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Early Childhood National Board Certified Teachers' Perspectives on Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Gay Fitzgibbon Barnes
Walden University

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Gay Fitzgibbon Barnes

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Appropriate Practice

by

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PhD, Alabama A&M University, 2007

EdS, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1995

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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February 2022

Abstract

Many early childhood teachers feel increased pressure to prioritize academic rigor in their early childhood classrooms over student centered developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood National Board Certified Teachers' (NBCTS) perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. The National Association for the Educators of Young Children guidelines for DAP served as the conceptual framework for the study. The research question focused on early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the practices and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. A total of 10 early childhood teachers who earned National Board Certification in the area of Early Childhood Generalist in 2017 shared their perspectives in semistructured interviews. Open and axial coding were used to analyze data. Through the use of thematic analysis five themes emerged: (a) teachers believed an understanding of DAP and young children is important; (b) teachers used a variety of DAP teaching practices; (c) teachers perceived that school, district, and state policy influence their use of DAP; (d) teachers believed they learn about DAP when they collaborate with colleagues; and (e) teachers believed they are responsible for developing the social and emotional health and well-being of students. Further research regarding perspectives on DAP of early childhood NBCTs who teach in different geographic regions or perspectives of early childhood teachers who are not NBCTs is recommended. The study findings have the potential to effect positive social change by providing knowledge that early childhood educators and stakeholders can use to improve the use of DAP and strategies.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my husband, Jim. I love the life we've built together. You are the most selfless, generous person I know. I have been working on this project for more than half the time we've been married. Thank you for encouraging me to pursue this degree, even though I know there must be times that you have regretted that decision. Thank you for all you've given up and given to me so I could complete this goal. I am looking forward to having more time to make more memories with you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In this study, I explored early childhood National Board Certified Teachers' (NBCTs') perspectives on the developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Many early childhood teachers feel increased pressure to prioritize academic rigor in early childhood classrooms over student-centered DAP (Bassok et al., 2016; Franko et al., 2018; Harmon & Viruru, 2018; Riley-Ayers & Figueras-Daniel, 2018). According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009), DAP in early childhood classrooms refers to practices focused on supporting the growth of young children through all learning domains, cognitive, physical, and social emotional. Although these domains may be identified separately, they overlap within a young child's growth, and encouraging proficiency in one area promotes proficiency in the others (National Research Council, 2015). All areas—cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development—are crucial to learning. Potential positive social change implications of this study may include providing information for educators who are responsible for preparing professional learning experiences for early childhood teachers. Potentially, this information may be used to plan effective, high-quality professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators, thus improving their understanding and use of DAP.

In Chapter 1, I summarize the background, problem statement, and purpose of the study. I then identify and state the conceptual framework. I discuss the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, and scope and delimitations, after which I outline the

study limitations and provide the significance of the study. Chapter 1 concludes with a summary and a transition to Chapter 2.

Background

DAP in early childhood classrooms refers to practices focused on supporting the growth of young children including the cognitive, physical, and social-emotional learning domains. These practices were developed from research on child development and learning (NAEYC, 2009). The current DAP policy statement identifies areas of practice in which early childhood teachers make decisions that impact the effectiveness of practice and instruction. These six areas of practice center on creating a learning community, developing healthy teacher-family relationships, assessing development and learning, teaching age-appropriate curriculum, planning and applying curriculum that supports learners, and professionalism (NAEYC, 2020). Although DAP is widely recognized within the field of early childhood education as the most appropriate framework to educate young children, current national trends and policies emphasize the academic domain often neglecting the physical, and social-emotional domains (Abry et al., 2014; Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015; Graue et al., 2017; Stipek et al., 2017).

Early childhood education refers to the care and education of children from birth through age 8 (Gallo-Fox & Cuccuini-Harmon, 2018; Graue et al., 2017). When children are appropriately engaged in learning, positive learner outcomes are evidenced in greater student learning gains (Brown & Mowry, 2015). The prevalence of state and national policies focused on standards-based learning and high-stakes accountability measures has impacted how teachers teach young learners. Brown and Weber (2016) reported their

findings that early childhood teachers struggle with implementing DAP when teaching in settings focused on, and driven by, standardized curriculum and standardized test scores. They concluded there is a great need for early childhood educators to be able to articulate the importance of DAP, which supports the individuality of students while also fulfilling the academic expectations of stakeholders.

Effective early childhood educators are intentional and purposeful in their teaching strategies (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives are also significant indicators of teacher quality (Hur et al., 2015). The interconnectedness of teacher beliefs and practices are complicated (Murray, 2015; Walter & Lippard, 2017). Early childhood teachers are responsible for providing young children high-quality learning environments, for protecting young children from the stress that may be occurring in and out of the classroom, and for preparing them to grow up to be contributing members of society (Phillips et al., 2016). Interactions between early childhood educators and the children they teach are a critical component of quality instruction, and teachers guide these interactions (Phillips et al., 2016; Stanton-Chapman, 2015).

There is a growing body of research concluding there are important repercussions to the instructional methods and structures of early childhood classrooms. These early childhood experiences have the potential to profoundly impact children's long-term growth in a variety of areas, including language, math, and social-emotional skills (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). Hur et al. (2015) reported that when teachers have child-centered beliefs, both academic achievement and children's ability to self-regulate are

improved. Alford et al. (2016) reported that prekindergarten through second grade students taught by teachers using DAP were more likely to be actively engaged with the teacher's instruction than students taught by teachers not using DAP.

Rigorous professional learning opportunities can play an essential role in helping teachers develop strong DAP (Stipek et al., 2017; Takanishi, 2016). Improvements in the quality of early childhood education should focus, in part, on preparation and professional learning to ensure instruction focuses on DAP (Hur et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2016). Limited relevant research exists about the practices of early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on practices and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP. Becoming an early childhood NBCT is a voluntary form of professional learning. It is grounded in examining and reflecting on an individual's classroom teaching practice and its impact on student learning as related to the Early Childhood Generalist (EC Gen) Standards (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS], 2021). These standards are in alignment with and grounded in tenets of DAP as is evidenced by the focus on understanding the development of young children, partnering with families and communities, issues of equity, as well as effectively managing and monitoring student growth and learning (NBPTS, 2021).

Numerous quantitative studies suggesting the positive effect of National Board Certification (NBC) on student achievement for students in Grades 3–12 have been conducted (Chetty et al., 2017; Cowan & Goldhaber, 2016; Goldhaber, 2016; Horoi & Bhai, 2018; Manzeske et al., 2017; Mokher et al., 2018). McKenzie (2013) conducted a quantitative study to compare the perceived use of DAP by EC Gen NBCTs to their non-

EC Gen NBCT colleagues and reported that EC Gen NBCTs' perceive they use a greater range of DAP in their classrooms. McKenzie (2013) recommended a need for future studies employing qualitative interviews to investigate EC Gen NBCTs' perspectives about how achieving NBC influences their use of DAP.

There is limited qualitative research investigating the perspectives early childhood NBCTs' of the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. This qualitative study addressed this gap in practice by exploring early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. As a result, this study may provide knowledge that early childhood educators and stakeholders can use to improve the use of DAP and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines.

Problem Statement

Many early childhood teachers feel increased pressure to prioritize academic rigor in the early childhood classroom over student-centered DAP (Bassok et al., 2016; Erickson, 2016; Franko et al., 2018; Harmon & Viruru, 2018; Riley-Ayers & Figueras-Daniel, 2018). Experts in the field of early childhood education tout the benefits of DAP as a direct way to encourage the academic success of young children (Costantino-Lane, 2019; NAEYC, 2009; Sanders & Farago, 2018). DAP promotes teaching to students' individual levels to encourage learning and growth in ways that help children meet challenging and attainable goals in early childhood settings (Brown et al., 2018; Cople & Bredekamp, 2009; Sanders & Farago, 2018). The use of DAP can reduce learning gaps, create seamless transitions between preschool and early elementary education, and

emphasizes the vital role of teacher knowledge and decision making (NAEYC, 2009).

Despite the support for the use of DAP, early childhood teachers are increasingly pressured to focus largely on the academic area of DAP with limited focus placed on the other equally important domains (Chan, 2016; Haslip & Gullo, 2017; National Research Council, 2015; Repko-Erwin, 2017).

National-, state-, and district-level policies focus on rigorous academic achievement, but academics are only one component of DAP (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Haslip & Gullo, 2017; Repko-Erwin, 2017). This emphasis on academic, cognitive learning at the exclusion of instructional practices that also support physical, social, and emotional learning is not reflective of DAP. Central to DAP is the premise that all learning domains (i.e., physical, social-emotional, and cognitive) are not only equally important but are also integrally related. What and how children learn in one area affects what and how children learn in another (Brown et al., 2018; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Knowledgeable, accomplished early childhood educators are in a unique position to educate stakeholders about the ways DAP in early childhood classrooms can improve student-learning outcomes (Brown, Feger, & Mowry, 2015; Fowler, 2017). There is much research supporting the influence of NBCTs on student achievement in Grades 3–12. There is limited research concerning the perspectives of early childhood NBCTs on practices and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. This study may add information to the literature to fill this gap in practice and provide needed information about the perspectives of EC Gen NBCTs and their use of DAP.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. A defining feature of basic qualitative research is the focus on understanding participants' perspectives about their experiences and how individuals make meaning from these experiences (Merriam, 2009). The use of DAP in early childhood classrooms has been shown to improve both short- and long-term benefits for children (Yoshikawa et al., 2016). Information gained from this study may assist stakeholders to better understand how early childhood teachers can be supported to implement DAP.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study: What are early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines?

Conceptual Framework

The National Association for the Educators of Young Children (NAEYC) guidelines for DAP served as the conceptual framework for the study. The qualitative nature of the NAEYC guidelines for DAP influenced my decision to conduct a basic qualitative study to explore the perspectives of EC Gen NBCTs about their use of practices and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines. The conceptual framework of the NAEYC guidelines for DAP supported the exploration of early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. I used the conceptual framework of the NAEYC guidelines for DAP to develop the

guiding research question to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on their use of DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with these guidelines. The NAEYC guidelines for DAP also informed the construction of interview questions and provided a lens through which the data were analyzed and reported. A more thorough explanation of the conceptual framework is provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This study was a basic qualitative study. I explored early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Basic qualitative research allows the researcher to understand how participants interpret their experiences as well as the meaning they assign to those experiences (Merriam, 2009). I determined that a quantitative design was not the most appropriate for this study as the purpose was to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives about their use of practices and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines. Quantitative researchers focus on the numeric reporting of data rather than illuminating the opinions, perspectives, or experiences of the study participants (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, a quantitative design was not the most appropriate for exploring the perceptions of the participants. A basic qualitative design using semistructured, one-on-one telephone interviews allowed me to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on their use of practices and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines. According to Ravitch and Riggan (2016), a basic qualitative design is the appropriate qualitative approach when the goal of the researcher is to understand the perspectives of others in specific experiences.

I collected data for the study using semistructured, one-on-one telephone interviews. The potential participants for this study were EC Gen NBCTs who achieved NBC in 2017 or later. I used the NBPTS directory to find names of the EC Gen NBCTs in the state where the study was conducted. I invited 74 early childhood NBCTs to participate in the study. Some of the teachers listed in the NBPTS directory were no longer teaching grades prekindergarten through third grade or were no longer teaching in the state where the study was conducted. From the pool of participants, the first 10 who volunteered and met the criteria were asked to participate in semistructured, one-on-one telephone interviews. I excluded from participation in the study any teacher holding EC Gen NBC whom I have supported as a candidate. I proposed to interview 10–15 participants. It was determined that data saturation was reached with 10 participant interviews. In qualitative research, the number of participants selected for the study must be large enough to confirm that most perspectives are revealed, but not so large that the information learned becomes repetitive (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). Data were analyzed using open and axial coding to identify themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Definitions

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP): Research-based teaching practices that are focused on creating a classroom community, planning, and teaching age-appropriate curriculum, assessing, and developing learning, and developing teacher-family relationships (NAEYC, 2009).

Early childhood generalist (EC Gen): A teacher of children ages 3–8 who has received an advanced certification by the NBPTS affirming the teacher has formally demonstrated the dispositions of accomplished teaching as outlined by the NBPTS (NBPTS, 2021).

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): A nonprofit organization that works to define and establish quality education programs for children from birth to age 8 (Olmore, 2020).

National Board Certification (NBC): An advanced professional certification available to in-service teachers who voluntarily complete requirements identified by the NBPTS (NBPTS, n.d.-c).

National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT): A teacher who has successfully completed the four components specified by the NBPTS, identifying the teacher as an accomplished teacher (NBPTS, n.d.-c).

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS): An independent organization formed to develop standards on accomplished teaching and to strengthen the quality of teaching for students in the United States (NBPTS, n.d.-d).

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Early Childhood Generalist Standards: NBPTS Standards that define effective early childhood instruction including a teacher's understanding and use of child development when planning, monitoring, and managing for learning; collaborating with stakeholders; and treating students equitably (NBPTS, 2021).

Assumptions

In this basic qualitative research study, I explored early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Two assumptions were made about the research. I assumed that participating teachers responded to the interviews truthfully and that their responses were grounded in their individual experiences and knowledge of practices and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines. Merriam (2009) noted that this assumption (i.e., that participants will be truthful) is intrinsic in a qualitative study that relies on the perceptions of participants. Other assumptions are that the early childhood NBCTs' possessed sufficient knowledge about DAP guidelines and that they provided rich, informative data allowing for the identification of common emerging themes. The EC Gen NBCTs' experiences provided important perspectives about their use of DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines.

Scope and Delimitations

In this basic qualitative research study, I explored early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. This study was delimited by scope. I planned to explore only the perspectives of early childhood teachers who hold EC Gen NBC. Participants were teachers in a single Southeastern state who achieved certification in the area of EC Gen in 2017 or later. These participants were classroom teachers with varying levels of experience, and it was expected that each individual offered unique experiences and perspectives. Due to these delimitations, transferability to other populations will be limited.

Limitations

Limitations are possible weaknesses or problems a researcher recognizes within a study (Creswell, 2012). All research has limitations. One possible limitation of this study may be the small number of participants. A small sample size is typical of qualitative research because the aim is to purposefully select participants who can share rich, detailed information in response to the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This study was based on the experiences of a small number of teachers who hold EC GEN NBC, which will affect the transferability of the findings. Another limitation of this research study is the small geographical region represented. I only reported on the experiences of EC Gen NBCTs from one Southeastern state. This will also affect the transferability of the findings in that teachers who have EC GEN NBC and who work in other parts of the country may have different experiences. A third limitation is researcher bias. I hold EC Gen NBC and have deep professional beliefs about DAP. I recognize these beliefs are my own and are not shared by all others. Because I was the sole researcher in this study, my personal perspectives could have potentially influenced the data collection and analysis. To guard against this researcher bias, I kept a reflexive journal in which I recorded my experiences interviewing participants as well as specifics regarding the research process.

