Public School Based Early Childhood Teachers' Beliefs and Their Approaches to Curriculum: A Naturalistic Case Study

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PUBLIC SCHOOL BASED EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS’ BELIEFS AND THEIR APPROACHES TO CURRICULUM: A NATURALISTIC CASE STUDY

JESSICA D. SLADE
Doctoral Program in Teaching, Learning, and Culture

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Joseph, who encouraged me to pursue my dreams, finish my dissertation, kept me laughing, and reminded me that it is too late to change my major.
PUBLIC SCHOOL BASED EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS’ BELIEFS AND THEIR APPROACHES TO CURRICULUM: A NATURALISTIC CASE STUDY

by

JESSICA D. SLADE, M.Ed.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
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for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This study explores the beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices of public school-based early childhood pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers on the U.S.-Mexico border. Additionally, introduced in this work is a new framework for making visible the belief and practices of classroom teachers, as well as theories and approaches to Early Childhood Education, called the process-product continuum. This naturalist multi-case study utilized semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, artifact collection, and construction of visual timelines from three participants; participant narratives are presented, classroom practices and belief statements are analyzed, and mapped on the process-product continuum. Findings indicate that in addition to teacher beliefs, Early Childhood Education teaching practices may additionally depend on previous experiences, students teaching and other personal life factors such as parenthood and in particular, may be heavily influenced by systemic restrictions. Further, result shows that all participants in the study employed teaching practices that spanned the entire process-product continuum, suggesting that this framework may be a valuable alternative to current dichotomous models for teacher reflection in the Early Childhood Education field. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In the current post No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era, the field of early childhood continues to feel the effects of curriculum push down that has resulted from the standardization of curriculum and the test taking emphasis placed on schools in middle elementary grades. Many schools have implemented standardized assessments of children beginning as early as prekindergarten to determine their school readiness in relation to the standardized tests they will take in third grade. Public school curriculum has been narrowed, eliminating school subjects that are not tested (Cawelti, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Guilfoyle, 2006; Robinson, 2016; Volante, 2004). As a result, educators have often been pushed to teach to the test and focus on testing rather than learning (Guilfoyle, 2006; Popham, 1999; Volante, 2004). In many cases, standards have been elevated while Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), such as play-based learning strategies and child-centered approaches has been abandoned (Adcock & Patton, 2001; Wein, 2004). As a consequence, individual creativity and the creative arts are being stamped out in an effort for students to achieve higher test scores at young ages (Hedges & Cullen, 2005; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009). The main goal for students to pass the tests rather than authentic learning in early grades is suggested to be contributing to a loss of individual student identity, with students assimilating to the hegemonic culture, the continuation of the marginalization of non-dominant cultural groups, and the assimilation to the dominant cultures creatively as well as linguistically, culturally, and traditionally (Cawelti, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008; Gay, 2013).

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was reauthorized, giving individual states greater responsibility for determining accountability systems for their schools and districts.
The goal of ESSA is to create accountability systems that are designed to improve schools through student learning and achievement “aimed at preparing students for life after graduation; that provide educators with information to improve their practice; and most importantly, that support schools’ capacities to reflect on and adjust their efforts to support students and educators” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016, p. 2). Within this system, it is possible to create curriculum that is play based, developmentally appropriate, and addresses the “Whole Child” [“Whole Child” is an approach common in the field of Early Childhood Education that values and nurtures development in social, emotional and physical domains equally with the cognitive (academic) domain]. Assessments can now be in the form of portfolios, projects, or extended performance tasks, as well as standardized assessments. The most emphasized component of the ESSA is the control individual states now have for designing and implementing their own accountability systems. Texas, however, has always utilized its own state assessments, so a change in curriculum may not be eminent as a part of the ESSA.

Some scholars have found that curriculum that places emphasis on standardization and product (or end result) serves to undermine the different learning styles of the diverse population of students within each classroom (Cawelti, 2006; NAEYC 2009; Volante, 2004). In fact, Robinson (2006) argues that emphasis on standardization is to blame for the influx of diagnoses for learning disabilities, as well as instances of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis due to the student’s inability to assimilate to the standards and related didactic teaching styles. The current system seems to be creating new labels for children who are unable to assimilate to the standardization (Cawelti, 2006; Guilfoyle, 2006; Robinson, 2016; Volante, 2004). Moreover, teaching to the test as a pedagogical practice utilizes passive teaching methods such as memorization, and “drill and kill”, whilst eliminating development in critical
thinking skills (Cawelti, 2006; Robinson, 2016). Yet, critical thinking skills are likely to be needed and important later in life after graduation (the goal of ESSA).

Prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms are now typically found in the public elementary school settings and hence, are being influenced by standardization and the environment that is more test-driven. In Texas, the state learning objectives knowns as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) have developed the Texas Pre-Kindergarten Guidelines, where preschool standards are aligned with the elementary standards of kindergarten through first grade. Within many public schools that offer prekindergarten and kindergarten, the effort of preparing students for school readiness assessment and the elementary school years has created classrooms that are more content-driven. This is counter to pedagogical approaches driven by play-based and child-centered methods that form the basis of DAP, and which are recognized by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as “best practice” in the field of Early Childhood Education (NAEYC, 2009). There seems to be a dis-connect between the field nationally and current public school implementation of early childhood education at the state level, including Texas, and specifically the region where this study takes place. Hence, current public school implementation may, or may not, align with public early childhood teachers’ beliefs on best practice for prekindergarten and kindergarten.

Early childhood approaches that are often labeled as non-traditional in public school settings and who oppose a “teach to the test” mentality (such as Reggio Emilia, Montessori, High/Scope and Waldorf) utilize the creative arts as an essential component for teaching content. Such approaches focus on active learning, play-based strategies and student-centered approaches; research has identified these classrooms as ones that engage students holistically, emphasize learning, and build critical thinking skills (Au, 2012; Chen, & McNamee, 2011;
Within these non-traditional approaches, art that focuses on the outcome is known as product oriented pedagogy, whereas art that focuses on the journey to reach a learning objective is known as process oriented pedagogy (Edwards, 2010; Narayan, 2010).

The previous introduction to product-oriented pedagogy emphasized a “teaching to the test” mentality and presented product as a negative entity. In the process-product continuum that is presented in chapter 2, product and process are not dichotomous or at odds; both have merit for different situations and purposes. As such, there are instances where product-oriented pedagogy is essential to the mastery of a skill or knowledge. For example, lessons that are focused on teaching safety, such as “stop, drop, and roll”, looking both ways before crossing the street, or creative arts endeavors that are dependent on product oriented pedagogy for its success, such as origami or sewing, require a certain element of product-oriented pedagogy for success. The goal of these lessons is the safety of the students or application of a specific art form, and requires strict rigor in mastery of the concept. This strongly suggests that in early childhood education, there is a need to include both product-oriented and process-oriented pedagogy to address a wide range of learning objectives, learning abilities and learning styles of the students in the classroom. Further, in the current educational climate specific to this study, there is a strong emphasis on test achievement. Students must still be able to pass a test to continue in various endeavors and thus, exposure to testing is an essential hands-on component to succeeding in school districts in the borderland.

Process-oriented pedagogy is often associated with non-traditional and non-public school settings. However, both product and process-oriented pedagogies can be used in the public
school settings, depending on several factors such as the learning objectives and goals, teacher beliefs, the needs of the students in the classroom, and the current level of the students in the classroom. Rather than a strict dichotomy, this study introduces a process-product continuum as a theoretical framework for viewing early childhood teaching practice (defined in the theoretical framework section p. 11) and explores three Texas early childhood public school teachers’ beliefs along this continuum. The continuum argues that both process and product, as defined in the theoretical framework, can be essential components to classroom learning and can be beneficial to both the teachers and the students.

**The Significance of the Study**

The factors that influence their beliefs, and in turn the pedagogy that is used within their classrooms, may work to inform how we prepare our early childhood teachers. A wealth of research supports that the practices teachers’ employ in the classroom is dependent on their personal beliefs about the way children learn (Brown, 2005; Cross et al, 2009; Garvis et al., 2012; Vartuli, 1999). These personal beliefs in turn affect teacher decision-making about how curriculum is implemented and the types of systems and classroom culture they cultivate in teaching the wide range of knowledge and skills required through the standards (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2009; McMullen, 1997).

Shulman (2013) reports on the “the missing paradigm” within research on teachers’ beliefs about pedagogy as ignoring the how’s and why’s of individual teachers, additionally, the missing paradigm refers to the dis-connect between teaching content and teaching pedagogy. In general, the current literature on early childhood teachers’ beliefs typically takes a quantitative approach using self-reporting tools to determine teachers’ beliefs through pre-determined belief statements and evaluating the level the teacher identifies with the statement. However, rather
than pre-packaging beliefs, this study explores individual teachers’ beliefs through an open-ended process where the teachers’ belief statements originate from the individual teacher.

This naturalistic-case study (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Stake, 1995) will explore and seek to understand public school based prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs about their approaches to classroom practices and what these look like within a specific context, namely the U.S.-Mexico Borderland. By understanding teachers’ beliefs about their teaching approaches and classroom practices, the hope is to inform the empirical literature, and in turn affect early childhood teacher preparation by specifically investigating the influences that have shaped the participants’ beliefs about teaching approaches and practices. This study will not seek to directly compare, but will seek to investigate as a multiple-case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), by providing a synthesis of the separate cases as a broadly represented bounded case. Additionally, this work will utilize the process-product continuum (defined in a later section) as a theoretical framework by analyzing the collected data within this model as a tool for envisioning teacher beliefs and practice. This model can have practical application, helping pre-service and in-service early childhood teachers map their beliefs and practices across the continuum to provide a deeper understanding of how their own practices may benefit or hinder the success of their students while simultaneously providing a venue for teacher self-reflection. It may also provide an opportunity for metacognition, helping the teacher thinking about their thinking in relation to the Early Childhood field and best practices, and identify other possible ways of exploring their own craft in the teaching profession.

**Selection of Literature**

This study utilizes various perspectives on process and product oriented pedagogies as a lens to both define a new model, and to explore the practices and beliefs of public school-based
early childhood teachers at one elementary school in the U.S.-Mexico borderland. There is an abundance of published anecdotal reports (Galvan, 2009) and reports on professional practices on the topic of product and process art in early childhood. These accountings are often utilized by early childhood teachers for professional development, specifically related to art education. Empirical data that uses process and (or versus) product art in early childhood as terms, however, is more difficult to find in the general early childhood literature. Instead, the literature often uses other terms such as: student-centered versus teacher-directed, active versus passive learning strategies, developmental versus content or academic driven, and alternative versus traditional as related or analogous concepts to process vs. product; this suggests that literature on process and product, when presented through other terms, may be used to inform other curricula domains beyond art education. Themes from the literature on product and process-oriented teaching practice has yielded common traits that work to support the past discussion of these pedagogical approaches as binary. Research on product-oriented pedagogy revealed behaviors commonly found in practice, such as: automaticity (Feldon, 2007; Gu, 2012; Maye, 2013), students work alone and reproduce models (Galanki, 2005; Sidorkin, 2004), and the use of external reinforcement (Albaiz & Ernest, 2015; Kohn, 1999). In contrast, a review of the anecdotal literature on process oriented pedagogy suggests the identification of 4 necessary traits required for implementing this approach in practice, henceforth referred to as the 4 C’s: Communication (Bainbridge et al., 2009; Chen & McNamee, 2011; Coates & Coates, 2012; Flewitt, 2006; NAEYC, 2009), Collaboration (Au 2012; Chen & McNamee, 2011; Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008; Flewitt, 2006; NAEYC, 2009), Classroom Culture (Apple, 2014; Flewitt, 2006; NAEYC, 2009), and Creativity (Cheung 2012; Dust, 1999; Flewitt, 2006; Fumoto et al., 2012; Gullatt, 2007; Kemple & Nissenberg, 2000; Narey, 2009; Prieto et al., 2006; Robinson, 2006; Sternberg
& Lubart, 1999; Webb & Rule, 2012, 2014). The process-product continuum that is defined and presented in this work draws from the above research in art education, along with utilizing additional theoretical literature, anecdotal literature, and reports on professional practices in early childhood education more, to create a theoretical model that can be applied to all early childhood education generally.

Additionally, as an essential component to understanding the approaches and practices of early childhood teachers, the literature review will explore current trends and research on early childhood pedagogy that has been presented through empirical research literature. These trends are play (Kagan, 1990; Miller & Almon, 2009), developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Goldstein, 2008), and school readiness (Brown & Gasko, 2011; Gullo & Hughes, 2011). Literature on teacher beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices (Akin, 2013; Leung, 2012; Widger & Schofield, 2012) will also be reviewed. The study conducted in this work seeks to understand both teachers’ beliefs, and approaches and practices; therefore, reviewing current literature on pedagogy is essential to understanding situating this study within the empirical literature.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this naturalistic case study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995) is to understand and explore public school-based prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs about their approaches to classroom practices and what these looks like within the specific context of early childhood classrooms. This study will take place in a STEM-focused (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) public school in the borderland on the Texas and Mexico border. The STEM-focused school was chosen as the research site for the purpose of researching teacher’s beliefs, approaches, and practices within this specific context. The Texas
and Mexico borderland is significant setting in itself with Hispanic and Latino populations at 81%; 68% of the population speak Spanish; and 22% of the population fall below the poverty rate (citation omitted to protect anonymity). This city is also home to a University where many of the teachers currently working in the districts have graduated. The location of the research site is in a newly developing area, and the school is the newest school in the district.

The intent of this study is to apply the process-product continuum outlined in this work in a novel manner, utilizing pedagogies traditionally associated with the creative arts, to a context that may not be readily associated with the creative arts such as a STEM-focused schooling setting. Methods of inquiry used in this naturalistic case study include: participant observations, semi-structured interviews, the collection of artifacts in the form of photographs taken of student work, classroom teaching resources (including posters, and other items hung on the classroom walls), and the collection of teacher handouts, visuals, lesson plans, and any other documents that may be relative to this study. Visual methods of timelines will also be utilized as tools for creating an additional venue for reflection from the participants. Data were analyzed through content analysis and narrative analysis through two separate stages: within-case analysis, and cross-case analysis, and in direct connection to the process-product continuum model outlined in this work.

Specifically, the research questions include:

1. What are the beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in a public school in the borderland?
2. What are the influences that have shaped these beliefs?
3. What do the teaching approaches and practices look like in the classroom?
4. How do these beliefs and teaching approaches map onto the process-product continuum model? And, how does this help visualize what is taking place in the classroom?
Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework and Review of the Literature

Defining the Process-Product Continuum

This study introduces a process-product continuum as the theoretical framework. Edwards (2010) defines a product approach as: “…more concerned with the final outcome or product than with the experience of creating. When we are concerned about how our art compares with that of others, we are focusing on product” (p. 7). Product oriented pedagogy relies on the product to define the population that produces it (Sidorkin, 2004). Students in these environments spend their days doing mass produced work in isolation while being discouraged to engage socially or verbally (Hedges & Cullen, 2005; Narayan, 2010; Ray & Smith, 2010; Sidorkin, 2004). When the desired goal is not reached, students are then forced to practice these skills harder, and rarely find enjoyment in the process of reaching the desired product (Hedges & Cullen, 2005; Narayan, 2010). Lack of enjoyment quickly leads to disengagement (Sidorkin, 2004).

Conversely, a process oriented pedagogy stresses the importance of hands-on, genuine experiences to enhance and facilitate student learning (Chen & McNamee, 2011, Cheung, 2012; Dust, 1999; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Fumoto et al., 2012; Gullatt, 2007; Hedges & Cullen, 2005; NAEYC, 2009; Narey, 2009; Ray & Smith, 2010; Strauch-Nelson, 2012), leading to the construction and co-construction of individual student identity, uniqueness, and cultural confidence among the participants (Apple, 2014; Bakhtin, 1990; Flewitt, 2006; NAEYC, 2009). As well, process oriented pedagogy encourages student engagement (Webb & Rule, 2012, 2014; Zhbanova, Rule & Stichter, 2015) and control over personal learning (Edwards et al., 1998). Each experience in the process oriented approach contributes to the individual student’s knowledge (Bakhtin, 1990, 1993; Hicks, 2000), in turn becomes a part of who they are (Bakhtin,
1990, 1993), and makes each student unique in their perception of their individual experience (Hicks, 2000).

The process-product continuum framework of early childhood education presented in this work focuses on how children are learning (teaching methods and strategies), not what the children are learning (content). The continuum spans both extremes: on one end, extreme product oriented pedagogy is completely teacher-directed (Narayan, 2010), with emphasis on standardized curricula (Rushton & Juola-Rushton, 2008), and learning independently (Gu, 2012); on the other end, extreme process oriented pedagogy is completely child or student-directed (Tzuo, 2007), with emphasis on student learning (Ortlieb, 2010), and collaboration (Little & Cohen-Vogel, 2016). The how facilitates the what, as there are lessons that are implicitly taught in both paradigms. For example, Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, and Milburn (1998) compared child-centered preschool and kindergartens to “didactic” and teacher-directed preschool and kindergartens in achievement and motivation, and found that children in child-centered programs were more likely to be self-confident in their skills, whereas children in teacher-directed programs showed more dependency on adults for permission and approval. Child-centered programs also scored higher on the preferences to be challenged and pride in accomplishment. This same study found that children in the teacher-directed programs scored higher on the letters and reading achievement test, but also had higher instances of worry and anxiety. This study is an example of the how students learn implicitly taught concepts in both approaches to teaching practice.

In this framework, the process and product act as perspectives at opposite ends of a continuum. This differs from the process-product paradigm (Winne, 1987), where process focuses on behaviors, and product focuses on achievement. Instead, the process-product
continuum framework stems from a process *versus* product view of pedagogical practices, relating to both the teachers and the students. It recognizes that both behaviors and achievement are present throughout the entire continuum, regardless of the level of process or the level of product. Additionally, the process-product continuum framework recognizes that both extremes of the continuum have merit within the classroom for specific purposes, however, the process-oriented approach seeks to provide learning in the form of experiences, whereas the product-oriented approach seeks to establish a demonstration of skill. This conceptualization differs from previous definitions and related research in that it serves as a framework recognizing that teaching approaches and classroom practices from a single teacher may reside at varying degrees on a continuum; previous research on process and product sought to determine levels of student achievement within each paradigm that resides as binaries rather than varying levels (Fang, 1996).

Within the process-product continuum framework, theoretical perspectives can be found. For example, the process end of the continuum may be connected to Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1987), and theory of imagination (2004), Dewey’s theories of learning (1900, 1902, 1916), and Bakhtin’s being-as-event (1990). For example, Dewey’s theories of learning emphasize social interaction (*communication and collaboration*) on the part of the learner within the school setting (*classroom culture*) and the world outside the school’s walls. As children gain information they must rely on their own *creativity* for inventing their interpretation as to how this new information fits within their already existing understanding of it (1916). Dewey’s theories of learning places process at the forefront. At the opposite end of the continuum, Skinner’s (1948) theory of operant conditioning, LaBerge and Samuels’ (1974) theory of automaticity, and DeKeyser’s (2007) skill acquisition theory tend to reside on the
product side. For example, Skinner’s theory of operant conditioning is directly dependent on external reinforcement, often through rewards and punishment. Skinner believed that by supplying the appropriate reinforcement, conditioning would lead to automaticity. Therefore, for teachers who desire that their students work alone, while demonstrating a relevant skill (reproducing models) the teacher must also supply an external reinforcement. Overtime, the teacher will have then moved the student closer to their goals of automatically demonstrating the desired skill (Skinner, 1951, 1953). These learning theories are not married to one side of the continuum or the other but are relatively placed depending on the context and specifics of the pedagogy enacted that connects to that theory. Figure 1 represents the process-product continuum in relation to how various learning theories generally fall within specific contexts. The double sided arrow indicates that the continuum continues beyond these examples into areas that are not identified within the realm of this study. The process end of the continuum is represented with the color red, and “sociocultural theory: collaboration between students” resides at the far end of the continuum with the representation of the same color and shade. The opposite end of the continuum is product and is represented with blue with the “theory of operant conditioning: writing worksheet” also represented in blue. The theories and pedagogical learning activities associated with these theories are plotted within the continuum in varying shades between blue and red indicating varying levels of product and process within these theoretical implications, and pedagogical approaches to learning activities.
The process-product continuum is a framework that can be used for analyzing a variety of teaching aspects: practices, beliefs, approaches, curriculum, pedagogy, and so forth. Once the main tenets or characteristics are identified within a practice, for instance, it may be mapped on the continuum based on the varying levels. For example, if we are interested in practices, and we
identify that during a lesson--the teacher is only lecturing, students are expected to remain silent (or possibly ask questions, or answer when called on but rarely), students are expected to take notes, and then rewarded for "paying attention" (fairly common practice in a lot elementary classrooms)—then this practice would be mapped on the product side, since all four of the tenets of product are emphasized. This could be effective for helping to analyze practice because the continuum supports that both sides are valuable and that lessons should utilize the tenets from both ends of the continuum. As a practical application, the teacher could then see that they are heavy on one side and may try to incorporate more creative practices, or collaboration within the classroom to balance the practices utilized. In this way, the framework could be applied to every classroom regardless of age or grade level. At the opposite end, schools who are heavy on the process side face issues that these practices are without rigor, and do not prepare their students for “real life”. One of my participants, Ms. Lopez said that we live in a testing culture, so if she didn't expose her students to tests now, in kindergarten, she feels that she is doing them a disservice. This is an argument that many teachers have. Practices that only rely on collaboration and communication (process extreme) for instance, may not build automaticity (product) which is a critical component of successful reading and mathematics learning. How successful learning outcomes are reached can vary; the process-product framework is valuable in that it provides a visual picture of practice. It allows teachers an opportunity for reflection and can serve as a focal point for professional discussion on how to achieve a balanced practice (i.e. in order to reach a balanced practice, a teacher would have to utilize all 8 of the tenets, 4 from each side of the continuum).
Beliefs about Pedagogy within the Process-Product Continuum

Edwards (2010) presents the affective development continuum, where information is first received, then responded to, valued, organized, and then becomes part of the value complex. It is a recursive process, directly related to Bakhtin’s being-as-event (1990). Every experience works to inform an individual’s belief system. Within the process-product continuum framework, it is expected that the school experiences each individual participant has encountered has contributed to their individual belief system about pedagogy. This study seeks to uncover these experiences as connected to teacher beliefs and how it is then in turn connected to their teaching approaches and classroom practices.

Within any applied pedagogy is the teacher’s beliefs about how and what is presented, or represented, in their classrooms. Clark and Peterson (1996) identified the two domains of teachers’ thought processes, and teachers’ actions: the observable and the unobservable. These domains have informed research that sought to connect teacher’s beliefs to their practices in the classroom. Many scholars (i.e. Clark & Peterson, 1996; Deplit, 1988; Hollingsworth, 1989) have studied teacher’s beliefs with the intent to inform and connect beliefs to pedagogy. Scholars have focused on teacher’s expectations of students and the effect is has on student performance (Good, 1987; Marshall & Weinstein, 1984); teacher theories about the nature of knowledge acquisition and how students learn (Fang, 1995); and teacher decision-making on how to teach (Shavelson & Stern, 1981), how to represent what they are teaching (Kinzer, 1988), and how to question students’ understanding (Shulman, 2013). Most prior research upholds: “Theories and beliefs make up an important part of teachers’ general knowledge though which teachers perceive, process and act upon information in the classroom” (Fang, 1995, p. 49). Thus, the consensus seems to be that teacher’s beliefs inform the way they approach relationships with
their students, their approach to presenting content, their practices of classroom management, and the classroom culture that is created aside from the school culture they currently reside in.

**Process**

Process pedagogy stresses the importance of hands-on, genuine experiences to enhance and facilitate student learning while utilizing the different voices of the classrooms through the four C’s of classroom culture (Bakhtin, 1990; Gee, 2012; Vygotsky, 1987) communication (Bakhtin, 1990; Dewey, 1902; Hicks, 2000), collaboration (Dewey, 1900, 1902, 1916; Hicks, 2000), and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Dewey, 1916; Vygotsky, 2004) as identified in the literature. Figure 2 represents the four C’s in relation to one another, as well as being dependent on one another. Within this framework, classroom culture requires collaboration and communication from its members, while embracing the individual creative ideas that are presented as a collaborative community. Creativity requires an opportunity to share the new and innovative ideas with peer groups requiring communication and many times stemming from a collaborative effort. Creativity also requires a feeling of safety, therefore, students rely on being accepted, and celebrated for their individual contribution to their classroom culture in order to convey and explore their creativity and contribute as a member of the learning community.

