. I used member checking by providing the participants with a summary of their transcriptions from their interviews and asking for their feedback and suggestions and/or concerns to ensure accurate information. The interview transcriptions were analyzed using the NVivo software.

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of the study, I was deliberate with the coding process. Saldaña (2016) suggests a three-step protocol to ensure credibility: (1) initially code while transcribing interview data; (2) maintain a reflective journal of the research project with copious memos; and (3) check interpretations developed with the participants themselves. Saldaña (2016) confirms that using multiple sources of data validates the coding and improves the quality of trustworthiness in the findings.

During the coding process, I followed the suggested three-step protocol. I coded the interviews as I read through the transcriptions; I maintained a reflective journal

throughout the data analysis process and sent each participant an email with the identified themes to get their input.

Transferability

In this study, transferability is supported by the participant selection process, by the fact that all 12 HS educators who volunteered to participate were included in the study. However, the participants represent a single geographical area in the Western region of the United States; therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other locations. Transferability was supported using thick rich descriptions and triangulation. Burkholder et al. (2016) explained that the “researchers’ responsibility regarding transferability is to provide sufficient description of the setting and the assumptions of the study, and transferability is supported by using thick descriptions and maximum variation” (p. 76). I provided rich detailed descriptions of the setting, participants, policies, background, and context of the phenomenon being investigated to allow the reader to have a better understanding of the problem.

Dependability

Dependability, which is the extent that other researchers could replicate the study, and there is evidence that the findings would be consistent in data collection and analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016,). In this study, dependability is supported through the triangulation of the data and member checking. To replicate this study, another researcher could do the study in any other region of the United States instead of only the Western region where I conducted this study. The researcher may choose more or fewer participants; however, the findings of the study would be consistent with the finding of

this study; the findings may not be specifically the same, but it should produce similar results (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality in the reporting of the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The findings in this study will represent the participant's responses in the interview process; they do not represent any points of view or bias from the researcher. Confirmability was supported in this study through member-checks and reflexivity strategies. All the HS educators were given the opportunity to check the preliminary findings of the study. Reflexivity is the researchers' awareness of how his/her background, beliefs and values, and previous experiences can bias the research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016); therefore, taking notes during the interviews and using reflective journals can prevent bias to the study. Consequently, I kept a reflective journal and took notes during the interview process. I kept journal logs of my coding and sorting of the interview transcripts. Once the interviews were transcribed, I began the initial coding process by assigning codes to the data to describe the content. I looked for patterns and themes to emerge across the different interviews. After defining and naming the themes, I produced a report of the findings. I emailed each participant a summary of the report and asked if the information makes sense to them, and did I capture their perspectives regarding the topic discussed in the interviews.

Ethical Procedures

Upon approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research study, my objective is to ensure the ethical protection of the participants. Before

I conducted the interviews, each participant, who was a volunteer at that time, received a request for informed consent via e-mail which included an explanation of their rights to voluntarily ask questions, participate, retain confidentiality, and withdraw from the study at any time. The participant informed consent document also described the study and expectations, potential benefits and risks, how they will receive the results, and my role as a researcher. All participants are assured their information will remain confidential in a locked cabinet in a password-protected file on my computer.

Participants provided their perspectives regarding PD surrounding their place of employment. Because some participants may have felt vulnerable to criticism from their employers; to ease these feelings of vulnerability, each participant was reassured that all information shared in the interview will not be shared with anyone other than me as a researcher. Each participant participated in member checking and could verify his/her transcription for accuracy. The digital files from interviews are stored in a password-protected digital storage and will remain for at least five years, and then will be deleted per Walden University requirements. The hard copy files from interviews such as antidotal notes and journals are stored in a locked cabinet in my home office for at least five years, and then will be shredded per Walden University requirements.

Summary

In chapter three, I have described the methodology chosen for the study of HS educators' perspectives on PD. The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews is to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children. Twelve participants provided face-to-face

interviews. Positive social change might occur as a result of supporting and providing PD by taking into consideration HS educators' perspectives towards PD. Chapter four will present the findings and provide an analysis of the study including the data collected using qualitative methods.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

This basic qualitative study with interviews was conducted to examine HS educators' perspectives on supporting transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC programs. The objective was to explore HS educators' perspectives on PD and gain insight on how PD would influence their teaching strategies to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) bioecological systems theory as presented in Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) and antibias EC program concepts proposed from the research of Derman-Sparks (2015). Six interview questions about teachers' perspectives on PD formed the basis of the interviews. The questions were designed from 3 original research questions. I interviewed 12 EC educators to explore their perspectives about how PD prepared them to support transgender and gender nonconforming children. In Chapter 4, I describe the setting, the processes of data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary.

Setting

This study provided results of 12 semistructured interviews with HS educators currently working in preschool programs. Participants in the study provided their perspectives on PD to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. The HS administrator was interviewed in her private office after work hours, HS teachers and an HS curriculum specialist were interviewed at the local library in a secure, private meeting room after work hours. Each participants' confidentiality was protected. Each interview was recorded using the voice recording application on my cell phone.

Upon completion of the interviews, I e-mailed participants a summary of their interview transcripts to confirm the accuracy of data.

Data Collection

Criteria for participants in this study included HS educators who held a bachelor's degree or higher, had at least 3 years 'experience, we're working with children 3 to 5 years of age, and had attended 10 or more PD trainings. All potential participants who met the criteria were sent invitations via e-mail and asked to participate in this study with a purposeful sampling of 12 interviews. At the beginning of each interview, participants were told that they may opt-out of the study at any time without penalty. All information that participants provided is kept confidential and stored on my personal password-protected computer. Data collected for this study will be destroyed in 5 years, which is in alignment with Walden University's privacy protection policy on storing sensitive information collected from research participants. I developed an interview protocol that consisted of 6 open-ended questions; I asked probing and clarifying questions to collect adequate data. All participants were encouraged to answer all questions honestly, freely, and provide descriptive responses that reflected their experiences and perspectives about PD.