Significance

The focus of this basic qualitative research study was exploring early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Researchers have examined the type of classroom instructional practices

implemented by early childhood teachers (Bassok et al., 2016; Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015; Engel et al., 2016). Using a quantitative design, McKenzie (2013) sought to determine whether EC Gen NBCTs' perceive that they use a more diverse range of DAP compared to teachers who do not hold this certification. However, minimal literature exists to qualitatively address the perspectives on the DAP and strategies EC Gen NBCTs use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. EC Gen NBCTs are considered to be accomplished early childhood educators (NBPTS, 2021). The perspectives of EC Gen NBCTs on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines could lead to a greater understanding of these DAP and strategies and how early childhood teachers can implement them in their early childhood classrooms.

This study is significant because it explored early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. This study has the potential to provide a unique contribution to this area of research. Experts in early childhood education consider DAP best practice for teaching young children (Coppole & Bredekamp, 2009). The results of this study may lead to more meaningful professional learning experiences that will support early childhood teachers' use of DAP. As a result, this study has the potential to effect positive social change by providing knowledge that early childhood educators and stakeholders can use to improve the use of DAP and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines. This information could possibly be used to plan effective, high-quality professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators, thus improving their understanding and use of DAP. This increased

understanding may provide opportunities for children to be engaged in high quality early childhood experiences leading to better outcomes in learning and development.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I explained the problem and discussed the need to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the practices and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. I provided a research question and a rationale for choosing a basic qualitative study design. In discussing the conceptual framework, I grounded the study in the NAEYC DAP guidelines. The significance for social change was also discussed, providing further justification for conducting the study. Chapter 2 includes a review of current literature relevant to the research problem, examining early childhood education, early childhood educators, DAP, early childhood education policy, NBC, the NBPTS, and the EC Gen Standards. A more detailed discussion of the methodology for the study is presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem this study addressed is that many early childhood teachers feel increased pressure to prioritize academic rigor in the early childhood classroom over student-centered DAP (Bassok et al., 2016; Erickson, 2016; Franko et al., 2018; Harmon & Viruru, 2018; Riley-Ayers & Figueras-Daniel, 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Although DAP is considered to be best practice in early childhood education, the increased number of policies at the local-, state- and national-levels that focus on academics has made the use of DAP less prevalent (Thompson, 2016). Early childhood teachers who meet the requirements to be NBCTs are deemed accomplished in the early childhood education field. This distinction puts them in a position to inform policymakers about the importance of DAP in early childhood classrooms to improve learning outcomes for young children. This chapter includes the iterative search process conducted for the literature review, the conceptual framework of the study, and a review of the current literature relative to the study.

Literature Search Strategy

A literature search was conducted using Google, Google Scholar, and the Walden University Library for relevant peer-reviewed articles and journals. To perform the search, I used ProQuest, ERIC, Academic Search Premiere, PsycINFO, and Thoreau. I used the same search terms for each database, which included *accountability, early childhood, early childhood education, developmentally appropriate practice, standards for developmentally appropriate practice, standards, DAP, tension, policy, paradox,*

standardization, National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Board Certification, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, impact of EC Gen NBC on student learning, National Board Standards, Early Childhood Generalist Standards, and National Board certification areas. I also used Google to exhaustively and extensively search the NAEYC website and related resources for information related to developmentally appropriate practice, position statements about DAP, early childhood standards, relationship between NAEYC early childhood standards and NBPTS EC Gen Standards, and position statements about early childhood standards. I also performed an exhaustive and extensive Google search of the NBPTS website and related sources for information about NBPTS EC Gen Standards, impact of NBC on student learning, relationship between NAEYC standards and NBPTS EC Gen NBC standards, and portfolio component explanations.

Conceptual Framework

To explore the perspectives of early childhood NBCTs and the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines, I selected the NAEYC Guidelines for DAP as the conceptual framework for the study. This framework guided the development of the research question, the interviews with study participants, as well as the analysis of data.

The first iteration of the DAP position statement was released in 1986. The DAP position statement was updated in 2009 and, most recently, in 2020. The 2020 iteration identifies six areas of practice in which early childhood teachers make decisions that impact the effectiveness of practice and instruction. These six areas of practice center on

creating a learning community, developing healthy teacher–family relationships, assessing development and learning, teaching age-appropriate curriculum, planning and applying curriculum that supports learners, and professionalism (NAEYC, 2020). The NAEYC has vocally championed the use of DAP and stresses DAP is directly linked to academic success (NAEYC, 2009).

Learning is not a linear process for young children, and they need many exposures to new information before it can be internalized (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). DAP helps early childhood teachers deliver instruction at a child’s appropriate level and has also been found to be more intrinsically motivating (Stipek et al., 2017). Children learn in very different ways and at their own pace and time. It is important to understand that there are typical learning trajectories that can help teachers know how to sequence instruction in ways that help students connect to and build on prior learning. The research question for this study was designed to explore early childhood NBCT’s perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Interview questions and probes allowed these teachers to share such perspectives.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

The literature review provides a thorough survey of the current peer-reviewed literature related to the research questions.

Early Childhood Education

Researchers have identified early childhood as a pivotal time of human development when brain growth is significant, and a child’s brain is most drastically influenced by all stimulation (Shonkoff, 2017). Ensuring children learn necessary

academic and social skills is best served by access to quality early childhood education (Alford et al., 2016). Bakken et al. (2018) conducted a study designed to measure the effect of early childhood education on the later performance of students. They concluded that students who had access to high-quality early childhood education realized more significant academic gains than peers in the control group and were rated by their classroom teachers as having strong social skills and positive dispositions about school.

Within the early childhood education community, it is agreed that the development of young children is not linear; children develop at different rates. Milestones are met within a span (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). In 1925, Gesell published his seminal work on child development. He found that for each measure studied, there was a clear pattern of when children could complete specific tasks, but he also identified average age spans for these tasks (Gesell, 1925). In a follow-up study, including roughly 1300 children from across the nation, found the results to be consistent with those of the original research in 1925 (Guddemi et al., 2014). Guddemi et al. (2014) concluded that children across the country reach developmental milestones much as they have over the last 100 years.

Understanding the differences in how children develop and learn aids teachers in planning targeted instruction directed to each child's "zone of proximal development" (Stipek et al., 2017). Moran and Senseny (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine the connection between a child's chronological age and their developmental age as characterized by the Gesell Developmental Observation-Revised assessment tool. They reported that kindergarten students in the United States typically begin school at the

chronological age of five and are expected to learn to read to meet district literacy standards. The findings revealed that the developmental age of the children in their study was younger than their chronological age. Providing developmentally appropriate instruction within the zone of proximal development is important (Engel et al., 2016). Carlsson-Paige et al. (2015) noted that when children's educational experiences are out of sync with their developmental level, learning needs, or culture, it can cause harm. Children may feel anxious, inadequate, and confused. Erickson (2016) reported similar findings from a review of the literature she completed to understand the role of DAP and kindergarten literacy instruction. She reported that DAP is typically absent in academic focused kindergarten classrooms causing the learner to feel inadequate. Another finding from Erickson's study was that an accomplished kindergarten teacher can create learning environments that equally blend child-centered and skill-based strategies.

Early Childhood Educators

Early childhood educators are the quality cornerstone for prekindergarten through third grade (Phillips et al., 2016). Well-qualified early childhood educators are critical in providing high-quality early childhood education (Dougherty, 2014; Manning et al., 2019). Early childhood educators who are licensed or certified to teach young children have specific training, and thus, specific strategies for implementing DAP grounded in their understanding of how children grow and develop (Hooper, 2018). Accomplished early childhood teachers can identify, explain, and articulate the relationships between developmentally appropriate instruction and the academic achievement of their students

as well as plan effective DAP lessons for their students that have a positive impact on student learning (NBPTS, 2021).

Early childhood educators often work with teachers and principals who are lacking in knowledge about DAP and its role in early childhood education (Brown et al., 2019). Grisson et al. (2017) conducted a quantitative study on school staffing. Using student performance data as the measure of effectiveness, they reported that school administrators frequently re-assigned ineffective upper-grades teachers to early grades, which resulted in decreased growth for kindergarten through second grade students in both math and reading. Hooper (2018) concluded that kindergarten students taught by a teacher with early childhood education licensing or certification had greater gains on math and reading assessments at the end of their first grade year.

Fowler (2020) investigated the different configurations of states' teaching licenses for early childhood educators and elementary educators. The researcher noted that when teachers receive a kindergarten through sixth grade elementary education license rather than a kindergarten through third grade early childhood license, they are often lacking in specialized coursework supporting critical teaching practices for young children. Conclusions for this study included that policymakers should use this information to best prepare teachers licensed to teach kindergarten through third grade to meet the specific and specialized demands of teaching young children. Hooper (2018) compared the impact of academic learning gains of kindergarten and first grade students taught by teachers with certification in early childhood education versus those taught by teachers with elementary certification. Results suggested a small positive effect for students when

taught by a teacher holding early childhood education certification. Manning et al. (2019) reviewed 48 studies focused on the correlation of teacher qualifications and early childhood learning environments and found a positive association between the two.

Education Policy and DAP

Across the United States, school districts have made changes in policy to provide consistency in the educational experiences of children in preschool through third grade. The goal is to increase the likelihood that gains made in the early grades will be sustained, leading to more significant overall developmental and learning outcomes (Stipek et al., 2017). Miller and Almon's 2009 report, *Crisis in the Kindergarten*, outlined several changes in kindergarten classrooms in the United States over the last several decades. One change has been the shift from play-based learning to a focus on academic skills. This change has created less focus on DAP and more on the use of scripted curricula. The report concluded that this trend should be reversed (Miller & Almon, 2009). Harmon and Viruru (2018) noted that the trend toward academic kindergarten is detrimental to both early childhood educators and young children. They further concluded this stance largely ignores the differences of individual children and does not reflect, nor honor, the diverse and complex nature of young children.

Stipek et al. (2017) noted that early childhood classrooms are directly affected by district, state, and federal policies. A trend in kindergarten being more academically focused is emerging, causing some to refer to it as "the new first grade" (Bassok et al., 2016). Bassok et al. (2016) found that when more kindergarten instruction focused on academic skills centered on paper-pencil tasks, less time was provided for science and the

arts. Policymakers have established gains in student learning as the primary focus of education reform. Early childhood educators are in a unique position to use this opportunity to educate stakeholders about how DAP in early childhood classrooms can improve student-learning outcomes (Brown, Feger, & Mowry, 2015).

Educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders have become increasingly interested in aligning educational objectives, curricula, standards, assessments, and teacher qualifications between prekindergarten and the earliest grades of the K–12 systems. This interest is significant because it is grounded in research connecting the alignment of early childhood education to increased academic learning and positive social and emotional behaviors among students during elementary years and beyond (Abry et al., 2014). Many stakeholders in the realm of early childhood education trace the change in focus from exploration and social skills development to academics to the accountability measures included in the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. (Goldstein, 2007; Pianta et al., 2007). Testing for children before third grade was not a requirement of NCLB, but the overwhelming pressures school administrators and teachers felt, led to a “trickle-down” effect. Stakeholders felt the need for even those teachers in untested grades to begin academically preparing kindergarten, first, and second-grade students for standardized testing (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Jacob & Ludwig, 2008). Brown et al. (2019) studied how various stakeholders recognized and understood the changes in kindergarten classrooms as a result of district, state, and federal policies. They reported that stakeholders representing these various levels reported discomfort with how these changes created a focus on academic learning experiences at the expense

of learning experiences that also focus on children's social, emotional, and physical development and knowledge. An unintended consequence of federal policies such as NCLB is the narrowing of curriculum that focuses on academic learning in isolated and specific ways that are counter to the tenets of DAP (McKenney & Bradley, 2016).

Children from birth to age 4 are most often supported by privately funded preschool settings, but children ages 5–8 are most often supported by public schools funded with public money. An increased interest in improving the quality of early childhood programs in the early 2000s brought funding opportunities for public kindergarten through twelfth grade schools to add prekindergarten programs for 3- and 4-year-olds (Gallo-Fox & Cuccuini-Harmon, 2018; Graue et al., 2017). Standards and assessments were developed and often these were not aligned with DAP (Graue et al., 2017). Graue et al. (2017) conducted a case study to understand how stakeholders perceived prekindergarten policy. They reported that the pressure felt by the stakeholders of schools serving kindergarten to twelfth grade to meet stringent accountability measures translated into kindergarten and first grade curriculum being delivered to 3- and 4-year-old preschoolers. Mongillo (2017) reported that the trend of housing preschool programs for children ages 3 and 4 in public elementary schools can be detrimental if principals of these buildings are not knowledgeable about DAP for early learners. Mongillo noted that intentionally developing strong school principals who are knowledgeable about and supportive of DAP could be beneficial for all learners housed in public schools.

Quality early childhood education involves a child's learning across the cognitive, social-emotional, and physical domains of learning. As kindergarten, and in many cases prekindergarten classes for 3- and 4-year-olds, have been connected to public K-12 systems, there has been a trend toward a focus on academic curriculum that does not allow early childhood teachers autonomy in making curriculum decisions based on the needs of the individual learners (Gallo-Fox & Cuccuini-Harmon, 2018). Franko et al. (2018) found varying degrees of alignment between systems supporting young children in preschool settings versus K-12 settings. Once children move to a K-12 setting, there is seemingly less emphasis on the need for teachers to use DAP in their teaching. Franko et al. found significant variance in the alignment of prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms. They also reported that less alignment existed between prekindergarten and kindergarten in centers and schools that served populations of poverty and children of color. Additionally, this population of children received less instruction guided by DAP.

In 2011, many states in the United States adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS included rigorous academic standards in language arts and math for kindergarten students. There was much debate about these standards from many early childhood education advocates who argued the CCSS do not reflect DAP (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). In 2012, as more than 45 states were in the process of adopting the CCSS, the NAEYC released a paper sharing what the association perceived as both the concerns and opportunities the implementation of the new standards presented. The widespread adoption of the CCSS included children in kindergarten through Grade 3 classrooms. Kindergarten through third grade overlaps with the later years of early

childhood education and is an area of great interest to the NAEYC. From the perspective of NAEYC, although these standards only directly impacted the kindergarten through third grade span of the early childhood curriculum, the association recognized the potential for a narrowing of the curriculum for these learners that would focus only on language arts and math. Gerde et al. (2018) studied early childhood teachers' feelings of self-efficacy about teaching literacy, math, and science. They reported that the teachers in their study reported greater self-efficacy in teaching literacy and math than science. The researchers noted that these findings could be related to the emphasis of literacy instruction and assessment in both pre-service courses and in-service professional development, pressure from administrators to focus on literacy instruction, and the lack of inclusion of science on kindergarten readiness screeners.