Collaboration and Communication have been combined, since they are reliant on one another, and is explained in greater detail in a later section (p. 20). Collaboration and Communication are an essential component to creating a learning community that fosters creativity and acceptance of one another individually.
Figure 2. The four C’s of Process

Within the process paradigm, learning requires a method in which the learner is engaged within an interaction that stimulates their interests, and the learner also produces a valued output of original ideas. Where process is utilized, the focus is on the journey to constructing the knowledge rather than what is produced as a result, therefore,

We have to respect the student, not for his product…but for the search for truth in which he is engaged. We must listen carefully for those words that may reveal a truth; that may reveal a voice. We must respect our student for his potential truth and for his potential voice. (Murray, 1972, p. 5)

If value is to be placed on each individual within the classroom culture, and what they uniquely contribute to the learning experience, an element of communication must also be present.
Learning in alienation is rarely successful (Sidorkin, 2004) and when students are expected to refrain from communicating, they tend to disengage entirely from learning as well.

**Classroom Culture**

Learning is rooted in the ability to construct and co-construct meaning within social contexts, individual contexts, and cultural contexts (Vygotsky, 2004); therefore, interaction and social experiences are the foundation to a conducive learning environment. “Meaning is primarily the result of social interactions, negotiations, contestations, and agreements among people. It is inherently “variable and social” (Gee, 2012, p. 21). A specific meaning is usually shared between cultural or social groups, based on common traditions and experiences; however, this meaning is not stagnant when presented within different contexts, cultures, and societies, for different purposes and motivational usages (Vygotsky, 2004). As we gain experiences and social interactions, we begin to see the world through experiences we can readily identify with; every new experience is connected by the similarities we can identify with old experiences. Bakhtin (1990) refers to this perspective of “aesthetic activity” that focuses on the development of self through the relationships formed with others.

Apple (2014) defines culture as “the way of life of a people, the constant and complex process by which meanings are made and shared… [it is] a producer and reproducer of value systems and power relations” (pp.45-46). This view of culture provides cause for oppression when the question of “Whose knowledge is of most worth?” (Apple, 2014, p. 47) is asked and other cultures are ignored or misrepresented in an effort to construct a culture of hegemony. This creates a perspective of the “Other” that results in “weak attachments to the” (Banks, 2008, p. 132) dominant culture and thus the curriculum content presented within the education system. “The space in many ways reflects the culture of the people who create it and, on careful
examination, reveals even distinct layers of this cultural influence” (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 331). When students are unable to identify their home culture within the dominant education culture, they are at risk for developing “addictions [that] leave little room or time for democratic efforts to become mature, concerned about others, or politically engaged in social change” (West, 2004, p. 176). When the dominant culture is creating the environment within a school without representation of those individuals involved within that environment, then minority voices are silenced (West, 2004). “The history, language, experiences, and narratives of the Other are relegated to invisible zones of culture, borderlands where the dominant culture refuses to hear the voice of the Other” (Giroux, 2005, p. 148).

There is a call for culturally responsive teaching which is defined by Gay (2013) as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It is a means for improving achievement by teaching diverse students through their own cultural filters” (Gay, 2013, p. 50). Banks (2008) advocates for a transformative citizenship educational pedagogy that “helps students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values needed to function effectively within their cultural community, nation-state, and region and in the global community” (p. 129). A process oriented curriculum where students are encouraged to both create and learn about and from the creative arts in an open-ended approach, would enable students to learn in a transformative citizenship education model, and in a culturally responsive manner (Apple, 2014; Banks, 1994; Fraser, 2007; Gay, 2013; Giroux, 2005).

In the process paradigm, communication and collaboration work together, and rarely in isolation. Communication is required in order to collaborate, and collaboration is required
during the act of communication. The next section discusses communication and collaboration in relation to the process-product continuum.

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

Communication

The verbal exchange of ideas, through the sociocultural collaborative process is labeled as a “social chorus” (Bakhtin, 1990), the idea that words are never neutral, but carry and change meaning as they transfer from one learner to the next. As each learner receives the ideas and combines it with their individual funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) the ideas morph into a new idea that the learner did not previously have. This idea is then expressed, and presented and the process continues. Hicks (2000) describes this process as “one value center envelops another, enriching the other with an outside perspective. Truth is, therefore, never unitary, because there are always multiple possibilities present with differing centers of value and response” (p. 231).

Communication is more than one individual talking about an idea, that individual also must respond to others’ ideas, and evaluate them. Bakhtin (1981) wrote that words may never be “neutral”, nor may they belong to one single individual, or meaning. In fact, when an individual uses a word, the word then takes on that individual’s intended meaning, the receiver’s interpretation, the context it is presented, the culture it is presented in relation to, and the time it is said (Gee, 2012). Consequently, the speaker adopts that portion of otherness derived from the word (Hicks, 2000) and an element of collaboration takes place.

In the process-oriented approach to education, students must be allowed, and encouraged to communicate in a wide varieties of modes. Modes are a “set of resources people in a given culture can use to communicate” (Bainbridge et al., 2009, p. 4). It includes the written word, but
also semiotic representations, such as gestures, gaze, music, and so on. Multimodality refers to the various modes of communication used to convey a meaning (Kress, 2003). It is the interaction and negotiation between the communicator and the receiver. When we receive a message, we have in our heads “…a combination of the following things: images or prototypes of what is typical of the things the word refers to; information and facts we know…; and typical uses of the word and the typical range of context in which the word is normally used” (Gee, 2012, p. 95).

Communication is a combination of various modes to convey and interpret meaning (Gee, 2012; Kress, 2003). When we experience something we interpret different tools or modes to create a connection within our own minds to what the message is that is being conveyed. Our meaning is unique and based on our own prior experiences (Gee, 2012). Communicating multimodally is innate in infants as they express themselves through gestures, gaze, facial expressions, auditory noises, and cries. Flewitt (2006) reported:

“…children…3- and 4-year-olds use imitating actions to supplement their linguistic resources, and to negotiate ideas and actions, and children intentionally use gaze, touching and pointing to attract or direct attention, initiate talk, elicit responses, accompany requests and negotiate turn-taking. Gesture is involved in cognitive change: by giving access to information that children know but do not say to those supporting their learning, and by conveying thoughts that may not easily fit into the categorical system that their language offers, thereby easing the learner’s cognitive burden” (pp. 208-209).

In fact, Pahl (1999) suggests that young children move seamlessly between modes without interruption, as the needs, interests, and context change. Moreover, Jewitt and Kress,
(2003) argue “what it is possible to express and represent readily, easily, with a mode, given its materiality and given the cultural and social history of that mode” (p. 14) is naturally embedded in young children’s communicative processes. Dyson (2003) found that children employ various modes from their home and community and simultaneously combine them with modes from their school contexts to create meaning and connection to the experiences offered that are unfamiliar. Regardless of the mode, when young children are communicating, they gain insight into various meanings through the response they receive as a result of that communication. From “…comments, acceptance, or praise—from the significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, peers, siblings), children get a quite clear message: that they managed to produce a representation that the others can understand” (Papandreou, 2014, p. 87).

Collaboration

Sidorkin (2004) discusses the negative affects alienation has on students in the current educational paradigm, and relates this argument to the need for learning to be a social event, requiring the participant to share in experiences that construct discourses that are shared among the participants. Social discourse is the give and take of verbal communication of new ideas, and communication about ideas in general (Bakhtin, 1993). It is more than one individual talking about it, that individual also must respond to others’ ideas, and evaluate them.

Collaborate of young children is most often situated in their everyday play. Play lends itself to social and emotional development (NAEYC, 2009). When children are engaged in open-ended play, they are learning in a social setting that values the give and take of ideas (Hedges & Cullen, 2005). Through play, children are also able to solve everyday problems in a safe environment, free of the stigma often associated with mistakes (Robinson, 2016). There is
an element of inclusion that happens when children work together and achieve a common goal (Chen & McNamee, 2011; Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008; Flewitt, 2006; NAEYC, 2009).

CREATIVITY

Originality, or having original ideas or thoughts that have value (Cheung, 2012; Robinson, 2006; Sternberg and Lubart 1999) is a recurring theme throughout the research on creativity. Many scholars (Prieto, et al., 2006; Sternberg and Lubart, 1999) define creativity as the production of ideas that are both novel and appropriate: novel refers to the quality of the work produced as a result of creativity (Cheung, 2012); appropriate refers to “the usefulness of the product towards a certain need” (Prieto, et al., 2006, p. 279). Uniqueness, as a trait of the product, is not among the list of criteria for creativity in young children according to Dust (1999), since the child’s abilities may be unique or original to the child at that particular stage of development. However, the idea or product may not be original when compared to other children or ideas in general. Csikszentmihalyi (1999) combines the additional interaction between the producer and the audience catering to the need for creativity to be socially constructed. Prieto, et al., (2006) extends this model of socially constructed creativity by identifying “important aspects…[of] the individual (personal background), the field (society), and the domain (culture). Interaction between domain and individual transmits information; interaction between field and domain selects novelty; and interaction between the individual and the field stimulates novelty” (p. 279).

Richards (2010) uses the term “everyday creativity” referring to the use of creativity not applied in relation to specific domains such as the arts. For example, a different approach to solving a common problem may be considered an instance of everyday creativity (Besançon, 2013). This approach to problem-solving is essential, and to daily tasks is an essential
component to innovative responses (Besançon, 2013; Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Prieto et al., 2006; Richards, 2010; Torrance, 2001). The use of divergent thinking is similar to everyday creativity since it is the thought process that is used for finding multiple solutions to one problem (Besançon, 2013; Richards, 2010). Likewise, Torrance (2001) discusses the necessity of sensitivity to problems that need solving and the ability to solve them, as the root of creativity. Wright (1987) suggests that a child who uses information in unique and original ways is behaving creatively. The consensus of characteristics that make an individual creative include: curiosity, independence of judgement, sufficient resources, originality, knowledge, motivation, and sensitivity (Cheung, 2012; Prieto, et al., 2006; Sternberg and Lubart, 1999).

**Product**

The product oriented approach is located at the opposite end of the continuum. Within the literature, the following practices emerge as essential behaviors when implementing a product based approach: automaticity, students engage in independent work focused on model reproduction, and the use of external reinforcement. Figure 3 represents the product end of the continuum with the four behaviors that are essential to a completely product approach. Each behavior may stand independently of the other three; however, some of the behaviors may lead to the others and working alone is typically paired with model reproduction. This is represented in one-directional arrows. External reinforcement is seen as a component of operant conditioning that leads to automaticity; it may also be used to facilitate the practices of working alone and reproducing models. Students reproduce models may also be a condition of automaticity, as well as working alone. Students working alone and reproducing models are typically reliant on one another when the focus is product. For automaticity to be mastered,
students often reproduce models while they work alone, and there may be the use of external reinforcement, therefore, one-directional arrows point to automaticity.

Figure 2. Behaviors of product

**Automaticity**

Automaticity has been defined as the “mental operations that process information with little or no conscious awareness” (Feldon, 2007, p. 126). The mental processes occur without intention or effort (Gu, 2012), without conscious monitoring (Wolf, 2016), without additional resources (Woodward, 2006), and occurs rapidly (Guerin & Murphy, 2015). Automaticity allows for the optimal cognitive capacity to operate without attention to skills that maybe or become automatic in nature (LeBerge & Samuels, 1974). From the saying that “practice makes perfect”, automaticity is directly connected to the practiced skills or routines that are required to reduce cognitive load and achieve proceduralization (LeBerge & Samuels, 1974). One becomes
an expert at that skill and no longer requires cognitive function to perform the skill, but the skill is executed effortlessly (Feldon, 2007). Once the skill is proceduralized and becomes automatic, it becomes difficult to modify the performance of that skill (Wheatley & Wegner, 2001).

In education, many scholars (Cummings, Dewey, Latimer, & Good, 2011; Frey & Fisher, 2010; Gu, 2012; Guerin & Murphy, 2015; Maye, 2013; Tournaki, 2003; Wolf, 2016; Woodward, 2006) deem automaticity is an essential tool for basic academic skills such as letter-sound recognition (Wolf, 2016) and other literacy skills such as fluency and comprehension (Frey and Fisher 2010, Cummings et al, 2011), or the physical act of writing (Gu, 2012), as well as mathematical skills such as basic addition and subtraction (Tournaki, 2003), and multiplication facts (Woodward, 2006). Some scholars (Tournaki, 2003; Woodward, 2006) also consider automaticity as a helpful tool in working with children with learning disabilities. Automaticity of the basic skills enables the brain to take on more complex tasks (Feldon, 2007).

Scholars argue about the best practices for obtaining automaticity. One side of the argument (Tournaki, 2003; Woodward, 2006) is in favor of repeatedly reciting facts, or the memorization of the facts or end results. The other side of the argument (Guerin & Murphy, 2015; McMaster, 1998) is the repeated processes, or routines that are subskills required and then adaptable to various situations. Although there is a disagreement in how automaticity is achieved, all of these scholars agree that achieving automatic mastery of specific skills is essential to reducing cognitive load and freeing the brain for other cognitive functions.

STUDENTS WORK ALONE AND MODEL REPRODUCTION

Students Work Alone

In a product emphasized paradigm, importance is places on the end product, not the journey to achieving the product. Within this mind set, many educational practices place
emphasis on students completing their own work, without collaboration or communication; each student is expected to work silently and independently (Stipek, 2006). Scholars have used terms such as alienation (Sidorkin, 2004), and isolation (Galanaki, 2005) to describe these practices noting that education in this fashion deems the students voiceless, and lonely. These scholars’ attribute student alienation and isolation to the current test taking culture of the education system (Cawelti, 2006), and the emphasis that is placed on the product or the outcome of the test.

Testing is an individual activity that discourages communication practices, discourages collaborative opportunities, and requires students to work in isolation (Cawelti, 2006; Guilfoyle, 2006; Popham, 1999; Volante, 2004). The test based curriculum is one of “drill and kill”, narrowing the curriculum to fit the tests, and ignoring and suppressing of individualism and different cultures (Giroux, 2005). Tasks within this curriculum may be considered mindless (Sidorkin, 2004). Sidorkin (2004) contends that “…the use, is the ultimate aim of creation, and the exchange of useful or usable objects, ideas, and services is the basis for all social life. By contrast, students neither consume nor exchange the products of their schoolwork” (p. 254), deeming these experiences as useless; “if we create ourselves through producing things, what sort of self can be created by producing useless things?” (Sidorkin, 2004, p. 254).

However, many scholars (Byrnes, 2001; Caranfa, 2007; Galanaki, 2005; Zimmermann & Morgan, 2016) cite the need for silence (Zimmermann & Morgan, 2016) and solitude (Byrnes, 2001) as a resource for student reflection on self and their emotional development. For example, Zimmermann and Morgan (2015) link silence, solitude, and contemplation, asserting that along this path students discover their sense of self, and the inner workings of their relationships with others. Additionally, Langer (2000) expresses the need for reflection and being mindful: “Mindfulness is a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing
new things and sensitive to the context” (Langer, 2000, p. 220) which may promote enthusiasm for the content of the curriculum. Wood (2005) does not see a dichotomy between silence and speech, nor solitude and community, but view these as “mutual requirements of authentic human existence” (Wood 2005, p. 32).

Furthermore, Caranfa (2007) makes a case for solitude in education as linked to an aesthetic experience. Caranfa cites evidence of solitary philosophy as described by Plato, and St. Augustine, Rousseau, and Pascal; artistic links to Pico, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo. For Caranfa, solitude is equivalent to contemplation and essential to marrying emotions and intellect through art and aesthetic education. Similarly, Byrnes (2001) presents an interesting conflict between perceptions of silence and solitude as representing a student as lazy or appearing to be doing nothing versus the moment of silence for prayer and reflection; schools seem to be encouraging and discouraging these practices simultaneously. Byrnes argues that current schools give little attention to the right type of solitude, and discourages the students from doing nothing. The scholars in support of silence and solitude may be represented on the process end of the continuum if these methods are implemented in the aesthetic educational methods that rely on students’ individual expression within their silence and solitude; however, the scholars who are reporting on alienation and isolation testify that the tasks that are required to be completed silently and independently are expected to be reproduced in accordance with a given model.

**Students Reproduce Models**

Gullo and Hughes (2010a) discuss the current state of kindergarten within the United States as increasingly teacher-directed and content driven, resulting in instructional activities that rely on reproduction of skills through the use of worksheets, flashcards, and mass produced
coloring sheets geared toward streamlining assessment practices (Gullo & Hughes, 2010b). Within this paradigm, the curricula utilized focuses on the transmission of knowledge rather than on individual meaning making and knowledge construction (Eckoff 2012). Bresler (1993) labels this strategy for teaching as the “product orientation”, whereby the teacher provides the materials and direction for a specific project, with the focus on each student completing the task with little opportunity for self-expression, or differentiation of any kind. The reproduction of a model extends beyond the art-based curriculum, and can be seen as a call-and-repeat model where the teacher requires the students to repeat after them. Many scholars connect these strategies to rote methods of teaching, and suggest that such methods are not the best to employ in early childhood to promote deep learning (e.g. Ball, 1995).

**EXTERNAL REINFORCEMENT**

By nature, children seek approval and acceptance from authority figures, both in explicit and implicit ways (Feldman, 1973; Hall, 2009; Pahl, 1999; Papandreou, 2014; Wright, 1987); therefore, if the teacher is serving as the authority figure and places emphasis on the product, the child quickly assimilates their unique ideas to please the adult (Feldman, 1973; Hall, 2009; Kellogg, 1970; Papandreou, 2014). “We seem to have a need to share with others what we have discovered…we are looking for confirmation…through the response and assent of someone else. We want to know whether or not we are peculiar in having certain perceptions…We want to boast, we seek applause, we desire approval” (Feldman, 1973, pp. 52). When affirmation is received in the form of external reinforcement, such as punishment or reward, it may be labeled as a form or operant conditioning or behaviorism (Skinner, 1948). Early childhood classroom management practices have a long-standing association with theories of behaviorism (Kohn, 1999). Many preschools use rewards like stickers, happy or sad faces, or time out in an attempt
to control students’ behavior in favor of learning the material that may be seen as uninteresting by the students (Albaiz & Ernest, 2015). This can have detrimental effects on students’ social and emotional development, such as the reinforcement of negative labels (Kohn, 2006), negative competition, and negative perceptions of self-worth. Additionally, the fear of making mistakes is eminent; Robinson (2006) attributes the death of creativity to the growing stigmata of making mistakes.

**Process-Product Continuum Framework situated in the General Early Childhood Education Literature**

This section utilizes empirical, and in some cases, theoretical literature, with the purpose of discussing current major trends in pedagogy and practice in early childhood education and their relation to the process-product continuum framework outlined previously. The major forces in the field of early childhood education that are driving pedagogy are: play, developmentally appropriate practice, and school readiness. This section will also discuss the empirical literature on teacher beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices.

**Trends in Early Childhood Pedagogy and Practice**

**Play**

Play and the important role it plays in children’s development has long been a topic of conversation in the field of early childhood education. In the early years of a child’s life, play is the work they accomplish for learning about the world around them. It is believed by developmentalists (Little & Cohen-Vogel, 2016) that play is the vehicle for development in cognition, social skills, emotional regulation, and physical milestones (Kagan, 1990; Miller & Almon, 2009). In early childhood education, the first kindergartens who embraced the Froebellian perspective are credited with the first conceptualization of play as curricular practice.
Froebel (1899) is known as the father of kindergarten and emphasized play as the most natural form of expression a child can make in regards to learning about the world around them. Dewey (1900, 1902, 1916) built upon these ideals by establishing learning through play as a central tenet to his theories about child development in early childhood education. This idea was again added to by Piaget (1951), who recognized that a child’s symbolic play and abstract thinking was expressed through play and interaction within the natural environment. Vygotsky (1978) then added the adult’s role in mediating the child’s play in a learning environment.

Fleer (2011) connects cognitive development to play through the use of imaginative play within a kindergarten classroom. It is through the child’s interactions with their peers that they are able to draw upon their skills and knowledge about the world around them to consciously make connections to new concepts about more academically driven content (Birbili, 2007). Within play a child is scaffolding their experiences within the natural maturational stages of development through play into complex transformation of self (Kravtzov & Kravtosova, 2010). Through play the child is working aesthetically (Lindqvist 1995) utilizing their entire body, knowledge, thinking skills, and senses in the construction and co-construction of knowledge. In the Reggio Emilia philosophy these can all be considered the “hundred languages of children” (Fraser, 2007; Edwards et al 1998).

The Reggio Emilia philosophy views play as the cornerstone of a child’s learning curriculum and requires collaboration between the child, their peers, the teachers, the families, and the community (Edwards et al., 1998). Play helps children to develop healthy emotional expression (Fraser, 2007), understanding (Davis & Bergen, 2014), and regulation (Ashiabi 2007). The social development that occurs in the early years is essential to understanding diversity, and creating awareness of an understanding of issues regarding identity as related to
gender, race, and disabilities (Fraser, 2007). Children naturally develop an awareness of differences (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010), and through open classroom play, within diverse classrooms, children begin to learn socially acceptable practices for understanding (Halberstadt, Denham & Dunsmore, 2001) and acceptance both of their own identities and those that differ from their own (Ashiabi, 2007). Increased immigration has impacted the social play of children in preschools where children are entering into play with peers who do not share their social experiences, cultures, and languages (Fraser, 2007); however, through the “hundred languages of children” (Edwards et al., 1998) and their innate ability to learn within the social context, this phenomena has impacted their play rather than hindered it. In fact, Fraser (2007) found that children from diverse and differing cultures and languages thrive linguistically in a play-based environment where the give and take of ideas, regardless of language, is valued by the peer group. Based on Katz’s (1998) idea that children require a shared understanding in order to communicate effectively, Fraser found that the children in her study constructed a shared knowledge and understanding in order to move the play along in a non-linear fashion.

The Montessori approach to play differs from the theories presented above. The Montessori approach was developed by Maria Montessori beginning in 1907 (Montessori, 1964). It utilizes multiage groupings to foster peer learning, focusing on the abilities of the child and building on these, rather than grouping children into predetermined age groups that assume the child is at the same developmental level as their same aged peers (Lillard, 2013). Montessori also focuses on large amounts of uninterrupted child-guided time of hands-on exploration of various real-world materials that are designed so that if a child makes mistakes, they can self-correct without the need of a teacher. The Montessori Method resembles many of the definitions
of play-based learning, however the Montessori Method differs from play-based learning through the lack of pretend play, and the limits on choice (Lillard, 2013).

With the important aspect of play being presented, researchers have found this is not what is always represented in early childhood classrooms. In its purest form, play is concerned with the spontaneous moment the child is experiencing at that exact moment, and rarely focuses on the outcome (McLennan, 2012); however, in the current educational paradigm, teacher’s must prepare their curriculum for the learning objectives (Logue, 2007), rarely making play the go-to option for teaching approaches within the classroom. Within the process-product continuum framework, play, by definition, is on the process end of the continuum. Additionally, play is the most direct link to developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp and Copple 1997) as “play facilitates problem-solving, perspective-taking, emotional and social skills, and the development of a theory of mind” (Ashiabi, 2007, pp. 201-202).

Figure 4 maps the Reggio Emilia philosophy, the Montessori Method, and Constructivist approach to play and learning on the process-product continuum. All three of these are mapped in the middle of the continuum in purple. All of these pedagogical approaches vary in how they utilize the tenets of process and product, however, they all utilize all eight tenets.
Figure 4. Play on the Process-Product Continuum

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published their position statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in 1987 as a response to “A Nation at Risk” (1983) and to the emphasis on academic practices in preschool classrooms. This document originally had two primary focuses: age appropriateness, and individual appropriateness. The original booklet gave early childhood practitioners examples of practices that were appropriate and inappropriate for children by age from infants to five years of age (Graue, 2008). It was revised in 1997 based on the NAEYC published book by Bredekamp and Copple (1997) that included the value of the “teacher as decision-maker” and stressed child development rather than appropriate by age. In 2009 NAEYC again published a revised position.
statement that now included culture as part of the appropriate practice, and recognized a child’s funds of knowledge [i.e. assets derived from specific cultural, community and family contexts (Gonzalez, Moll & Amati, 2005)]. DAP now addressed the Whole Child, and embraced the “Whole Child” approach to teaching (Goldstein, 2008). Specifically, this emphasis on holistic education aims to cultivate the highest levels possible of cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and ethical development for each child, as well as helping individuals live more consciously within their communities and natural ecosystems (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010).

While many scholars argue that DAP is still alive and well, other scholars argue that DAP is on its way out. Graue (2008) argues that the systems that influence teacher decision-making are too great and too far from the developmentalist perspective, therefore, can no longer be considered developmentally appropriate. Early childhood education, traditionally a developmentalist run system, is rapidly moving to: “…content-focused perspectives related in linear ways to student outcomes. Decision-making and action are now to be guided by overarching goals and ultimately by student outcomes” (Graue, 2008, p. 442).