I collected data using the following format: 10 HS teachers, 1 HS curriculum specialist, and 1 HS administrator were interviewed for this study. I contacted the HS director for permission to conduct the study. After receiving the HS director's permission and Walden Institutional Review Board Approval (IRB #11-05-19-0475611), I contacted HS educators via e-mail to schedule interviews. It was essential when contacting

potential participants that I clearly explained the parameters of the study to ensure that they understood what they were volunteering for. I sent participant invitations and attached a consent form via e-mail. Potential participants replied to my e-mails and gave their consent to participate in the study with the words “I Consent” to confirm they were volunteering.

One-on-one semistructured audio-recorded interviews took place between December 2 and December 13, 2019; the interviews ranged in length from 20-30 minutes. I used an interview protocol to ensure that all interviews were consistent (see Appendix). Data was audio-recorded on a personal recording device. I took journal notes during the interviews. Immediately following each interview, I manually transcribed the interview, which allowed me to acquire an initial sense of the data that was collected.

Each interview followed guidelines by Rubin and Rubin (2012) to collect data that conveyed an in-depth view of HS educators’ perspectives. The semistructured format allowed for interviewer flexibility and enabled the participants to contribute rich, thick descriptions (see Burkholder et al., 2017) of their perspectives on PD to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. After each interview, I thanked each participant for contributing their valuable input to the study. I explained that they would receive an e-mail with a summary of their interview transcripts to check for accuracy of content and verify that the transcripts reflected their perspectives.

Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to codify data or arrange the data in a systematic way (Saldaña, 2016). I used the NVivo 12 Plus software 7-step method for my data

analysis. The steps included: import the data, check for word frequency, code the data, review the coding, analyze data, note demographics, and write the results. I focused on accurate interpretations of the perspectives and experiences of HS EC educators.

After each interview was conducted, I transcribed the audio recording from a digital recording device and saved the transcription to my personal password-protected computer. I emailed each participant a summary of their transcripts to check for the accuracy and meaning of their perspectives. All participants verified their transcript was accurate; therefore, no changes to the transcripts were made.

After receiving confirmation from participants that their transcripts were accurate, each transcript was printed. During the interview process, I took journal notes, and any recurring words from participants were highlighted. My journal notes and transcripts were compared to locate recurring responses, concepts, and identifying patterns, and to ensure significant data was not disregarded. I highlighted the patterns, recurring words, and concepts and created six themes: (a) gender identity, (b) teacher preparation (PD, trainings), (c) challenges and biases, (d) knowledge and education, (e) self-efficacy, and (f) the need for more PD. Each theme was clarified as it related to the research questions. Analysis verified the participant's responses supported one another, and there were no discrepant outliers.

Results

I asked participants 6 interview questions followed by additional prompting questions about HS prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings.

Participants are identified with pseudonyms (P1, P2, . . . P12) in interview transcripts and results. All participants gave the impression that they were elated to participate in the study; the participants responded to the interview questions with eagerness and honesty, providing rich, thick descriptive answers. The data collected from participants enabled me to comprehensively answer the 3 research questions and provide valuable insight into future recommendations, which will be discussed in the following chapter. The following sections present results based on three research questions and describe the themes that emerged.

Results: Research Question 1

The following interpretations are outcomes of data related to RQ1. RQ1 stated: What are the perspectives of prekindergarten HS teachers regarding PD to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

A thorough exploration of RQ1 revealed common themes that included (a) gender identity, (b) teacher preparation (PD, trainings) (c) self-efficacy, (d) challenges and biases, (e) formal/college courses, (f) the need for more PD.

Participants' definition of transgender and gender nonconforming. Eleven of the participants expressed they did not have a definition of "gender nonconforming" and they did not understand what the term meant. P8 defined gender nonconforming as "when people don't really care what gender they are; they are existing in both sexes." All participants provided their definitions of transgender. Six participants understand that the meaning of transgender is a person who identifies as the opposite sex they were assigned

at birth. Three participants defined transgender as people who are experimenting or trying to figure out who they are. Two participants defined transgender as a boy who feels like a girl inside or a girl who feels like a boy inside. One participant defined transgender as a person who is not comfortable with his/her body, and the brain and the body are experiencing different feelings. P3 stated, "I would like to see more research on the brain to see if they are born that way or if it is a brain disorder." All participants mentioned that they needed more PD on gender diversity that specifically included definitions and issues surrounding the topic of transgender and gender nonconforming children.

Teacher preparation (PD, trainings). All participants reported that they would benefit from PD to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. They expressed that such PD would allow HS educators to develop their capacities (knowledge, skills, understanding, sense-of-self, and a strong commitment to improving student learning) to support transgender and gender nonconforming children. All participants commented that they never received any PD that specifically addressed transgender and gender nonconforming children. P1 and P4 had taken education courses where the topic was addressed; however, P1 stated, "Sometimes it was taboo, and people did not know how to respond to it, and they questioned the course." The participants mentioned that the lack of PD on transgender and gender nonconforming children was a significant barrier for EC educators to effectively support transgender and gender nonconforming children in their classrooms due to their lack of knowledge and education on the topic. Additionally, all participants noted there was a lack of teacher preparation courses in colleges and universities that specifically teach about transgender and gender