Minicozzi (2016) explored how early childhood teachers negotiated the conflicts of standards based teaching mandates and the need for using DAP in early childhood classrooms. The early childhood teachers involved with this study indicated their frustration about accountability mandates that are contrary to their understanding of DAP. Minicozzi reported that early childhood teachers could be supported by being involved in decisions about teaching approaches and by working with administrators who have an understanding of early childhood education and DAP. Chan (2016) reported that kindergarten teachers in her mixed methods study demonstrated a discrepancy between their philosophy and their practices. Reasons cited for these differences were professional education and personal reflection and increased pressure from stakeholders that students meet academic demands. Costantino-Lane (2020) researched the perceptions of

kindergarten teachers who had past experience teaching in developmental kindergartens and were currently teaching in standards-based kindergartens. The 103 study participants perceived that the literacy curriculum was developmentally inappropriate for the students, that there was excessive testing, and the number of literacy standards students were supposed to learn was unmanageable. These teachers perceived that developmental kindergartens were more advantageous for their students.

One word often associated with this focus on academic achievement is rigor. Academic rigor is most often considered a sign of high-quality instruction. Academic rigor focuses on academics, which is only one component of DAP. DAP can be rigorous when they allow children to use and develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills in the context of engaging academic learning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). According to Brown and Mowry (2015), academic rigor can and should be incorporated into DAP and instruction for young children. They noted a learning environment that is both academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate exists when early childhood teachers plan instruction allowing for many learning opportunities that consider children's individual development and sociocultural needs. The ability to do this depends largely on the quality of the classroom teaching, the teacher's understanding of pedagogy, and the ability to connect instruction to the needs of young children (Snow & Pizzolongo, 2014; Stipek et al., 2017).

There is also evidence that instruction concentrated on academics in kindergarten can be beneficial to students' learning (Engel et al., 2016). One concern about the move from DAP to a focus on academics is the impact this may have on developmentally

appropriate learning experiences that focus on developing executive functioning abilities, as well as mental and physical health (Bassok et al., 2016). Executive functioning, mental, and physical health are all considered critical predictors of a child's long-term outcomes (Bassok et al., 2016). Costantino-Lane (2019) conducted a qualitative study to explore the perspectives of 10 kindergarten teachers with experience teaching in both developmental and academic kindergartens. These teachers perceived that the changes to a more academically focused kindergarten were considerable and that not all children are ready for the academic standards they are expected to meet. Early childhood education stakeholders agree there are, and should be, ways to incorporate engaging literacy and math instruction that are consistent with DAP (Bassok et al., 2016; Clements et al., 2014; Pondiscio, 2020). The ability to do this depends largely on the classroom teacher and his or her understanding of pedagogy, the quality of teaching, and ability to connect instruction to the needs of young children (Katz, 2015; Pianta et al., 2016; Snow & Pizzolongo, 2014; Stipek et al., 2017).

Professional Learning and Early Childhood

The policy changes of the last several decades have directly affected early childhood classrooms (Bassok et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2018; McKenney & Bradley, 2016; Stipek et al., 2017). Part of helping teachers appropriately address these changes is providing ample professional learning opportunities (Phillips et al., 2016). Han (2014) reported early childhood educators have few professional learning opportunities designed to foster the development of theory and practice. There is a lack of coherence in professional learning for teachers of prekindergarten through third grade. The

prekindergarten workforce is lacking consistency and structure with a more coherent system for kindergarten through twelfth grade teachers (Phillips et al., 2016). Ivrendi and Johnson (2002) researched the relationship between professional certifications, professional learning, and DAP. They concluded that teachers with early childhood certification had a better understanding of DAP than did their elementary or other/specialized certified counterparts, thus making the type of professional development to which teachers have access essential. One recommendation from this study is the need for professional learning, specifically focused on teachers developing an in-depth understanding of DAP. NBC is professional learning that has the potential to create consistency in professional development for teachers working with students ages 3–8.

Fonsén and Ukkonen-Mikkola (2019) conducted a qualitative research study to investigate teacher perceptions about the impact of professional development on teaching practices. The results of their research indicated early childhood teachers perceived professional development gave them a greater breadth of pedagogical knowledge, the developmental nature of young children, and a greater ability to advocate for best practices in early childhood education. Mages et al. (2018) studied what type of professional learning was most impactful on early childhood educators. The 28 study participants provided quantitative and qualitative data, which indicated their belief that professional learning, that focused on the application of learning that was relevant to their teaching context, was most beneficial. Spelman et al., (2016) studied early childhood teachers of grades kindergarten through third to examine the impact of professional

development and coaching on math instruction and classroom culture. These researchers concluded that when teachers participated in professional development focused on best instructional practices for teaching math and classroom culture, quantitative measures showed gains for these areas.

Professional development that is relevant and focused on best practices allows early childhood teachers opportunities to learn how to change their practices in ways that best support young children. Brown, Weber, and Yoon (2015) interviewed teachers to learn about their experiences participating in professional development designed to use DAP as a method for instruction to develop culturally responsive practice (CRP). After participating in this professional development, the researchers reported the teachers had a better understanding of both DAP and CRP. Opportunities for early childhood teachers to participate in this kind of effective professional learning are frequently limited (Markowitz et al., 2018). Riley-Ayers and Figueras-Daniel (2018) examined how professional learning experiences supporting teachers' use of DAP instructional methods affected vocabulary development in an under-resourced school with emergent bilingual learners. They reported the professional learning support was effective in helping early childhood teachers implement DAP instructional strategies that had a positive impact. Betawi and Jabbar (2019) studied the perceptions towards DAP of early childhood preservice teachers and reported that these future teachers identified DAP as an important and relevant child focused approach to teaching prior to field experience opportunities. The researchers also noted that once the early childhood pre-service teachers began

participating in field experiences, they recognized the difficulties of implementing DAP in traditional education programs.

Historical View of the NBPTS

The idea for the NBPTS began in 1983. It was at this time, the report, *A Nation at Risk* was issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education and reported grim findings on secondary education (NBPTS, n.d.-b). Subsequently, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy brought together a group of stakeholders to recommend solutions to this problem. In 1986, this group released the report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. The NBPTS began in 1987 and was established as a way for the teaching profession to define and recognize accomplished teaching. The mission of the NBPTS is to provide a framework of accomplished teaching and provide a voluntary system of advanced board certification that will professionalize teaching (NBPTS, n.d.-b).

NBC

To pursue NBC, teachers must have a bachelor's degree, a current teaching license or certification, as well as three years of successful teaching experience (NBPTS, n.d.-a). NBC is an advanced certificate granted in conjunction with state licensure or certification. It indicates a teacher has voluntarily completed a rigorous, performance-based, peer-reviewed assessment based on multiple measures that document accomplished practice (NBPTS, n.d.-a). Through the successful completion of NBC, teachers show they thoroughly understand specific content knowledge, the students they

teach, and how to use assessment data to influence their teaching and planning (NBPTS, n.d.-c).

EC Gen Standards

The EC Gen Standards are organized into 10 standards (NBPTS, 2021). The standards are not ordered according to priority; instead, they are ordered to promote clarity and understanding. Each standard describes an integral part of accomplished teaching, and while they are written separately, they often co-occur as this is exemplified in accomplished practice (NBPTS, 2021). The EC Gen Standards describe accomplished early childhood teaching. The 10 standards are related to knowledge of child development, partnering with families and communities, equity and diversity, knowledge of content, instructional and assessment strategies, classroom environment, reflecting on practice as related to student growth and learning, and professionalism (NBPTS, 2021).

NBCT candidates must complete four components successfully (NBPTS, n.d.-a). The four components focus on content pedagogical knowledge, how a teacher differentiates planning, teaching, and assessment for students, how a teacher collaborates with other relevant stakeholders in ways that benefit students, how the teacher creates appropriate learning environments that foster respectful and beneficial interactions with students, and how the teacher uses reflection of his or her practice to improve teaching (NBPTS, n.d.-a). Although the names of the four components are consistent for each of the 25 certification areas, the instructions and the standards assessed differ. Teachers can complete the components in any order, and they may complete as few as one or as many as four of the components at a time. Candidates have five years to complete the entire

process (NBPTS, n.d.-a). The cost to complete each component is \$475.00, with a total cost of \$1,900. There is an additional \$75.00 annual registration fee. If candidates do not successfully complete any component, they have the option to re-submit the element for an additional cost (NBPTS, n.d.-a).

Research on NBCTs

The positive impact of NBC on student achievement has been widely researched (Cavalluzzo et al., 2014; Chetty et al., 2017; Cowan & Goldhaber, 2016; Goldhaber, 2016). Belson and Husted (2015) studied the association between NBCTs and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) achievement scores for reading and math. They concluded there was a positive relationship between the number of NBCTs teaching in a state and that state's NAEP scores. Horoi and Bhai (2018) conducted a quantitative study to examine the effects on student achievement in math and reading when taught by an NBCT. They found that these students had greater gains than students taught by non-NBCTs.

Manzeske et al. (2017) conducted separate studies in two different states designed to examine the effect of NBCTs on students' academic gains as well as specific student behaviors compared to those of students taught by non-NBCTs. In one state, researchers found no difference in academic gains between the two groups but did find that the fifth grade students taught by NBCTs had slightly better student behaviors. In the second state, the researchers found that student academic gains for the fifth graders were higher, but found no differences, positive nor negative, in student behaviors. The researchers concluded that although their overall findings supported the conclusions of other

researchers that NBCTs do positively affect student academic gains, more research is needed, particularly as related to identifying the specific practices responsible for the student academic growth.

Mokher et al. (2018) conducted a study to learn about the instructional strategies used by NBCTs and how these strategies changed during the certification process compared to the instructional strategies used by teachers who were not pursuing NBC. Secondary math and science teachers pursuing NBC were observed at the beginning, middle, and end of the certification process. Teachers not pursuing NBC were observed following the same time frame. The researchers observed strategies over nine different indicators, including areas such as assessment, classroom management, and questioning. The study concluded that the teachers who were NBC candidates had higher initial scores than noncandidates, and there was little change in scores for either group over the three observation periods. Scores did improve for the NBC candidate group for indicators in the classroom culture domain. The conclusion made by the study's authors is that NBC can serve as an indicator of teacher quality.

Petty et al. (2019) studied NBCTs to identify their perspectives about how the process changed their practice. This quantitative study collected data from 496 NBCTs representing a variety of certification areas. The findings showed the participants reported growth in their instructional practices, content knowledge, and leadership. Additionally, the study findings supported positive change concerning the NBPTS Five Core Propositions. The researchers further noted these findings support that the NBC process provides effective professional development for teachers. Houston and Kulinna (2019)

conducted research comparing the decision-making and teaching efficiency of NBC physical education teachers and non-NBC physical education teachers. Although this study employed a small number of participants, the researchers concluded there was no significant difference between the two groups on these measures.

Other research seeks to clarify what impact NBCTs may have on the larger school community. A differentiating characteristic of the NBPTS certification system is an emphasis on teachers participating as members of learning communities. This requirement creates opportunities for NBCTs to serve as mentors and lead professional learning opportunities, both formally and informally. Dagen et al. (2017) conducted research to learn about the various leadership roles NBC teachers accept within schools. The NBCTs who participated in the study reported they most often participated in leadership opportunities related to students' academic growth and those related to supporting the professional development of other teachers. The study participants reported the leadership area in which they least often participated were those related to advocacy for students or the teaching profession.

Summary and Conclusions

A review of the literature focused on the topics relevant to early childhood education, DAP, and NBC reveals the following themes: early childhood education, early childhood educators, education policy and DAP, professional learning and early childhood education, historical view of the NBPTS, National Board Certification, NBPTS EC Gen Standards, and research on NBCTS.

Researchers supports the use of DAP as a best practice to most effectively teach young children (Brown & Mowry, 2015; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Fowler, 2017; Hur et al., 2015). The instructional methods teachers' employ in early childhood classrooms can impact the growth of young learners in both the short- and long-term (Bakken et al., 2018). Learning for young children is not linear (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). Understanding the non-linear differences in how young children learn and translating this into DAP can also provide higher levels of motivation for children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Stipek et al., 2017). Changes in local, state, and federal testing and accountability policies have caused a greater focus on academic rigor often at the peril of DAP (Bassok et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2018; Katz, 2015; Snow & Pizzolongo, 2014; Stipek et al., 2017). Phillips et al. (2016) reported that society has high expectations for early childhood teachers, and professional learning opportunities are one way to help early childhood teachers strengthen their practice. It is reported in the literature that there are few professional learning opportunities offered to early childhood teachers that focus on both theory and practice, which would be reflective of DAP (Han, 2014; Phillips et al., 2016).

Many of the studies that have been conducted to learn about NBC have been quantitative. These studies have focused on the impact of student learning as measured by achievement scores. Jang and Horn (2017) reported the NBC process is useful at identifying effective teachers as related to student achievement. Other quantitative studies have also noted the positive impact on student achievement when taught by an NBCT (Cantrell et al., 2008; Cavalluzo, 2004; Chingos & Peterson, 2011; Clotfelter et al., 2007;

Goldhaber & Anthony, 2007; Harris & Sass, 2008; Vandervoort et al., 2004). Belson and Husted (2015) analyzed the connection between NBCTs and NAEP scores on reading and math assessments. There are few studies focused on the early grades of pre-kindergarten through third grade and DAP (Ivrendi & Johnson, 2002; McKenzie, 2013). McKenzie (2013) suggested the need for future qualitative research using one on one interviews to investigate early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the influence of NBC on their use of DAP. There is relatively little quantitative or qualitative research investigating the perspectives of early childhood NBCTs on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. This study addressed this gap in the literature and extends the knowledge about the perspectives' early childhood NBCTs' of the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines.

Chapter 2 provided the conceptual framework for the study as well as a discussion of the relevant literature on early childhood education, professional learning, and NBC. Chapter 3 includes the study methodology of participant selection, instrumentation, and the procedures for recruiting participants. The plan for data collection and data analysis is also provided. Lastly, I discuss issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. In this chapter, I provide a description of the research method including the research design and the rationale. I also describe the role of the researcher, the methodology used, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question I addressed in this study is as follows: What are early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines?

The phenomenon of this study was the perspectives on the practices and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. The role of accomplished early childhood educators is critical in ensuring that the early years of learning are acknowledged as vital to the healthy growth and future success of all children (NBPTS, 2021; National Research Council, 2015). The purpose of this study was to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines.

This study was a basic qualitative study using interviews. Using this approach helped me explore the perspectives of early childhood NBCTs about the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. This is an acceptable approach given that the focus of this study was to explore the perspectives of the teachers who participated in this study and the meaning they assigned to their experiences (see

Merriam, 2009). Other qualitative approaches were considered but not selected. I ruled out a case study approach because to learn about early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the practices and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines does not require analysis of a phenomenon or the use of multiple viewpoints or data sources (see Creswell, 2012). I ruled out a grounded theory approach because grounded theory would be appropriate if the purpose of the study were to develop a theory to explain early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the practices and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines (see Creswell, 2012). However, the purpose of this study was not to develop a new theory to understand the study phenomenon.