Graue’s argument is inconsistent with NAEYC’s position statement on DAP. The position statement (2009) argues that “it is the teacher who is in the classroom every day with children” (p. 5) and the teacher’s knowledge of the dynamics of the classroom, qualities and knowledge of individual students, and how to best meet the standards while simultaneously meeting the needs of the students is the driving force of a successful learning environment. Moreover, effective teaching hinges on the teacher’s ability to make decisions about materials, learning experiences, teaching strategies, engagement strategies, setting up the classroom, curriculum planning, and assessment strategies. In fact, NAEYC stresses the importance of intentional teaching through individual decision-making or teacher agency (Bandura, 2001).
Bandura (2001) describes the core features of personal agency as intentionality around plans of action, forethought through expectations of goals or outcomes, self-reactiveness as a self-motivator and self-regulator, and self-reflectiveness. Additionally, Bandura states that “efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency” (p. 10). Therefore, when related to early childhood teacher agency, self-efficacy is essential to the teacher’s success in achieving developmentally appropriate practice. McDonald (1992) argues that all teachers’ curriculum decisions are made in the context of uncertainty, since humans are unpredictable in nature; however, Ashton and Webb (1986) found that early childhood teachers with self-efficacy and characteristics of persistence are most likely to embody child-centered curriculum approaches, what is now widely known in the field of early childhood education as developmentally appropriate practice.

NAEYC provides five guidelines that address decisions that early childhood professionals make in the areas of practice: “(1) creating a caring community of learners, (2) teaching to enhance development and learning, (3) planning curriculum to achieve important goals, (4) assessing children’s development and learning, and (5) establishing reciprocal relationships with families.” (p. 16) At the core of developmentally appropriate practice is intentionality of the teachers’ and their knowledge when considering and making decisions. At the core of developmentally appropriate practice is teacher agency, which is why DAP and standardization in early childhood is often a relationship of tension. Traditional DAP utilized three main components that rely on: knowledge of general child development (Brumbaugh, 2008), specific individual development (Rushton & Juola-Rushton, 2008) and cultural contexts (Goldstein, 2008). Within this paradigm, teaching approaches come from the child (Warash, Curtis, Hursh, & Tucci, 2008). From the concept-driven paradigm, teaching approaches come from the need to meet standards
(Logue, 2007). For young early childhood, school readiness comes into question and forces teachers in grades younger than first to become content-driven (Little & Cohen-Vogel, 2016).

Figure 5 positions the three main components of traditional DAP in relation to Graue’s (2008) argument that curriculum is now content-focused guided by overarching goals and student outcomes. This argument by Graue is essential to understanding the current climate of DAP in relation to early childhood education. In general, content-driven public school curriculum that focuses on the test is housed on the product end of the continuum. Figure 5 places both “knowledge of general child development” and “specific individual development” in the center of the continuum, with “knowledge of general child development” slightly on the process side, and “specific individual development” slightly on the product side. The process-product continuum recognizes that both ends of the continuum supports the “Whole-Child” as DAP in a balanced form. “Cultural contexts” resides further towards the process side, since this component alone would not teach to the “Whole-Child” but focus solely on the cultural contexts in which the child exists.
Figure 5. Developmentally Appropriate Practice on the Process-Product Continuum

**SCHOOL READINESS**

Texas, where the participants in this study are located, has currently adopted the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) for programs that serve children younger than kindergarten (Brown & Gasko, 2011). TEEM is a state funded program that works with the administration and teachers within the program to provide “quality”, “research-based” approaches to school readiness (Landry, Swank, Smith, Assel, & Gunnewig, 2006). School readiness is determined through standardized assessment of an individual child’s skills (Gormley, Gayler, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005). Additionally, children within pre-kindergarten programs that utilize the TEEM models participate in curriculum that utilizes the Pre-kindergarten Guidelines (2008), and aligns with the state standards for kindergarten through twelfth grade. Brown and Gasko (2011)
identified the school readiness and success trends and utilized a case study in Texas to explore the phenomena of early childhood as a standardized reformed movement. Their findings indicated that the additional federal funding for the programs legitimized early childhood as an education field, yet placed extreme pressure and additional work on the teachers and administrators involved. This study shined light on the growing number of questions about early childhood education, standardization, and school readiness.

Many developmentalists caution against the standardization and alignment of early childhood with elementary grades, citing that standardization does not always indicate quality, academically or content-driven early childhood does not always indicate success in school, and financial support for these programs is often based on the programs ability to demonstrate their student’s academic achievement (Camilli, Vargas, & Yurecko, 2003), often through standardized measures (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Other concerns stem from the perceptions that the education methods of Reggio Emilia and Montessori, which focus on child-led approaches and the fostering of development for the whole child, are deemed as alternative methods of education rather than normative. Under many of the federally funded programs, attention is focused on the academic development while ignoring the social and emotional development (Logue, 2007). Additionally, developmentalists are concerned with the practices used to achieve school readiness (Null, 2003). For instance, in many content-driven approaches, developmentally appropriate practice and play are often disregarded (Gullo & Hughes, 2011).

On the opposing side of the argument, pre-kindergarten programs often provide early education to children of low socioeconomic status who wouldn’t have the opportunity otherwise (Doggett & Wat, 2010). Many scholars have found that children in these programs show progress and achievement in academics and self-confidence as compared to the more advantaged
students in the same area (Doggett & Wat, 2010; Graue, 2008; Magnuson et al., 2007).

Additionally, Magnuson et al. (2007) conducted a longitudinal study on the effects on academic skills for advantaged children versus disadvantaged children and found that the children in the disadvantaged population continually demonstrated more advanced academic skills through elementary school, whereas their disadvantaged counterparts seemed to lose their advanced academic skills by first grade; however this may be attributed to the amount of children who stayed at the same school from preschool through elementary being higher for the disadvantaged population than for the advantaged population.

In fact, some scholars (Doggett & Wat, 2007) claim that legislation on the availability of early childhood classrooms in the public schools offered an opportunity for children from families within lower-socioeconomic households access to educational experiences earlier. Yet some argue that it has been shown that due to pressures outside the immediate school setting, the best practices are rarely seen within these public school classrooms; federal standardized testing begins at the third grade, and many scholars (i.e. Spodek & Saracho, 2003) have found that teachers in grades younger than third feel pressure to prepare their students for the tests that accompany the third grade year. Teachers in these studies abandon play-based curriculum in favor of rote memorization and test-taking strategies as precautions for preparation.

Additionally, Cawelti (2006) found that since NCLB was passed in 2001, children in the lower-level grades (kindergarten through third) spend a significantly more amount of time listening to lecture than in years before NCLB was passed.

The goal of the accountability system, and “skillfully aligned standards” (Graue, 2008) is to provide a perceived equalized educational experience among children of a diverse population. These standards are replacing the teacher’s decision making (Brown & Gasko, 2012) abilities in
the classroom by becoming “the basis for decisions we make about curricula, assessments, professional development, and expectations for teachers’ daily practice” (Scott-Little, 2006, p. 2). School readiness is up for debate since the data seems to point in different directions as to the actual benefits academically based early childhood instruction has on the social and emotional development of young children. Additionally, the indicators for school readiness relate back to the state standards.

Figure 6 plots the major arguments against the school readiness movement as outlined above. “Standardized assessment of individual child’s skills” along with “focus on test preparation” both reside on the furthest product side of the continuum since typically, teachers disregard play and DAP in their pedagogical practices in an effort to prepare their students for the test. In relation to the components of the school readiness movement, I have also plotted the developmentalists’ argument for whole-child pedagogy as residing in the middle of the continuum since the continuum is a balanced approach to whole-child instruction, and is an essential component to teaching to the development of the whole child. Additionally, the Pre-Kindergarten Guidelines are also plotted in the middle of the model since the guidelines themselves follow DAP as outlined by NAEYC (2009); it is when the Pre-Kindergarten Guidelines are applied in the context of standards that they become developmentally inappropriate.
Teacher Beliefs about Teaching Approaches and Classroom Practices

Studies on teacher beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices in early childhood education seem to be centered around developmentally appropriate practice (Akin, 2013; Alford, Rollins, Padron, & Waxman, 2015), play (Li, Wang, & Wong, 2011; Leung, 2012), confidence within their own individual skills as teachers (Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016) and process pedagogy, although other terms are used in these studies such as qualitative
conceptions of learning (Leung, Wong & Wong, 2013), and student-centered (Widger, & Schofield, 2012). The following sections discuss the empirical research about teacher beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices of early childhood educators.

**Beliefs about Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

Developmentally appropriate practice is a term coined by NAECY, yet other theorist have been advocating for similar practices as discussed in the section titled “Play”. Within the public school system, with the mandated standards, DAP has been a hard sell from the beginning. Teachers often feel conflicted between wanting to provide developmentally appropriate practices, and their obligation to teach academic standards (Goldstein, 2008). DAP includes allowing for teachers to make decisions based on their knowledge of the students within their classroom, and provide the curriculum, environment, and instructional methods that best fit the students rather than the teacher or even specific state standards. In the wake of the No Child Left Behind [NCLB] system, many teachers feel they are unable to be the decision makers for their classroom. Many teachers feel that DAP is a concept they learned in their teacher education (Davis & Bergen, 2014), yet is unrealistic in their own classrooms. However, Goldstein (2008) argues that DAP recognizes all influences on development and learning, and “because NCLB is a prominent feature of the social and cultural context in which U.S. children are presently living, attending and responding to the demands of NCLB is an important aspect of culturally appropriate practices” (p. 254). Teachers as decision-makers within the classroom are informed by the policies of the institution and are therefore acting agents of DAP. This argument refers to Bredekamp’s (1997) report that the “current” system is sufficient by stating that “early childhood programs exist in contexts. Those contexts are influenced by many factors— among them are parents’ preferences, community values, societal expectations,
demands of institutions at the next level of education, and broadly defined values of American culture” (p. 43). In connection to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory of ecological systems of human development, Goldstein (2008) is arguing that the culture of NCLB is part of the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that actively contributes to each child’s development by influencing the sociocultural milieus and the larger sociopolitical systems (Goldstein, 2008). In regards to DAP in teachers’ beliefs and practices, many scholars have found a mismatch between what the teachers believe, and what they practice. Chi-hung (2012) utilized a self-reporting questionnaire about beliefs and a self-reporting evaluation of classroom practices; this resulted in constancy between beliefs and practices, however, findings indicated a mismatch between what teachers believed to be DAP and what DAP is according to NAEYC (2009).

Beliefs about DAP has also been studied with participants in the preservice stage. Akin (2011) studied 507 preservice teachers in Turkey, using the Teacher Beliefs Scale (TBS) to understand their beliefs in regards to DAP and found that the majority of the participants held beliefs that were “closer to the child-centered end of the teacher-directed versus child-centered continuum” (p. 310). However, Akin cautioned, citing other scholars (Erdiller, 2003 as cited in Akin, 2011) that many of these preservice teachers’ practices would not align with their beliefs once in the classroom based on the findings of these other studies.

**Beliefs about Play**

Cheng (2012) conducted an in-depth qualitative case-study of two pre-service teachers in the student teaching phase, and found that although these early childhood teachers expressed a preference for incorporating play into the curriculum, their classroom practices did not support their expressed beliefs about play. This may have been due to the external influences of the school context, and the participant’s need for approval from their mentoring teachers and the
school system. In fact, Kagan (1990) identified three obstacles teachers face when implementing play: teacher’s attitudes towards play and its implementation; structural limitations surrounding the implementation of play in regards to curricula, time, space, materials and other resources; and functional barriers of school and classroom context. Since Kagan’s work, there have been a growing number of obstacles teachers face when implementing play as the primary pedagogical practice including the high-stakes testing of the NCLB accountability system: the Common Core Standards and the push down effect they have on early childhood education, and the pressure to prepare their students for school readiness are a few of the obstacles early childhood educators face when attempting to provide a play-based educational model.

**CONFIDENCE WITHIN THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL SKILLS AS TEACHERS**

Many studies report professional development support for teachers as a necessary component for building confidence in teachers’ skills, and closing the belief-practice gap (Li Wang, & Wong, 2011). Hamre et al. (2012) conducted a comparative quantitative study that used the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), questionnaires, and videoed classroom observations of 440 early childhood classroom teachers. Half of the participants were enrolled in a 14-week course designed to help early childhood teachers organize, describe, and demonstrate effective teacher-child interactions (course condition group), the other half did not participate in the course (control condition group). This study found that teachers in the early childhood professional development course condition had stronger beliefs regarding the importance of intentional teaching, higher levels of knowledge about effective teacher-child interactions, and higher quality of observed teaching practice.

Additionally, Polly, Neale, and Pugalee (2013) found that continued professional development in mathematics resulted in a higher confidence level for teachers and their beliefs
towards mathematics and teaching mathematics in student-centered instructional practices. Similarly, Graue et al., (2015) reported on a “teaching-research hybrid” (p. 40), where early childhood teachers engaged in professional development focusing on the children’s funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and utilizing DAP in early mathematics, and found that with support, teachers gained confidence in utilizing play for teaching mathematical content knowledge in a meaningful way.

**Beliefs about Process Pedagogy**

Leung, Wong, and Wong (2013) conducted a quantitative “phenomenographic” (p. 59) study that explored the different ways in which 461 pre-service and in-service teachers in early childhood conceptualize learning and “their perceptions of their students’ views of this phenomenon” (p. 59). They found that all participants viewed “memorizing and reproducing important facts” (p. 65) as the least important in the conception of learning, and “applying what one has learned” (p. 65) and “understanding what one has learned” (p. 65) as the most important, indicating a higher preference for “qualitative than the quantitative conception of learning” (p. 65). This can be linked to other studies of teachers’ beliefs in developmentally appropriate practices and play over preference for school standards and policy.

Li, Wang, and Wong (2011) conducted a mixed methods study in which ten kindergarten teachers were observed and interviewed in order to understand how their beliefs and teaching practices compare with the preferred objectives of the reformed early childhood practices of the Western influence in China. Teachers were expected to adopt approaches such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and high/scope methods in an attempt to create a developmentally appropriate emphasis on classroom practices. This study resulted in several crucial implications for why this type of reform may be unsuccessful including a belief-practice gap and cultural conflicts.
between the Western methods and Chinese pedagogies. Many teachers expressed displeasure with being asked to abandon their own cultural beliefs, ideas, and skills in favor of foreign methods. Although Li, Wang, and Wong’s study was in the context of China, other scholars have also attributed a difference in cultural beliefs to that of the expected practices as reasons for believing one thing and doing another (Akin, 2013; Brown, 2005; Davis, & Bergen, 2014; Hedges, & Cullen, 2005; Hollingsworth, 1989).

Conversely, when teachers are in programs where the program philosophy aligns with their own teaching philosophy, they tend to demonstrate practices that are coherent with their beliefs. One qualitative interpretive study by Widger and Schofield (2012) studied educators whose practices aligned with five different philosophical approaches common in New Zealand early childhood education. Participants were one educator from each of the following approaches: Steiner, Montessori, Gerber, Playcentre, and Reggio Emilia. Participants were interviewed to gain an understanding of their personal “beliefs regarding whether and when to interact with children when they are engaged in learning experiences” (p. 30). This study found that each educator’s beliefs about whether and when to interact were aligned with their perspective philosophical approach, and only waivered when absolutely necessary, such as safety reasons for example.

**Research Questions**

Learning is happening at both ends of the process-product continuum, however, what the students are learning is in question. Understanding how meaning is made rather than memorized is essential to creating classrooms that foster optimal development. Although there is a large general literature on teacher beliefs, and some, smaller knowledge specific to early childhood
teachers, little is known about the connection between the process-product continuum, early childhood teacher beliefs and teaching practice. Therefore, this qualitative case study seeks to understand the beliefs teachers have about classroom practices utilizing the lens of the process-product continuum framework. It focuses on prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in a public elementary school in order to provide insight into the relationship between beliefs and practices of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in public schools on the borderland, as well as what influences have shaped these beliefs.
Chapter 3. Methodology

In the following chapter I will outline the methodology used to explore the beliefs and approaches of public school based early childhood teachers within the process-product continuum. The specific research questions are:

1. What are the beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in a public school in the borderland?
2. What are the influences that have shaped these beliefs?
3. What do the teaching approaches and practices look like in the classroom?
4. How do these beliefs and teaching approaches map onto the process-product continuum model? And, how does this help visualize what is taking place in the classroom?

Researcher Positionality

I grew up in an urban southwest area known for its art, theatre, and music. It has been named the mecca of different cultures, and was identified as the third largest art market in the United States. I have vivid memories of my early years in school, in a Reggio Emilia inspired preschool and kindergarten where the curriculum was almost completely child-directed. I thrived in this environment; however, as a first grader at a local public school, I struggled to connect to the curriculum. I went from a child-centered environment that emphasized hands-on curriculum with encouragement in the creative arts, to a teacher-directed environment that emphasized the academic subjects. My early elementary years were filled with worksheets, memorization, and focusing on building content knowledge. I struggled in school. I was diagnosed with dyslexia and was told I did not learn the way that other children did. My parents
hired tutors, and extra help with my academic subjects while enrolling me in after school programs and classes like ceramics, theatre, painting, and piano.

I graduated high school and sought a bachelor’s degree in theatre arts, because that was the only class where I felt I excelled naturally. Once I finished my undergraduate studies and returned to my home town, I began teaching in a two- and three-year-old classroom as a way of saving money to further pursue a career in the theatre. Once teaching I found something that I excelled in and enjoyed more than a career in the theatre, and that was early childhood education. I began studying developmental theorists like Piaget, Dewey, Vygotsky, and Erickson, so that I could apply what I was learning to the classroom I was teaching. I attended professional development workshops that emphasized process over product, then implemented what I had learned into my classroom. I found it ironic that I excelled as a teacher when I had struggled as a student.

It was abundantly clear to me that despite attending teacher meetings and workshops, and receiving the same handbooks, and learning objectives, my classroom looked completely different from my fellow teachers. We approached the same learning goals in different ways, and the outcomes our students achieved differed as well. I utilized emergent, child-led curriculum that used the children’s interests to drive the activities. I felt it was my job to provide activities that were hands-on and real-world to meet the learning goals and developmental domains for my students. If the goal was to get the children to write, and they were interested in traffic and transportation while building in the block area, I would provide writing materials in the block area and encourage the children to create road signs. This differed from my peers who provided writing worksheets where the children practiced tracing letters. If the goal was to teach the children the alphabet, and the children in my classroom frequently played the “this is mine”,
“this is his/hers” game [a typical game in preschool among children], I would make sure that items were labeled with the children’s names, and I would point out the letters as symbols representing each child’s name. In this way, the children in my class began recognizing the different letters that made up their own name, as well as their peers’. This differed from my peers, who used pointers and letters on the wall and required the students to recite them in unison during circle time. Figure 7 illustrates my own beliefs about approaches and classroom practices.

Figure 7. The researcher’s beliefs about approaches and classroom practices on the process-product continuum.
Figure 7 shows that the belief of utilizing emergent, child-led, hands-on, and real-world is on the process end of the continuum. It is reliant on communication, collaboration and creativity both between the students, and the teacher co-constructing a classroom culture; therefore, it is mapped on the furthest point on the process side of the continuum. Creating road signs in the block area as a writing activity utilizes creativity within the classroom culture, but may also use communication, and collaboration. Simultaneously during this activity, students may choose to work alone. They are reproducing models, though these models are not provided by the teacher, but students rely on their own prior knowledge to reproduce their models. Assuming that this is not the first time they have participated in a writing activity, continued practice leads to automaticity, and students may seek external reinforcement for their completed creations. Therefore, this is placed in the middle of the continuum, represented with purple [since mixing red and blue together creates purple]. “This is mine”, “this is his/hers” to learn the alphabet relies on the students’ knowledge of their peers (classroom culture), communication, and collaboration. Additionally, it becomes second nature in the recognition of the symbols that represent each child’s name (automaticity), and student receive external reinforcement while communicating with their peers about the symbols in their names. Since this activity utilizes 3 of the 4 characteristics of process, and 2 of the 4 behaviors of product, it is placed towards the middle of the continuum, but closer to the process side; the variation of purple, leaning toward red that represents process.

As I pursued my Master’s studies I discovered that, like me, many students are lost in the current curriculum that is offered in our schools. Children are expected to adapt to the curriculum rather than the institutions adapting the curriculum to fit the needs and abilities of our students. As an early childhood teacher, I was able to reach the children in my classes and many
of their parents, but I felt helpless to change the system. I decided to pursue a doctoral degree in order to teach teachers, and hopefully reach more children, and possibly change the paradigm of what early childhood education can be.

In my doctoral studies I became obsessed with creativity and the creative arts as a pedagogical approach. I began teaching an undergraduate level early childhood class called “Art for the Elementary Teacher” and quickly discovered that my students identified themselves as being non-creative. I also quickly learned that many of the concepts I was teaching tended to get lost in the accountability system and public school cultures. With the differences in approaches between teachers, and my own experiences in school, I began researching process-product approaches, and discovered that although process-product are discussed in professional development workshops, rarely is it discussed as a pedagogical approach with the classrooms.

As someone who uses process-oriented pedagogy, I became intrigued in why other teachers might utilize product-oriented pedagogy. Through a class project, I had the chance to closely observe a teacher whose practices resided heavily on product-oriented pedagogy. It was through this experience that I learned the necessity of automaticity, students working alone, students reproducing models, and external reinforcement. I began researching the different ideologies surrounding these four tenets of product-oriented pedagogy, and found many arguments in favor of these classroom practices. My own thinking changed, and I saw that I had also utilized these four tenets in my own practices without identifying them as being essential. I had previously thought product was a negative pedagogy, and now I saw it as a critical and necessary component of teaching. This led to my reconceptualization of teaching practice as being dichotomous (either process-oriented OR product-oriented) but more of a continuum
whereby teachers utilize certain tenants of each extreme, or some combination, at specific times and for specific purposes.

Applying a process-product continuum to the entire curriculum and classroom practices, may help to shine a light as to why teachers use the approaches they do in the classroom. My beliefs are deeply rooted in my experiences as a student in school, and I suspect that the teacher’s in my study may have similar roots for their own personal beliefs.

**Research Design**

The goal of this naturalistic case study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is to understand and explore teachers' beliefs about their approaches to classroom practices and what this looks like in this specific context. This study utilizes an emergent (Lincoln & Guba, 1988) and interpretivist paradigm (Koetting, 1984). The interpretivist researcher sees the world as being “made up of tangible and ‘intangible’, multi-faceted realities” (Koetting, 1984, p. 5). Research in this paradigm is studied as a unified whole while investigating the individual realities within the multi-faceted system (Yin, 2014). The researcher seeks the research in relation to what the researcher already knows, and the reports from the participants. Naturalistic inquiry is a blanketed methodology that encompasses ethnography (Beuvin & Vries, 2015). Within this paradigm, “naturalistic inquiry ought to be a case study” (Lincoln & Guba, 1988, p. 2). In this arena, analysis of data requires participation from those being studied. Meaning is co-constructed (Beuvin & Vries, 2015; Chase, 2005; Galman, 2009; Mathison, 2012; Mitchell, 2013) from the interaction between the data, the participant, and the researcher. The utilization of visuals as cultural artifacts within this research paradigm is useful and recommended (Adriansex, 2012); therefore, visual methodologies in the form of timelines was utilized during
the data collection and analysis. The use of multiple data sources provides an opportunity for triangulations, that I will describe in a later section.

**NATURALISTIC INQUIRY**

The naturalistic approach to research recognizes the researcher as having a personal stake and attachment through personal and professional experiences to what is being studied (Walker, 2013), but chooses what will be studied based on their personal experiences with the phenomenon (Beuvin & Vries, 2015). The goal of naturalistic research is to gain a deeper “theoretical understanding of society” (Beuving & Vries, 2015, p. 16). Ethnographies “are culturally informed case studies” that “allow us to assess and describe what really is happening” (LeCompte, & Schensul, 2010, p. 113). Ethnography focuses on the culture of a group (Creswell, 2009), and provides “in-depth insider accounts” (Bhatti, 2012, p. 80) within the natural environment. Naturalistic research embraces characteristics of ethnography, with the natural setting and the study of naturally occurring events within a culturally bounded system (Stake, 1995).