nonconforming children in the EC field. Three of the participants noted that teacher preparation courses should prepare future teachers about the latest in EC gender identity development and that these developments must include gender diversity covering transgender and gender nonconforming children. P2, P3, and P6 confirmed that EC educators would benefit from these courses; and as a result, they would learn how to implement positive strategies that supported all children. EC educators believed that they have the responsibility of creating safe environments for all children to learn; therefore, teacher preparation courses must educate and provide teachers with the knowledge, positive strategies, and tools so they can create environments that support all children to become successful learners. P5 suggested that parents should have a role in teacher preparation. P5 explained that parents play a vital role in their children's education; and therefore, teachers and parents must build strong relationships by collaborating on the best strategies that produce positive outcomes for their children. All participants reported that parents also need to be educated on gender diversity and that parent trainings would allow parents opportunities to gain a clear understanding of transgender and gender nonconforming children. Participants expressed that parents need to understand why PD about transgender or gender nonconforming children is vital to children's education and well-being, so educators include and support all children. Table 2 follows and confirms participants' expressed need for additional PD and teacher preparation programs that specifically address transgender and gender nonconforming issues in EC settings.

Table 2

Specific Content Education

Participant #	Participant degree	Participant years of experience	Professional development about transgender	Teacher preparation course on transgender
1	Bachelor of arts in early childhood	12 years	None	Yes
2	Bachelor of science in child development	27 years	None	
3	Bachelor of science in early childhood	17 years	None	
4	Bachelor of arts in human services	19 years	None	Yes
5	Master of arts in business administration	30+ years	None	
6	Bachelor of arts in early childhood	4 years	None	
7	Bachelor of science in liberal arts	23 years	None	
8	Bachelor of science in child development	20 years	None	
9	Bachelor of arts in early childhood	8 years	None	
10	Bachelor of science in early childhood	6 years	None	
11	Bachelor of science in early childhood	11 years	None	
12	Master of science in early childhood studies	19 years	None	

Further, Table 2 shows participants have varying levels of higher education and teaching experience. Three participants have Bachelor of Arts degrees in EC, 1 participant has a Bachelor of Arts degree in human services, 3 participants have Bachelor of Science degrees in EC, and 2 participants have Bachelor of Science degrees in child development. One of these participants is pursuing a master's degree in EC education. One participant has a Bachelor of Science in liberal arts and plans to pursue a master's degree in the fall of 2020. One participant has a Master of Science in EC studies, and one participant has a Master of Arts in business administration. The participants' varying levels of education and experiences allowed me to collect thick rich descriptive data.

Table 2 also shows that all participants have never had PD specifically addressing transgender or gender nonconforming children. Researchers have indicated that PD is an excellent and effective way to increase educators' knowledge and proactive behaviors regarding LGBTQ issues (Coulter & Miller, 2018). The participants commented that they need PD specifically addressing transgender and gender nonconforming children to develop their capacities to support all children.

Case and Meir (2014) and Payne and Smith (2018) communicated that teachers enter the EC field without adequate preparation on LGBTQ issues from their teacher education programs. Two participants have taken teacher preparation courses on gender diversity which included transgender; however, they reported that the course was not well received, they believed because transgender is a controversial topic and many students are not ready or willing to talk about it. Meyer and Leonardi (2018) confirmed that teacher preparation programs must provide more literature on the needs of transgender

and gender nonconforming students. The participants communicated the need for more teacher preparation programs to include content-specific courses too better prepare future educators.

Self-efficacy. HS educators must be confident in their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in their classrooms; however, most of the participants reported they were not competent in their capacities to support these children. The participants expressed that their self-efficacy depended on their education and knowledge about transgender and gender nonconforming children. The participants noted that PD will provide the opportunity to build their self-efficacy and confidence needed to support all children. They also noted that teacher preparation programs need to provide courses on gender diversity which includes transgender and gender nonconforming children so future educators will already have the knowledge and confidence when entering the EC field. The participants expressed that their lack of knowledge was a deterrent that impeded their self-efficacy and confidence to effectively support transgender and gender nonconforming children. P12 stated, “I don't feel that I have the skills necessary to adequately support this population, and I do think that I need more training.” PD on transgender and gender non-conforming equity issues can contribute to building confidence in EC educators to improve their self-efficacy.

Challenges and biases. All participants reported that they foresee parents as the biggest challenge for them addressing transgender and gender nonconforming children in the classroom. One of the challenges that EC educators indicated they are faced with is the lack of education of teachers, administrators, and parents surrounding transgender and

gender nonconforming diversity. Eight participants confirmed that they have had no educational courses addressing transgender and gender nonconforming children; therefore, their lack of education proves to be a challenge to effectively support these children. Another challenge that participants foresee is parent and staff biases. Four participants reported that staff biases posed a challenge for addressing transgender trends and explained that some staff enforced gender rules in their classrooms, for example, teacher enforce the unspoken rule that only boys can play with trucks, and only girls can play with dolls. Two participants of this study noted that they allow all children to play in the dramatic play center in their classrooms; however the participants shared information that some of the parents in their classrooms have told them that they are not comfortable with teachers letting children decide their gender identities; in other words parents said, “Teachers should not allow boys to wear dresses and girls should not play with cars.”

Nine participants said that parents have expressed that they do not want their children to learn about anything that has to do with sex-related issues such as gender identity. The participants explained that at parent conferences, teachers talk about what they are teaching children; and the discussion of gender identity was mentioned and some parents disclosed their concerns. Six participants shared that they do not allow children, staff, or parents to make judgments about any children or their families. P3 stated, “I try not to judge people for who they are, I see the person for their strengths.” P12 reported that some parents and staff are against her teaching about gender diversity because of their personal beliefs and values. P12 also noted that many parents do not want or are uncomfortable with change; however, it is our responsibility as educators to provide

children with the best quality education, but because parents are not accepting of changes it makes my job much harder. P10 stated, “Parents don't want to change, and they are not willing to learn about anything different.” EC educators must remember that they have a moral and ethical responsibility to provide safe environments for all children, and biases should not be in the classrooms.