I did consider a quantitative research design. Quantitative research is used to confirm a hypothesis about an occurrence, and data is reported numerically. Quantitative research poses closed-ended questions that give quantifiable answers (see Creswell, 2012). Because this study sought to explore perspectives, and the data were collected using open-ended questions during one-on-one interviews, a basic qualitative design was the most appropriate.

Role of the Researcher

As the sole researcher of this study, I was responsible for the study design and implementations, data collection and analysis, and the evaluation and presentation of the results. The study participants were educators from a state in the Southeastern United States who became EC Gen NBCTs in 2017 or later. My current professional role is that of an assistant professor of education at a small liberal arts college in the state where the study took place. Although I have worked in the field of early childhood education for

over 30 years, I did not currently work, nor had I previously worked, in a supervisory role that holds any power over any of the participants. None of my former public school students nor students I have taught at the college level are NBCTs in the state where this study took place. I have held NBC as an EC Gen since 2001. I have been active within the state, serving as a candidate support provider to help teachers achieve NBC. I excluded from participation in the study any teacher holding EC Gen NBC whom I have supported as a candidate.

During my years as an early childhood educator and my experiences as an EC Gen NBCT, I have developed beliefs about the importance of DAP and how earning NBC served my growth as an early childhood educator. To address any potential of bias resulting from these experiences, I kept a reflexive journal noting my experiences interviewing participants and focused on recording my opinions and feelings concerning DAP. The use of a reflexive journal allowed me to monitor my reactions to participants' responses, thus helping me understand where my biases may have affected my interpretation and analysis of participant responses (see Noble & Smith, 2015; Orange, 2016). I did not conduct this study within my work setting nor during my work hours. There was no connection between my work as a college professor and this study. My employment as a tenure-track professor was not contingent upon completion of this study.

Methodology

Participant Selection

There were 99 EC Gen NBCTs who were certified in 2017 or after in the Southeastern state where this study took place. These 99 individuals formed the population from which I selected my study participants. Interested teachers whom I have mentored through candidate support in the past were excluded from participation in the study. I recruited participants for data collection through an email communication. The NBPTS provides an online directory including the names of EC Gen NBCTs as well as the school districts where these individuals are employed. I used a Google search to secure school email addresses to invite these teachers to participate in the study. Some of the 99 EC Gen NBCTs listed on the directory are no longer teaching in the Southeastern state where this study took place or are no longer teaching in prekindergarten through third grade, so I was able to invite 74 EC Gen NBCTs to participate in the study. I asked teachers who hold EC Gen NBC to contact me via email if they were interested in participating in the study.

The sampling method for this study was purposeful sampling. Patton (2015) noted that purposeful sampling in basic qualitative research allows for the participation of people who have first-hand experiences of a phenomenon and allows them to share this information and to provide in-depth understanding. In this study, purposeful sampling allowed for the inclusion of participants based on their ability to describe their perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Based on their experiences, these teachers shared rich, detailed information to help

answer the research question (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The criteria for selection were that teachers were early childhood educators who certified as EC Gen NBCTs in the year 2017 or later and that they were not teachers to whom I provided mentoring through candidate support.

Qualitative research methods frequently employ a small number of participants because the goal is to develop an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) for the collection of rich, thick data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Experts in qualitative research agree there is no specific number of participants needed for individual studies to reach saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest et al., 2020). I planned to interview 10–15 early childhood NBCTs. Because these participants were similar in their experiences, I expected data saturation to be reached with this number (see Guest et al., 2020). I interviewed 10 early childhood NBCTs who had received their certification in 2017 or later. At this point, it was determined that participant interviews were no longer yielding new information (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and that data saturation had been met after the 10th interview. These participants were the first early childhood NBCTs who volunteered to take part in the study and were asked to participate in one-on-one semistructured interviews. I had proposed to use snowball sampling as a back-up recruiting option if not enough participants volunteered, but this was not needed.

After receiving institutional review board (IRB) approval from Walden University, I recruited participants for data collection through an email. Using information provided by the NBPTS directory, I secured email addresses and sent emails inviting these teachers to participate in the study. I asked all prospective participants to

contact me via email if they were interested in participating in the study. In this communication, I provided a written explanation of the purpose of the research and procedures to maintain participant privacy. Once prospective participants had reviewed the provided information and had the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification and responded “I consent” to the invitation, I responded by email to inform the first 10 EC Gen NBCTs who responded they had been selected to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

The instrument was a researcher-constructed interview protocol (see Appendix) designed specifically for this study. The source of data for this research was semistructured telephone interviews with open-ended questions and probes. I based the development of the interview questions and the interview protocol on the interview protocol refinement method described by Castillo-Montoya (2016). This method ensured the interview questions were aligned to the research question and assisted in creating an interview protocol that contributed to conducting comfortable interviews that were conversational yet allowed for the discovery of early childhood NBCTs’ perspectives.

Each participant was asked the same questions with the addition of probes as needed and as were appropriate during each interview. This type of data collection is used to collect descriptive data in a way that allows the subject of the interview to tell their story in their own words and from their perspectives. This method of collecting data was appropriate for this research method because it allowed participants the opportunity to describe their experiences and perspectives with rich, detailed information and facts (see Merriam, 2009). The use of open-ended questions allowed participants much latitude

in explaining their ideas in detail. As the interviewee responded to the open-ended questions, I listened carefully for the opportunity to ask probing questions. Probing questions were a part of the interview protocol and were used as necessary to allow for further clarification of information provided by the research participants (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The open-ended interview questions demonstrated content validity as they are supported by the conceptual framework of the study, which is comprised of the NAEYC Guidelines for DAP. Content validity is also demonstrated as the interview questions were specifically aligned to the research question. I created questions to learn about early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. I delved deeply into the literature concerning DAP and the NAEYC DAP Position statement. I used this information to guide the development of the interview questions.

Because the interview protocol was researcher-constructed, the interview questions were reviewed for appropriateness and alignment to the research question by a peer reviewer. This peer reviewer teaches in the education department of a private liberal arts college and holds a doctorate in educational literacy/reading and has taught in kindergarten through twelfth grade settings, as well as undergraduate- and graduate-level courses, including research methods. Additionally, this peer reviewer has chaired numerous dissertation committees and has experience as a qualitative researcher. The peer reviewer was asked to provide feedback about the interview questions and the interview protocol and to evaluate the alignment of the interview questions with the

research question. The peer reviewer was also asked to provide feedback assessing that the interview questions were not leading and were free of bias. Minimal changes were suggested, and the interview questions and interview protocol were revised to reflect this feedback.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment of participants began after Walden University IRB approval was given for the study (Approval no. 07-14-21-0465955); participants were recruited using email addresses. I emailed an invitation to participate that explained the purpose of the study, asked for volunteers interested in participating, and included the letter of consent. Prospective participants responded “I consent” via email if they wished to participate. The first 10 early childhood NBCTs who volunteered and who met the participant criteria were selected to participate. I contacted the teachers via email to arrange a day and time for their interview.

The interviews for this study were one-on-one phone interviews. An advantage of interviewing by phone included the ability to overcome logistical barriers presented by geographical distance (Drabble et al., 2016). This method allowed me to interview EC Gen NBCTs from across the state rather than within a small region of the state. Other advantages of conducting telephone interviews were the ease of scheduling opportunities for participants, greater anonymity, fewer concerns of privacy issues, and fewer distractions for both participants and the researcher (Drabble et al., 2016; Holt, 2010; Irvine et al., 2012). Establishing rapport and a relationship is critical to effective interviews, and phone interviews can present challenges in this regard (Drabble et al.,

2016, Irvine et al., 2012). Irvine et al. (2012) noted that email and phone communications with the participants before the actual telephone interview are effective ways to establish rapport and a relationship with participants. This was done through the initial email contact when asking for volunteers to participate in the study as well as through follow-up emails and phone conversations to answer questions, provide clarification, and to schedule an interview time. To encourage positive rapport with participants, I maintained a friendly, conversational tone with the participants in these communications. Being responsive to the information shared by the interviewee during the interview is important and is an area that required careful consideration during the telephone interviews. Since opportunities to read facial expressions and body language did not exist during a telephone interview, I was an active listener to participant responses and used supportive vocalizations (for example, “I see,” “right,” etc.) to signal to the participant that I was listening and interested (see Drabble et al., 2016; Holt, 2010; Irvine et al., 2012). The interview protocol included probing questions to encourage the participants to elaborate on answers.

Telephone interviews were scheduled for a date and time convenient for the participants. The interviews lasted 45 minutes to one hour. This is considered an appropriate length for an interview as it is typically sufficient time to gather important and relevant data but brief enough to avoid fatigue for either the participant or the researcher (see Adams, 2015). Phone interviews were conducted from my home office with no one else present. Interviews were digitally recorded, and notes were also taken during the interviews. I scheduled time to hold four interviews a week over four weeks

until all interviews were completed. Upon completion of the transcription of the interviews and analysis of the data collected, all participants had the opportunity to review a brief 2-page electronic summary of the data findings and were asked to provide comments on the findings and interpretations (see Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). I provided both an email address and phone number to allow an opportunity for any participant who wished to discuss the summary with me. If a participant had reported inaccuracies, a one-on-one follow-up telephone interview lasting approximately 15 minutes would have been conducted to clarify and correct the summary of findings. However, there were no participants who indicated any revisions needed to be made to the summary. Participants exited the study after they completed the interview and had been given the opportunity to review the written summary to verify for accuracy or correct inaccuracies. There were no follow-up interviews.

All information relating to data collection, transcription, and analysis was confidential. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure anonymity. Participants were referred to as P1, P2, P3, and so forth to avoid the use of names. Any information stored on my personal computer has been password protected. Handwritten notes have been scanned onto my password-protected personal computer, and the hard copy of these notes were shredded. Any data that is saved to a USB drive has been secured in my home office in a locked desk. Data will be secured for 5 years. After this time, physical data will be secured by shredding. Electronic, digital data and audio recordings will be deleted and/or erased.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of qualitative research involves credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) note that consistency and reliability of collected data are necessary for trustworthiness of the research. I used a variety of strategies to ensure these were met.

Credibility of this proposed research was established through the use of a reflexive journal, member checks, and expert review. The reflexive journal was used to note the plans for the study, the decisions made concerning data collection and analysis and served as a place to record my personal reflections about the study as I was conducting it (see Nowell, et al., 2017). The applicable sections of the reflexive journal with notes relevant to participant interviews and data analysis were used to confirm the accuracy of my interpretation of the participant responses (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This increased the validity and reliability of the data. I also employed the use of member checking. Participants were provided a brief 2-page electronic summary of the study findings and asked to provide comment on the findings and interpretations (see Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). Participants were asked to check the accuracy of the findings, if descriptions were complete, if the themes were accurate, and if the interpretations of the data were fair (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Expert review was also used as another layer of credibility. A colleague with experience as a qualitative researcher reviewed the transcribed data and final themes and provided feedback and verified the findings to identify the possibility of researcher bias (see Noble & Smith, 2015). This colleague has a doctoral degree in early childhood education and expertise in qualitative research. The

use of a reflexive journal, member checks, and expert review together established credibility as well as provided for a measure of control over any researcher bias.

In qualitative research, transferability serves as a measure of how study results may be transferable to another situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Transferability for this proposed study was addressed through the use of thick descriptions. Using thick description provided a detailed report of how data were collected (see Noble & Smith, 2015). Patton (2015) advises that the use of rich descriptions and the use of direct quotations are important for the reader to more fully understand the thoughts shared by the study participants. The use of rich, thick verbatim descriptions in this study supported the study's findings (see Noble & Smith, 2015). This method provided readers data from this study that may be pertinent to other settings. It will be the responsibility of the reader to determine if the evidence from this study is relevant to their personal situations.

Issues of dependability within the proposed study were addressed by establishing procedures used for collecting and interpreting data related to the study. This included the use of audiotaping the interviews and explanations of how the relationships between the researcher and participants are established, (see Lodico, et al, 2010). This use of in-depth methodological descriptions increased the dependability of the proposed study.

Confirmability within the proposed study was addressed by the use of a reflective journal by the researcher to record reactions and thoughts during the data collection and data analysis process (see Noble & Smith, 2015).

Ethical Procedures

Every effort was employed to ensure the participants of the research study were protected from any harm. Approval by Walden University's IRB was completed to protect the rights of the participants. The teachers interviewed were teachers with whom I have no professional relationship nor with whom I serve in a supervisory role. The study commenced after the IRB granted approval, and the appropriate persons had given informed consent. Participants were asked to read and provide an email statement of consent that explained the purpose of the study and the procedures that were used. This consent form informed participants that participation was voluntary, explained their right to withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions, verified their right to ask questions and obtain results of the study, confirmed their identity would remain anonymous, affirmed that there were no known risks, and explained the benefits of the study (see Creswell, 2012).

To protect the identity of participants and to further assure confidentiality, participants were assigned numbers (i.e., P1, P2, P3, etc.) and were not referred to by name. The data collected will be kept securely, and I will be the only person with access to the information. Any information collected or transcribed electronically is stored on my personal computer that is password protected. Handwritten notes and hard copies of relevant documents used for analysis were either shredded, secured on the hard drive of my personal password-protected computer, or secured in a locked drawer in my home office. Digital recordings of participant interviews have been destroyed. All printed data related to the study will be shredded five years after the study completion date.

Summary

This chapter outlined the purpose of this study which was to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. A qualitative case study was identified as the most appropriate research design to achieve an in-depth exploration and provide rich, thick descriptions to gain greater insight into teachers' perspectives. This chapter also identified purposeful sampling as the most appropriate method of selecting participants, provided an in-depth discussion of data collection and analysis, described procedures for establishing trustworthiness, and provided the necessary information to address ethical procedures for conducting the research. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. I describe the setting, the data collection process, data analysis, results, evidence of trustworthiness, and summarize the answers to the research question.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. The following single research question guided the data collection, the data analysis, and the interpretation of the study's findings: What are early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines?

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the study design and summarize the study findings. First, I describe the setting of the study, including relevant participant demographics. Next, I explain the procedures for data collection related to number of participants and how and when data were collected, followed by a description of the data analysis process and information related to evidence of trustworthiness. Lastly, I present the results of the research through the use of data to support each identified theme. I conclude this chapter with a summary of the research findings.

Setting

The setting for this basic qualitative study using semistructured telephone interviews was a single state in the Southeastern United States. Participants were early childhood NBCTs who worked with students ages 3–8 in a variety of school settings that represented urban, suburban, and rural areas of the state. I conducted all 10 semistructured telephone interviews from my home office, and participants chose to speak with me from a location of their choice. There were no personal or organizational conditions that affected participants or their experience at the time of the study that influenced the interpretation of the study results. Data were collected through

semistructured telephone interviews using the interview protocol I developed for the study (see Appendix). Participants were asked questions related to their perspectives on DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. After the recorded interviews were transcribed, I began the coding and analysis process.