Naturalistic research in education tends to begin with an investigation into a problem as perceived by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the researcher gains knowledge about the problem through empirical data collection methods, themes and questions emerge (Walker, 2013). This is why naturalistic inquiry may also be called emergent research (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). As interpreted themes emerge from the data, the research calls upon the epistemology of the participants to gain further insight into the problem being studied. Naturalistic research relies on the interpretation of the researcher for validity, reliability, and trustworthiness; however, there are critical steps the researcher must take to preserve the educational, and scholarly integrity of the research.
One key difference of researching naturalistically as stated by Beuving and Vries (2015), is the reflexivity of the researcher, and their statement of this perception. The researcher maintains an etic role (Beuvin & Vries, 2015), but reports the analysis from the emic perspective (Walker, 2013). The researcher as the outsider, etic, maintains the role from the outside perspective in order to explain the phenomenon, but reports the insider, emic, perspective of understanding and meaning. This is accomplished through the key elements that are discussed in the Reliability and Trustworthiness section (p. 69). The researcher is directly involved in the research as a participant as well as the data collector, writer, analyst, and presenter. This type of research requires “constant attention to self-reflection, self-critique and concurrent active reading” (Walker, 2012, p. 78) on the subject. Research is reported through narrative (Chase, 2005, 2011), descriptive (Athens, 2010), and interpretative (Koetting, 1984) forms of writing. Since Naturalistic research aims to explore the social world, interpretation is emergent and relies on the researcher’s interpretations of the social norm while avoiding generalizations (Karlsson, 2013).

Theory within the naturalistic interpretivist paradigm represents a way of reporting on the data that is collected, or telling the story of the participants in the study, yet serves the purpose of credibility as a connection to knowledge that already exists (Beuving & Vries, 2015 p. 16). This study utilizes the process-product continuum as a lens for analyzing the observed practices of the teachers, and the represented beliefs as co-constructed by the researcher and participant. Boote (2008) argues “that good educational research is a social activity concerned with persuading an audience by contributing to our collective concerns” (p. 303). Naturalistic research rejects normalcy and the obligation to maintain regularity (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993), and understands that the research adapts and changes throughout the course of study to achieve
the studies objectives. The researcher may make modifications due to gaining new knowledge through the research process, and epistemologies place responsibilities on the research community rather than the individual researcher. “In this way, we ought to think of research as a rhetorical practice in which the central concern is persuading other people through publication” (Boote, 2008, pp. 308-309).

**CASE STUDY RESEARCH**

This study sought understanding and exploration of specific participants in a specific context (Stake, 1995). This is a multiple-case case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), where there are multiple bounded systems. This study sought to explore the teachers’ beliefs and their approaches to curriculum and practices within the classroom. According to Fylvbjerg (2011), the choice to do a case study is not a “methodological choice” but a “choice of what is to be studied” (p. 301). Additionally, this study focuses on the phenomena in relations to the environment it is situated in (Yin, 2014) characterizing it as a case study. As connected to naturalistic inquiry, a case study utilizes in-depth exploration through empirical data collection and analysis within the natural environment (Yin 2014). For this study, each of the individual participants act as individual cases, in their own bounded system (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, the cases together in the specific context of early childhood teachers, in one learning community during the time of this study serve as another bounded system. Selection criteria will be discussed in greater detail in the sampling section (p. 57). Figure 8 illustrates the multiple-case bounded systems of this study.
Figure 8. Bounded Systems for this Multiple-Case Study

**Context**

Mountain-view is the newest elementary school in the Mountain-view School District in a Texas town located on the U.S and Mexico border. It opened in the 2015-2016 school year with classes from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. There are currently 2 morning pre-kindergarten, 2 afternoon pre-kindergarten, 5 kindergarten, 4 first grade, 3 second grade, 3 third grade, 4 fourth grade, and 3 fifth grade classrooms (Plan4Learning.com, 2016). As a new school, teachers were recruited from other elementary schools in the district, new teachers to the field, and new teachers to the district. The teachers engage in planning meetings almost weekly and several professional development meetings throughout the school year.

**Sampling**

Within naturalistic inquiry, there are three approaches to sampling (Marshall, 1996), convenience, judgmental or purposeful, and theoretical. This study sought participants who
teach prekindergarten or kindergarten within a STEM-focused public-school setting. Willingness to share and explore their own beliefs and approaches through visual communication strategies of timeline creating and personal reflection was required. Participants were also required to meet with the research for extended times. Prior to beginning the study, the Principal of Mountain-view Elementary School was presented the criteria for participants. The principal selected three participants whom she felt would provide a range of teaching styles, and different experience levels. Participants could expect to gain insight into their beliefs through reflection, with the opportunity to affect their classroom practices. Each participant received $200 dollars in the form of gift cards after completing the study.

Participants

The participants are in-service prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers at Mountain-view, and included teachers who are considered: novice, with three or less-years’ experience teaching; and advanced, with more than seven years teaching. Although this is not a comparative study, the reasoning for involving teachers of varying experience levels was to gain a potential glimpse of the different generational perspectives, and how this may provide understanding of potential difference in beliefs and approaches. However, the main goal of this study was to gain the deepest understanding possible of each these teachers’ beliefs. Criteria for participant selection is outlined in Table 1. Table 2 outlines the characteristic specific to the participants in the study.

Table 1. Criteria for Participant Selection

| Criteria of Inclusion as a Participant in the study | • Being a teacher in a prekindergarten or kindergarten classroom at Mountain-view Elementary school during the 2017-2018 school year  
• Recommended for inclusion by the principal |
Criteria for Exclusion as a Participant in the study

- Not being a teacher at Mountain-view Elementary school
- Not teaching in prekindergarten or kindergarten
- Not being recommended for inclusion by the principal
- Not being interested in participating in the study

Table 2. Characteristics specific to the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Years’ Experience</th>
<th>Ethnicity/ELL</th>
<th>Current Grade Teaching And linguistic focus</th>
<th>Other personal characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carol Bakerfield</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian, native English speaker, monolingual</td>
<td>Kindergarten – monolingual</td>
<td>Began teaching at age 40; has 2 children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay Lopez</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Latina, native Spanish speaker, bilingual</td>
<td>Kindergarten – dual language</td>
<td>Didn’t know she wanted to be a teacher until student teaching; no children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mancha Dulcinea</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Latina, native Spanish speaker, bilingual</td>
<td>Pre-kindergarten – monolingual in am Dual language in pm</td>
<td>Mother was a teacher for 45 years; has 3 children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Research Questions and Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What are the beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices of</td>
<td>• Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Timelines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in a public school in the borderland?

- Classroom Observations
- Artifact collection including, but not limited to photographs of students’ work with the names blurred, classroom handouts, photographs of bulletin boards within the school with the students’ names blurred.

2) What are the influences that have shaped these beliefs?

- Interviews
- Timelines
- Classroom Observations

3) What do the teaching approaches and practices look like in the classroom?

- Classroom Observations
- Artifact collection including, but not limited to photographs of students’ work with the names blurred, classroom handouts, photographs of bulletin boards within the school with the students’ names blurred.

4) How do these beliefs and teaching approaches map onto the process-product continuum model? And, how does this help visualize what is taking place in the classroom?

- Narrative analysis
- Content analysis
- Process-Product Continuum

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with each participant while constructing a timeline of their personal and professional educational experiences. Artifacts and documents were collected, and observations in the form of field notes were additionally gathered. Table 4 outlines the sequence of data collection per individual participant.

Observation set refers to conducting observations in each teacher’s classroom at least once, although many times field notes were collected more than once per classroom. Table 5 outlines the number of hours for data collection for both the researcher and the participants.

Table 4. Proposed sequence of data collection per individual participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Key Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Interview</td>
<td>• Building a relationship with the participant  &lt;br&gt;• Gaining an understanding of the life history of the participant as it relates to their educational experiences.  &lt;br&gt;• Gaining and understanding of the practices and procedures of the classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Begin timeline construction

| Classroom Observations: First set | • Classroom practices  
• Approaches to curriculum  
• Classroom layout and gathering artifacts |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Second Interview                  | • Gain an understanding of the data gathered during classroom observations,  
• Gain an understanding of individual experiences and memories as connected to individual beliefs  
• Continue timeline construction |
| Classroom Observations: Second set | • Classroom practices  
• Approaches to curriculum  
• Classroom layout and gathering artifacts |
| Third Interview                   | • Gain an understanding of the data gathered during classroom observations,  
• Gain an understanding of individual experiences and memories as connected to individual beliefs  
• Continue timeline construction |
| Classroom Observations: Third set | • Classroom practices  
• Approaches to curriculum  
• Classroom layout and gathering artifacts |

Member checks

• Verify that each participants’ life story is represented accurately.

Table 5. Hours of researcher and participant data collection

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total interview hours for participants – outside of normal classroom time</td>
<td>10-12 hours total per participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total classroom observation hours for participants – during normal classroom time</td>
<td>12 hours per participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total hours for researcher</td>
<td>66-72 hours total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews**

Each participant participated in multiple interviews to gather data that narrated and expressed significant events and experiences within each participant’s life history in order to gain an understanding of where the participant’s beliefs come from (Adriansex, 2012).

Interviews were semi-structured in nature, allowing for spontaneous interaction between the researcher and the participant. Each interview worked towards creating a visual timeline as a tool for prompting more questions, and as a tool for representation of self-reflection for the teachers. Additionally, the participants found that once they began creating their timelines, they
would remember additional information through the reflective process. The first interview was the most structured, focusing on having teachers: a) represent their earliest classroom from their first experience with school or learning; b) recall memories of their favorite teachers and the qualities that made them favorites; and c) discuss why they became a teacher. Later interviews were less structured, more conversational and served to continue and extend ideas that emerged in the first interview; hence, later interviews varied from teacher to teacher. Regardless, each interview served to encourage participant narratives that provided their individual and unique perspective in their pedagogical approaches to education by reflecting both to their past, present and future. As described by LeCompte and Schensul (2010):

Narratives…create a text that explicitly describes the narrator in terms of four directions: Events that hark back toward the past, events or phenomena that anticipate movement forward toward the future, descriptions on inward states of feelings held by the narrator, and outward or horizontal elaboration of the narrator’s context, environments, current activities, and associates” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 118).

The “back” often reveals the roots of our belief systems (Chase, 2011). When paired with meaningful reflection, the participants may have a realization as to what motivates their practices within the classroom (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). The anticipated future events allow the participants to plan and implement classroom practices in explicitly planned and intentional ways (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The “inward” relates to the reflection of the motivations and beliefs held by each individual participant, and the “outward” allows for an action to take place that may reflect the inward motivations (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Although given options in the first interview to provide representations in any format, all three participants chose to
speak verbally to reflect on their past, present and futures, with the exception of the timeline creation through linguistic writing.

**Timelines**

During each interview, the participants were asked to construct a personal and professional timeline of influences that have helped to shape their beliefs (Adriansex, 2012; Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). The construction of the timeline encouraged the participant to be creative, call upon their unique cultural influences and experiences, communicate meaning and collaborate with the researcher to co-construct meaning. Co-construction of meaning takes place when more than one individual is involved in the articulation of meaning and the interpretation of a visual representation. The construction of the timeline encouraged each participant to exhibit their experiences through the media of their choosing; however, in actuality, all three participants chose to represent their experiences through writing in a systematic list fashion. The purpose of the timeline was twofold: to create a venue for additional reflection from the participants and to create the opportunity for the co-construction of meaning through visual imagery (Galman, 2009) and to achieve *mutuality* (Goss et al, 2002), whereby interpretation of information occurs together as people reflect together. Timelines are often helpful in psychology for unlocking events from the past that the participants may not recognize as being significant to their belief systems (Rose, 2001). Therefore, careful planning and construction of each participant’s timeline required thoughtful reflection on the part of the participant (Adriansex, 2012). Narrative accompanied the timelines in the form of verbal or written narratives in relation to the images (Galman, 2009).
Classroom Observations

The researcher conducted classroom observations of the teachers within their individual classrooms while they were conducting lessons. Data was collected through field notes and audio recording with a focus on the teacher’s interaction with the students during the presentation of the classroom lesson. The mere presence of the researcher can influence the environment (Erlandson et al., 1993), known as the Observer Effect (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), therefore, participation on the part of the researcher also happened during classroom observations. The goal of the observations was to gain an understanding of how the teacher creates their classroom environment, classroom culture, and approaches the curriculum. Field notes acted as the primary method for recording the data during observations, and the audio recordings acted as an aid to compliment the field notes to assist in recording the events within a busy classroom. Table 6 outlines the focus for each observation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Observation</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Classroom Observations</td>
<td>• Focus was on the physical classroom layout and how the teacher used this to aid in instruction of the students  &lt;br&gt; • How the teacher facilitated the daily classroom routines, processes, and procedures &lt;br&gt; • Focus was on instructional time with students, and the teacher’s approach to the lesson &lt;br&gt; • Focus was on learning the classroom management style of the teacher &lt;br&gt; • Focus was on dynamics of the students, and the teacher’s adjustment to the different needs within the classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Artifacts

Collection of artifacts and documents that are used by the participants in the study help to give insight into their planning strategies, rationale, and processes of implementation.

Artifacts collected included photographs of the classrooms, photographs of the supporting teaching resources, handouts, photographs of the learning objectives for each learning activity
observed, teacher instructions for activities, worksheets in the classrooms, curriculum, and
district standards. These artifacts served as tools for analyzing the way teachers are using them
in the classroom. Additionally, photographs of student artwork, or classwork was also-collected
with the child’s name blacked-out to preserve anonymity. This study focused on the teachers’
practices, therefore photographs of children’s work only sought to compliment the data collected
in relation to the teacher, and assent and parents’ consent was not needed.

Member Checks

Lincoln and Guba (1985) states that “all statements are constructions; the issue here is
whether my construction is fair” (p. 6); therefore, consistent and constant member checks were
necessary throughout the course of study. Mears (2009) recommends meeting with each
participant following the initial interviews for an additional review, reflection, and interpretation
meeting to co-construct and confirm the participant’s meaning. The purpose of these member
checks was to provide an additional element of trustworthiness on the part of the researcher
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Analysis

This study utilized case study methods of analysis, including: Content Analysis, and
Narrative Analysis. Analysis relied on the participants’ involvement in the co-construction of
meaning through narrative. Analysis was conducted in a recursive process, allowing for the
exploration and discovery of new information to guide the data collection and the analysis
(Lyons & Coyle, 2015). As this is a multiple-case study, analysis was conducted in two stages:
within-case analysis, and cross-case analysis to look for general patterns. First, each case was
analyzed as a within-case analysis, where “each case is treated as a comprehensive case in and of
itself. Data was gathered and assessed so the researcher could learn as much as possible about
the contextual variables that might have a bearing on the specific case. Next the data underwent a cross-case analysis; although this study was not comparative per se, cross-case analysis was conducted utilizing a synthesized model (Yin, 2014). This study followed the synthesized model as “a unified description across cases; it can lead to categories, themes, or typologies that conceptualize the data from all the cases; or it can result in building substantive theory offering an integrated framework covering multiple cases” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 234).

Data from each individual participant was coded in an open-coding process to identify themes within data from the individual cases (Charmaz, 2006). Analytical coding followed open-coding. Analytical coding comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning” (Richards, 2015); Patton (2015) states that “you must rely first on your own sense making, understandings, intelligence, experience, and judgement” (p. 572) to gain a deeper understanding of the case being studied. Codes were then sorted according to themes and categories, and lastly, inferences were made as to patterns observed (Lyons & Coyle, 2015).

After the coding process, the data were applied and interpreted within the process-product continuum framework introduced in this work, showing that the observed practices of the participants within the classroom displayed traits within the continuum. Additionally, unobservable beliefs of the individual teachers were mapped onto traits within the continuum framework, and belief statements of the individual participants were highlighted within the continuum framework. In this way, the process-product continuum framework was used to present the data as a representative sample within the specific context of time and school culture within each individual case, and additionally, across cases.
Narrative Analysis

Narrative thematic analysis (Riessman, 2005) was utilized for analyzing transcripts from interviews, timelines, visual narratives, and classroom observations. It followed Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal’s (2004) model of narrative data analysis which utilizes a six-stage process of: 1) biographical data, 2) thematic analysis, 3) re-construction of the case history, 4) analysis of individual texts, 5) a comparison between a narrative and the life currently lived, and 6) the formation of different types of narratives (the cross-case analysis). Within each stage, emphasis was placed on the content of the data, the “what” more than the “how” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), and organized into themes. Since meaning is co-constructed between the participant and the researcher, the themes that emerge as a result of the data collected will remain objective in nature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There is also an element of performative analysis (Lyons & Coyle, 2015) with the classroom observations acting as the performance of the narrative previously gathered during the interviews. The theory of performative narrative analysis linking the actor to the story and as a representation of identity and self (Riessman, 2005). For this study, identity is directly connected to the individual participant’s beliefs about who they are as a teacher, and how they present themselves within the identity of teacher. For narrative analysis, the past is interpreted rather than reproduced (Riessman, 2005), and “the ‘truths’ of narrative accounts are not in their faithful representations of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future (Riessman, 2003, p. 6).

Content Analysis

Content analysis was also utilized for analyzing classroom observations, and artifacts. Analysis of the classroom observations and artifacts followed the conventional content analysis model as described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), where the data collected was first hand-coded.
in an open-coding process, as codes emerge that denote themes, data content was sorted into categories. Subcategories developed as relationships between groups of codes emerge (Stemler, 2001). Lastly, definitions for each category, subcategory, and code are developed. Within the conventional content analysis model, data was first coded as manifest content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), which is the “concrete terms contained in a communication, as distinguished from latent content” (Babbie, 2011, p. 346) and latent content, which is the “underlying meaning of communications, as distinguished from their manifest content” (Babbie, 2011, p. 346). In visual research methodologies and content analysis, utilizing both manifest content coding and latent content coding reinforces a level of trustworthiness by looking at the objective (manifest), and the subjective (latent). Content analysis may be used for multiple purposes (Mayring, 2002) such as to “identify the intentions and other characteristics of the communicator” (Weber, 1990, p. 9), to “reflect cultural patterns of groups, institutions, or societies” (Weber, 1990, p. 9), or to “reveal the focus of individual, groups, institutional, or societal attention” (Weber, 1990, p. 9); all are relevant reasons for utilizing content analysis for understanding the meaning of classroom observations, and artifacts for the purposes of this study.

Table 7 outlines the data, method of analysis, purpose, and connection to answering the research questions.

Table 7. Data analysis methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Method of Analysis</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are these participant early childhood teachers’ beliefs about teaching</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Narrative Analysis</td>
<td>• Biographical narrative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approaches and classroom practices?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timelines</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>• Comparison between narrative and current life (as co-interpreted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>between researcher and participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Formation of different types of narratives (cross-case analysis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Biographical narrative analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2. What are the influences that have shaped these beliefs? | Analysis | • Thematic analysis  
• Re-construction of the case history  
• Analysis of individual text  
• Comparison between narrative and current life (as co-interpreted between researcher and participant) |
|-------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Visual Narratives | Narrative Analysis | • Biographical narrative analysis  
• Thematic analysis,  
• Re-construction of the case history,  
• Analysis of individual texts |
| 3. What do these teaching approaches and practices look like in the classroom? | Classroom Observations | Narrative Analysis  
• Thematic analysis,  
• A comparison between a narrative and the life currently lived,  
• The formation of different types of narratives (the cross-case analysis). |
| | Content Analysis | • Manifest content  
• Latent content |
| Artifacts | Content Analysis | • Manifest content  
• Latent content |
| 4. How do these beliefs and teaching approaches map onto the process-product continuum model? And, how does this help visualize what is taking place in the classroom? | All data collected | Narrative Analysis & Content Analysis  
• Illustrating practices on the process-product continuum by identifying the characteristics and behaviors of Classroom Culture, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Automaticity, Students work alone, Students reproduce models, and External reinforcement. |

**RELIABILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Naturalistic inquiry requires several safeguards to ensure credibility within the academic community of research. Therefore, this study utilized the “four powerful tools” (Beuving & Vries, 2015, p. 42) in an attempt to refute bias. Beuving and Vries’s (2015) argue that the reliability and trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiry rely on: grounded theory; triangulation; “iteration between the collection of empirical data and making theoretical reflections about those data, note taking, and diary keeping” (p. 43); and member checks.
This study aims to explore the early childhood teachers’ belief and practices using the process-product continuum as theoretical framework. The data collected and coded was compared to the characteristics within the process-product continuum, and was interpreted through this lens. This comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) sought to make the abstract more concrete by connecting the narrative to the empirical facts (Beuving & Vries, 2015). Trustworthiness in the data collection and interpretive analysis for this study relied on a number of research-based methods, including: researcher’s reflexive journal, triangulation, and iteration between the data and theoretical reflections as outlined in the framework.

**Researcher’s Journal**

Since I, as a researcher, have personal experience and connection to this topic, I kept a researcher’s journal that documented my experiences and personal perceptions of what I experienced and observed through this process. This journal was essential to keeping my own biases and interpretations in check (Beuving & Vries, 2015). In keeping with the lead of my participants, I created my own timeline, and answered the interview questions within this journal to maintain my own reflexivity and help to limit bias in observations and interpretations. Additionally, I revisited my journal and added to it after each interview and observation to critically reflect on my own biases in an effort to be metacognitive aware of potential differences and also authenticate the teachers point of view.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is “essentially a strategy that will aid in the elimination of bias and allow the dismissal of plausible rival explanations such that a truthful proposition about some social phenomenon can be made” (Mathison, 1988, p. 13). It utilizes multiple data collection and analysis methods to find and confirm the findings within a study. In a qualitative naturalistic
inquiry, triangulation may be used as a way of pointing to the “contradictions and tensions” (Ashley, 2012, p. 13) within the data, it may also spur insight and additional questions (Hurworth, 2013). Triangulation also provides a variety of perspectives (Smith & Kleine, 1986) through the use of different lens. Denzin (1978), gives four types of triangulation: data triangulation; investigator triangulation; theory triangulation; and methodological triangulation (pp. 294-307). This study used data triangulation through the use of more than one participant, multiple observations at different times, and multiple interviews. Understanding teachers’ beliefs requires an “examination under a variety of conditions” (Mathison, 1988, p. 14). This study also utilized methodological triangulation through the various methods of observations, interviews, visual methodologies, and artifacts. Denzin advocates that "the rationale for this strategy is that the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another: and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each while overcoming their unique deficiencies" (Denzin, 1978, p. 302). By using combined forms of data collection and multiple points of data collection, this study utilized triangulation to gain a clearer picture of teachers’ beliefs and practices than use of a single approach to data collection or a single sampling would have achieved.

**Iteration**

According to Beuving & Vries, (2015), the naturalistic researcher must continuously “coordinate the iteration between the collection of empirical data and making theoretical reflections about those data, note taking, and diary keeping” (p. 43). When a researcher confronts their own beliefs on what is being studied, the researcher is adopting a self-critical stance (Mathison, 2012) and a reflexive attitude (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). The use of
the researcher journal was essential to increasing trustworthiness and continue to keep myself reflexive and self-critical.
Chapter 4. Results

The purpose of this study was to understand: 1) What are the beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in a public school in the borderland? 2) What are the influences that have shaped these beliefs? 3) What do the teaching approaches and practices look like in the classroom? And 4) How do these beliefs and teaching approaches map onto the process-product continuum model? And, how does this help visualize what is taking place in the classroom? The results begin by offering a context for the location of the study, including the systemic restrictions that attribute to the classroom practices of each participant. Next, the participants are introduced in their biographical data, with the re-construction of each case history (within-case analysis). Lastly, themes that emerged in the data that are specific to each participant are shared, presented through the different types of narratives.

Setting the Stage

You are able to see Mexico in the not-so-far distance. Driving through the valley, as Bordertown straddles the interstate, the houses closest to the interstate seem cookie cutter with new development emerging constant and rapidly. As you turn towards the mountain, houses begin to get bigger. The newer development on the mountain seems to compete with the development of businesses, big box stores, and fast food restaurants. Continuing on my early morning drive up the mountain side, a clearing in the houses appears to reveal a large concrete building with the US flag painted on the front. Parking seems scarce, however, finding a spot is never a challenge (even during drop off and pick up, the busiest times of the day). As I walk along a winding path from the parking lot to the front of the school, I pass a small fenced playground with a climbing structure in the middle, turf, a half wall and rocks and bushes. The
playground is shaded by a large blue sail. I continue to the front of the school, passing newly planted trees held up with ropes and sticks anchored in the ground. The grass seems healthy, and fresh, perhaps ironic for the desert climate.

Standing at the front entrance, the school spanning the landscape in front of me, it’s hard not to notice the display cases filled with photographs of Government officials. Mountain-view Elementary School (pseudonym used) is one of six elementary schools in a district whose population consists of 74.8% economically disadvantaged, and 27.5% are English Language Learners according to the website. Mountain-view Elementary is the newest of the schools in the district, opening its doors to students in August of 2015. The Principal of Mountain-view was given reign to recruit the teachers that now serve that school. Specifically, Mountain-view’s population consisted of 44.1% economically disadvantaged, 30.4% English Language Learners, and 7.5% Special Education during the 2016-2017 school year. During the 2017-2018 school year, Mountain-view Elementary was operating at 125% capacity, forcing the school district to reassess the boundary lines for the students for the next school year (source omitted for anonymity).