Formal/college courses. All participants expressed that when they took college courses in pursuit of their bachelor’s degrees, they did not recall ever taking any courses specifically about transgender or gender nonconforming children. P1 and P4 recalled having a course that addressed transgender briefly; however, they reported because participants felt it was a controversial topic, they said it was “taboo.” The class did not respond well to the discussion on transgender issues, so the instructor did not mention it again. Four participants shared that they have taken courses on gender and gender diversity but transgender or gender nonconforming was never included. Six participants have not taken any college courses in over 20 years, and they reported they do not remember gender classes being available when they went to college years ago let alone classes on transgender and gender nonconforming trends. All participants expressed that transgender and gender nonconforming trends should be included in EC, elementary, secondary, and higher learning education programs. P12 explained that it is important to keep up with the latest developments so teachers are prepared and have the necessary skills to provide children with the best learning opportunities and strategies to help them succeed in school.

The need for more teacher preparation courses. All participants confirmed that PD on transgender and gender nonconforming will be beneficial for EC educators to learn how to create welcoming and supportive environments. P1, P2, and P6 noted that they need to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children and what better way than PD. The participants reported that often they felt unprepared to support transgender children and consequently more PD, trainings, and teacher preparation courses on transgender and gender nonconforming trends are necessary to equip teachers with the necessary tools to effectively support all children. P8 expressed that colleges and universities need to incorporate classes specifically on transgender and gender nonconforming, and how to incorporate positive strategies into the lesson plans. The participants mentioned that they need more in-depth PD on creating positive supportive environments; and PD needs to focus on diversity including transgender and gender nonconforming trends.

Results: Research Question 2

The following interpretations are outcomes of data related to RQ2. RQ2 stated: What are the perspectives of HS administrators' on providing PD for HS educators to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children? When exploring RQ2, the themes that emerged include: (a) challenges and biases, and (b) the need for more PD.

Challenges and biases. P5 noted, as an administrator, one of the biggest challenges she foresees for providing PD about transgender to staff is that staff will not implement the strategies provided from PD in their classrooms due to their personal

biases. P5 commented that she has observed teacher biases contributing to gender rules in many classes; for example, some teacher's rules indicate that boys can play with cars; however, boys are not allowed to play with dolls. These gender rules are teachers' personal biases and they do not belong in the classroom. P5 explained that one challenge she foresees is getting teachers to accept and implement positive gender strategies into their lesson plans. Another challenge P 5 foresees is parents accepting the topic of transgender being taught in the classroom. P5 noted that many parents also have their own biases about gender rules. P5 shared that some parents may not react positively to transgender trends being taught to their children. P5 stated, "it is a lot to think about as an administrator, on how I will provide PD to staff and families; I know as an organization, we will find a way to educate the people we serve and our communities." P5 also noted she is up to the challenge of addressing transgender and gender nonconforming in EC settings, and she believes the time to start is now.

The need for more professional development. Providing training and PD opportunities often are the responsibility of administrators; P5, as an administrator confirmed that part of her responsibility is to provide her staff with PD opportunities. P5 noted that she has not provided her staff PD on transgender or gender nonconforming yet because she needs more knowledge on gender diversity. P5 stated, "I need to be educated first before I can provide any trainings or PD to my staff." P5 explained that colleges and universities must provide more courses on gender diversity that specifically includes transgender trends so future teachers will be prepared once they enter the classroom. P5 stated, "I just really believe that it just needs to be more education for all of us." P1, P4,

and P6 commented on how college courses tend to focus on helping children and the “whole” child; but they fail to focus on the teachers; and teachers are the ones who are the future educators that will be teaching the children. P8 noted that higher education needs to train future teachers on topics like transgender “so we can send off the best of the best teachers which is the most understanding compassionate teachers into our schools to teach our young children”. The participants felt that PD on transgender and gender nonconforming would be a benefit to them as well as the families they serve.

Results: Research Question 3

The following interpretations are outcomes of data related to Research Question 3. RQ3 stated: What are HS curriculum specialists’ perspectives regarding PD to help the support HS teachers in their classrooms to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children? When exploring RQ3, the themes that emerged include: (a) formal/college courses, (b) challenges and biases, and (c) the need for more PD.

Formal/college courses. P1 explained that as a curriculum specialist, she never took any formal or college courses that specifically focused on transgender or gender nonconforming. P1 commented that the formal education courses she participated in focused on child development and curriculum planning. P1 also shared that the college courses she participated in did not provide any information on creating supportive environments, building strong positive relationships with the children, their families, and the community. P1 suggested that higher learning institutions need to incorporate courses that specifically address the transgender population so future educators can provide

supportive environments and build strong positive relationships with children, their families, and the community.

Challenges and biases. P1 noted, as a curriculum specialist, a challenge that she foresees for her helping HS teachers address transgender and gender nonconforming diversity in their curriculum is teacher biases. P1 explained that part of her responsibility as a curriculum specialist is to help teachers with their lesson planning, and support teachers in their classrooms which includes substituting. P1 stated, “I think that one of my biggest challenges is being around teachers who are very strong on the fact of boys need to wear boys’ clothes and girls need to wear girls’ clothes.” P1 shared that we all have biases; however, biases do not belong in the classroom and we must be aware that we have biases. P1 also noted that many parents have the same biases as teachers, and many parents do not want their children to learn about transgender trends at school which poses another challenge. P1 commented that teaching about transgender has been a controversial issue in schools across the country.