The participants in this study were early childhood NBCTs with experience teaching children in prekindergarten through third grade and who were familiar with the NB Early Childhood Standards and DAP. Participant demographic data are displayed in Table 1. All 10 study participants achieved NBC in 2017 or later. The participants worked with young children from a variety of settings across the state. Five teachers taught in suburban areas, three worked in rural districts, and two taught in urban districts. The participants were all experienced early childhood teachers. Their years of experience ranged from 7 to 19 years, with 15 years being the average for the group. As proposed, telephone interviews were scheduled at a time and date that was convenient for the participants and participants spoke with me from a location of their choice.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Years teaching	Grade taught	School setting
P1	16	Second	Urban
P2	19	Second	Urban
P3	19	First	Rural
P4	18	Prekindergarten	Urban
P5	17	Second	Suburban
P6	15	First	Suburban
P7	11	Prekindergarten	Rural
P8	7	Kindergarten	Suburban
P9	15	First	Suburban
P10	13	Kindergarten	Rural

Data Collection

A total of 10 early childhood NBCTs participated in semistructured telephone interviews. The data collection process lasted approximately 7 weeks. This timeframe was longer than originally planned. Data collection was happening as schools in the state were preparing for their openings and, after providing consent, some participants asked for an interview time to be scheduled after their school year had started. Interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the participants. I used the interview protocol (see Appendix) to remind participants of the purpose of the study, the research question, and the anticipated time parameters for the interview. Further, I reminded them that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I asked participants if they had any questions about any of the information included in the consent form and verbally verified that they consented to participate in the study. I discussed with participants that I would be audio recording the interview and confirmed this was acceptable to them. I asked each participant if they had any questions about any of the information shared with them and all responded that they did not. Using the interview protocol (see Appendix), I interviewed each participant asking the same questions in the same order. I used the prompts from the interview protocol to allow for more descriptive responses. The interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. During the interviews, I took notes to help me collect information as accurately as possible. Notes were also added to my research journal immediately following each interview. At the end of the interview, I thanked participants for their time and participation and told them they would receive an email with a one- to two-page summary of the study results

to review for accuracy and fairness. I asked that they email or call me if they had questions or concerns about the findings.

I used the speaker phone function on my cell phone and placed it near a digital recording device to record the interview. There were no significant interruptions during the interviews, and each interview produced a clear, useable audio recording. There were no unusual circumstances encountered during data collection. After each interview, I uploaded the digital audio recording to Scribie (<https://scribie.com>), an online audio transcription service, for a written transcription of the conversation. Each recorded interview yielded a clear and useable transcript. I verified the accuracy of each transcript by listening to the audio recordings while reading the transcripts. Any differences between the audio recordings and the transcripts were corrected prior to the data analysis. Printed copies of transcripts and other hard copy data are stored in my home office in a locked filing cabinet. Digital copies of transcripts and other data are stored on my personal password-protected computer and will be destroyed after 5 years.

I interviewed a total of 10 early childhood NBCTs during a 7-week period. I proposed to interview between 10 and 15 participants with the understanding that data collection would end at the point of saturation. I established that data saturation had been met when the participant interviews no longer yielded new information and were redundant. Experts in qualitative research agree that a small number of participants is frequently used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and that there is no specific number of participants needed for individual studies to reach saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest et al., 2020).

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data collected from the interviews following the thematic analysis model described by Clarke et al. (2006). This model includes a six-step, recursive process. After the data were collected through one-on-one interviews with participants, each recorded interview was uploaded to a transcription service that provided a written, verbatim transcript of the interview. After I verified the accuracy of the transcripts, I began my data analysis. In the first step, I read and re-read the transcript data and reviewed my notes and added notes to my research journal on things I believed were relevant or important in relation to the research question. I printed hard copies of the interview transcripts and read each while listening to the corresponding audio recording. This allowed me to verify the transcript for accuracy as well as to further familiarize myself with the data. I re-read each transcript multiple times. In the second step of the thematic analysis, I began open coding, line by line, by looking for significant statements and phrases relevant to the study's conceptual framework of DAP and the research question. I created notes of initial ideas and relevant phrases in the margins of the transcripts for codes. This allowed me to become familiar with the breadth and depth of each transcript's contents. I listed recurring phrases, words, and comments found in the data and began to generate initial codes. I manually coded in the margins of the transcripts. I underlined and circled recurring phrases and words. Equal attention was given to each transcript. Table 2 includes a sample of the initial open codes shared by participants including supporting excerpts.

Table 2*Sample-of-Open-Coding*

Code	Participant	Excerpt
Meeting children where they are	P1	“Reaching children where they are and taking them to the next place”
	P2	“Meeting students where they are so that you can help them grow”
Talking with students about their feelings	P3	“Helping them acknowledge their feelings so just having those conversations with children”
	P10	“Sometimes students come into the classroom upset, and I always make sure that they have some time with me.”
Emphasis on literacy instruction	P8	“We have at least 90 minutes for ELA and 60 minutes for math ... it’s always just been 30 minutes allotted for science and social studies instruction.”
	P5	“With the whole adding more and more minutes for reading ... we just have so much more put on us”
Teacher and family as a team	P9	“I think it’s important for families to know that we’re all on the same team”
	P4	“From the very first time I speak to the parents, I tell them, I want you as a partner.”
Using multiple forms of authentic formative assessments	P6	“I’m listening to them read out loud or asking them questions and they are responding ... and I’m listening to them talk and explain their thinking.”
	P1	“Lots and lots of observation, anecdotal notes, exit slips, pre-assessments, or just talking, having them share and talk.”
Student engagement is important	P8	“They’re constantly engaged in what I’m teaching ... we’re constantly getting up and moving, we are not sitting in our desks very often.”
	P7	“I really purposely plan the materials that I’m gonna be using for that. And I do it so that they continue to be engaged with what they are learning.”
Learning with colleagues	P6	“We talk together and run ideas past each other. ‘My kids really struggled with a math concept today. Can you talk to me about how you did it in your classroom-and was it effective?’”
	P3	“I always work to surround myself with others that make me wanna be better ... and I see it as an opportunity to learn.”
Working with school and district stakeholders	P10	“Collaborations with administrators or the curriculum director, they are making certain we are meeting our goals and meeting the parameters of the state literacy act.”
	P9	“We have grade level meeting with administrators, and they always feel free to join our collaborative times.

Before beginning the next phase of analysis, I reviewed my conceptual framework, the DAP guidelines from the NAEYC website, and the study's research question. This allowed me to focus on the codes from the data that were important in answering the research question in a meaningful and important way (see Braun & Clarke, 2013). Once I was satisfied that each transcript had been appropriately and completely coded, I transferred codes, recurring phrases, and relevant examples to sticky notes. This part of the analysis provided an additional opportunity to re-read and interact with the transcripts. I organized the individual sticky notes using axial coding to help me determine connections, patterns, and relationships between the initial codes. I examined the initial codes for redundancy and similarity and collapsed codes into categories when it was logical and needed. Table 3 includes a sample of the axial coding. These codes were then organized into the following categories: (a) teachers' perspectives on DAP; (b) perspectives on classroom community; (c) perspectives on social-emotional learning; (d) perspectives on families as partners; (e) perspectives on assessment; (f) perspectives on state, district, and local mandates; and (g) perspectives on teaching strategies and practices. For this part of the analysis, I used large, poster-sized sticky notes to organize the smaller sticky notes with the codes into categories. This allowed me to physically sort codes and move them to different categories as I began to identify the themes important for answering the research question.

Table 3*Examples of Categories and Open Codes*

Category	Code	Participant	Excerpt
Students as problem-solvers	Student choice	P7	"We make commitments to each other ... whatever they feel like they need to work on"
	Students as problem-solvers	P1	"Not necessarily telling them what's wrong, but just helping them to think of better ways that would make their own work better."
Role of Talk	Students talking to and learning from one another	P6	"They're not talking to me anymore, they're talking to each other to explain their thinking, or to help somebody out, or to say that they disagree."
	Planning opportunities for students to talk	P10	"I always incorporate a song that allows them to interact with each other."
Assessment	Use of multiple forms of assessment for instruction	P9	"We make sure that we have data from different assessments."
	Use of formative assessments to know students as individuals	P5	"I like spending time just getting to know the children and sharing ... about their sports and family."
Engaging teaching strategies	Student engagement is important	P9	"I always try to use teaching strategies that give me the most student engagement."
	Gradual release model	P10	"I definitely think the I do, we do, you do model is probably the most beneficial at this moment."
Mandates for increased instructional time	Emphasis on reading and math	P4	"We spend pretty much all morning on English/language arts content and then an hour for math after lunch."
	Computerized testing	P2	"I know sometime the computer test doesn't give you a complete picture."
Decreased time for "extras"	Loss of recess time	P8	"I really count on rest time to be able to do one-on-one assessments ... I pull them during rest time."
	Diminished time for the arts	P5	"With the whole adding more minutes for reading and more minutes for math, we're not doing as well at that as we used to."
Collaborating with colleagues	Collaboration with colleagues who share students	P3	"I like to approach collaboration with the sense of curiosity that let me put away judgement."
	Work with school and district administrators	P6	"Administration and district staff are beneficial in providing opportunities for professional learning."
Equity and inclusion	Strategies for creating equitable and inclusive classrooms	P2	"Everyone needs to come in no matter what is going on outside the room and feel comfortable so they can learn."
	Benefit of inclusive classrooms	P9	"I think greater learning takes place in a classroom community where they feel that everyone is equal and valued."
Families	Teacher and family as a team	P4	"I tell them, I want you as a partner."
	Ways to involve and engage families	P3	"The communication depends on the family."
Classroom community	Rituals and routines	P1	"We do the calming heart ... and think and give time to listen to yourself and give your brain time to recover from the rush, rush, rush."
	Talking with students about feelings	P7	"There are steps we walk them through where they tell us how they feel, they choose a way to calm down."

Organizing the codes in this manner allowed me to physically see the data and to consider whether there was enough substantive data to support a theme, how the developing themes related to one another, and allowed me to determine how each theme helps tell the “story” of my data (see Braun & Clarke, 2013). Additionally, a colleague with expertise in qualitative research and a background in early childhood education provided an expert review to identify the possibility of researcher bias and provide further credibility of the findings. She reviewed the codes, categories, and themes to verify their accuracy in representing the data, the relationships between the themes, and the veracity of the themes to answer the research question.

In the next stage of analysis, I named and defined each theme. These five themes identified from the data analysis were (a) beliefs about DAP and young children; (b) teaching strategies; (c) influence of school, district, and state policy on DAP; (d) professional learning through collaborations; and (e) social and emotional health and well-being of students. Table 4 provides examples of categories and themes identified during thematic analysis.

Table 4*Sample of Categories and Related Themes*

Category	Themes
Meeting children where they are Knowing children	Theme 1-Beliefs about DAP and young children
Problem-solving Role of talking Assessment	Theme 2-Teaching Strategies
Mandates for increased instructional time Decreased time for “extras”	Theme 3-Influence of school, district, and state policy on DAP
Working with colleagues Working with school and district administrators	Theme 4-Professional learning through collaborations
Classroom community Families Equity and inclusion	Theme 5-Social and Emotional Health and well-being of students

I shared the findings with the study participants via email to conduct a member check. All 10 participants agreed that the findings were accurate, fair, and logical, and no changes were required. The final stage of data analysis was to write up the results of the analysis of themes. There were no changes in my data analysis from what was proposed, and the six-step thematic analysis model was implemented and allowed me to answer the research question. There were no discrepant cases found among the data.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis model, as described by Clarke et al. (2006). This model provided a six-step, recursive process which included reading and rereading transcript data, identifying codes, finding themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up the analysis of the themes. Data analysis began with the participant interviews. After I completed the interviews, I uploaded the audio recordings

to an online software program in order to transcribe the recordings to written texts. This provided an initial transcript of each interview. I printed copies of each interview transcript and reviewed and read a hard copy of each transcript while listening to the corresponding audio recording to verify for accuracy and to further familiarize myself with the data.

I then analyzed the data using open coding. I looked for significant statements and phrases that were relevant in answering the identified research question. Next, I used the study's conceptual framework of DAP and the corresponding research question to re-read and continue coding. I created notes of initial ideas in the margins for codes (see Clarke et al., 2006). The initial stages of analysis allowed me to become familiar with the breadth and depth of the transcripts' contents. I created a preliminary list of recurring phrases, words, and comments found in the data. From this preliminary list of significant phrases, words, and comments found in the data, I began generating initial codes. To identify the initial codes, I searched for descriptions within the data that were interesting and/or meaningful about the identified research question (see Clarke et al., 2006). I coded each transcript manually. Each transcript was given equal attention.

After open coding, I used axial coding to examine the initial codes for connections and relationships to form broad categories (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I further compared these codes to discover the relationship between the data, the conceptual framework, and the research question. I analyzed these axial codes for categories and to determine themes to support answering the research question. By writing each code and a brief description in different colors on sticky notes, I created a

thematic map allowing me to identify how the different codes could be combined to create overarching themes (see Clarke et al., 2006). I placed the sticky notes on a wall where I could easily read the codes and physically move them to categorize the codes logically. After establishing the themes, the next step in my data analysis was to review the themes to ensure that each one was distinct from all other themes and that information within each theme was meaningful and cohesive (see Braun & Clarke, 2013). Next, I named and defined each theme and identified any sub-themes that were needed to more easily and efficiently analyze a major theme (see Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Once themes were established, they were connected to the relevant research question. I used these themes to write a rich, descriptive narrative explaining the themes and using direct quotes from the interviews to support these descriptions (see Miles et al., 2014). The collection of thick, rich data were detailed in a way to provide a full and enlightening story of the participant's perspectives and also helped establish trustworthiness and credibility. This type of data increased the likelihood that I, as the researcher, viewed the data more objectively and reduced the likelihood that I viewed the data in ways that supported my biases and expectations (see Morrow, 2005). There was no discrepant data to be reported.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. The results of the study are presented in this section in a logical order. The order is not to suggest that one theme is more or less important than another. Each theme was derived from patterns

identified from the coding process. From this data, categories and then 5 interrelated themes were identified that answer the research question: What are early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines? These five themes were (a) beliefs about DAP and young children; (b) engaging and differentiated teaching strategies; (c) influence of school, district, and state policies on DAP; (d) assessments; (e) professional collaborations; (f) social and emotional health and well-being of students.

Theme 1: Beliefs About DAP and Young Children

Participants believed that understanding the developmental nature of young children is an important component of being able to use DAP and strategies supported by DAP guidelines. These beliefs reflect participants' understanding of *why* DAP is important rather than *how* they implement DAP and strategies. P1 stated, "Where is the why? Where's the why in me doing this a certain way. Where is the why in me pulling a small group or even in how I am organizing that small group?" P5 and P3 shared their beliefs that DAP and strategies are important because they support the developmental nature of young children. P5 believed, "They [students] are little, they are young. They need to move; their bodies are active." P3 shared that young children are active and do not need to sit and be still and work for long periods of time, rather they should have activities that allow for choice, and provide movement and activity. P6 believed it is important to be child-centered in her teaching stating, "My instruction needs to NOT meet MY needs, it needs to meet the needs of my students." P4 reported her belief that, "Practice is what you do with that knowledge [of DAP]. Knowing that your students have

a certain type of understanding ... then you provide activities of things that will encourage them to grow.”