After checking in at the front office, with the gentleman who asks me to sign in and I present my identification, I receive my visitor’s pass and I am let into the adjoining hallway through the secure access door. To my right are the administrative offices, the principal and assistant principals are not usually in their offices when I visit. I usually see them in passing as I’m walking down the hallway, or perhaps I see them speaking with students, teachers, or parents. The concrete hallway echoes the footsteps of the children walking through, and the occasional teacher, or staff member’s high-heeled shoes click-clacking. The school has high ceilings, and curved walls, as if inviting someone to rub their hands along the ebbs and flows that
leads you to the next hallway intersection. To the right, I am greeted with another hallway, taking me to the kindergarten and first grade classrooms. Midway to the classrooms, I pass more offices: the counselors, the nurse, conference rooms, the parent volunteer lounge and workroom. I’m then greeted with large floor to ceiling windows, one side looking out on the lawn and freshly planted mini trees; the other side, an outdoor theatre of sorts with concrete steps that lead to another miniature lawn and more playground equipment.

To reach the prekindergarten class, I take a different hallway. I pass a dark computer lab with rows of computers, followed by a wall to wall white board. I pass the library with a mixture of textures: fabrics, books, concrete, children’s-book-inspired art. I pass another display case, with a picture of a former president smiling next to a congressman. Entering into another hall, I am greeted with stair cases or the possibility to continue down the hall. Children’s bathrooms are on the right: boys on the right, girls on the left, and a trough for hand washing separating the two bathrooms. I reach the end of that section of hallway and am greeted with another hallway. To the right are the fourth-grade classrooms, and to the left seem to be second or third grades. I turn left and proceed to the very end of the hallway, to the last classroom on the left. This is the prekindergarten classroom, surrounded by hallways on all sides. It is visibly larger than the other classrooms, and seems out of place.

In all of the classrooms rules for walking in the hallways are displayed with pictures that reads:

Be mute
Because you are cute
Less talking
More walking
No wiggling

No giggling.

These rules are significant because they may not express what the teachers believe to be good classroom management, but seems to be a standard that the school has for the transition times when students are walking in the hall. Some teachers may not believe that these rules are necessary to regulating students’ behavior, and may prefer to address this transition time differently.

**Dual Language at Mountain-View Elementary School**

The dual language program at Mountain-View Elementary School is a 50/50 model, where students in the dual language classroom are instructed in English one day and Spanish the next day. The dual language classroom has a mixture of native English speakers, and native Spanish speakers. Ms. Bakerfield’s kindergarten classroom is monolingual, without the Spanish component. However, Ms. Lopez teaches in a dual-language kindergarten classroom, and Ms. Dulcinea’s prekindergarten classroom is monolingual in the morning, and dual-language in the afternoons.

**Systemic Restrictions**

The three participants expressed a wide range of systemic restrictions stemming from a variety of sources; however, all three teachers credited the district’s expectations as the biggest contrast to their beliefs about teaching and as a challenge to their teaching. Both Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield expressed frustration because while the standards the teachers are required to cover seem developmentally appropriate, the district had asked the teachers to teach them in a way that is not “Early Childhood” and at times does not follow what they know to be “best practices”. Both of these teachers also expressed frustration about the changes in teaching trends
and programs used to teach different subjects. For example, Math their Way versus Guided Math, or Primary Years Program versus HighScope or CIRCLE. Each of these different trends presents curriculum in a different pedagogical approach, with mass produced resource materials and step-by-step, and day-by-day instructions on what should be taught, and when. Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield had both been teaching in the Mountain-view District for the breadth of their careers, and both had more than 20 years of teaching experience in the classroom. Both teachers provided commentary that indicated their annoyance with what they perceive as the ever-changing trends in the early childhood field and the reactionary programs that have been introduced by their district and then becomes required of them.

Additionally, all three of the participants stated that the district has expectations beyond what is stated in the TEKS [Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills], and required the teachers to cover them. Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield (the more experienced teachers) tended to feel restricted by these expectations, whereas Ms. Lopez (the more novice teacher) seemed to convey a normalcy to the district expectations; she didn’t seem to feel like they were a hindrance, but more a normal part of teaching life. Ms. Lopez’s own schooling followed much of what she feels the district requires of her, and therefore, it is a system that she was required to perpetuate. She seemed to feel that this is the nature of school and the nature of authority. She expressed that these two things - school and authority – are deeply connected.

Both Ms. Dulcinea, and Ms. Bakerfield, the experienced teachers, expressed that they felt a lack of empowerment or ownership in what they were able to teach. And, Ms. Bakerfield said she felt “society views teachers and schools as not being very important, but teaching is an art that takes time to develop and so teachers need to be treated as professionals and artists” (interview 3). The data strongly suggests that these teachers have deep feelings of frustration
engendered by the oppressive nature of systemic district restrictions, to the point where both spoke about the love they have for their students but also their eagerness to retire due to these restrictions and oppressive administrative district expectations.

Both Ms. Lopez, and Ms. Bakerfield, the kindergarten teachers expressed a dislike for the district required assessments of the kindergarten students. Ms. Lopez said “there is no need to test them at the beginning of the year, because they don’t know anything that is on that test yet” (interview 2). According to the teachers, these assessments don’t measure developmentally appropriate skills and knowledge for each student, and are presented as lacking meaning for the students. Additionally, the teachers are required to conduct these assessments one-on-one with each student at the beginning of the school year, as a measurement for each student’s knowledge and skill level, however, the assessment doesn’t seem to provide a resource to the teachers for curriculum planning, nor a measurement on what the child actually knows. Ms. Lopez even said that “based on these assessments, they don’t know anything” (interview 2). When the kindergarten teachers preform these one-on-one assessments, it could be expected that from the results of the assessments, that the teachers would then utilize what they have found to inform their classroom practices, and build curriculum that meets each child at their developmental level, providing an opportunity to scaffold the learning of the students and providing each students with their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). However, with the district’s expectations that the teachers utilize the Year at a Glance for their curriculum planning, the teachers in this study see the beginning of the year assessments as lacking meaning.

In addition, the district conducts curriculum writing during the summer where teachers are offered a stipend to participate. During the curriculum writing, the district presents to the teachers a Year at a Glance (YAG), taking the TEKS for each grade level and separating them
into the school weeks. Teachers are then given specific TEKS to cover in specific weeks throughout the year and during summer curriculum writing, groups of teachers from all different schools in the district develop activities that the individual teachers are then required to use in their classrooms during specific weeks. One challenge to this, explicitly stated by Ms. Lopez, is that many children do not master the required TEKS before the following week, when the teacher is required to move on. Moving onto the next concept before everyone in the class understands, can create confusion in the children, and frustration for the teacher, as many of the TEKS are scaffolded and require mastery of understanding of the concept prior to learning the following level. Ms. Lopez declared this was her greatest frustration, but that she felt she needed to continue with her teaching for the entire class’s benefit. She felt that her students did grasp or mastered the skills and content eventually, even if it was weeks after the required time that standard was covered.

Class size also seemed to be an issue for all three teachers. Ms. Bakerfield had 23 children in her class, Ms. Lopez had 30, and Ms. Dulcinea had 15 (but she shared a space with the other pre-kindergarten teacher who also had 15 students). In February, Ms. Lopez was relieved of several of her students and ended the school year with 23. During conversations with the participants and other teachers in the school, I was told that there is a 90 school day loophole where the district is given 90 school days to alleviate over-crowded classrooms. The participants indicated that the district tends to wait the full 90 days to avoid paying salary and benefits to a teacher during that time. Mountain-view Elementary school also ran at 125% capacity and finding a physical space for a classroom proved to be a challenge, which is why Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Samuels (another pre-kindergarten teacher) were housed together in a classroom designed for special education life skills classes. These pre-kindergarten teachers attempted to
provide the same curriculum at circle time by doing their story times and teacher led instructional time together, but Ms. Dulcinea asserted that with 30 4- and 5-year-olds on one carpet was more crowd control than constructive learning time. Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Samuels divided their classroom for teacher-led instruction time, and combined their classes for other activities; Ms. Dulcinea affirmed this to be noisy, yet productive.

Interruptions to the day was also a common theme in all the teachers’ commentary; further, these were acknowledged to contribute to a lack of time to be able to cover the requirements of the TEKS and additional district administration paperwork expectations. Interruptions identified by the teachers included: picture day, Kids Excel performances, pep rallies, fire and other emergency preparation drills, and holiday celebrations. Ms. Dulcinea felt she lacked enough prep time, and canceled her own children’s after school activities, so that she could stay in the classroom to plan and prepare. Ms. Lopez said that she felt teaching was only 60% of what she did each day, and that she spent the other 40% on administrative paperwork, like attendance and assessments. Ms. Bakerfield said she spent long days at school, and often worked late.

A lack of resources was an issue for all of the teachers, in particular for Ms. Dulcinea in the prekindergarten classroom where she lacked shelving to house teaching resources for the children. [During one of the interviews, Ms. Dulcinea took a phone call about purchasing three shelves for the classroom out of her own pocket.] Additionally, the curriculum she was asked to use was missing the books and other supporting materials essential to following the curriculum, but Ms. Dulcinea often purchased the needed books out of her own pocket. None of the teachers felt that the amount of financial expense that they had to personally dedicate to their classrooms in order to adhere to the expectations and curriculum of the district was appropriate, because they
could only claim $250 of what they spent on their taxes; all three teachers felt they have spent
more than that before the winter holidays.

Ms. Lopez indicated feelings of being “forced” to create her own readers in Spanish to
mirror her readers in English because the resources that were available from the district were
lacking in relevant Spanish, and often did not mirror the English that was being covered.
Because this particular district has a stated goal to be dual language with a 50/50 model, Ms.
Lopez felt that she needed to provide a true 50/50 model for both languages; since the Spanish
component was missing, she created her own. Ms. Bakerfield spoke of the lack of pay teachers
everywhere suffer from, as well as the health troubles she suffers, suspecting it was due to the
ventilation system of the building [despite the building only being 3 years old].

These systemic restrictions were stated by the participants in the study as, not only
context, but may also be reasons for the participants’ teaching approaches and classroom
practices. The systemic restrictions are influences on the participants’ practices, but not their
personal belief on teaching approaches and classroom practices. The following are the narrative
accounts for each participant, providing the context for their beliefs, and the influences that have
shaped their beliefs.

**Carol Bakerfield**

“I remember always loving education. I loved what it did for me as a parent. I loved
what it did for me as a person…They say you learn everything you need to know in
kindergarten. Well, some of us even as teachers, need to learn those life lessons about
other people. Being around little kids, you’re real or they eat you alive” (interview 3)
The earliest classroom experience that Carol Bakerfield can remember was fifty-five years ago. She remembers a “frazzled looking woman with 30 children” (interview 1), a boy named “Chuck”, and him moving her chair as she was sitting down. Her earliest school memory is not the best memory of her first-grade classroom; but she remembers that she always liked school. As a twin, growing up in a family of 5, Ms. Bakerfield remembers school as a place where her teachers cared for her, listened to her, and genuinely showed interest in her. She found a love of reading, and numbers. Ms. Bakerfield lived just outside of Washington D.C. during most of her school years. She went to the “best schools in the country” (interview 1) or at least that is what she was told, and Ms. Bakerfield remembers wanting to be a teacher when she grew up.

With the life experience that Ms. Bakerfield has had, it is difficult for her to remember specific teachers. Fifty-five years makes for a lot of teachers to remember. She remembers beginning formal school in California, but moved to Washington D.C. when she was five. Once the family had relocated, Ms. Bakerfield and her twin sister were separated into different classrooms as the school felt it was inappropriate socially to keep the sisters in the same classroom. Ms. Bakerfield acknowledges that her sister is still more of the leader between them, and at the young age of kindergarten, Ms. Bakerfield had trouble making friends in the wake of her sister’s shadow. Once on her own in her own classroom though, Ms. Bakerfield made friends and found school to be a safe place.

Her parents were “good parents”, (interview 1) but her mother didn’t care for living on the East Coast, and longed to return west. Her mother seemed to be a “somewhat frazzled parent” and her “dad was a 50s kind of dad. He came home, he watched the news, he had a couple whiskeys, and that was dad” (interview 1). These interactions on solidified Ms.
Bakerfield’s relationships with her teachers, especially since her teachers showed an interest in her where her parents may not have.

During that time, in the 1950’s and 60’s, the expectation was for children to be seen and not heard. “Kids are obedient, and that was that” (interview 1). Ms. Bakerfield remembers meeting the expectations, and frequently her mother would send her and her siblings outside to play. Ms. Bakerfield learned a lot about life during her outdoor play, and she remembers that time fondly.

When Ms. Bakerfield turned 17, the family left her father back east, and her mother and siblings moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and then to a small town called Socorro. “It was just total culture shock” (interview 1). Ms. Bakerfield met people who had never seen the ocean, or who had never been outside of New Mexico or their small town. There was a different culture from her hometown back east, with people who were experiencing different things, and had different expectations. This was a challenging and “traumatic time for the family” (interview 1). There was no money for Ms. Bakerfield to pursue a formal education. Back then, in the early to mid ‘70s, college seemed to be reserved for the rich kids or the “smart kids”; and although Ms. Bakerfield is extremely smart, she did not perceive herself as such at that time.

She married and moved to another southwestern town on the U.S./Mexico border. She didn’t know what she wanted to be when she “grew up”. Her sister became a biologist and travels a lot for work. Her brother works for IBM writing computer languages and developing systems. Although Ms. Bakerfield liked science, her experiences lead her down a different path, not thinking she was bright enough for college, and definitely not rich enough. Ms. Bakerfield had her son when she was about 30 years old. She found employment at a bank and enjoyed working with the customers and the numbers that the job requires. About 3 years later, her
daughter was born, and Ms. Bakerfield was able to stay home with her daughter for a while, but soon found herself to be a single mother of two small children. Her boss at the bank had once told Ms. Bakerfield that she would make an excellent teacher, and his wife worked as a teacher for the school district Ms. Bakerfield currently teaches in. Her employer had selected Ms. Bakerfield to teach teller training classes, and Ms. Bakerfield was not convinced that teaching was a profession that she wanted to pursue. She reluctantly began studying to be a teacher, but wouldn’t be certain she had found her calling until after her second year of teaching children. She was good at teaching adults in the teller training class, but “adults are different than kids” (interview 3).

Parenthood is a something that has influenced Ms. Bakerfield’s beliefs. As a parent with her own children, at times, Ms. Bakerfield felt inadequate in her parenting skills; making the conscious choices to not spank her children, or discipline them the way she was disciplined in her youth. Ms. Bakerfield looked to her mother as her role model for parenting. The role model Ms. Bakerfield had growing up approached parenting differently than Ms. Bakerfield, and Ms. Bakerfield stated that she “would have liked to have a better role model” and she is “sympathetic to parents who struggle with not having parenting skills” (interview 1). Ms. Bakerfield also cherished the time spent with her children, acknowledging that the “precious moments” (interview 1) came and went too quickly. In fact, Ms. Bakerfield was inspired to become a teacher in her 40’s to “be a better parent” (interview 1), and so she wouldn’t miss the precious moments with a teaching schedule similar to her children’s school schedule. She also longed for knowledge about her own children’s development. Through getting her teaching degree and through her 20 years of teaching she has learned a lot about children. “I chose teaching as a
career because it would give me more time with my kids, and it would also teach me about kids. Man, I’ve learned a lot about kids” (interview 3).

Ms. Bakerfield finished her degree when she was 40. She found that she really like teaching, because she loves learning new things, and teaching always presents a challenge. She was “getting to know what little kids really needed and understand it in a way that she [I] never had before” (interview 3).

Ms. Bakerfield first began teaching prekindergarten, two-weeks after the start of the school year. The principal at Ms. Bakerfield’s first school had called her and asked to interview her for the position. Ms. Bakerfield was desperate for her educational investment to pay off, and took the job. The previous teacher had quit after three days on the job, and Ms. Bakerfield was apprehensive as to what she had gotten herself into. The principal gave her about $5000 to buy materials, and as a new teacher Ms. Bakerfield sought advice from the other teachers at the school. Ms. Bakerfield was by herself in the classroom, without an aid, since this district does not provide aids for the prekindergarten classrooms. Her daughter attended a Montessori inspired school and Ms. Bakerfield took inspiration from what she saw her daughter doing and brought these types of hands-on activities into the classroom. She utilized themes and created hands on experiences but also focused her time on relationship building and self-guided inquiry.

After a few years, the school moved Ms. Bakerfield to a kindergarten classroom, and Ms. Bakerfield saw this as an opportunity to continue learning. She enjoyed kindergarten because she was now teaching the children to read, and write, whereas in prekindergarten you are “getting them ready and giving them the understanding of literacy, but very few of them are actually ready to sit down” (interview 3). She happily taught kindergarten for about four years, and was then moved back to prekindergarten for “a long time”.

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Prekindergarten teaching became tiresome; however, after about eight years the district received a grant for a training called the CIRCLE program. This program taught the teachers systematic classroom management, curriculum instruction, and basic child development for prekindergarten children. It emphasized routine, and schedule, and developmentally appropriate practice. Despite Ms. Bakerfield’s years of experience teaching prekindergarten, it wasn’t until her completion of the CIRCLE training that early childhood began to make sense. “When I got the CIRCLE training, it’s like all of a sudden, ho, somebody explained it to me. That’s when I really got into early childhood, pre-K” (interview 3).

In 2015, when Mountain-view Elementary School opened its doors, Ms. Bakerfield was recruited to teach prekindergarten, and then a year later Ms. Bakerfield was given an ultimatum “go to kinder or be moved to another school” (interview 3). Ms. Bakerfield was apprehensive but was ready for the change because she is “getting older” (interview 3). Ms. Bakerfield’s love of learning and literacy fuels her passion for teaching, and she often refers to the “scientist in me” (interviews 1, 2, 3) when talking about assessment, learning, and professional development.

**Jay Lopez**

“I used to do a lot of waitressing, and when I would work, I would look at the windows and I would see freedom. But then, when I was doing my student teaching, I looked at the windows and I didn’t want to be on the other side. I wanted to be in the classroom. That’s when I knew I wanted to be a teacher.”

Ms. Lopez also has limited memories of her early school years, and begins her timeline with second grade. Jay Lopez was born and grew up in Mexico. She remembers her second grade teacher as being “a super old lady” (interview3), but she was also very loving and would
take the time to explain things to little Ms. Lopez when she didn’t understand. This teacher stood out because Ms. Lopez felt as though this teacher “really liked me”. She remembers this teacher leaving in the middle of the year, and Ms. Lopez suddenly found herself, somewhat lost with the new teacher. As a child Ms. Lopez was quiet, but not shy. She had trouble focusing on one subject at a time, and would frequently day dream and gaze out the window. Ms. Lopez even diagnosed herself with ADHD because she rarely paid attention to what her teachers were saying, and was a very quiet student. In her other years in school, Ms. Lopez remembers sitting in classrooms with fifty students and one teacher, unlike her current situation where there is a limit to how many students can be in one class.

Growing up in Mexico, Spanish was Ms. Lopez’s first language. There was some instruction in English, but she did not learn to speak English until she came to the US for college. Ms. Lopez remembers repeating words with her mother, and repeatedly practicing her reading and writing with her mother while doing homework.

Once in college she felt that is where she learned how to speak English, because she needed to in order to pass her classes. This is directly connected to Ms. Lopez’s beliefs about learning. She strongly believes that people learn by doing, and Ms. Lopez learned English by speaking English. As a young child, Ms. Lopez felt that she mimicked English, and what English sounded like to her. She would repeat songs, but lacked an understanding of what she was singing and what those words meant.

Ms. Lopez’s college years were spent searching for what she wanted to be. She began as a nutritionist, then communication, and then lastly tried teaching. In Ms. Lopez’s last semester of college, she began her student teaching. She recalls the stress she felt by taking classes and student teaching at the same time. The teacher she worked with was in fourth grade, which was
desirable to Ms. Lopez because at the time she felt that “the little ones, they’re too needy. So I
was just like, ‘No, give me the upper grades’” (interview 2). Ms. A. was the fourth grade teacher
Ms. Lopez was assigned to, and emphasized the importance of the STARR Test. Ms. A took the
initiative the majority of the instruction time, due to the emphasis placed on the standardized test,
but tried to allow Ms. Lopez to take the lead whenever possible.

Ms. Lopez loves science, and feels that this is an area that she excels. It also happens to
be an area that is not tested in the fourth grade. “She gave me liberty…so most of my lesson that
I did in my student teaching was in science” (interview 2). Ms. Lopez would break down the
concepts and teach these through modeling. For example, she would make drawings, or would
have “five kids [be] the molecules in the solid stage and they’re hugging” (interview 2). Ms. A
recognized Ms. Lopez’s talent for explanation, and Ms. Lopez was offered a job running the
science camp held on Saturdays for the fifth graders to help prepare them for the test.

She was also offered a job tutoring at that same elementary school, before she had
graduated. Ms. Lopez finished her student teaching, and continued working closely with
students in her tutoring position. It was then that Ms. Lopez felt she was in the profession that
she belonged; however, Ms. Lopez focused her attention on the upper elementary grades, and
defered opportunities to tutor younger children to the only other tutor at the school.

One benefit of tutoring, was that Ms. Lopez would go to many different teacher’s
classrooms, and would gather teaching ideas from what she saw in their classrooms. She made a
connection with one of the teachers, Ms. G. who provided some emotional support and gave Ms.
Lopez some teaching strategies to use with the children Ms. Lopez tutored. These experiences
seemed more beneficial to Ms. Lopez, because she recalls that during her student teaching, she
was “just trying to survive and do copies. I was just trying to pass and make her [Ms. A.] like

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me, and just be useful for her. But really, what shaped me was when I worked with Ms. G” (interview 3).

From here, Ms. Lopez applied for teaching jobs in the fifth grade. Fifth grade focuses on science, the area that Ms. Lopez knew she excelled. She applied at several different schools, but did not hear anything back. By the end of the summer, Ms. Lopez had given up applying for any more positions, and resigned to being a tutor for that next school year, when she was offered a job at that same school. “They called me, it was my mentor, from where I did my student teaching, she talked to [the principal] and said, ‘My student teacher was very good.’ So they called me because of Ms. A’s recommendation. It was for kinder.” Reluctantly Ms. Lopez accepted the position, “I interviewed on Wednesday and they’re like, ‘You start Friday.’ And then I was like, “I wish I had some experience with kinder” (interview 2).

Ms. Lopez was nervous about teaching kindergarten, because she was in a dual language classroom, expected to teach children to read in both English and Spanish, and many of the children didn’t know how to hold a pencil. She was unsure how she was going to get through the school year, and successfully prepare her students. “My first year was very tough, very tough.”

When Ms. Lopez finally took ownership of her own classroom, she was left without a formal mentor. Fortunately, her peers identified her as the “new-girl” and offered support for her where she needed help. She felt comfortable going to her neighbor teacher, who was teaching first grade that year. Ms. T. taught first grade and would remind Ms. Lopez about things like Christmas presents, or to remember to ask parents for Valentine’s Day candy, and shoe boxes. Ms. T would open her files of teaching ideas for Ms. Lopez to brainstorm when she was stuck, and showed a genuine interest in Ms. Lopez’s “survival” (interview 2). Through this support, Ms. Lopez was able to learn on her own.
Ms. Lopez is currently in her fourth year teaching, and takes pride in being one of the dual language kindergarten teachers. She feels like she has figured out how to teach in a kindergarten class, and even turned down an opportunity to teach a higher grade level. Although she loves teaching and specifically teaching kindergarten, she is exhausted at the end of the day and even more tired at the end of the week. She would consider teaching first grade if offered, because at this rate she is “going to get old very fast” (interview 2). First graders are more mature than kinder, and Ms. Lopez often sees her former students and how they have grown and matured in their first grade classes and reflects on the more kindergarten-like behavior she witnessed when they were kindergartners in her class.

Ms. Lopez seems to have a love-hate relationship with teaching kindergarten. At times she speaks very highly about it, about how she is able to see the progress of a student’s understanding and skills from one day to the next, and see their brains develop. Other times, Ms. Lopez speaks of her frustrations of working constantly with one student, only to have that concept click during a vacation break, and the student returns performing the skill without help. Ms. Lopez recognizes that many of what is asked of the students is not developmentally appropriate, yet it is required by the standards to be covered.

Ms. Lopez is currently the mentor to a new-to-the-district teacher with ten years of teaching experience. Most of her mentorship has to do with district and administrative required paperwork that is different from her mentee’s prior school.