The need for more professional development. The participants commented that they have never had any PD focusing on transgender or gender nonconforming trends; however, they felt they need more in-depth PD specifically on transgender and gender nonconforming trends to effectively develop their capacities to support these children in EC settings. P1 explained that gender diversity is a taboo topic for many educators mainly due to their lack of education, hence the need for more PD. P8 suggested that higher education institutions need to teach courses that specifically address transgender and gender nonconforming diversity so future educators will be better prepared when

they enter the classrooms. P8 also noted that future teachers need to be knowledgeable on the current trends and developments in EC so they can create positive supportive environments for all children which includes transgender and gender nonconforming. P12 stated. "I hope that more professional development to address the fears and misconceptions can be broken down because I think that's a big barrier to bringing support to this population." The participants believed that PD specifically on transgender will be a benefit to prekindergarten educators in all EC programs.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research involves several factors: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Burkholder et al., 2016). I ensured credibility by utilizing an interview protocol and a consistent interview process. I audio recorded all interviews and transcribed them immediately. I used member-checking as each participant was invited to review a summary of their interview transcript for accuracy and clarification of data.

Transferability was enhanced using thick, rich, descriptions, and triangulation. Burkholder, Cox, and Crawford (2016) described effective criteria for evaluating qualitative studies as acknowledging that transferability should include rich descriptions of the setting, participants, policies, and detailed information on context and background. In this study I have provided thick, detailed, descriptions of the setting, participants, background, and context, that may allow the reader to acquire a reasonable understanding of the topic and make comparisons with their situation. Transferability was also increased

by using triangulation by corroborating evidence through multiple views from different participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) disclosed that strategies used in qualitative studies to ensure consistency and dependability include triangulation, peer examination, and the researcher's position or reflexivity. The dependability of this study's findings is supported through triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was achieved by corroborating evidence from twelve HS educators from two different sites. Through member checking, I asked participants for feedback from their interview transcripts regarding any misinterpretations or omissions that may have occurred from me on what they said before final approval and dissemination. None of the participants asked for any corrections therefore, no modifications were made.

Confirmability was increased in this study by implementing member-checking and reflexivity strategies. Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted that confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to illustrate that the data represents the participant's responses solely and not the researcher biases or viewpoints. Based on this notion of confirmability, I asked the participants to review a summary of their interview transcripts and disclose any discrepancies noted that did not represent their perspectives. No discrepancies were noted. Member checking contributed to the validity of the study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) referred to reflexivity as the researchers' awareness and understanding of how their beliefs, values, background, and previous experiences can affect the research process. To accomplish confirmability in this study, I took notes during the interviews and kept a reflective journal to prevent researcher bias misrepresenting data of the study. As I

analyzed each recorded interview, I removed segments in which any of my comments may have influenced a participant's response.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews is to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children. Utilizing indepth face to face interviews and my researcher journal notes, the qualitative approach to this study allowed me to explore a deeper understanding of prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. Twelve HS prekindergarten educators participated in this study. Data was coded and 6 major themes emerged: gender identity, teacher preparation, self-efficacy, challenges and biases, formal/college courses, and the need for more PD. Each of the 12 participants confirmed they valued the importance of PD to develop HS educators' capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children. Three research questions guided this study, and the results answered each question. In answer to RQ1, the results showed that HS teachers have never had PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children; however, HS teacher's perspectives indicated that they need PD on transgender and gender nonconforming children to effectively support these children in their classrooms and provide the children with a high-quality education. In answer to RQ2, the results showed that HS administrators have never provided PD to HS staff about transgender and gender nonconforming children; however, HS administrators indicated they need more education, knowledge,

and PD training on transgender and gender nonconforming children before they can provide PD to their staff. HS administrators indicated that it is a challenge to provide PD on a topic they have little or no knowledge about. In answer to RQ3, the results showed that HS curriculum specialists have never had PD on transgender and gender nonconforming children; however, HS curriculum specialists indicated they must have PD training on transgender and gender nonconforming children to support the teachers in their classrooms; the curriculum specialists reported that it is a challenge to support teachers on a topic you know nothing about nor have had any type of training or education that has been provided by HS. Chapter 5 will address the interpretation of findings, limitations, recommendations, implications for social change, and the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children. This study was conducted to fill both a local need and a gap in the research on practice regarding PD for prekindergarten educators to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. The following 3 research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of prekindergarten HS teachers regarding PD to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of HS administrators' on providing PD for HS educators to develop their capacities to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

RQ3: What are HS curriculum specialists' perspectives regarding PD to help the support HS teachers in their classrooms to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children?

I interviewed 12 HS educators to acquire insights into their perspectives regarding PD to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. EC educators have a moral and ethical responsibility to create safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments for all children (NHSA, 2018). However, research has shown that EC educators fail to act regarding anti-LGBTQ bias and are ill-equipped to address these issues (Payne & Smith, 2018). Teachers enter the profession without adequate

preparation on LGBTQ issues from their educator preparation programs (Case & Meier, 2014; Payne & Smith, 2014, 2018); PD would be an effective way to increase educator's knowledge and proactive behaviors regarding LGBTQ issues.

In Chapter 2, I investigated research regarding HS prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. Research was conducted on transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC programs and PD provided in HS programs to support this population. However, a gap exists regarding HS educators' PD experiences and HS educators' perspectives on how PD experiences developed their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children. In Chapter 3, I summarized the methodology and data collection approaches for this study. In Chapter 4, I provided findings from data that were gathered from 12 face to face interviews. The interviews provided a thick, rich descriptive understanding of HS educators' perspectives.

The findings from interview data established that there is a need for PD, specifically on transgender and gender nonconforming children, to be provided for HS educators if they are to effectively develop their capacities to support all children in EC settings. All participants reported the need for more PD and training specifically on transgender and gender nonconforming in the EC field, including teacher preparation programs. My research study contributes to the gap in research on practices surrounding PD for EC educators to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. This chapter includes interpretations of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications for social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

My interpretation of the findings from this qualitative study is a result of reflections on data collected during interviews and my journal notes taken during interviews. Throughout this process, I considered the conceptual framework based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) bioecological systems theory and Derman-Sparks (2015) antibias concepts. The outcomes of this study were established by the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2 and the interpretations in the context of the current literature.