Participants believed part of understanding the developmental nature of young children is recognizing their students as individuals who are different from one another and who have unique strengths and differences. Participants’ responses reflected their beliefs about the development of young children in regard to their individuality. P4, P5, and P8 reported that it was important to both recognize and celebrate the differences between their students. P6 reported that understanding the strengths and differences of her students is one way she can, “adjust my instruction to better meet the needs of each individual student.” P1 noted her belief that because each child in her class is an individual, every child in her class needs something different and “everybody will get what they need, according to what they need.” P3 stated her belief that by knowing her students’ individual personalities, it helped her understand their temperament and how to approach the learning she would work on with her students. P9 stated she teaches, “kids with different strengths that they bring to the table.”

Participants believed that because of the developmental nature of young children their use of DAP and strategies cannot be the same for all their students. Many participants reported the importance of meeting children where they are as critical to teaching young children. P3 explained that because there are widely held expectations for what a student should be able to do at certain ages, a key part of DAP is knowing her students as individuals. P4 stated, “You just meet their needs, I know that sounds too simple, but I don’t think it’s always just an age group. It’s very individually based.” P7

also used age verses development when discussing her understanding of DAP. She stated, “I want to meet each child where they are developmentally, but DAP ... is not an umbrella term for like all four-year-olds should be doing this ... you should do what’s developmentally appropriate for the individual child.” P1, P2, and P10 stated their beliefs that meeting students where they are is an important part of supporting students in meeting their potential. P1 and P2 reported that it is important to be on the students’ level, but to also expose them to more so they can move on to the next level. P10 stated her goal was “meeting my kids where they are and providing them with the steps to meet their potential, whatever that potential is.”

Participants believed part of understanding the developmental nature of young children is understanding their cognitive, social-emotional, and physical growth. P1 stated her belief that part of DAP, “is looking at their social [emotional] needs, looking at what they need emotionally ... and making sure that that’s not pushed to the back just to get a standard across.” P10 and P2 both described their understanding of DAP as teaching centered not only on the cognitive, academic growth and development of young children, but also focusing on the social-emotional needs of students. P10 discussed how attention to a child’s social-emotional and physical growth is essential in making certain the child can reach their full potential. P2’s response to her understanding of DAP reflected a “whole child” approach. She noted, “And looking at the whole child ... things that are happening at home or in their lives, because that helps you with the whole development of the child and the more you can know the better you’ll do to help students.”

Theme 2: Teaching Strategies

Four areas of DAP and strategies participants use for teaching and learning were identified from the participants' responses: (a) engaging and differentiated teaching strategies, (b) talking to learn, (c) choice and problem solving, and (d) use of assessment.

Engaging and Differentiated Teaching Strategies

The participants described different DAP teaching strategies they use to support student learning. These included the use of hands-on strategies allowing for high levels of engagement, explicit instruction, the gradual release model, and the use of one-on-one, small group and whole group instruction. The majority of the participants mentioned the need for teaching strategies to be hands-on and engaging. P9 and P4 discussed the importance of using hands-on teaching strategies that allow for optimum student engagement. P7 noted, "We do a lot of hands-on activities ... a lot of movement or making patterns with our bodies to help them remember." P6 discussed using engaging, hands-on activities that do not involve using a workbook. P5, P9, and P10 all mentioned explicit instruction as a DAP they use. P5 noted that what she wants students to learn from a lesson should be clear to them. P9 responded that explicit instruction is part of how she balances instruction for her students. One DAP all 10 of the study participants reported using was the "I do, we do, you do" or gradual release model. P10 shared this strategy as a way to build schema when teaching students new information. P1 reported this strategy as a way she can differentiate her instruction. The 10 participants also reported the use of one-on-one, small-group, and whole-group instruction as a DAP they implement. P2, P7, and P8 noted all of their students receive instruction in all three ways

throughout the week. P4 and P5 reported small-group instruction provides opportunities to differentiate instruction based on student understanding of new concepts during whole-group instruction. P3 discussed how she uses one-on-one and small group instruction to monitor student learning of new material being taught.

Talking to Learn

The participants explained how they use talk and social interactions as a DAP and strategy in their work with young children. P6 reported, “They’re not talking to me anymore, they’re talking to each other to explain the thinking, or to help somebody out, or to say they disagree.” P1 and P10 reported they intentionally plan opportunities for social interaction between students. P1 shared she believes her students are learning when they are talking. P10 noted that she provides time for students to talk with one another and to talk with her at the beginning of each day. These opportunities for talking set a positive tone for the day.

Participants discussed the role of talk and social interaction in their students’ social-emotional development. P3 noted how she is mindful of having conversations with her students and helping them name their feelings. The participants discussed the importance of helping young children interact with others because many young children may not yet have the language to describe their feelings to others. P5 reported that she helps students think through the possibilities of communicating their emotions by modeling. P4 described her use of guided conversations to help students appropriately interact with one another. In this strategy, she facilitates an appropriate conversation

between students when there is conflict and helps them appropriately name and express their feelings.

Problem-Solving and Choice

The participants reported that part of maintaining DAP and strategies in teaching and learning is helping students see themselves as capable learners and problem-solvers. Many participants discussed the importance of giving their students' ownership in their learning. P6 stated, "I stop and talk to them after a lesson and will just ask them, 'What do you think went well in this lesson? What was difficult for you in this lesson?'" This type of questioning supports students' ownership in their learning. Participants also discussed using supportive language to help students see themselves as capable learners and problem solvers. P8 noted when her students are involved in a class discussion and someone does not know an answer or how to respond, she simply tells them, "Okay, keep thinking about that answer, I'm gonna come back to you." P1 shared her use of supportive language during conferences as a way of helping students recognize how to improve their work independently.

All of the participants reported that their students had opportunities for choice throughout the day and many connected the role of choice in supporting students' ability to be capable learners and problem-solvers. P10 reported during center time, her students have free reign over what materials they will use and how they will use them. This supports their decision-making and allows them to be successful with what they choose. P7 noted the use of student commitments to one another as part of how her students learn

to negotiate and solve conflicts. This DAP strategy allows her students to see themselves as problem-solvers.

Use of Assessment

Participants explained how they use developmentally appropriate assessments and assessment strategies to support teaching and learning. P3, P5, and P1 discussed how they use informal assessment information to know their students as individuals. P3 reported she does this through observing them in a variety of settings throughout the day and keeping anecdotal, observational notes on what she is noticing. P5 noted she sits with her students at lunch to learn more about their life outside of school. P1 discussed observing students in her classroom to learn which students shy away from challenges and which do not mind sharing their thinking. P7 shared she can learn what students are learning and understanding from lessons when she watches them play and interact with others.

The participants explained the most important assessments they use are formative and happen within normal classroom activities rather than school, district, or state required assessments. P2 stated she does this by “eyeballing” and walking around the room assessing what students understand and who may need support or re-teaching. P6 noted, “I feel like I learn the most about the kids and what they’re learning when I get to hear their voice ... I can jot things down ... and those anecdotal records are the most meaningful for me.” P5 reported she does a great deal of one-on-one assessments so she can “watch and see what students know.” These assessments yield the best information because there is nothing between the teacher and child and the assessments are occurring in an authentic context. P4 explained she is required to use a state computer test but

believes it should be used as one data point. P9 and P10 noted that using data from different assessments, both those required, and teacher selected, provides more comprehensive information to support teaching and learning.

The participants described a multitude of developmentally appropriate formative assessments and strategies they use to check student growth and learning. In addition to observations and anecdotal notes, teachers also referenced exit slips, questioning, and hands-on assessment that occur as teaching is happening. P5 and P9 shared how their use of simple exit slips allows a quick way of understanding which students may not understand a lesson and who may be ready for new learning. P9 discussed how the use of exit slips have the advantage of not being exhausting the way some of the district assessments may be. P8 reported she uses questioning to assess her students' understanding of lessons. P10 described her use of "hands-on assessment" as assessment that happens during teaching and learning. P5 noted, "It's always the ongoing assessment and continuing to always evaluate where they are and what they know and how I can move them on from that point." All of the participants reported their use of teacher selected, formative assessments are an important part of maintaining DAP in teaching and learning.

Theme 3: Influence of School, District, and State Policy on DAP

Participants reported that state, district, and school policy mandates impact their use of DAP and strategies reflective of DAP. In the state where the study was conducted, a law was recently passed that codifies retention for students who are not reading "on grade level" by the end of their third grade year. The enforcement of the retention

component of this law is scheduled to begin during the 2021-2022 academic school year. Participants in the study perceive this law is negatively impacting their use of DAP and strategies supported by DAP guidelines. Although none of the teachers who participated in the study taught third grade, all 10 of the participants mentioned the newly passed legislation. P3 reported her school principal grappled with having young students prepared to do well on “the test” if classroom instruction is DAP. P7 noted, “people are so concerned about reading and math, especially now that we have this new law. They just think we have to be doing instruction, instruction, instruction, and not realizing that having that time to play ... could actually benefit instruction.”

All of the participants discussed the influence this legislation has had on the use of a computer-based, progress monitoring, summative assessment required for all kindergarten through third grade students in the state and why this type of assessment is not DAP. P8 noted her kindergarten students spend several hours over a three-day period to complete the test and they do not have the stamina or attention span for this type of assessment. P4, P5, and P2 questioned the accuracy of the assessment results. P4 reported that she learns more about her students and how to plan for instruction when she is listening and watching them throughout the day than she does from computerized assessment results. P5 stated that it was important to “use your teacher brain” because an overreliance on data from the computer-based assessment might lead teachers to create instructional groupings that are not appropriate. P2 noted that the test does not provide a complete picture of student growth and learning and that she believes it is DAP to assess

in ways that allow her to “see” student thinking so she can determine next steps for her teaching.

The impact of the retention policy created by the new law was also reported by participants in their perspectives about district and school mandates for increased time for literacy instruction. The participants noted spending an average of 120-180 minutes a day on literacy instruction. The participants reported that this emphasis on instructional time for literacy impacted their ability to maintain DAP such as recess and rest time, the arts, and a well-rounded curriculum including time for social studies and science instruction. P5 shared that recently her district had issued a mandate that in order to provide more instructional time, her kindergarten students will only have rest time during the first semester of the school year. P8 reported she uses student rest time to assess or work with her kindergarten students one-on-one and if a student is working with her, they miss their rest time. The majority of participants also referenced district and school policies that limit the amount of recess time for their students. P6 and P9 reported the policy mandated by their respective school systems is a 20-minute daily recess. P9 noted her students need more than a single 20-minute recess time given that they are in school for more than seven hours. P6 discussed how she builds in frequent brain breaks between academic lessons to support her young students need for physical movement.

When participants were asked how their students are involved in the arts in the classroom, the majority reported there was limited time spent on the arts or that the arts were integrated through a literacy lesson. P8 shared her use of a visual arts strategy she referred to as “directed drawing” that addresses speaking and listening standards. P1

reported she uses directed drawings as well as literature responses where students listen to or read a story and complete an art activity afterwards. The participants also reported spending limited time planning and teaching science and social studies. P4 shared that she tries to teach science or social studies at least every other day, but they are not taught every day. P10 noted that although her school system has required pacing guides for literacy and math, the district does not provide pacing guides for science or social studies. P6 reported that in her district, science and social studies are not assessed by standards, rather students receive a participation grade. P2 stated, “Science and social studies kinda get the shaft...we just have so much reading and math to work on”

Theme 4: Professional Learning Through Collaborations

Participants reported that professional learning through collaborations with a variety of colleagues are critical in their ability to continually grow and develop their DAP and strategies. Participants reported the importance of collaborations with colleagues on their team, within their building, and across school districts as ways they learn more about DAP and are able to best serve their students. All of the participants discussed the power of learning with their grade-level colleagues within their schools as professional collaborations the helped them better serve and teach their students. Participants frequently mentioned grade-level planning meetings, grade-level data meetings, group texts, and impromptu conversations that happen before, after, or throughout the school day as ways these collaborations might occur. P6 noted that during her team’s common planning time, they share teaching strategies that have been effective with their students. P8 reported weekly team meetings allow her team to work smarter by

sharing lesson plans and what is and isn't working in the teaching-learning cycle. P5 noted team meetings keep her from feeling isolated in working through the complexities of day-to-day teaching. The participants also discussed the benefit of learning through collaborating with teachers from other grade-levels and departments within their schools. P1 discussed working with her grade-level team to align learning targets and assessments. P9 noted the importance of learning with other educators in the building who also teach her students. She stated, "I have kids with IEPs and who are ELL ... I want our work with the students to be seamless and so we communicate about what is going on in the classroom, what we are all seeing." P7 shared how she learns through collaborations with teachers from grades and departments other than her own to support her past students. She provides insight about her students to new teachers and is available to provide advice about communicating with families or mentoring her past students if they are struggling in anyway. Collaborations with teachers across the district were also mentioned by many of the participants. P2 reported that district-wide grade level meetings can provide fresh-perspectives about issues and teaching strategies to support her students. P3 noted that these collaborations are one way she surrounds herself with others who can make her a better teacher and she always uses these meetings as an opportunity to learn.

Participants discussed the role of learning through professional collaborations with school and district administrators as part of how they continually grow their practice in ways that best support their students. P8 noted that her school principal is very involved and often joins their grade level meetings. P10 reported that collaborations with personnel from her district's office helps her understand her progress in meeting the

system's goals and meeting the requirements of the state literacy law. P4 discussed the benefits for students when district level administrators collaborate with classroom teachers to gather feedback before implementing new policies. P6 noted that collaborations with school and district administrators are important because decisions about professional learning opportunities are made by these people.

Theme 5: Social and Emotional Health and Well-Being of Students

Participants reported that developing the social and emotional health and well-being of their students is an important part of DAP and strategies. All of the participants discussed the role of establishing a positive classroom community as part of supporting social-emotional health and well-being. P4, P6, P7, and P8, noted the importance of having a classroom community where students feel safe and valued. P3 and P10 discussed rituals and routines they use to develop a predictable classroom environment that helps students feel safe. P3 noted the use of daily morning meetings, a school family name, classroom jobs and "I love you" rituals. P10 reported that she starts the day each morning giving students a hug, a handshake or a high five, spends time talking with them, and monitors for students whose day may not be going well.

All 10 participants reported they help students learn how to recognize and manage their feelings as a way to support their students' development of healthy, social-emotional dispositions. P5 and P8 discussed modeling and role-playing as two strategies they use with their students. P5 described having students participate in role-playing different conflicts that might happen in the classroom between friends and how these conflicts can be resolved. P8 shared how she models for her class the feeling of being sad

when someone hurts her feelings. She noted, “We talk about my face and looking at the details on my face...I try to show the sadness...and we talk about why it makes me sad.”