Ms. Lopez’s identified the influences or mentors of her teaching through the different stages of her teaching career. All of her mentors provided emotional support, but during each stage Ms. Lopez focused on mastering systems that would work for her in her teaching and in her career. Her Ms. A, (her mentor for student teaching) provided a glimpse into how to handle the
stress of the teaching profession; Ms. G (an informal mentor during the tutoring experiences) gave her insight into how to teach in a dual language classroom; and Ms. T (an informal mentor during Ms. Lopez’s first year of teaching) showed Ms. Lopez how to manage the administrative paperwork required.

Additionally, Ms. Lopez utilizes her connection to her religious beliefs, and frequently thanks God, or prays about her situation as a teacher, her classroom, and her students.

**Mancha Dulcinea**

“One reason that I get along with my pre-k’ers is the fact that I haven’t forgotten what it feels like to be four years old and that everything is new and we’re not going to learn things quickly and the things are going to seem very, very strange because I remember trying to learn just to classify in first grade. I have been classifying. I know that but the concept completely changed when I went to schools because now, I was being made it do it in a certain way, not because I was playing with it.

Ms. Dulcinea’s earliest memory of school was the first grade. Her teacher lacked patience, and Ms. Dulcinea was frequently disinterested in what was going on in the classroom. This was Ms. Dulcinea’s first experience with school, and the teacher instructed the children to go to the board and write. Since Ms. Dulcinea had never been to school before first grade, she found this experience to be traumatizing, and she soon thought that it was “very difficult for me to learn” (interview 1). Ms. Dulcinea wanted to be a nurse when she grew up, because she wanted to “work with people” (interview 1), but she never thought she would be a teacher.

Ms. Dulcinea’s third grade teacher, Professor Ray, quickly became her favorite teacher until he “fell off the alter” (interview 1), when Ms. Dulcinea forgot her math homework and
Professor Ray hit her hands with a ruler. Prior to this event, Professor Ray was saint-like for Ms. Dulcineaa.

In Mexico, at the age of nine, Ms. Dulcinea remembers sitting on a mountain looking across the US-Mexico border at the University. She saw the University as “my future” (interview 3), “I didn’t want to be in Mexico. I knew there was nothing for me over there, so I saw University and I knew that if I went there, I would have something for myself”; as a chance to be something and somewhere else. For sixth grade, Ms. Dulcinea had Maestra Blanca, with long black hair who invited Ms. Dulcinea to join the folclórico dance group. Ms. Dulcinea didn’t have any money to pay for the dance or the costumes needed for the performances; but Maestra Blanca didn’t allow that to stop Ms. Dulcinea from joining, and Maestra Blanca bought fabric and made Ms. Dulcinea’s dress for the performance. At Ms. Dulcinea’s sixth grade graduation, she performed with the dance group.

Ms. Dulcinea stated that at fourteen years old, she “crossed the border illegally and found her forever home in the US” (interview 3). A year later she was adopted by a wonderful couple who helped her to finish school. Ms. Dulcinea had not been to seventh grade yet, but once here in the US, Ms. Dulcinea scored high on a placement test, and she was placed in the eighth grade. Growing up in Mexico, Ms. Dulcinea spoke Spanish, and her move to the US, and then into eighth grade proved to challenge her because she was now expected to speak and learn in English. She was placed in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class with a teacher who was very patient.

In her ESL class, the teacher’s aide worked directly with Ms. Dulcinea. Ms. Dulcinea listed several teachers who contributed to her success in learning English, and to her successes in school. However, when she met with her school counselor, she was told to stop trying because
her English would never be “good enough” (interview 1). When Ms. Dulcinea returned home and told her parents what the counselor said, they pulled her from that school, and she went to another school, in another district where students were not separated into the English speaker and the English learners. It was a stressful transition, but now Ms. Dulcinea reflects on how it has benefited her. Her new school taught English classes, and Spanish classes; and Ms. Dulcinea was able to learn both along with her peers. Because, Ms. Dulcinea’s school years were stressful, she feels that she has “lost a lot of memories” (interview 1).

As a teenager, Ms. Dulcinea thought that becoming a teacher was the last thing she would ever become. She saw how teenagers treated their teachers, being rude, talking back. Ms. Dulcinea was ashamed of the other teenagers around her. She was raised to always show respect to teachers, and to view teachers as important as her own parents. Her peers seemed to be disrespectful, and didn’t seem to care about authority.

At age eighteen, Ms. Dulcinea graduated high school, and became a US citizen. She began attending college, at the same University she had gazed upon in her youth. She began studying to become an accountant.

Ms. Dulcinea’s adoptive mother was a kindergarten teacher, in the Mountain-view school district for 45 years, but Ms. Dulcinea’s mother was beginning to have health problems. Just prior to Christmas break, Ms. Dulcinea volunteers in her mother’s classroom, where she met a child named Rachel, who was a special needs child. During Ms. Dulcinea’s time volunteering in her mother’s kindergarten classroom, working closely with Rachel, Ms. Dulcinea saw the progress Rachel was making, and soon realized that Ms. Dulcinea, herself, had contributed to that progress. It was then that Ms. Dulcinea realized that teaching and working with children is what she was “meant to do” (interview 1). She returned to the University for the spring
semester, and changed her major to education. Ms. Dulcinea then spent all her free time volunteering and subbing.

Ms. Dulcinea Dulcinea graduated at age 26 with her Bachelor’s in Early Childhood and Bilingual Education. She was hired immediately at another school in the Mountain-view School district, and worked as a kindergarten teacher, in a classroom next to her mother’s. Shortly after beginning her teaching, Ms. Dulcinea’s father died, and being close with her mother on a daily basis was important to Ms. Dulcinea, and her mother. The next year she changed to teaching pre-kindergarten and fell even deeper in love with teaching young children.

At 29, Ms. Dulcinea gave birth to her first baby. This was a life changing moment for Ms. Dulcinea, and it reflected in her teaching. She realized that she had not been “showing the children enough love, patience” (interview 3), and she felt comfortable expressing her affection for the children in her class through the way she spoke with her students.

Ms. Dulcinea had two more children, and by the age of 33 had learned valuable lessons on how to work with and deal with the parents of the children in her own classroom. “I started putting myself in my babies’ teacher’s place…I learned to deal more with my own parents, my kids’ parents because I realized they don’t want to hear this because I didn’t want to hear that either” (interview 3).

Ms. Dulcinea’s years of volunteering and substituting lead her to meet Ms. Harper. Ms. Harper taught kindergarten, and structured her day so that she would gather the students at the carpet, read them a story then the children would play in the centers. Social/emotional development was a priority in Ms. Harper’s classroom, and Ms. Dulcinea saw this type of pedagogy as beneficial to the children’s learning in all areas.
Ms. Dulcinea taught at her original school for 20 years, then was recruited to Mountain-View Elementary school when it opened. She currently displays a plaque congratulating her on 20 years of teaching with the Mountain-View School District.
Chapter 5. Discussion of Findings

This chapter discusses the findings of first three research questions, with the fourth research question: How do these beliefs and teaching approaches map onto the process-product continuum model? And, how does this help visualize what is taking place in the classroom? Throughout this chapter, the process-product continuum is used to map the beliefs and teaching approaches and classroom practices for each participant. Illustrating the beliefs and teaching approaches and classroom practices on the process-product continuum provides a visualization of what is taking place in the classroom, and allows for an additional opportunity for self-reflection for the teachers. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Triangulation was utilized throughout the process of analysis, relying on the interviews, timelines, classroom observations, and artifacts that were collected. Member checks were also performed to ensure trustworthiness and reliability on the part of the researcher. The use of the continuum model throughout this chapter facilitates the iteration between the data collected and the theoretical framework, directly linking the two together.

Research Question 1: What are the beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in a public school in the borderland?

Common Beliefs among Participants

The data provided evidence that the three participants in the study share some common beliefs. First, all three of the participants felt that it is essential for their students to be interested and engaged in what they are learning. [However, it is important to note that the participants differ on how this is accomplished.] Second, the participants also all agreed that learning should be hands-on with exposure to real-world. [Again, the participants differed, this time on how this
Third, the participants all agreed that they live in a unique setting (the borderland), and that their students are in situations, where parents seem to be active and participants in the students’ education. The participants thought this differed from other students in the rest of the district. Fourth, they all agreed that they tend to have more affluent socioeconomic status students than is common in the district, and therefore, parental involvement is extremely high. Finally, the belief that all three teachers most strongly agreed upon was the immaturity of their students in relation to the expectations held by the school/district administrators; the teachers’ felt that the administration’s expectations of students are unrealistic, and not developmentally appropriate. These were the only commonalities among all three of the participants’ beliefs.

Beliefs Specific to the Individual Participants

Ms. Carol Bakerfield’s Beliefs about Teaching Practices

Through our interviews and conversations, three themes emerged when talking about Ms. Bakerfield’s beliefs about her own teaching practices: real-world experiences through play and center time; interaction between her and her students, as well as interaction amongst her students; and freedom within structure.

Real-world experiences through play and center time.

Real world experiences seemed to be a theme throughout our conversations about Ms. Bakerfield’s classroom. In her classroom, Ms. Bakerfield tends to act as the facilitator of activities, meeting the children’s interests with content from the TEKS. She wishes for more field trips, or the ability to take her classes on nature walks when discussing the weather, or nature. Hanging on one of the windows is a graph about apples. The students in her class conducted a taste test of different types of apples, and graphed their opinions of these apples on
the graph paper as a whole group lesson. These same students explored pumpkins while they were preparing for the fall to arrive. They learned about them by cutting them open, and scooping out the seeds and membranes from inside.

As part of the real-world experiences, Ms. Bakerfield attempts to utilize opportunity that arise spontaneously and organically within the classroom. On one of my visits with Ms. Bakerfield, the students in her class had taken her thumb drive with important information on it. They had hidden it from Ms. Bakerfield, and only when she addresses the entire class, did the student admit to their actions. Instead of yelling at the students, Ms. Bakerfield, took this opportunity to teach her students about the word “frustrated”. She told them that she felt frustrated when the children had taken something that belonged to her, and wouldn’t give it back. She asked the children “what does frustration mean? Remember when I seemed kind of upset with you when I was trying to help a group here and the others were so loud?” The students responded with “Oh. Yeah, we remember that! It looks a lot like anger”. She then used “frustrated” in several sentences, and asked for the class’s input for times when they have felt “frustrated”. “Misbehavior for me is a learning opportunity” (interview 1)

Ms. Bakerfield’s classroom is home to an easel at the back of the classroom, next to the sink. Children may go to the easel as a choice, or as a center. It is imbedded within the classroom routine, and curriculum. The students are encouraged to go there to create. Next to this is a block center that seemed to be a favorite for a select group of children who seemed to pick up where they had left off the day before, despite having cleaned up the day before. Students in this class move somewhat autonomously through the space. This classroom is noisy, filled with noises of children speaking and interacting with one another. Ms. Bakerfield stated that interaction is an important part to the learning experience.
One of Ms. Bakerfield’s teaching influences has been her own child’s Montessori inspired school, where the ideologies of play and autonomy are a prevalent theme. Throughout our conversations and interviews, Ms. Bakerfield often returned to these two themes. She believes that children can only learn if they are engaged in the classroom, and a natural source of engagement for children is play. She believes that the TEKS are written in a developmentally appropriate fashion and utilizes these as a basis for her lesson planning and preparation for various engaging learning activities within the classroom. Ms. Bakerfield reflected on her experiences throughout the years and stated that her teaching has “become more sophisticated,” (interview 3). Her teaching practices have changed as she has gained experience, saying:

“Maybe the first through third year, I just did whatever I could to keep them entertained really with what I had. I had an idea because I had seen how the Montessori lesson worked that they would start with their circle time in the morning, maybe a story. They would have their center activities. I had a sense that the kids had the freedom to go play, although theirs were much more sophisticated than the kitchen center and a pile of books in the corner and maybe computers or some old blocks in the other corner. It was really sad. It was basic early childhood, but it wasn’t based on my knowledge of what works and best practices, early childhood practices” (interview 3)

Ms. Bakerfield also utilizes literacy within her classroom to connect to the concepts and content that the children are studying.

“I like to use literature. I think that language should be the priority at this age level because they don't have the vocabulary, they can't do anything else. They do pick up on math. Kind of. It's natural. You rarely see small children who can't pick up math. If they have any trouble, it's usually because of vocabulary. I like to do direct teaching in a
structured way, but then give them the freedom to explore. Centers are important part of my classroom, so it's not all play-based like pre-K was, but play is definitely integrated into it. Then like I said, literature, I think they got to walk out of here loving reading…They need to have the opportunity to look at books, to love books. Reading's fine. Kindles are great, but they need to hold books in their hands” (interview 2)

The students in this classroom each have a place on the carpet, and the carpet is utilized on many occasions, for reading stories, whole class discussions, and many other opportunities. The large carpet area seems to be the nucleus meeting space of the classroom where each activity begins and ends.

**Interaction**

Ms. Bakerfield was asked how she thinks her students describe her. She responded with: “Oh, sometimes they tell me I'm mean. Sometimes I am…I think, for the most part, they like me…I try to be very empathetic to them, and I always explain to them why if they're not allowed to play or have to sit out on the playground what happened. I always approach it with not, ‘Why did you do that?’ but, ‘What happened? What did you want to have happen?’ to help them understand that there might be a better way to approach things. They recognize that. They trust me that they can come to me. They think I'm funny” (interview 2)

Ms. Bakerfield’s students are separated into group of 4, and each group works on a single task, though it may differ from the tasks of the other groups. The children are placed in these groups after Ms. Bakerfield has had ample time to get to know her students, the different personalities and the different dynamics of her students. She knows very well who is friends with whom, and who tends to get left out. One of the things that is important to Ms. Bakerfield,
is that all of her students feel included and valued in the classroom. She gives her students ample time to communicate with one another during learning centers. Ms. Bakerfield also holds many whole group discussions, where the children are encouraged to take turns speaking, and Ms. Bakerfield facilitates this and asks the children to take their turn speaking, then allow for others in the class to speak before they get another turn.

*Freedom within structure*

Ms. Bakerfield and I discussed the use of technology in the classroom, and she felt it tended to get in her way. She is proficient in the Mimio board, but prefers to use that space in her room for her word wall. She does not currently have one, nor use one. “The reason why is because I want to use that for my letter wall, because if it’s down, it’s too low. If it’s up, it’s too high. It needs to be right at their eye level, and so I suppose I could put is back there, but I’d have to rearrange the way my classroom’s set up” (interview 1). Despite having four computers in the classroom, technology of this type seems to be more of a distraction than beneficial to the students, and Ms. Bakerfield uses the computers during center time, but does not rely on these for practical teaching purposes. Ms. Bakerfield strives to utilize the CIRCLE training she received in her earlier years of teaching, which addresses classroom set up and layout. It emphasizes seven key centers “which interestingly enough does not include computers. We include it because our district uses Istation as an assessment” (interview 3).

When asked to “sell me on the way you teach,” Ms. Bakerfield stated:

“I believe in structure with young kids. They need to know the schedule. They need to know what’s going to happen next to make them feel comfortable and have some understanding. They don't have to ask, "What are we going to do now?" I think they're anxious when they don't know what's going to happen next. I try to make my classroom a
safe place at all times, that they feel like they're safe here, that I will take care of them. Those two things are really important in early childhood. The structure you put in place in pre-K is going to be different than what you put in place for kindergarten, because you have more expectations for academics in kindergarten than first grade and so on and so forth” (interview 2).

Ms. Bakerfield has many systems in place, but as observed during my classroom observations, her students are autonomous in knowing where they are supposed to be when. There is freedom within the boundaries of her classroom as students are free to move around as they please, as long as they stay on task. Reflecting on her experiences, Ms. Bakerfield discussed the teacher she was when she first began teaching:

“They did do coloring and stuff like that. Really it was a lot of coloring. Back then, I didn’t feel adequate. One time, I had a child not wanting to do it, not surprisingly. They wanted to go play. The principal came in and he was telling her, ‘No. This is your work. Your work is coloring.’ I thought that’s just sad that their work is coloring. It seems like they should have better work than that. I always felt like there’s something missing from what I’m doing those first three years, writing or coloring and then free play time and outdoor play. That was pre-K. Those were not bad things. They just weren’t enough, I didn’t think, and they didn’t really address the differences that students had. Some knowing a lot of letters already and ready to do more with that as far as writing. Some just can’t even hold a pencil” (interview 3).

As Ms. Bakerfield gained experience in teaching, and within the district, her teaching practices began including more structured play with center time, circle time, direct reading instruction, and meeting students where they were and building on those. She learned how to
navigate the expectations of the administration and district, by working on the skills that her students were expected to know by the end of the year, within the teaching philosophies and approaches that she knew to be best practices and developmentally appropriate.

Figure 9. Ms. Bakerfield’s beliefs about teaching practices as mapped on the process-product continuum.

Figure 9 outlines Ms. Bakerfield’s beliefs about her teaching. She articulated that the themes of Freedom within structure, interaction, and real-world experiences are her more important priorities within the classroom. Freedom within structure is dependent on the classroom culture that Ms. Bakerfield co-creates with her students within her classroom. She has created a culture
of autonomy, but only works if the students participate within the boundaries of the expectations. Freedom within Structure is also dependent on communication, and collaboration since it is set in a way for students to learn from one another and work together. Additionally, Freedom within Structure is dependent on creativity as students are given tasks and asked to solve these within their groups. They must find possible answers, linking problem solving to creativity. Many of the centers are open-ended in nature allowing for the student to express their understanding in a multitude of ways. Because freedom within structure is dependent on all 4 C’s of the process side, it is represented with red and mapped on the furthest point on the process side of the continuum.

Interaction is directly dependent on communication and collaboration. Students are encouraged to engage with one another for learning experiences. This also builds upon the classroom culture. Interaction utilizes 3 of the 4 characteristic of process, and therefore is mapped on the process side but closer to the middle of the continuum. It retains the red hue, but adopts some blue making it a more purple version of red.

Real-world experiences is dependent on the classroom culture and the willingness of the students to participate in the learning activities. Within this, creativity is a crucial component of real-world experiences, since Ms. Bakerfield must create these within a classroom setting. She utilizes her own creativity to create the experiences that she feels her students need to thrive in a learning world. It also requires the students to utilize their imagination (a component of creativity) to associate the experiences with experiences they may have in the real-world. Ms. Bakerfield also uses her students’ ideas within these activities, allowing for their creative exploration of the various learning tasks. Because real-world experiences only utilize two of the four C’s of process it is mapped closer to the middle of the continuum. Since none of the three
beliefs of Ms. Bakerfield utilize behaviors of the product side of the continuum, they remain heavy on the process side.

**Ms. Jay Lopez’s Beliefs about Teaching Practices**

Through our interviews and conversations and classroom observations, three themes emerged when talking about Ms. Lopez’s beliefs about her own teaching practices: structure, organization, and authority; 21st century technology; and Exposure to higher content.

**Structure, Organization, and Authority**

Structure and organization are essential in Ms. Lopez’s classroom. “I don’t like a lot of clutter. Even those supplies up there (pointing to extra supplies stacked neatly on a shelf) they are extra and they didn’t fit in my closet. But usually I don’t like a lot of stuff on the walls and a lot of clutter” (interview 1).

Ms. Lopez also uses a range of classroom management strategies that she believes teaches her students independence in how they manage their behavior in the classroom. She has several systems in place. For example, if a child needs to use the bathroom, they must first go and get an orange cone to place at their seat then they may go to the bathroom. This tells Ms. Lopez that this child is in the bathroom, and not somewhere else in the school. Ms. Lopez also utilizes her classroom in the pods or tables as individual teams, each associated with a color. On the board is a graph where each team is awarded hand drawn smiley faces for excelling and are deducted smiley faces for misbehaving. Ms. Lopez sees this system as having a dual purpose: 1) it helps the students to track their behavior and success, and 2) it exposes them to graphing, which is not covered on the TEKS until a later grade.
In keeping with the STEM-focus of the school, Ms. Lopez instructed her class that they are all “little engineers” (interview 1) and “engineers solve problems”. So any problem that arises for the children in the class, they are expected to brainstorm ways of solving the problem.

Submitting to authority was also a common theme throughout our interviews and while observing Ms. Lopez’s classroom. “Because imagine in my classroom, I had 20 different opinions and it gets very chaotic. Imagine if you want to try to make everybody happy, and so you need to submit to authority” (interview 2). Submitting also applies to Ms. Lopez. She identified that the school district had the authority to require certain things of the teachers, and for the teachers to do some things in a specific way.

**21st Century Technology**

Ms. Lopez likes to use a lot of 21st century technology in her classroom. Ms. Lopez sees these skills as essential to her students’ success in navigating the world outside of the classroom. By using the technology, her students are able to see all the possibilities that technology can provide. By practicing with technology, her students are learning how to use the technology first hand. Ms. Lopez sees this approach as more engaging to the students, and utilizes her MIMO board for many class lessons. The students react with excitement, and again Ms. Lopez tracks their engagement and successes on the color chart with smiley faces for each team.

**Engaging Practice**

The students in Ms. Lopez’s classroom are expected to practice their new skills repeatedly; however, Ms. Lopez also knows that the drill and kill model leaves her students reluctant to participate in the practice drills. She utilizes different strategies for keeping her student’s engagement, such as play theatre for English Language Arts, and coloring pictures for learning letters. “What I want of my kids is they start doing, and with instruction you modify
and you give feedback...no, you don’t want a kid to be repeating something wrong, like writing ‘a’ wrong, so you have that private instruction, direct instruction. But when it’s a whole group you just want them to get out there, even it’s not right, but at least you just jumped” (interview 2). If the students do not make an attempt and try the activity or lesson being presented, then Ms. Lopez will have a difficult time teaching the children.

Ms. Lopez also acknowledges that children learn different things at different paces, and that is another reason why she feels that the children need adequate practice, because “there’s some [students] that you just teach them one time and they’re done…and there’s students that they need a whole year. You do small group with that topic, like math and reading, there are skills that for some students it requires more” (interview 2). With more practice, Ms. Lopez believes that every student will eventually “get it”.

Practice for Ms. Lopez has to be consistent, even when the students in her class don’t seem to understand. Ms. Lopez feels that through consistent exposure through student practice, eventually they will understand. This is where Ms. Lopez utilizes a lot of the 21st century technology in her classroom that includes interactive games among the students.

Practice also extends to the parents and homework. Each student is required to get a signature from their parent after they have practiced their words at home. The parents are required to work with their child through practices letter sounds and words every night.
Figure 10. Ms. Lopez’s beliefs about teaching practices as mapped on the process-product continuum.

Figure 10 illustrates Ms. Lopez’s beliefs about her teaching practices on the process-product continuum. Ms. Lopez’s use of 21st century technology is only slightly towards the product side, however rest primarily on the process side, being dependent on automaticity, but relying on the classroom culture, collaboration, and communication between peers, since rarely does this happen in isolation. Structure, organization, and authority is purple indicating that it falls in the middle of the continuum being dependent on classroom culture and external reinforcement.
Lastly, engaging practice is dependent on Automaticity, students work alone and reproduce models, leaving it blue and residing on the product side of the continuum.

**Ms. Mancha Dulcinea’s Beliefs about Teaching Practices**

**Social and Emotional Development**

“And personally I feel that social-emotional behavior needs to be developed before any of this academic stuff is trying to be stuck in their head...because once they have that social-emotional and they’re confident in themselves, then all of this will go in by itself.” (interview 1).

For Ms. Dulcinea, she feels that pre-kindergarten is the child’s first experience in a school setting. She feels that many of the children, even if they have experience in day care, do not have experience socializing with their peers. She feels that through play children are building their social and emotional development in a natural and organic fashion. Once they are confident, and know how to navigate social through their world, the academic stuff will come naturally. It is her priority to build these skills within the classroom in order for the children in the classroom to be successful.

**Engaging Curriculum and Activities**

I asked Ms. Dulcinea what her classroom would look like if she had unlimited resources. She answered that she could do so much in her classroom, but that she would separate the classroom into engaging play centers for the children. “My classroom would be in centers the way that it is supposed to be” (interview 1). There would be toys that would be engaging for the children, and Ms. Dulcinea would allow for the children to move about the classroom to where they were the most interested. If they were interested in playing in the kitchen or dramatic play center, they would be free to play there. This is directly connected to her beliefs about social and emotional development.
Ms. Dulcinea would also incorporate nature into the classroom and would allow for the children to bring items they find outside into study. Through this type of hands on exploration, the children in the class would be self-directed in their learning, and they would have the opportunity to learn a wide range of things without the interference of the teacher directed instruction. There would still be teacher-directed instruction, but not like what is required now. The class would begin with a whole circle time, with storytelling and imagination building. Ms. Dulcinea often asks her students to close their eyes, while she is reading a story to them. She does not show them the pictures, but asks them to close their eyes and use their imagination to illustrate the story. After the story time had concluded, she would introduce a concept to them, perhaps a math concept, or science. Then they would be allowed to explore the centers, which some would have been changed to be connected to the concept that was introduced, or to go along with the theme of the story. The children would have a long time of uninterrupted play and would be encouraged to work out their new understandings of the concepts. They would then have some outdoor play, and would come back for another circle time with another brief concept followed by more play. The day would conclude with a brief whole class meeting, where the children would be encouraged to discuss what they learned that day.