There is an increasing number of children between 3- and 5-years of age who are transgender or gender nonconforming (Fast & Olson, 2018; Sullivan, 2014). Many of these children attend EC programs where staff members assumed that they are boys or girls and heterosexual; consequently, teachers do not recognize or value transgender or gender nonconforming differences in children (Smith & Payne, 2016). Although transgender and gender nonconforming children are becoming increasingly visible in EC classrooms, participants of this study reported that they have never had any children in their classes that assumed the identity of transgender that they were aware of. However, one participant expressed, "Just because we are not aware of any transgender children in our classes does not mean there are none." P6 noted that EC educators need to be prepared and have the knowledge to support all gender diversities; therefore, PD that specifically addresses transgender and gender nonconforming is necessary to help educators develop their capacities and create safe spaces for all children. Participants reported that most teachers believe that 3- to 5-year old children are too young to

understand the meaning of transgender and gender nonconforming and further express their perspectives that PD on this topic would be helpful. P4, P5, P7 commented that children at this age are just learning who they are and what gender identity is all about. In this study I explored and described EC educators' perspectives regarding PD opportunities to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. Using face to face interviews, my research results supported the idea that PD opportunities will develop EC prekindergarten educators' capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. The participants confirmed that there needs to be more content specific courses on transgender and gender nonconforming children in teacher preparation programs. The participants felt there also needs to be more PD and training on transgender and gender nonconforming children. In addition to PD and transgender and gender nonconforming specific training, it is imperative to understand what educators feel they need to teach children (Bautista, Ng, Múñez, & Bull, 2016)

Conceptual Framework: Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1977) believed that children's growth and development must be considered within each child's environment, which includes the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. For HS prekindergarten educators, the classroom is the most significant microsystem. An objective of HS educators is to build positive relationships (microsystem) with children and provide safe spaces for all children to learn. However, the results of this study indicated that HS prekindergarten educators desire to create safe spaces for all children, but their lack of

knowledge on how to create supportive safe spaces limits children's growth and development within the microsystem. The participants confirmed that they need more knowledge and education that include positive strategies and how to how to create supportive, safe spaces in their classrooms. Seventy-five percent of the participants explained that teacher biases are a contributing factor for many teachers not creating safe spaces. One of the participants commented that we all have biases; nonetheless, biases should not interfere with children's well-being, education, growth, or development. P8 shared that teacher biases about gender diversity harm children; she believed that teachers must allow all children to blossom and become the persons they are supposed to be without teachers forcing them to act according to societal norms or personal biases. Interactions in the microsystem contribute to the child's knowledge and attitudes about gender and gender identity formation and expression. P6 reported that when teachers enforce gender rules—for example, boys play with cars and girls play with dolls—these teachers are not allowing children to express their gender identity. Further, Becker et al. (2015) explained that EC teachers must be knowledgeable about children's developmental levels, needs, and cultural and familial contexts, and purposefully provide a safe environment for children to learn.

Antibias

ABE is defined as an approach to teaching that supports children and their families as they develop a sense of identity in a diverse society. It focuses on embracing a person's own differences as well as differences of others, developing authentic communities, and identifying bias to advocate for positive change (Derman-Sparks, 2015;

Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). One of the goals of ABE is that each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities. However, the participants expressed a concern of not having the capacity to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in their classrooms. P12 stated, "I don't feel that I have the knowledge or skills necessary to adequately support this population." All participants reported that they are not aware of any transgender or gender nonconforming children in their classrooms. P11 stated, "If we don't know about transgender how are we supposed to support them? We need professional development to teach us positive strategies to include in our curriculums." The quality of relationships EC teachers create with young children offers a key predictor of their academic achievement and social-emotional competence (Becker et al., 2015). ABE practices assist EC educators in recognizing and understanding their own biases (Derman-Sparks et al., 2015). One participant noted, we all have biases, but unfortunately, some teachers bring their biases into the classroom. Seventy-five percent of the participants talked about teacher bias contributing to transgender children not being supported in the classroom. P8 explained that some teachers have gender rules, which makes it harder for some children to express their identity. P12 noted that teachers have biases that they are not aware of such as only girls can wear pink. Antibias practices include fostering positive relationships between teachers and children that promote acceptance of all people regardless of their diversities. Furthermore, while many EC educators expressed a need for practical strategies to help them create inclusive curriculums, they also confirmed their gap in knowledge surrounding supporting LGBTQ issues (Leonardi & Staley,

2015). Having conversations about the topics of race and gender identity is challenging with young children; however, these conversations are essential, and concepts learned are part of children's learning processes (Hooven et al., 2018). Incorporating antibias into EC programs can be challenging and rewarding at the same time. Madison (2018) suggested it is also essential that EC educators be allowed to develop to their fullest potential while meeting the needs of all children.