The majority of the participants reported the importance of separating the child from the behavior and to recognize what a child is trying to communicate through their behavior in ways that reflect DAP. P3 stated, “We have to go into situations assuming the child is missing a skill, not that the child is being mean, so using language like, ‘You didn’t have the words to ... Next time, try saying ... Let’s try it now for practice.’” P6 discussed never publicly berating a child for behavior, but rather allowing space and time for the child to talk one-on-one with a grown-up. P2 noted that even though it is easy to get frustrated with a child exhibiting difficult behavior, it is important to take the time to talk to the child and determine what is causing the behavior. P3 shared her use of specific breathing strategies with children to help them be more aware of relaxing when they are stressed. P1 discussed a strategy she referred to as “the calming heart”. She noted, “Helping them see there’s time for us to be still and take time to listen to yourself and give your brain some time to recover from rush, rush, rush.”

All of the participants discussed their work with families in supporting the social-emotional health and well-being of their students. P4 reported including families as partners and using the word teamwork to convey her belief that when teachers and families work together children are more successful. The participants shared a multitude of strategies they use to engage and include families including phone calls, emails, text messages, digital apps that allow for the sharing of photographs and videos, and class websites. P8 reported she uses the photograph share feature of an app to include her

families in their child's daily learning and to support them in knowing how to support their child. P10 shared how she uses an app that allows for a two-way conversation through texting as a way to develop and maintain open communication with the families of her students. P9 noted the importance of recognizing families as the best experts about their children and capitalizing on that expertise in her planning and teaching.

Equity and inclusion were also identified as important components of developing the social-emotional health and well-being of students. P1 and P10 noted that young children have difficulty understanding the concepts of fair and equal. They discussed intentionally planning opportunities for students to explore these ideas. Teachers reported using a variety of strategies to create inclusive classroom communities. P4 noted the use of conversations with her students about who they are as people so that students can realize the things they have in common, how they are alike, and how they are different. P9 shared that greater learning takes place in her classroom when everyone is equal and valued.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure that trustworthiness of the research was met, I used a variety of strategies to address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To establish credibility, I used a reflexive journal, member checking, and expert review. In my reflexive journal, I kept notes about the plans for the study, data collection, and data analysis. Immediately following each interview, I recorded my personal reflections and my initial thoughts about the information shared and how it related to answering the study's research question (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As I analyzed the data, I

periodically reviewed these notes. A second strategy to support the credibility of the research was the use of member checking. Each participant was emailed a summary of the research findings and offered the opportunity to provide feedback regarding their perception of the accuracy, fairness, and logicalness of the findings (see Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). All participants agreed with the accuracy, fairness, and logicalness of the summary findings. This was important to limit the possibility of research bias. A third strategy used to ensure credibility was the implementation of an expert review. A person with expertise in qualitative research and early childhood education reviewed the codes, categories, and themes, and verified the accuracy of the findings and the fairness of the interpretations of the data to guard against researcher bias (see Noble & Smith, 2015). The use of these three strategies, a reflexive journal, member checking, and expert review, provided credibility and limited any researcher bias.

Transferability for this study was addressed through the use of thick descriptions and direct quotations to assist the reader in understanding the perspectives of the study participants (see Patton, 2015). The study's findings are supported by the use of thick, verbatim descriptions and will offer data that may be germane to other settings. Other researchers will be responsible for determining the transferability of this evidence to their own situations.

Establishing procedures for collecting and analyzing data were used to address issues of dependability. An interview protocol was used in each interview so that all participants were being asked the same set of questions. Each interview was digitally audio recorded and each transcript produced from these recordings was reviewed for

accuracy (see Lodico et al., 2010). Dependability for the study was increased through this use of in-depth methodological descriptions. Confirmability was addressed through the use of a reflexive journal. Recording my reactions and thoughts during the data collection and data analysis process allowed me to be aware of my biases and helped me maintain my objectivity.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I reviewed the purpose of the research study and the research question. I discussed the setting, the participant demographics and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness of the study. I presented the method for data collection, and a summary of the thematic analysis method used for the data analysis. This study was guided by a single research question and explored early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Data analysis followed the six-step thematic analysis model as described by Braun and Clarke (2013). I identified and defined each theme used to address the research question and used supporting data to support each finding. Completing the data analysis allowed me to answer the research question: What are early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines? I identified five themes from the data: (a) beliefs about DAP and young children; (b) teaching strategies; (c) influence of school, district, and state policies on DAP; (d) professional learning through collaboration; and (e) social and emotional health and well-being of students.

In response to the research question, the participants believed that understanding the developmental nature of young children is an important component of being able to

use DAP and strategies supported by DAP guidelines. Participants reported it was important to recognize students are individuals with unique strengths and differences, and that it is critical to meet students where they are by recognizing that there can be discrepancies between a student's chronological versus developmental age. Participants also believed that part of understanding the developmental nature of young children is understanding their cognitive, social-emotional, and physical growth. The second theme from the study was that participants identified the use of teaching strategies as an important part of DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Participants reported the use of engaging and differentiated teaching strategies, talking to learn, problem-solving and choice, and a variety of assessments as DAP and strategies they use. The third theme was that participants perceived that school, district, and state policy mandates influence their use of DAP. Participants reported they perceived state legislation impacted the selection of computer-based assessments. Participants also reported their perspectives that school and district mandates for increased instructional time in literacy and math have decreased time and opportunities for science and social studies instruction, recess, rest time, and the arts. The fourth theme was that participants perceive that professional learning through collaborations are critical in their ability to continually grow and develop their practice in ways that best support their students. Participants reported they work with school colleagues within their grade level and from other grades and departments, school principals, and district personnel to learn more about DAP and strategies. The fifth theme was that the participants perceived that developing the social and emotional health and well-being of their students is an

important DAP and strategy they use that is consistent with DAP guidelines. Participants perceived that establishing a classroom community where children feel safe and valued through the use of rituals and routines was important. Participants also reported that helping students name and manage their feelings was important. Participants also perceived that including families in the classroom and establishing equitable, inclusive learning environments in which their students feel safe and valued was important.

In Chapter 5, I address the interpretation of the findings and the limitations of the study. Further, I address the implications for positive social change this study might have for early childhood educators and stakeholders. I also make recommendations for future research and provide a conclusion for the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. I conducted one-on-one, semistructured phone interviews with 10 early childhood educators who taught in a Southeastern state in the United States. I collected data from these interviews that allowed me to gather an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use. Five themes were identified from the analysis of the data, including (a) beliefs about DAP and young children; (b) teaching strategies; (c) influence of school, district, and state policies on DAP; (d) professional learning through collaborations; and (e) social and emotional health and well-being of students. Understanding the perspectives of early childhood NBCTs will provide information to early childhood educators and stakeholders that can be used to improve the use of DAP and strategies in early childhood classrooms. In Chapter 5, I will include the findings of the study as related to the conceptual framework and current literature. I will also offer implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of the Findings

The interpretation of the findings for this basic qualitative study was based on the data collected from 10 one-on-one, semistructured interviews, the literature review, and the conceptual framework, the NAEYC guidelines for DAP. The study focused on one research question: What are early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines? Five themes were identified and evaluated in relation to the research question. Findings in the study extend and

confirm information about early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use to teach young children.

Theme 1: Beliefs About DAP and Young Children

The development of young children is predictable but not linear (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). Participants believed that understanding the developmental nature of young children is an important component of being able to use DAP and strategies supported by DAP guidelines. Participants reported that understanding how young children grow and learn helps them know why they teach the way they teach. Researchers in the field of early childhood education support the use of DAP as the most suitable way to teach young children (Brown & Mowry, 2015; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Fowler, 2017; Hur et al., 2015). Participants believed that their instruction should focus on the unique needs of young children in child-centered ways. Shonkoff (2017) reported that early childhood is a crucial time of human development when a child's brain grows significantly and is significantly influenced by all stimulation. When young children are appropriately engaged in learning, there are greater positive learner outcomes (Brown & Weber, 2016).

Brown and Weber (2016) noted it is important for early childhood educators to understand and be able to explain the importance of DAP as a way to support the individuality of their students while also satisfying the academic expectations of stakeholders. Participants believed part of understanding the developmental nature of young children is recognizing their students as individuals who are different from one another and who have unique strengths and challenges. Understanding the differences in how children develop and learn helps teachers in planning specific instruction targeted to

each child (Stipek et al., 2017). Participants believed they are responsible for being certain each child's individual needs are addressed. Participants reported that they do this by knowing the children they teach. Carlsson-Paige et al. (2015) reported that, when children's educational experiences are not in sync with their developmental level or learning needs, it can be detrimental, causing children to feel anxious.

In Gesell's (1925) seminal work on child development, he reported that for each measure studied there was a pattern of when children could do certain things, but he also identified average age spans for when a child may be able to do them. Participants believed that because of the developmental nature of young children, their use of DAP and strategies cannot be the same for all children. Guddemi et al. (2014) reported that children in the United States meet developmental markers in much the same way as they have over the last century. Many participants discussed meeting children where they are as an important part of teaching young children. Participants reported that individual children may greatly differ even within the context of a single classroom and that a child's chronological age may not match their developmental age. This finding is consistent with the literature. Moran and Senseny (2016) reported that the typical kindergarten student in the United States has a younger developmental age, based on the Gesell Developmental Observation-Revised, than their chronological age. Participants believed that meeting students where they are is an important part of helping young children meet their full potential. This is consistent with information from the literature review noting that teaching to students' individual levels can encourage growth and

learning to help children meet challenging and attainable goals in early childhood settings (Brown et al., 2019; Sanders & Farago, 2018).

A learning environment that is academically focused and developmentally appropriate exists when early childhood teachers plan many learning opportunities that account for individual children's development as well as their social-emotional and physical needs (Stipek et al., 2017). Participants believed part of understanding the developmental nature of young children is understanding their cognitive, social-emotional, and physical growth. Participants noted that meeting children where they are was not solely about a child's academic growth, but also included their social-emotional and physical growth. Erickson (2016) reported that an accomplished early childhood teacher can create learning environments that equally blend child-centered and academic learning strategies. Although there is evidence that instruction geared toward academic learning benefits academic growth (Engel et al., 2016), executive functioning abilities as well as mental health and other social-emotional learning and healthy physical growth are equally important and are predictors of a child's long-term outcomes (Bassok et al., 2016).

Participants believed that understanding the developmental nature of young children is an important part of being able to use DAP and strategies supported by DAP guidelines. They believed this requires them to recognize the strengths and differences of individual children and to recognize the chronological age versus the developmental age of students as they support students' cognitive, social-emotional, and physical growth. DAP guidelines encourage supporting the growth of young children across the cognitive,

social-emotional, and physical domains, and these practices were developed from research on child development and learning (NAEYC, 2009). These guidelines support teaching in ways that consider children's individual and unique patterns of development. Further, the guidelines support teachers knowing their students in a holistic manner in order to best teach them (NAEYC, 2020). Phillips et al. (2016) noted that early childhood educators are a key factor in the delivery of quality experiences for children in prekindergarten through third grade. Participants in the study clearly articulated their beliefs and insights about the role understanding early childhood development plays in their use of DAP and strategies.

Theme 2: Teaching Strategies

An important component of being an effective early childhood educator is being intentional and purposeful in selecting and implementing teaching strategies (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Participants reported a wide range of teaching strategies they use which they considered DAP and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines. The majority of the participants believed that it was important for the teaching strategies they use to be hands-on strategies allowing for high levels of student engagement. This finding is supported by Alford et al. (2016) who noted that young children taught by teachers using DAP are more likely to be actively engaged with a teacher's lesson than young students taught by teachers not using DAP.

Participants also reported the importance of using talk and social interaction as a teaching strategy that is a DAP and strategy supported by DAP guidelines. Participants shared how they planned opportunities for their young students to talk to each other to

explain and clarify their thinking, to share with other students and the teacher about things from their life that they wanted to talk about with others, and to support their students in appropriate ways to name and express their feelings. This finding is consistent with information from the literature review. Phillips et al. (2016) reported that the interactions between early childhood educators and their students are a critical part of quality instruction, and it is teachers who lead these interactions.

The participants perceived that helping young children see themselves as capable learners and problem solvers is an important part of DAP and strategies that reflect DAP guidelines. Participants described classroom scenarios that allowed children to reflect on their learning and to consider what about certain tasks felt challenging or easy and how they used language that scaffolded children's thinking without providing answers. All of the participants reported that they provided numerous opportunities for students to have choice in their learning throughout the day. Planning instruction and opportunities for learning across all domains is important to the development of young children. Stipek et al. (2017) reported that when teachers have a solid understanding of how young children grow and learn, they are best able to plan instruction suited to each student.

When early childhood teachers provide tailored instruction that accommodates the needs of children's individual development, they have created learning environments that are both academically rigorous and developmentally appropriate (Brown & Mowry, 2015). One way the participants reported being able to accommodate the needs of individual children was through the use of developmentally appropriate assessments and assessment strategies. Participants shared that they collected anecdotal, observational

notes while watching students engaged in authentic learning activities during the course of the day. Many participants reported that the information they learned about their students through observing them at work in the classroom provided the most meaningful data about what students know and were able to do. All of the participants mentioned the use of more standardized computerized assessments their students are required to complete, but the participants believed that the formative assessments with which they choose to assess their students were more accurate and more beneficial. They reported that their use of developmentally appropriate assessments helped them understand what individual children understood about lessons and helped them know how to move children forward in their learning. An accomplished early childhood teacher understands and can articulate how DAP and academic growth of their students is related and can put this knowledge into action by planning DAP lessons for their students that have a positive impact on student learning (NBPTS, 2021).

The teaching strategies early childhood teachers use in their classrooms can impact the growth of students in both the short and long term (Bakken et al., 2018). The participants' perceptions about teaching strategies are supported by the NAEYC DAP guidelines. According to the NAEYC DAP guidelines (NAEYC, 2020), young children benefit from a variety of engaging teaching strategies that help teachers differentiate their planning and instruction to meet the needs of individual learners. Some instruction should be explicit, but young children benefit when teachers provide them with choices to plan their own learning as well as when teachers ask questions, present students with a problem to solve, or use other supportive language (NAEYC, 2020). Developmentally

appropriate assessments help teachers know where children are in their learning, and they can use this assessment information to help their students' progress (NAEYC, 2020).

Theme 3: Influence of School, District, and State Policy

The policy changes that have occurred over the last several decades have impacted early childhood classrooms (Brown et al., 2019; Stipek et al., 2017). Participants reported that school, district, and state policy mandates have a negative influence on their use of DAP and strategies reflective of DAP guidelines. This finding is confirmed from information found in the literature review. Thompson (2016) reported that the increase in policies at the school, district-, state-, and/or national-level that focus on academic learning have made DAP and strategies harder to implement. All 10 participants talked about a newly passed state literacy law which requires the use of certain curricula and assessments. Brown and Weber (2016) reported that early childhood teachers find it difficult to implement DAP when teaching in schools that are focused on one-size-fits-all curriculum and standardized test scores. Participants reported that the adopted computer-based test they are required to use as a summative, progress monitoring tool is not DAP for their young students and that the assessment results are often inaccurate.