The classroom would have enough shelves to be able to distinguish between the different centers with not a lot of space to run, because that can bring “chaos” (interview 1). The shelves would also be low to the ground so that Ms. Dulcinea could see everyone in the classroom at all times for supervision and safety.

“I would have doors to the outside where we could have a place to grow a garden” (interview 1). The playground would have tunnels, and water available for the children to play with.
In the current classroom, shared with Ms. Samuels, center time is combined between both classes, leaving the two teachers grasping at ways of engaging the 30 children in the class. “If they’re not at their table, and they’re running around, then there’s something wrong. I have done something wrong. But if they’re still at their table engaged, I feel that they’re still learning something there” (interview 2).

As part of the engaging curriculum and activities, Ms. Dulcinea acknowledges that exposure to as many concepts, vocabulary, and higher content as possible, is very important for the success of the children.

“It’s exposure…So long as you have been exposing them, they’re hearing the vocabulary in the classroom. I’m sorry, but not everybody’s going to learn the vocabulary at the same rate…Either from pictures, from acting it, from doing it, from anything. That doesn’t mean that they’re going to learn it…But they have heard it…And maybe that is enough that when they go to the next level, and they hear it again, maybe something will click and say, ‘Oh, That’s what she meant’” (interview 2)

“If I love them, I will teach them discipline in school”

Part of teaching the students discipline, Ms. Dulcinea believes, means also teaching them the social expectations of a school setting, with sitting when the teacher asks you to sit, walking in a line, and behaving safely. She believes that through love, the children will learn how to behave to receive the desired reaction from their peers. If she corrects a child’s behavior, it is through love and understanding that what they are doing isn’t because they are bad children, but because they are learning how to navigate the world around them through their behavior, and then through the reactions they receive for that behavior. “They need to be shown when they’re making a wrong decision and get them to understand that it is not a correct decision, but that the
only way that they are going to do it is by reminding them” (interview 1). When telling me about the dynamics of her classroom, and when asked about the challenges that she faces with her students, Ms. Dulcinea always referred to the children as her “beautiful Alex” or “my love Stephanie” (all pseudonyms). Even one child who had become a “special challenge” she said “my beautiful Arnold is still arguing, but not as much as he used to. Now he’s starting to understand that at some point, we all have to listen” (interview 2).

Ms. Dulcinea feels that with all of the children in the pre-kindergarten classes reach a similar level of development when in the program because despite all the teachers doing the curriculum differently, they all do the curriculum.
Figure 31. Ms. Dulcinea’s beliefs about teaching practices as plotted on the process-product continuum.

Figure 11 illustrates Ms. Dulcinea’s beliefs about her classroom practices. Engaging Curriculum and Activities and Social and Emotional Development as Ms. Dulcinea describes them are dependent on all four C’s of the process side of the continuum. “If I love them, I will teach them discipline in school” is dependent on the classroom culture that Ms. Dulcinea embodies, and External reinforcement. In this instance the external reinforcement is presented in the form of love being the external force guiding the children to the desired behavior, therefore, “If I love them, I will teach them discipline in school” is mapped in the middle of the continuum.

**Research Question 2: What are the influences that have shaped these beliefs?**

**Mentors**

All the participants felt that their mentors, both formal mentor teachers and informal mentors, had significant influence in what kind of teachers they became. All three participants reflected back to their days in school and their student teaching as being a time of learning and molding them into the types of teachers they are now. Ms. Bakerfield and Ms. Dulcinea also cited their professional development and years of experience working with different students and different types of learners as influencing their current teaching practices. Ms. Dulcinea cites Ms. Samuels as teaching her a lot of new ways of teaching this year, since they are in the same classroom, and observing each other’s strengths. Ms. Dulcinea also expressed that she was beginning to feel confident in many of the activities and things that she does in the classroom. Prior to this, she indicated that she felt insecure about what strengths she has in teaching, and often felt that she wasn’t doing something right. Ms. Dulcinea did specify there was a time when she was confident in her teaching, and shared a story about utilizing Native American folk lore to facilitate a lesson that lead to the children constructing bows and arrows. She felt comfortable
with the freedom she was given to provide this type on inquiry-based pedagogy, but indicated a loss of confidence when she was forced to adhere to the conventions set by the district.

**Motherhood**

Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield also attributed their own motherhood to influencing their teaching practices. Ms. Dulcinea felt that motherhood helped her to gain patience with her students, but also informed her as to how to teach the children to advocate for what they believe is morally right. Her love of her students, which she explicitly states, seems to be what drives her passion in the classroom, and in turn how she manages the classroom as well. Ms. Bakerfield was influenced by motherhood because she went into teaching to be able to better understand the challenges and celebrations her own children were having throughout their childhoods. Through studying to become a teacher, she was exposed to what her own children were learning and why it was important. Her own children went to a Montessori-inspired school that utilized child-led activities and real world experiences in a holistic pedagogy while meeting all the content that was developmentally appropriate and individualized. Ms. Bakerfield states that she feels that if she were given more freedom in the curriculum, she would accomplish more in the classroom and it would be better for her students; they would learn more, and learn lessons that are not outlined in the state standards.

**Research Question 3: What do these teaching approaches and practices look like in the classroom?**

All three participants’ teaching approaches and practices seemed to mirror their beliefs about their teaching approaches and practices. Through classroom observations and the interviews, three broad categories arose in regards to teaching approaches and classroom practices: Classroom Management, Classroom Structure, and Lesson Structure Practices.
Classroom management “refers to creating safe and stimulating learning environment” (DJigic & Stojiljkovic, 2011, p. 820) and includes the teacher’s personality, abilities, and the “processes that take place in a group of students” (p. 821). It also involves the management of space, time, activities, materials, labor, social relations, and behavior of the students. For this study, the focus was on the approaches and practices I was able to observe in the classroom, with additional support from the interviews to gain a deeper perspective from the teachers about how they feel they approach classroom management. Classroom structure refers to the layout of the environment, the various strategies a teacher uses in their teaching approaches, and the different routines or systems the teacher has in place for teaching not related to classroom management but to the curriculum (Kohn, 2006; Marshal & Weinstein, 1984; Rushton & Juola-Rushton, 2008). Lastly, examples of a lesson for each teacher is provided to give a general sense of the teacher’s general lesson structure practices. It is important to note that these lesson structure practices were not in isolation; the teachers engaged in many different lessons throughout the semester and the examples given for each teacher happened repeatedly during classroom observations.

The pedagogical practices of teachers are displayed through how they chose to set up their classrooms (Albaiz, & Ernest, 2015; Hamre, et al., 2012; Rushton, & Juola-Rushton, 2008). The different ways classrooms are set up are a visible representation aiding their beliefs about practices, curriculum, and pedagogy (Chen, & McNamee, 2011; Elmore, 1996; Ray, & Smith, 2010; Tzuo, 2007).

Ms. Bakerfield

Ms. Bakerfield believes that real-world experiences through play and centers, interaction, and freedom within structure are priorities for providing best practices within the classroom.
Ms. Bakerfield’s Classroom

At the end of the kindergarten hallway, you find Ms. Bakerfield’s kindergarten classroom. The hall is lined with bulletin boards, covered in bold primary colored paper, and samples of student’s crafts, or writing samples. Entering the classroom, I am immediately greeted with a book shelf with tattered books thrown on the top shelf. An empty shelf is just below, and the bottom shelf houses a stack of white 2-inch binders. Next to this is another shorter shelf that seems to proudly display a box of tissues, a box of folders, and a basket of books that seem to be better cared for. The lower shelf is home to stacks of puzzles. On the wall above is a bulletin board announcing “Reading is Fun!” followed by the daily schedule, and a list of rules, reading:

Our Classroom Rules

1. We walk.
2. We listen.
3. We share.
4. We clean up.
5. We take care of our school.

The bulletin board also displays a bumper sticker with the school’s logo and mascot; a poem by Dorothy Law Nolte called “Children Learn What They Live”, displayed in both English and Spanish, and printed on paper bordered with flowers, butterflies, and vines; and the rules for walking in the hall that is displayed in all of the classrooms.

Moving left along the wall is a large white board that spans almost the entire width of the classroom. The state flag hangs vertically on the white board. At children’s-eye-level, the alphabet is displayed on individual paper cutouts of each letter with the capital letter, lowercase
letter, and a picture of an item: an apple for the letter A, a snake for the letter S. Below each letter are more words written on cards, including the names of the students, and taped to the white board. A flip chart piece of paper, with adjectives describing apples has been cut in half and taped on the board as well, partially covering some of the letters of the make-shift word wall. Below the white board are more flip chart papers, cut in half with instructional resources written on them. The concrete floor, just below this wall is lined with children’s work that has either been painted or glued, and I am informed by one child, that this is where they leave their “art to dry, before we can take it home”.

The carpet that greets the visitors to the classroom follows the two-foot concrete “drying rack”. It is mostly bold primary colors with squares and letters on it. In the far corner sits Ms. Bakerfield’s desk, covered in papers, with frequently utilized supplies at easy access on the edge. A desk chair, with Ms. Bakerfield’s sweater sits behind the desk, and another smaller chair sits in front of it, as if to invite the children’s eyes to that part of the classroom during carpet time. An easel with the half-flip-chart paper sits empty, waiting for the next carpet instructional time. Following the word wall, Ms. Bakerfield has displayed organizational resources: job chart, calendar, center groups, reading groups, learning goals, a green-yellow-red faced behavior chart with clothespins for each student. A filing cabinet sits facing the classroom door, with an old clock radio on top.

Behind Ms. Bakerfield’s desk sits a tall bookshelf with neatly organized books. Picture frames and knick-knacks sit on top of the shelf. The far wall is then lined with windows, overlooking the mini trees, and the playground. A shelf filled with containers labeled “number center”, “abc”, “counting”, “reading center”, etc. protrudes into the classroom, closing off Ms.
Bakerfield’s desk from the rest of the room. Beneath the window, lines 4 computers on long tables.

The opposite corner seems to be home to a science center of sorts, with a microscope, magnifying glasses, and non-fiction books in a container. A rolling cart lives in that corner, with different supplies that seem to be there temporarily. A crate filled with wooden blocks sits waiting in this corner as well.

The next wall doubles as cabinets with cabinet doors at the bottom, white board sliding doors in the middle, and empty space (containing storage tubs) at the top. This white board has teacher instructional posters, like posters of the seasons, or shapes, or numbers. Near the end of these cabinets lives a painting easel that seems to have seen a lot of use over the years. That corner is home to a sink, at the child’s level; however, two step stools accompany this area. The bathroom wall greets this sink, and bulges into the classroom slightly. The closed door is labeled, with a measuring tape poster. On the remaining bathroom wall, sits a play kitchen with a play table that is about six inches shorter than the other tables in the classroom.

This next wall is home to 32 cubbies, school supplies in the open top, followed by a closet that houses additional teacher supplies.

The middle of the classroom is home to five round tables with four chairs at each. There are four nametags at each table, indicating where the children’s assigned seats are. There is one other u-shaped table near Ms. Bakerfield’s desk that flaunts piles of student work, a cup of freshly sharpened pencils, and readers from the curriculum.

Parts of the room seem cluttered, Ms. Bakerfield’s desk, the bookshelf, and the cubbies; however, it is clear that the students and Ms. Bakerfield know where to find items they are looking for. The windows provide a tremendous amount of natural light, however, Ms.
Bakerfield’s classroom light remains on the majority of the time. Besides the computers in the classroom, twenty-first century technology seems scarce, and Ms. Bakerfield seems to rely on hand-made teaching resources, made during class discussion rather than store-bought resources.

Figure 12. Ms. Bakerfield’s Classroom

Classroom Management

When children misbehave in Ms. Bakerfield’s classroom, they are pulled aside from their peers and Ms. Bakerfield asks them questions like “do you believe you should do that?” or “can
you tell me what you are having trouble with?” This seems to be an empathetic approach to what some would call discipline issues, however, her students seem to respond positively to this approach; although there are a few students whom Ms. Bakerfield keeps an extra close eye on, the classroom seems in general to have a positive and harmonious emotional climate. If students continually misbehave after Ms. Bakerfield has spoken to them privately, she requires that they sit down during the first part of recess. Before the children may join their peers on the playground equipment, they must tell Ms. Bakerfield why they had to sit out. She then helps them to think of better ways of behaving the next time. When conflict between two students arise, Ms. Bakerfield tells the students to first try to work it out. It seems rare for her students to have conflicts with one another. Ms. Bakerfield believes this is because she has spent “significant” time in the classroom asking the students to say nice things about one another in front of the class. Ms. Bakerfield has also made sure that every child in the classroom has had someone say nice things about them before others are repeated. Figure 13 are field notes from observations from Ms. Bakerfield’s classroom supporting the above described classroom management.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bakerfield 9/15/17: 2:00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class is outside on the small playground at the front of the school. The playground is surrounded by a wall the height to sit on. Ms. Bakerfield has given crackers to each of the students. Some students are still sitting on the wall finishing their crackers, others are playing on the playground</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| G: “Ms. Bakerfield, he is pushing me still!” |
| T: “Have you told him that you don’t like that?” |
| G: “I DID! But he not listening to me!” |
| T: “ok, I will talk to him.” (to Boy who has been pushing) “Name, girl has told me that you are pushing her, and she doesn’t like that. Can you tell me why you are doing that?” |
| B: shrugs |
| T: “Ok, well, do you believe you should do that?” |
| B: “No, but she was doing it to me!” |
| T: “I see, did you tell her that you didn’t like that?” |
| B: “I did but she kept doing it so I pushed her back” |
| T: “I will talk to her, but what do you think you should do next time if this happens again?” |
**Classroom Structure**

Ms. Bakerfield’s classroom is organized with round tables and lots of open space to play. These spaces for play have blocks, an easel, a kitchen set, and puzzles. There are various activities available for the students to engage in during the time when they have freedom of choice. She allows her students to work in groups and if one person needs help, they should first consult their peer for help before taking it to Ms. Bakerfield. Additionally, she allows her students freedom of choice in where they would like to play after they have finished their assigned activities. Most of the whole-group work is conducted with the children sitting on the carpet; they each have assigned seats on the carpet. Ms. Bakerfield will often introduce a book or story, read it, and then pull specific concepts that she wants to go over with the children. Throughout this process, Ms. Bakerfield asks for input from the students. From the student’s input, she builds on the concept being discussed using the student’s ideas. Figure 14 are one example of field notes from Ms. Bakerfield’s classroom structure as described above. Additionally, they are another example of her lesson structure practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bakerfield 9/25/17: 9:15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class is returning from PE – they get water either from their water bottle or from the water fountain. The lights are on, blinds are open.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The children sit on the carpet when they are finished without prompting from Ms. Bakerfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: turns on the CD player and sings songs with finger motions with the children. The children are standing on the carpet facing Ms. Bakerfield. They sing several songs until all the children are on the carpet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T tells the class that she wants them to continue with the rules of the class: respect, responsible, raise hands, and sitting like pretzels. The children sit down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: points to the chart paper next to her, and says “what word are we working on?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G: says “The”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: “I’m glad you said that, who can find the word on the word wall?”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students are speaking about the different “The” and “Thee” pronunciation and “the” that they are seeing around the room, and with a capital “T” and a lowercase “t”

T: “Yes, there are 2 ways to write the, because sometimes it has a capital T, and sometimes not”
T: “Who can find the on the word wall?”
She draws a popsicle stick from a cup. (each popsicle stick has a child’s name on it)
“Name (boy), I’m going to help you, where is the word?”
B: points to “the” on the word wall
T: “Name, did a great job. Everyone uses this word. Can you tell me how you use ‘the’?”
Girl raises hand and T points G: “Can I go to the bathroom?”
T: smiles “You used ‘the’, yes”
Another child “Go to a waterpark”
T: “use ‘the’ can we use ‘the’?”
Many students are raising their hands, some are bouncing in their seat
T: “I’m looking for a quiet girl”
T: tries to alternate between the boys and girls
Girl: “The three”
T: “What about the three?”
Girl: “The three squares”
T: “Can you give me a whole sentence? Sentences tell me what you are thinking, can you give me a whole sentence?”
Girl: “The three is a number”
T: “Very good”
T: “We need the word ‘the’ in order to make and read sentences”
On the chart paper at the front of the class, next to Ms. Bakerfield, is written “I can [eye picture] the”
T: again points to the chart paper and the picture of the eye “I sounds like one word but there are two different meanings: eye like an eye to see, and I like…oh I forgot a word ‘can’. Who thinks they can read what we have so far?”
Many children raise their hands and many are bouncing in their seats
T: “Thinking of what we wrote for science…I can see the…this is an incomplete sentence, we have to finish it”
Girl: “I can see the flower”
T: “very good, now I’m looking for a quiet boy”
Boy: “I can see the spider”
T: “very good”
Girl: “I can see the tomato”
T: “very good”
Boy: I can see the dog”
T: “very good, I know there are more sentences but we have to stop because yesterday we didn’t have time to make playdough ‘A’”
T: draws “A” on the board
T: “Ok look at the directions on the board; reach up high, [to another child who is yelling] bubble in your mouth…then you have slanted line, and slanted line…what’s next Name?” [to child who is talking with a friend]
B: “cross at the middle line”
T: “Capital A”
T: continues to draw a lower case “a” on the board “‘a’ looks like a balloon, watch me again”
T: “do you need a pencil to do this?”
The class together say in a long drawn-out “yes”
T: “your books might be mixed up”
T: passes a book to a child and the child gives it to the perspective child.
T: “When you are done, and you have done a good job you can play with playdough”
T: to child who passed out books “good job, thank you”
The children go to their cubbies and retrieve their pencil boxes, then go to different tables. Each table has a name tag with a spot for each child
T: walks around the room and stops at a child who says they are finished: “It’s like a bull in a china shot, be careful please, tuck your legs in.” Child is sitting on their chair, and T is adjusting their sitting first, then correcting their mistakes.
T: “Take our time, we are not in a hurry. I do have an eraser. Erase one and I will hold your hand”
The child is left handed, and T says “left! I don’t know if I can do this” her tone is calm and playful. She holds the child’s hand and helps they write “A”
T: continues to walk the room and announces “I like how [Name] is writing” She stops and says “make them taller”
To another child: “All the way up”
To another child: “Get a pencil honey”
To another child: “Try another one”
To another child: “Your capital is perfect, now for the lower…keep trying”
Children are finishing their work and begin asking for playdough.
T: gets playdough, individual playdough cups (sold for party favors)
T: to another child: “looks like a ball on a stick try again”
Children are looking in the box of playdough cups for theirs T: “find your playdough, it has your initials on it”
To another child: “That one is perfect, can you make more like that?”
At another table that has gotten louder than the other tables “How are you guys doing, lets finish A’s…you are doing pretty good.”
The room is noisy, yet the children’s conversations are about their A’s or about their playdough. The noise level is a low rumble.
To another child: “Perfect make some more”
To another child: “They are floating, they need to be down”
Children are making letters with playdough
T: claps her hands twice and announces that it is center time, the play dough goes in their cups, and the quiet table with their heads down will be called first.
T: “Look at the red table, they can put their boxes away, push in your chairs then sit on the carpet.
T: claps her hands twice and calls the remaining tables by level of quiet and if their head are on the tables.
The materials helper puts different boxes of materials on each table.
Centers are:
• Writing center – makes an “M” with macaroni
• Writing words on scavenger hunt – different words with pictures are posted throughout the classroom, students find the matching picture and copy the word on their worksheets
• Reading – finding the sound, then cut out and glue on a different place, worksheet
• Computer – Istation
• Teacher table – another teacher is here to help read with 4 students
• Writing center – drawing shapes using stencils

When the children are finished with their center they may go and do another center:
• Reading – puzzles and books
• Guided reading
• Drawing pictures
• Painting at the easel

There is a buzz of child conversations. Some about what they are doing, but also some about other things that they are doing or things that they like.

Figure 14. Field notes of Ms. Bakerfield’s classroom structure and lesson structure practices

Lesson Structure Practices

Whenever possible, Ms. Bakerfield brings in real-world items to teach her students; for example, they tasted different colored apples when reading Johnny Appleseed. The students then created a graph the illustrated the different tastes of the apples. If you refer back to figure 9, Ms. Bakerfield’s priorities in her beliefs seems to reside primarily on the process side of the continuum. Her teaching approaches and practices seem to mirror her beliefs about teaching approaches and practices.
Ms. Bakerfield’s teaching practices on the process-product continuum.

Figure 15 outlines some of the teaching approaches and practices observed in Ms. Bakerfield’s classroom. The three mapped practices reside towards the process side. Individualized discussion regarding behavior is plotted on the farthest point due to the individualized nature and the dependency on communication and collaboration between the teacher and the student. This in turn affects the classroom culture that is co-constructed between Ms. Bakerfield and her students in an individual basis. “Students choose their own activities” remains closer to the process side, however, it is slightly towards the product side. While the students are allowed to
choose their own activities, the activities that are available to them are activities that Ms. Bakerfield has chosen to make available. There is a wide range to choose from but they all have a learning objective that has been chosen by Ms. Bakerfield prior to being presented as an option for the students. Additionally, many of the activities are designed to engage the students’ memory, for example, learning a letter or numbers and counting, which relies on an element of automaticity. Apple tasting and whole group discussion and graphing the different flavors resides closer to the middle of the continuum. For this lesson, students engaged in communication and collaboration as a whole class. They graphed the different tastes of the apples and counted together the numbers in the graph. This demonstrates elements of automaticity and reproducing models, although the models are not individual to each student reproducing the models; therefore, it is mapped in the middle of the continuum, and represented with purple.

**Ms. Lopez**

Ms. Lopez believes that structure, organization, and submission to authority, 21st century technology and exposure to higher content are priorities for her classroom.

**Ms. Lopez’s Classroom**

Ms. Lopez’s classroom is located in the kindergarten hall, across and 2 doors down from Ms. Bakerfield, but closer to the offices. Her classroom overlooks the back of the school, the outdoor theatre. The permanent fixtures mirror Ms. Bakerfield’s classroom, with the same cabinets-whiteboard-door-empty-shelf, bathroom bulging in the corner, wall of windows, cubbies, white boards at the front of the room. Entering the classroom, the lights are almost always off. To my immediate right, is a square book shelf where student’s folders and construction paper are located. On top of this shelf is a treasure box conveniently located for end
of the week prize awarding. The same closet mirrors Ms. Bakerfield’s classroom, along with the 32 cubbies. Above the cubbies are school resource books, and extra tissue boxes. Each cubby has children’s belongings in them, as Ms. Lopez has 30 children in her dual language class. At the end of the cubbies is a play kitchen sink and stove only, with a small table in front, but without chairs. An empty doll house also sits on the floor on a small neutral toned carpet. A rolling cart stands in the corner with various teaching resources organized neatly on each shelf. A tall book shelf sits next to the cart, with organized books and papers displayed. The bathroom separates the shelf from the sink on the other side where the whiteboard cabinets are located. Above these cabinets are two oversized stuffed animals, with colors spelled out and posted on the wall. The white boards on the cabinets have a makeshift word wall, with magnetic letters standing for the very specific site words (in English) below. One door has the months in both English and Spanish, pictures of coins, and shapes. Hanging from hooks along this wall is also a banner labeled “calendar math” with a calendar, “days in school”, “Pick-a-problem”, “Estimation Jar”, “make-a-pattern” and places for premade cards at the bottom.

The far corner has two tall bookshelves organized with readers from the curriculum. One shelf covers a window. Slightly in front of this corner is Ms. Lopez’s u-shaped table. A chair on wheels sits in the u-bend. The wall opposite from the door is mostly windows, with a small supporting wall in between. On this wall is a green, yellow, and red face behavior chart with a clothes pin for each child in the class. Beneath the windows are four computers. Another rectangle table is against the wall, but it is clear that no one sits at this table, as it has a basket of papers, folder holders, and a filing box with file folders for each student in the class. Additional curriculum materials are in boxes tucked under this table. A filing cabinet separates the table from Ms. Lopez’s desk which faces the corner. On her desk is a computer, a printer, overhead
projector, and laptop. She has one plant on her desk, and a rolling chair without a back tucked under the desk.