Professional Development

The process of PD refers to how teachers acquire knowledge and apply what they learned into practice, which allows them to improve their practice and professionalism (Soto, 2018). Ahmed et al. (2017) explained that research studies have disclosed that research is scarce regarding supporting teachers' needs through PD and that previous literature suggested inadequate PD results in teachers' lack of professional skills. Research indicated that HS has had trouble crafting high-quality PD for its teachers (Fitzgerald, 2014). Fitzgerald (2014) noted the HS program lacks PD on many EC education and development issues facing educators today. The participants noted there is a need for more PD on transgender and gender nonconforming in the EC field. The participants shared that kindergarten through 12th-grade educators are provided PD on LGBTQ diversity; however, PD on transgender and gender nonconforming has never been provided in EC programs that they are aware of. P5 stated, "I think as far as transgender education goes if we don't know about it how can we teach about it?" Soto (2018) explained that when EC educators implement the materials learned from PD into their curriculums, it promotes positive social change. Payne and Smith (2014) confirmed

there are few PD opportunities related to supporting transgender and gender nonconforming provided for teachers. Vujičić and Čamber Tambolaš (2018) explained that PD for preschool educators is an individual process of professional advancement and a process of changing the culture, which includes all participants in the EC field. The participants shared that not only do they need PD about transgender and gender nonconforming issues, the families that they serve also should be provided PD so they can understand why it is important to include gender diversity in EC programs. All the participants commented that parents are the biggest challenge that prevents them from including gender diversity into their lesson plans. Also, 80% of the participants said that parents do not want their children to learn about gender diversity, and most parents believe that preschool programs should not be educating children on this issue. EC educators must have the knowledge and training to support all children. PD is an excellent opportunity to provide educators with the necessary tools to develop their capacities on how to help children understand their own cultural identities (Gichuru, Riley, Robertson, & Park, 2015). Furthermore, Leonardi and Staley (2015) recommend that educational communities support EC educators by providing high-quality PD focused on specific issues including gender and sexual diversity.

The need for more teacher preparation. There are teacher education programs that include LGBTQ issues as part of their diversity training; however, topics on transgender and gender nonconforming are often not included (Case & Meier, 2014, Payne & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, Mason et al. (2017) and Meyer and Leonardi (2018), disclosed that there needs to be more literature in teacher education about the

needs of transgender and gender nonconforming students. The participants in this study commented that there is a necessity of providing EC educators with content specific teacher preparation experiences so future educators will be prepared when they enter classrooms. Also, Payne and Smith (2018) concluded that future research for increasing LGBT content in leadership training is an essential step towards convincing school leadership about the importance of LGBT competence for teachers. P1 and P4 indicated that they took teacher preparation courses where the topic of transgender was addressed; however, they mentioned that the topic was considered taboo and other students seemed to have a hard time responding to it and they questioned why the topic was included in the course. Rowan et al. (2017) acknowledged that there are concerns across the country about teacher knowledge and preparedness to teach diverse learners; therefore, teacher education programs must reflect upon how much of their program explicitly provides teachers with knowledge about diversity to ensure teachers have an understanding and capacity to effectively respond and support learners. Furthermore, many EC educators expressed a need for practical strategies to help them create inclusive curriculums, they also confirmed their gap in knowledge surrounding supporting LGBTQ issues (Leonardi & Staley, 2015). The participants communicated that they felt unprepared to create supportive environments that included transgender children; they shared that they were never given the resources or tools to talk about or include children who are not heterosexual. P5 explained that as an administrator, she needs more education on transgender education before she can provide PD to her staff. Three of the participants indicated that teacher preparation courses tend to focus on helping children succeed, but

they fail to give teachers the tools they need to help all children succeed. Balter et al. (2016) confirmed that “the domains of sexuality and gender are missing components of EC frameworks” (p. 39). Case (2016) and Case (2018) emphasized that future educators should have required trainings on gender identity and trans experiences to reflect on their own bias, acquire knowledge and skills to teach diverse students, and prepare to implement these strategies in the classroom. The participants communicated that more PD that specifically focuses on transgender and gender nonconforming diversity will provide them with positive strategies to include in their lesson plans which will promote a supportive inclusive environment. Seventy five percent of the participants indicated that teacher biases contribute to EC educators not including transgender information into their curriculums. The participants noted that if teachers were provided PD on transgender or if teacher preparation programs specifically provided courses that focused on transgender, more teachers would be knowledgeable and equipped to talk about transgender issues and consequently they will have the capacities to support all children. Teacher preparation programs must prepare teachers and give them opportunities to gain experience and knowledge about gender identity. If teachers can explore their feelings and bias about gender stereotypes, it is a starting point that can bridge the gap of student teachers being prepared to meet the academic, emotional, and safety needs of all children (Chick, 2014). Furthermore, Rosenthal (2016) found that there is a gap in the literature regarding understanding transgender and gender nonconforming children.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations in this study included: sample size, researcher bias, and location. First, the study sample population was small due to only twelve HS educators' participating: therefore, the number of participation limits generalizability across all HS educators. Further, data collection was limited to certain individuals who chose to participate, limiting the data to their perspectives. A second limitation was that, as an HS educator myself, I had established my perspectives about PD. However, I took reasonable measures to address these limitations. To restrict any researcher bias, I made a conscious effort not to manipulate the participant's responses to the interview questions. To minimize researcher bias, I used a journal to take notes during the interview process, each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed immediately, I then used member checking which allowed each participant to review a summary of their transcripts for accuracy of content to avoid bias, omissions, and misrepresentations. Each participant confirmed there were no discrepancies in their transcript, therefore, no changes were made to documents. Also, all HS educators with whom I have a personal relationship were excluded from the study. Third, the data collected was limited to 1 state in the western region of the United States. To add to the generalizability of the findings; Future research can include different regions and include suburban and rural areas.

Recommendations

According to Osmanoglu et al. (2015), EC educators who work with young children must be knowledgeable and aware of their practice. The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives

on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children. My recommendation is to broaden the sample and population of the study. I only interviewed HS educators (teachers, curriculum specialists, administrators) in the current study. Synthesizing the perspectives to include parents, social workers, and teacher aides would produce a more integral perspective of the effectiveness of PD to prepare HS educators on how to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. Another recommendation is that this study should be replicated in other regions within the United States. This study specifically focused on a community in the western region of the United States, and by expanding research into other geographical areas, learning opportunities through PD can be gained to develop EC educator's capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. I also recommend that future researchers who replicate this study, do a survey to identify how educators are working with families who have children who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming in EC programs. Another recommendation might be for researchers to conduct a survey to identify how many HS teachers have taught lessons to children who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming in EC settings. The results of this research study will be disseminated to HS organizations with the hope of sharing these results in their newsletter.