Another mandate of this law is the required retention of students who are not reading on grade level by the end of third grade. Participants reported that this has caused district administrators to require increased amounts of classroom time on literacy instruction. Participants shared that school and district administrators who do not have a solid understanding of DAP and its importance in educating young children often make

decisions that are counter to DAP. Mongillo (2017) noted that developing strong administrators who are knowledgeable about DAP and know how to support teachers in their use of DAP is beneficial. Participants noted that the increased amount of time devoted to literacy instruction has had a detrimental effect on time allocated for rest time, recess, science, and social studies instruction, as well as the arts. This is consistent with the literature. McKenney and Bradley (2016) reported that the narrowing of the curriculum focused on academic learning in isolated and specific ways are not consistent with DAP guidelines and have been an unintended consequence of many policies.

Minicozzi (2016) reported that early childhood teachers often felt frustrated with policies that are contrary to their professional understanding of DAP. Participants recognized the ways in which the often unintended consequences of law and the policies they create make it harder for them to use DAP and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines in their teaching. Brown et al. (2019) reported that stakeholders were not comfortable with changes based on policies that placed greater focus on academic learning experiences at the peril of learning experiences focused on social-emotional and physical development and knowledge. The use of one-size-fits-all curricula and an over-reliance on computerized testing is not consistent with DAP guidelines. Rather, these guidelines recommend that young children have access to a full curriculum that includes all curricular areas with adequate opportunities for play both in and outside the classroom (NAEYC, 2020).

Theme 4: Professional Learning Through Collaboration

According to Phillips et al. (2016), quality professional learning opportunities are one way to help teachers address the changes early childhood classrooms have encountered due to policy changes. Participants reported that professional collaborations are critical in their ability to continually learn about and develop their DAP and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines. Participants shared that collaborations with grade-level teachers within their school provided opportunities to learn about effective teaching strategies, lessons that have worked and have not worked, and to align learning targets and assessments. This finding is in alignment with the research. Brown, Weber, and Yoon (2015) noted that professional development that is applicable to an early childhood teacher's daily work and that is grounded in best practice helps teachers change their practice in positive ways. Participants reported that they worked with other teaching colleagues in the building such as those who support students who are emergent bilinguals or are served through an individualized education plan. Mages et al. (2018) reported that early childhood teachers perceived that professional learning that is focused on student learning within their teaching context was most beneficial. Collaborations with teachers across districts and administrators were also reported. Participants reported that collaborations with school and district administrators were a way for early childhood teachers to provide input before new policies are implemented as well as having input into future professional learning opportunities. DAP in early childhood classrooms can improve student learning in all domains. Early childhood educators can share this information with stakeholders (Brown, Feger, & Mowry, 2015).

Professional learning is an important part of how teachers develop strong DAP and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines (Stipek et al., 2017). Participants reported that their collaborations with others helped them learn more about DAP and strategies to use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Additionally, these collaborations provided opportunities to advocate for DAP. Fonsén and Ukkonen-Mikkola (2019) noted that early childhood teachers perceived that professional learning helped them develop greater pedagogical knowledge, gain a better understanding of the developmental nature of young children, and helped them advocate for DAP. DAP guidelines encourage early childhood teachers to collaborate with other early childhood education stakeholders to continually grow their ability to implement DAP and advocate for the understanding of how young children develop and learn (NAEYC, 2020).

Theme 5: Social and Emotional Health and Well-Being of Students

Participants reported that developing the social and emotional health and well-being of their students is an important part of DAP and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines. This theme is consistent with information found in the literature review. Phillips et al. (2016) reported that early childhood teachers are accountable for creating high quality learning environments, buffering young children from stress in and outside the classroom, and helping them develop into contributing members of the community. Participants noted one way they support the social and emotional health and well-being of their students is by building a positive classroom community where students feel safe and valued. Establishing a positive classroom community is one way early childhood teachers help students develop a healthy self-concept (NAEYC, 2020). All of the

participants reported they use a variety of strategies to help students name their feelings and identify appropriate ways to manage their feelings. Participants also reported the importance of separating the child from the behavior. DAP in early childhood classrooms focuses on practices that supports the social-emotional growth of young children (NAEYC, 2009).

Participants also reported how they worked with families as part of supporting the social and emotional health and well-being of their students. Participants shared a multitude of strategies they use to include, inform, and collect information from families about their children's growth and development including phone calls, digital apps, and conferences. Part of DAP is recognizing, knowing, and valuing each child as an individual. Early childhood teachers use families and their expertise about their children to help them know their students (NAEYC, 2020). Participants also reported that equity and inclusion are important components of developing the social and emotional health and well-being of their students. Helping students understand their own value and strengths as well as the value and strengths of others is a DAP strategy that helps young children form healthy relationships with other (NAEYC, 2020).

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study was the small number of participants from a small geographic region who were interviewed. I interviewed 10 early childhood NBCTs from a single state in the Southeastern United States. The participants shared their perspectives on DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. However, because of the small number of participants from a small geographic region, the

representation of perspectives is limited. Early childhood NBCTs from other parts of the country may have different experiences than those represented by the participants in my study thus affecting transferability.

Another limitation of the study is researcher bias. I have been an EC Gen NBCT since 2001 and spent more than 20 years as an early childhood teacher. I have deep professional beliefs about DAP. To address this researcher bias, I kept a reflexive journal during data collection and analysis. I recorded personal reflections about the study and kept notes relevant to participant interviews and data analysis. I also used member checking to ensure that participants agreed with the accuracy of the findings and the fairness of the interpretations of the data. Additionally, I had an expert reviewer who reviewed the final data analysis as another way to monitor for bias.

Recommendations

This basic qualitative study explored early childhood NBCTs perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Participants included in this study identified beliefs about DAP and young children, teaching strategies, influence of school, district, and state policies on DAP, professional collaborations, social and emotional health and well-being of students as important DAP they use. Participants believed that meeting children where they are and knowing and teaching students as individuals was important to their use of DAP and strategies. Participants reported an extensive knowledge of engaging and differentiated teaching strategies they use in their work with young children. Participants perceived that the influence of policy hindered their ability to use DAP and strategies. Participants believed

that collaborations with other professionals helped them use DAP and strategies.

Participants perceived that they are responsible for helping develop the social-emotional health and well-being of their students. The study finding support the gaps in practice about EC Gen NBCTs perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. The following recommendations for further research are grounded in the strengths and limitations of the current study as well as the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

One recommendation for further research is that a similar study be conducted in different geographic locations within the United States to explore the perspectives of early childhood NBCTs. All of the participants in this study referenced a newly passed law applicable to the teachers and students in the state where this study took place. This law requires retention of students who are not reading on grade level at the end of third grade. The perspectives of early childhood NBCTs in other states where a similar law and policy does not exist could be very different. Also, in states where a similar law and policy has already been implemented, perspectives of early childhood NBCTs may be very different. Studies of early childhood NBCTs in different parts of the country could provide similar results to verify those of this study, or could provide different, additional information to improve the understanding of early childhood NBCTs perceptions about the use of DAP and strategies.

A second recommendation for further research is that a similar study be conducted with a different participant population. The participants in this study were early childhood NBCTs who became certified in 2017 or later. The EC Gen NBCT

process is rigorous, and the EC Gen Early Childhood Standards are well-aligned with the NAEYC DAP guidelines. Teachers who complete the process of NBC spend numerous hours planning, teaching, assessing, and reflecting on their practice. Early childhood teachers who have not had the professional learning opportunity of becoming a NBCT may have very different perspectives about the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Studies of early childhood teachers who are not EC Gen NBCTs could provide similar results or provide differing perspectives of early childhood teachers beliefs about their use of DAP and strategies.

Implications

This study has the potential to effect positive social change by providing knowledge that early childhood educators and stakeholders can use to improve the use of DAP and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines. This information has the potential to be used to plan effective, high-quality professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators, thus improving their understanding and use of DAP. This increased understanding may provide opportunities for children to be engaged in high quality early childhood experiences leading to better outcomes in learning and development. This information also has the potential to be used to educate school administrators and other stakeholders who are not in classrooms with young children, but who make decisions that affect day-to-day life in classrooms. A greater understanding of DAP and strategies that are supported by DAP guidelines could help administrators when making decisions affecting early childhood teachers and the children they teach.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. There is limited relevant research about the practices of early childhood NBCTs and their perspectives on the DAP and strategies they use. Much of the research around NBCTs and their practices is quantitative and focuses on academic achievement gains for students in Grades 3–12 who are taught by NBCTS. I interviewed 10 early childhood NBCTS who taught prekindergarten first, or second grade. Participants were forthcoming in responding to interview questions about DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines.

Five themes emerged from the data including (a) beliefs about DAP and young children; (b) teaching strategies; (c) influence of school, district, and state policies on DAP; (d) professional learning through collaborations; and (e) social and emotional health and well-being of students. The findings of this study fill a gap in practice by contributing to a greater understanding of early childhood NBCTs' perspectives on DAP and strategies they use that are consistent with DAP guidelines.

It is important for early childhood educators to understand and be able to explain the importance of DAP as a way to support the individuality of their students while also satisfying the academic expectations of stakeholders (Brown & Weber, 2016). This study provided new knowledge about the perspectives of early childhood NBCTs and their use of DAP and strategies consistent with DAP guidelines. The findings of this study can be used to improve the use of DAP and strategies in early childhood classrooms and to

inform high-quality professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators.

The findings may help inform school administrators and other decision makers about the importance of DAP and strategies. Quality early childhood education is critically important in ensuring positive future outcomes for young children.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for Early Childhood National Board Certified Teachers

Participant # _____ Date: _____ Time _____

Script before the interview:

Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for my research study. As we have discussed before, the purpose of my study is to explore the perspectives of the developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and strategies early childhood NBCTs use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. Our interview today will last approximately forty-five minutes to one hour, and I will be asking you some questions to help me understand your perspectives of DAP and strategies you use that are consistent with DAP guidelines. As a reminder, any information you share with me will be kept in confidence and your identity will not be revealed. This is a voluntary study, and you have the right to withdraw at any time.

Previously, you signed a consent form. Do you have any questions about the consent form or anything else relevant to being interviewed for the study?

We also discussed that I have your permission to audio record our conversation strictly for my use to be certain the notes that I am taking are accurate. Is this still okay with you? (___yes or ___no).

If yes: Thank you so much!

If no: Thank you for letting me know. I will take written notes of our conversation today.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions for me?
If during the interview, you have any questions, feel free to ask.

Interview Questions:

To get us started, can you tell me your name, where and what you teach, how many years of experience you have, and what year you became an Early Childhood Generalist National Board Certified Teacher (EC Gen NBCT)?

Introductory Questions

- What is your undergraduate degree in?
- Aside from being an EC Gen NBCT, do you hold any advanced degrees?
- How long have you been teaching? What grade do you currently teach? Have you always taught this grade, or which other grades have you taught?
- What are your favorite things about teaching this grade/age group?

Transition Questions

Interview Question 1:

Describe your overall perspective(s) about the experience of becoming an EC Gen NBCT?

Probes if needed

- How did the process change your teaching?
- How did the process affirm your beliefs or practice in any way?
- What effect did becoming an EC Gen NBCT have on your teaching?
- What were the positive aspects of the experience of becoming an EC Gen? The negative aspects?

Interview Question 2:

What is your understanding of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP)?

Probes if needed

- What effect, if any, did the reading and implementation of the Early Childhood Generalist Standards have on your understanding of DAP?
- What were the factors about the NBC process that helped you develop a greater understanding of DAP?

Interview Question 3:

What stands out to you about the importance of creating a classroom community that is caring and equitable?

(DAP Guideline #1-creating a caring, equitable community of learners)

Probes if needed

- What are practices you employ to establish a sense of classroom community?
- Describe the ways your students are involved in the arts during their school day.
- How do you help children develop social-emotional skills and strategies?
- How did the NBC process influence your pedagogical knowledge?
- How did the NBC process influence your content knowledge?

Interview Question 4:

Describe how you create partnerships with families, colleagues, and other education stakeholders in ways that support student growth as well as ways that support your growth as a teacher.

(DAP Guideline #2 Engaging in reciprocal relationships with families and communities)

Probes if needed

- How do you share what your students are learning and still need to learn with their families?
- Do you teach students or work with families who are emergent bilinguals? If so, how does your understanding of their language and culture affect your planning?

- What do you learn from your collaborations with colleagues, those in the building, or virtually, that helps you be a more accomplished teacher?
- Is it difficult to bring the community into your classroom or to take your classroom out into the community?

Interview Question 5:

(DAP Guideline #3 Observing, Documenting and Assessing Child Development and Learning)

What strategies do you use to assess your students?

Probes if needed

- How do you use technology for teaching and/or learning?
- If you use small group instruction, how do you decide which children work in your different groups?
- What do you learn from observing students in the classroom, or from collecting anecdotal notes from your observations?
- Are there formative/summative assessments you are required to use by your school?
- Are there formative/summative assessments you are required to use by your district?
- Are there formative/summative assessments you are required to use by the state?

Interview Question 5:

(DAP Guideline #4-Teaching to enhance child development and learning)

What are some teaching strategies that you are currently using that you believe are effective in support your students' learning and development?

Probes if needed

- How do you help students understand difficult grade-level concepts?
- When you work with small groups of students or are working with students one-on-one, what are the other students doing?
- How many minutes a day are children in your school given for recess?
- Describe the ways your students are involved in the arts during their school day.
- How do you help children develop social-emotional skills and strategies?

Interview Question 6:

(DAP Guideline #5-Planning and implementing an engaging curriculum to achieve meaningful goals)

Tell me how you plan for all the content areas you are required to teach.

Probes if needed

- Do you teach students or work with families who are emergent bilinguals? If so, how does your understanding of their language and culture affect your planning?
- What is your process for planning for instruction both in terms of teacher-directed and child-initiated activities?

- What opportunities for choice do your students have throughout the day?
- How do you teach reading/language arts? Math? Social studies? Science?)

Interview Question #7:

(DAP Guideline #6- Demonstrate professionalism as an early childhood educator)

Describe times you have advocated for your students, your families, and/or the profession.

Probes if needed

- Are you a member of any professional organizations related to the field of early childhood education?
- In your practice, what does it mean to you to be a reflective practitioner?
- What are your strategies for continuous professional learning that informs your practice?

Closing Question***Interview Question 8:***

Is there anything else you would like to add to our conversation that you think is important for me to know to help me understand your perspectives about how the process of becoming an EC Gen NBCT has influenced your use of DAP in your classroom?

Conclusion: I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to get to know you and your perspectives about DAP and the strategies you use that are supported by DAP guidelines. A one- to two-page summary of the data results will be shared with you. I will ask you to verify it for accuracy, or any inaccuracies or discrepancies, and share that information with me. I will correct any inaccuracies or discrepancies that you find.