Implications for Social Change

The purpose of this basic qualitative study with interviews was to explore HS prekindergarten educators' perspectives on PD about transgender and gender nonconforming children. The results revealed that HS educators do believe that PD on

supporting transgender and gender nonconforming children will increase their knowledge and capacities on how to effectively include and support these children in EC settings.

Despite the limitations of this study, the perspectives, experiences, and recommendations of these HS educators have the potential to create a positive impact within the HS organization. Implications for social change at the policy level include acknowledging that quality HS preschool programs make a substantial difference in the development and progress of young children. This study, along with other studies, corroborates the notion that EC education works; however, it is necessary to include all stakeholders in systemic change to maximize initiative effectiveness. Collaborating with stakeholders by forming a mutual respect and common understanding to develop new points of view and perspectives, may allow EC educators to collectively discover appropriate strategies to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. Positive social change occurs when EC educators implement these strategies which positively affect the development, learning, and progress of young children.

Findings from this study may influence improved guidelines for universities and colleges to include in pre-service programs with regards to teacher preparation and PD trainings in EC programs. This research can lead to positive teacher preparation experiences by including data from the findings into college courses, PD opportunities, and trainings. The content added to these college courses, PD opportunities, and training would be specifically on the topic of transgender and gender nonconforming diversity, and how to assist EC educators on practicing effective strategies that foster positive

gender identity and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children that promotes a welcoming supportive environment.

At the organizational level, this study brings into perspective the voices and experiences of the HS educators affected by institutional change. It provides suggestions, and recommendations for improvement of how PD is and should be implemented in HS EC settings. However, the greatest implication for effective positive social change is for the children. The interviewed HS educators recommended considering the restoring of a child-centered practice guided by the HS vision of advocating and serving the whole child, the families, and the community to ensure that all parties involved including educators have what they need to succeed (HS, 2017).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and present an understanding of prekindergarten educators' perspectives about PD to develop their capacities to support transgender and gender nonconforming children in EC settings. In this study, my goal was to explore prekindergarten educators' perspectives to determine how to best support them and provide strategies so they will be equipped to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children. I conducted 12 face to face interviews, collected data regarding what the participants described as necessary information they needed to prepare them so they can create supportive environments that include all children. The participants gave clear, precise, and honest in-depth responses, which provided rich thick descriptive data to support the research questions.

The participants expressed that PD that specifically focuses on transgender and gender nonconforming children should be provided to prepare them to support and create safe spaces for all children. All participants expressed a desire to provide safe spaces for all children; however, their lack of knowledge and training make it less of a reality. Unfortunately, taking 1 college class, or 1 PD or 1 training is not enough to address the enormous knowledge base (Boutte, 2018). Educators need ongoing training and PD to build adequate levels of understanding. P12 stated, “I don't feel I have the necessary skills to adequately support this population in my classroom, but I do think that I need more training and teachers need to be aware in their classrooms.” The participants shared that more colleges and universities need to offer courses specifically addressing transgender and gender nonconforming equity issues. These courses will allow for improvement in educators’ self-efficacy and build positive relationships with the children, their families, and the community for prekindergarten educators in EC settings.

All the participants have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, however, none of the participants have taken courses at college or had any PD that specifically focused on supporting transgender equity issues. Some of the participants have over twenty years’ experience teaching in EC programs; nevertheless, no support or strategies have been provided to prepare these educators how to foster positive gender identities and expressions for transgender and gender nonconforming children; thereby making in-service PD for prekindergarten educators important to address gaps in preservice preparation and PD. After looking at this study results, it is evident that all the participants desired more content-rich PD. The results of this study filled a gap in the

literature. There was research with regards to PD and supporting LGBTQ equity issues; however, there was a lack of research that specifically addressed transgender and gender nonconforming issues. This current knowledge in the EC field may provide EC educators with a voice to assess and communicate awareness regarding PD opportunities that may contribute to creating PD opportunities that specifically focus on the content of transgender and gender nonconforming equity issues. Focusing on this issue improves EC educators' knowledge and self-efficacy, as well as focusing on the whole child.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Head Start Teachers

What experiences do you have working with children who are perceived to be transgender or gender non-conforming? What are some concrete strategies you use to support these children? If you have not had any experiences, what specific strategy would you use to support these children?

Please describe any professional development training that specifically addressed transgender or gender non-conforming children and how to support them? If you have not had any professional development on this topic, how do you support these children in your class?

Head Start Administrators

Do you feel administrators should provide professional development regarding transgender and gender non-conforming children to early childhood educators? If yes why, and if not why?

Administrators, what is your rationale for providing professional development that specifically address transgender or gender non-conforming children, and how teachers can support them?

Head Start Curriculum Specialists

Curriculum specialists, how will professional development regarding supporting transgender

and gender non-conforming children help you support teachers in their classrooms?

Have there been any experiences in your life that influenced your understanding of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals?

Prompts

How do you define transgender and gender non-conforming?

What does gender identity development mean to you as an early childhood educator, and how might your perspective influence or inform your lesson plans?

What are some challenges that may prevent you from addressing the topic of transgender and gender non-conforming children?

How might you benefit from the professional development trainings regarding transgender and gender non-conforming children?

What would you like to see as a result of this study; in other words, what are your perspectives about how research findings of this study can help you? Please share any perspectives that you have that were not covered in this interview.