The last wall of the classroom begins with an empty bulletin board covered in bright yellow paper. Next to this is a white board that extends most of the width of the wall. A sign that says “objectives” is outlined in pink borders and has four separate spaces, one each for Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, and she has written with dry erase marker the objectives of that week’s lesson. Next to this, is a cloud shaped sign with green backing that states:

1. Follow the teacher’s instructions.
2. Treat the teacher and students with respect.
3. Stay seated unless you have permission to stand.
4. Do your work with excellence.

On the same board, next to the rules, is more pink border in an L shape. Below the horizontal line are four dots: yellow, green, red, and blue. And within the L shape are hand drawn smiley faces. It is a graph.

Hanging from a magnetic clip is a sample of a student’s work, with a sign hanging below showing the students which language they will be using for instruction that day: English or Spanish. The remaining portion of the white board is empty so they may use the smart board functions for interactive games. Above the white board on this wall is the alphabet with pictures, and above this is a number line 1-25.

At the entrance to the classroom, on the same wall is another empty bulletin board with bright yellow paper. Beneath this are four paper holders, one each in yellow, red, green, and
blue. They are sitting on small cubbies that are holding student’s work that has been painted or glued to dry before the students may take it home.

The tables in Ms. Lopez’s classroom are rectangular with two desks adjoined to each table to seat either six or seven children per pod. There are a total of four separate pods, and each pod is identified as a color: red, yellow, green, or blue. Each pod of desks has two carriers holding scissors, glue, glue sticks, crayons, and pencils. Ms. Lopez has stated that she feels it is important that each student faces the front of the class when she is giving a lesson, and therefore each chair and table is positioned so that each student sitting in their individual chair, is facing the board at the front of the classroom.

Towards the back of the classroom is a rolling rod with a handmade rubric for handwriting and coloring. One side is written in English and one side is written in Spanish.

Ms. Lopez’s classroom seems strategically organized, with everything having a specific place. The only place where clutter seems to be present is in some of the students’ individual cubbies, or where students have turned in their work. There also seems to be a plethora of twenty-first century technological tools to choose from. Ms. Lopez has stated on several occasions that organization is a top priority for her classroom. She also utilizes twenty-first century technology in her classroom whenever possible.
Ms. Lopez’s classroom management style differs from both Ms. Bakerfield and Ms. Dulcinea in significant ways. She often requires her students to work in silence. She also requires that her students place an orange cone on their spot when they leave their desk to use the bathroom. She uses “friendly competition” (interview 3) to motivate her students, but tells her students that each pod (i.e. seating group) is a team. Students need to work together in their
teams to answer questions and receive smiley faces on the chart at the front of the classroom.

These teams are also used with the intention of what Ms. Lopez believes is “positive peer pressure” (interview 2). When students are displaying the desired behavior, they get more smiley faces for their team and when they are displaying behavior that Ms. Lopez deems undesirable, they lose smiley faces for their team. Figure 17 are field notes of Ms. Lopez’s classroom supporting the above description of classroom management in her classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lopez 10/5/17 1:20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An alarm sounds, and T announces in Spanish that it is time to clean up quickly. The students jump to their feet and begin racing to clean up. Many students grab items from other students to put them away. The other students do not seem to mind, they are also rushing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many of the students are at their seats and are calling to other students to hurry and sit down. They sit with their heads down and wait, some are talking but most are quiet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When children are seated at the table with their heads down, T adds ☺ to the red color on the chart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the yellow color T adds 3 ☺ - children count as they are added.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child from green table retrieves an orange cone and places it at their seat. Girl explains to me that if you need to use the bathroom you have to put the cone on your seat so that T knows where you are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T goes to the board. The children are sitting with their heads on their desks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: draws “1” and puts a dot next to it. “uno” and the class repeats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then she draws a “2” and asks the students in Spanish “what is this?” The class says “dos”, then T adds 2 dots and the class counts “uno, dos”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next T writes a “3” and asks who would like to put the dots. Many of the children raise their hands and yell “me me me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T reminds them that she will call on someone who has their head on their desk, she calls a Girl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl goes to the board, and MM asks in Spanish “What is this, put the dots.” Girl puts up three dots while the class counts “uno, dos, tres.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The class claps for Girl, and T gives her a high 5, she then adds a ☺ to the red section on the chart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several children are asking for the Magic Sticks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T get a glass jar with popsicle sticks that have the children’s names on them, she puts them on her head and the class says a chant. T picks out a stick and reads it to the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T writes “4” and the boy adds 4 dots with the class counting. The class claps for Boy, and T gives him a high 5, she then adds a ☺ to the green section on the chart.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17. Field notes of Ms. Lopez’s classroom management.
**Classroom Structure**

The classroom is set so that every student faces the front of the classroom, (despite having their individual desks in pods). Everything, including student work and papers are stacked neatly or organized into folders. The only space in the classroom that seems cluttered are the students’ individual cubbies that hold their belongings from home. The students seem to work autonomously through their school work and remain quiet the majority of the time. During observations, I only observed one instance of the students choosing their own activities once they had finished coloring in the letter G, cutting it, and adding a beak and feet to make it into a goose. This would be an example of students reproducing models and students working alone. In fact, one child, whom was sitting close by to where I was observing, tried to whisper to me about what he was doing without being heard by the teacher. Once the students were finished with their goose, and they had received Ms. Lopez’s permission, they were allowed to choose another activity. There seemed to be two activities that the students choose from, or perhaps there were more available but the students only did these two: building with blocks or writing on white boards at the back of the room. The students participated in these activities for less than 10 minutes and then Ms. Lopez then had them clean up to do another lesson. Figure 18 are field notes of an example of the classroom structure described above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lopez 9/21/17 1:00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Room was dark, lights off but window blinds open. Room is quiet except for a few whispers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children sitting at tables, working on a work sheet: 5 senses. Children needed to color the cat, cut out the cat and “sense” words then glue them on construction paper in appropriate places. Then write about the 5 senses in Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As children finish they may go to computers of “center time” – one student asked “can I go to ‘center time’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T walks around the room looking at the students’ work, she stops and points and asks a question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The children are gluing and cutting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some are helping another child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some begin picking up the scraps from the floor. The scraps are tiny pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some children wash their hands once they are finished.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some children are at the computers (2) IStation,

Some children go to the word wall and get mini white boards with markers. They sit on the carpet and write or draw on the boards. Many of the children are copying the words on the word wall.

T helps one student glue the paper in the appropriate place on the construction paper.

A group of boys begin building with some Mega Blocks.
Some children build with wooden blocks

At 1:20 an alarm sounds, and T announces in Spanish that it is time to clean up quickly.

Figure 18. Field notes of Ms. Lopez’s classroom structure

**Lesson Structure Practice**

One lesson that I observed repeatedly was the use of the Mimio board. A Mimio board is a technological device that is placed on a white board where a projector shines an image, and the Mimio allows the lesson to become interaction on the white board. During these lessons, Ms. Lopez focused on numbers and counting, then later in the semester the students were adding and subtracting. Ms. Lopez asked for quiet while the class waited for the computer program to load and for Ms. Lopez to calibrate the board with the pen. This seemed to be a long process, and the students seemed excited, often exhibiting signs (i.e. talking, instructing Ms. Lopez about the process, fidgeting, etc.) of a difficult time staying quiet. Ms. Lopez called upon students one at a time to answer a question. She used a method of drawing names on sticks from a container. Students would come and answer and if they answered correctly their team received a smiley face on the chart. Ms. Lopez did not take smiley faces away from the teams if they answered incorrectly, but called upon another student to try to answer the question. This also took place in both English and Spanish, depending on which language was to be used that day.
Figure 19. Ms. Lopez’s teaching practices on the process-product continuum

Figure 19 illustrates Ms. Lopez’s teaching approaches and practices on the process-product continuum. A Classroom Management strategy of ‘friendly competition’ resides in the middle of the continuum. It requires the students collaborate and communicate with one another, while contributing to the classroom culture. “Classroom Structure: students work alone” relies on students working alone and students often reproduce models while working alone; therefore, it is mapped on the product side, however not at the end point and represented in a bluer hue of purple. The “Mimio board math lessons” are dependent on individualized successes of right or
wrong answers (automaticity) and students are rewarded for their successes (external reinforcement). The students did not collaborate and were discouraged from communicating with their teams during this activity. Because of the displayed behaviors of product, it is mapped on the furthest point of the product side.

Ms. Dulcinea

Ms. Dulcinea believes that students should have engaging curriculum and activities; school should focus on social and emotional development; and “If I love them, I will teach them discipline in school.

Ms. Dulcinea’s Classroom

Ms. Dulcinea shares a classroom with Ms. Samuels. The prekindergarten classroom, is located at the end of the hallway that houses the third and fourth-graders, and seems to be a classroom located on its own. This classroom was originally designed to be the life-skills, special education classroom for the proposed middle school, once it is added on in future years. As such it has a full kitchen, bathroom, and even laundry facilities. Additionally, the classroom is not a rectangular shape, but in the shape a triangular L. There is one wall of windows that looks out onto a courtyard at the front of the school. With Mountain-view operating at 125% capacity, housing the prekindergarten classrooms proved to be a challenge, and so the two separate classes were combined into the same space. The two teachers share the space, and at times collaborate during instruction time, but separate for smaller circle times, and each teacher focuses on the assessments, progress, and achievements of the students assigned to their class. The prekindergarten program is a half-day program, and therefore this classroom sees thirty children in the morning and thirty different children in the afternoon.
When you first enter the classroom and shut the door, which seems to be closed most of the time, there are four long strips of paper, with Velcro on each. At the top of each strip of paper is a label: Home, School, Casa, Escuela. Below these are the student’s names on individual papers with their pictures. Moving counter clockwise around the room is the small leg of the L, with a table and books on top, then beneath the table are storage bins holding the children’s belongings and backpacks. On the next wall is a door to the bathroom, next to two filing cabinets. Another wall swells into the classroom with another door, the laundry facilities perhaps? On this wall Ms. Samuels has hung instructional materials, utilizing the back of the door as well as the wall. The adjacent wall has a bulletin board with additional teaching resources: numbers, schedule, alphabet, and calendar. The end of this nook is defined by a square book shelf with few items on it. Turning the corner is a table protruding into the classroom, and home to several tablets and a desktop computer. Above the table is an empty whiteboard. This wall also has a door to the classroom office that holds mostly boxes of school related supplies, some belonging to the teachers, and some belonging to the school. Looking out from the office door, on the right is a small wall, and the beginning of the wall of windows that overlooks the courtyard. On this wall and on some of the windows, Ms. Dulcinea has hung her teaching resource: job chart, schedule, calendar, numbers, and shapes.

Following the windows is a play kitchen, careful not to block the second door to the classroom. The play kitchen has a play stove, sink, table and chairs, and refrigerator. Following the play kitchen and on the next wall, is the full kitchen with dishwasher, stove and oven combination, and sink, with both upper cabinets and lower cabinets. At the end of these cabinets is an empty space on the wall and a rocking chair, with a book shelf to indicate a different space within the classroom. In front of the rocking chair is a large carpet. The final wall of the
classroom is another row of lower cabinets, with a bulletin board on the wall. The teachers have lined these with purple sheets of construction paper for a word wall. Each paper has a different letter. A small sink is located at the end of these cabinets followed by a closet. They have placed a shelf here to indicate the separation of space, and have a puppet theatre there as well.

In the larger part of the L, are six rectangular tables with six chairs each.

Figure 20. Ms. Dulcinea’s Classroom

*Classroom Management, Classroom Structure, and an Example of a Lesson*

Ms. Dulcinea’s pre-kindergarten students seem to have a lot more freedom to explore the classroom as compared to the kindergarten teachers. Therefore, her classroom management, classroom structure, and an example of a lesson are combined into one section to illustrate the flow and consistency of her classroom. Ms. Dulcinea shared that for classroom management,
she and Ms. Samuels would choose activities to place on the different tables that aligned with the theme that the teachers had decided upon during planning. The students would begin on the carpets (each placed in their individual classes and on different area carpets in the classroom). The teachers would discuss with the children the specific concept they were focusing on for that day (or week depending on the level of the children and the level of the concept). Ms. Dulcinea would encourage the students to share their ideas and their own understanding in a discussion. Once both classes were finished with their separate whole group times, they would allow the children to combine together and choose the activities they wanted to participate in. There were different types of manipulatives at the tables such as: one table usually had playdough, one table usually had puzzles, one table had small connecting blocks, and one table had a lacing activity. Children were allowed to choose any area of the classroom they wanted. Many of the children would go to one side of the classroom to build with blocks, while others were quick to grab a computer tablet (although Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Samuels tried to make sure that everyone got turns). There was a science center with fall items such as pumpkins, gourds, and dried corn. Some students also played in the kitchen center. Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Samuels would find their own space in the classroom where there seemed to be the most children. After 45 minutes to an hour, the students were required to clean up, and sit on the big carpet all together. Ms. Dulcinea would then transform into a story teller, and read the children a story. Her story telling qualities emerged as she asked the children to close their eyes and imagine parts of the story as it relates to them, or imagine the story without the pictures. She would ask the children to share what they saw. She would change her voice, or her intonation, trying to capture the attention of all 30 children at once. Ms. Dulcinea’s beliefs about teaching approaches and practices mirror her teaching approaches and practices, however, her in-class teaching approaches and practices are
not what she truly believes is best developmentally appropriate practices. Due to the different restrictions that are placed on the pre-kindergarten class, she feels that she is unable to give the students everything they deserve to have (interview 3). When children have a difficult time in the classroom generally keeping their hands to themselves or listening when Ms. Dulcinea is speaking, Ms. Dulcinea attempts to separate the children who are bothering one another, always referring to them as “my love” or “hito”. If problems continue, then Ms. Dulcinea will pull the child aside and tell them that she doesn’t like the behavior that she was seeing. She reminds the child of all the wonderful things that she loves about the child, and tells the child that she wants everyone else to see these same things, but they can’t see them when the child behaves like this. She reported to me that often the children change their behavior for a short time, but then are in need of reminders so she continues to remind them of their talk. Figure 11 represents Ms. Dulcinea’s beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices. Ms. Dulcinea emphasized “Engaging curriculum and activities”, “social and emotional development”, and “If I love them, I will teach them discipline in school”. All three of these priorities for Ms. Dulcinea were observed demonstrated throughout the classroom consistently.
Figure 21. Ms. Dulcinea’s teaching practices on the process-product continuum.

Figure 21 illustrates Ms. Dulcinea’s teaching practices on the process-product continuum. Her “Lesson Structure Practices - Story telling with the children” is plotted towards the end of the process side due to the fact that Ms. Dulcinea has co-constructed this as part of her classroom culture, encouraging the students to communicate, and engaging their imagination and creativity. It is not at the end point of the process side because it does not have the children collaborating with their peers, but it tends to be more of a self-reflective process for the students (students work alone) which brings it closer to the product side. Her “classroom structure: open centers,
where students choose” connects to the 4 C’s of the process side, while also allowing for the possibility for students to work alone. Additionally, repeated participation in the different activities could lead to automaticity. “Classroom management: Loving, individualized discipline” is plotted in the middle of the continuum due to the individualized nature of the Ms. Dulcinea’s style. Over time, students learn to exhibit the desired behavior, suggesting an element of automaticity and the external reinforcement surfaces through Ms. Dulcinea’s words of how the world sees the child.

Ms. Bakerfield and Ms. Dulcinea are both heavy on the process side of the continuum for their beliefs and for their practices, while Ms. Lopez’s beliefs span the entire continuum, and her practices are heavy on the product side of the continuum. The participants were mainly influenced by their mentors through student teaching, or their current peers. Ms. Bakerfield and Ms. Dulcinea were both influenced through their own experiences with motherhood.
Chapter 6: Implications, Conclusions, and Future Recommendations

The purpose of this naturalistic multi case-study was to understand and explore public school based prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers’ beliefs about their approaches to classroom practices and what these look like. This study utilized the process-product continuum framework for analyzing data. Additionally, analysis of the participants’ influences was also presented through the stated themes of the participants of: mentorship, motherhood, and systemic restrictions. The following chapter will discuss the implications, and conclusions, as related to literature from the field of early childhood education. Table 8 depicts the breadth of the study with the research questions, methodology, findings, and implications.
### Table 8. Table of research questions, methodology, findings, and implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the beliefs about teaching approaches and classroom practices of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in a public school in the borderland?</td>
<td>• Interviews • Timelines • Classroom Observations • Artifacts</td>
<td>• Students interested and engaged in learning • Learning should be hands-on with exposure to real-world • Unique context with more affluent families and high parental involvement • Students are immature in regards to the expectations of the district</td>
<td>• Teachers beliefs drive their approaches to teaching, and classroom practices as connect to developmentally appropriate practice • Experienced teachers’ practices differed from the novice teacher’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are the influences that have shaped these beliefs?</td>
<td>• Interviews • Timelines • Classroom Observations</td>
<td>• Motherhood</td>
<td>• Beliefs seem to be dictated by personal experiences with children, practical experiences, and authoritative powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What do the teaching approaches and practices look like in the classroom?</td>
<td>• Classroom Observations • Artifact collection</td>
<td>• Classroom management: Individualized discussions • Classroom structure: students choose activities • Lesson Structure: apple tasting</td>
<td>• Experienced teachers’ beliefs and practices tended to weigh heavily on the process side – believe following DAP • Novice teacher’s beliefs were more evenly laid along the continuum; however the practices were heavy on the product side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How do these beliefs and teaching approaches map onto the process and product continuum model?</td>
<td>• Narrative &amp; Content analysis • Process-Product Continuum</td>
<td>Beliefs: heavy on the process side Practices: heavy on the process side</td>
<td>To assess teacher practices in the classroom; applied as a model for accountability and quality assessment of teaching approaches and classroom practices.</td>
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Summary of the Findings

Ms. Bakerfield is a kindergarten teacher, and Ms. Dulcinea is a prekindergarten teacher. Both have more than 20 years of teaching experience. Ms. Lopez is a dual language kindergarten teacher with three years’ experience teaching experience. Both Ms. Bakerfield and Ms. Dulcinea’s stated beliefs resided heavy on the process side of the continuum, while their classroom practices also mapped heavily on the process side of the continuum. Ms. Lopez’s beliefs however were mapped across the continuum, whereas her classroom practices were heavy on the product side of the continuum. The influences that shaped these teacher’s beliefs were mentors, motherhood, and experience in the classroom. From the data and analysis, I found that despite differences in age, years of teaching and grade level (Kindergarten vs. Pre-Kindergarten), when looking across cases, several patterns of common beliefs emerged from the data. These include:

- students should be interested and engaged in their learning [although, the participants did not agree with what this entails exactly];
- learning should be hands-on with exposure to real-world [as could be expected from teachers who are versed in developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, & Copple, 1997; Goldstein, 2008)];
- the participants are currently in a unique context with more affluent families and a high level of parental involvement [suggesting and awareness of Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Practice (DCAP) (Hyun, 1996) and cultural relevance (Gay, 2000)];
the students are immature in relation to the expectations from the district and the standards [which suggests some sort of tension related to the issue of academic pushdown in early childhood classrooms].

**Teacher Beliefs on the Process-Product Continuum**

Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield’s practices matched their stated beliefs when mapped on the process-product continuum. Both teachers demonstrated their practices on the process side, as well as having their stated beliefs on the process side. Ms. Lopez, however demonstrated practices mainly on the product side. Her stated beliefs did not match her practices; her stated beliefs spanned the entire continuum. This mismatch is supports Goldstein’s (2008) claim that many times teacher’s belief about what is happening in the classroom is not supported by their actual classroom practices.

The continuum framework, however, specifically displays teaching as not a dichotomy of process versus product (wholly one or the other), with one side as “good” and one side as “bad”. Instead, the process-product continuum framework avers that teacher’s practices and beliefs span the entire continuum at different times, in different ways, and for different reasons. In this way, the process-product continuum recognizes that both sides of the continuum have merit and may be needed for specific purposes. Particular to the findings of this study, Ms. Lopez recognizes that the U.S. public educational system is currently dependent on standardized tests for assessing the learning of the students, and the quality of the teachers. She believes that by exposing her students to standardized tests through a practice model, she is preparing them for the tasks within the education system. This is similar to Goldstein’s (2008) claim that developmentally appropriate practice encompasses the current testing culture of the public education system. Ms. Lopez even referenced the requirement of passing a standardized test to achieve certification in
order to become a teacher. This type of pedagogical practice is placed on the product side of the continuum, but also may be valued as positive and necessary. Conversely, Ms. Bakerfield believes that children gain autonomy through the choices that they make with guidance stimulating curiosity in learning new things, which is a requirement for success in school later in life. Children who are active participants in their own education thrive (Munn, 2010). This type of pedagogical practice is placed on the process side of the continuum, but again may be valued as positive and necessary.

Further, both practices and their value, as outlined by Ms. Lopez and Ms. Bakerfield, depending on how they are presented to the students, could be adjusted to different places on the continuum. The practices that Ms. Lopez utilizes could be employed in a more open-ended, student-directed way (for example: using the Mimio as a center activity and allowing children to collaborate to solve more complex problems other than number or letter identification), moving towards the center of the continuum. In the same vein, Ms. Bakerfield’s open-ended practices could move towards the middle of the continuum (for example: if she presented it with more individual work, or more reproduction of models).

A critical finding of this study is that all three participants demonstrated practices that went across the continuum; this strongly suggests that the process-product continuum framework may be a more accurate way of assessing teaching practice, approaches, curriculum, or pedagogy than any dichotomous models used for reflecting on teacher beliefs and practice. Assessment of teachers’ practices, approaches, curriculum, or pedagogy is a critical part of our current accountability system, and the process-product continuum could provide an assessment of growth for teachers’ skills, and pedagogical practices. Use of the process-product continuum framework could help to strengthen individual teacher’s practices in the classroom by being used
as a tool for self or program/school reflection; this potentially may help to address some of the issues of curriculum pushdown in regards to individual/school/district interpretations. Administrators may also benefit from utilizing this framework in helping to understand the individual strengths of their teachers, and in helping to address where student learning may be challenged. For instance, this could become part of the new accountability measures under the ESSA, as a reflective model, and in aiding to help teachers set their individual annual professional development goals. Additionally, the process-product continuum framework could be used as a reflective model within school districts to explore systematic restrictions and their effects on academic pushdown, and the tension their teachers may feel between complying with the district standards while utilizing best practices such as play-based pedagogy and developmentally appropriate practice. More specifically, the findings from the study indicate that the process-product continuum model may be a vehicle for professional development on beliefs versus actual classroom practices to encourage more reflective teaching (Zimmerman, 2009), and to inform early childhood education practice.

**Beliefs versus Other Factors Impacting Teaching Practice**

Although the participants shared many similar beliefs, they all differed on how they utilize them when viewing their actual teaching practice (i.e. Classroom Management, Classroom Structure, and Lesson Structure Practice), and how they translate their beliefs to the classroom. This suggests that in addition to beliefs, other factors may influence actual teacher practice. In particular, themes around mentors, established approaches, experience in the field, and motherhood were apparent from the data. All three of the participants explicitly indicated that they were influenced by both formal and informal mentors. In particular, Ms. Lopez who was the newest teacher, spoke the most about her student teaching experience and then her
experiences working as a tutor and directly with several of the teachers upon entering the profession who influenced her current teaching. Mentorship in relation to the process-product continuum is important, since Ms. Lopez expressed that her thinking about becoming a teacher changed due to her interactions and relationships with her mentors. This implies that through mentorship, and self-reflective practices in relation to utilizing the process-product continuum, teachers’ practices have the potential to change.

In the instance of Ms. Lopez, mentoring is defined by Smith (2007) as “a particular mode of learning wherein the mentor not only supports the mentee, but also challenges them productively so that progress is made” (p. 277), and by Fairbanks, Freedman, and Kahn (2000) as “complex social interactions that mentor teachers and student teachers’ construct and negotiate for a variety of professional purposes and in response to the contextual factors they encounter” (p. 103) These definitions encompass the experiences that were cited by the participants in this study, and disregards the usual hierarchical implications of mentorship that many times is assumed. Ms. Dulcinea was directly influenced by Ms. Samuels, her colleague who shared the same classroom space. Both Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Samuels have significant years of teaching experience, but worked together to challenge each other to expand on their teaching knowledge and practices. Additionally, Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Samuels shared a specific context where their beliefs about teaching approaches and practices were challenged in an on-going manner due to the systemic restrictions they noted [specifically, a lack of resources, academic pushdown, and continuous challenges to developmentally appropriate practice]. Because of this, the results from this study suggest that the peer mentoring relationship they shared fully embraced the three components as described by Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) of: relationship, process, and context.
The above definition of mentoring also applied to Ms. Lopez’s experiences during her student teaching. She discussed the many mentors that influenced her in a variety of ways. Ms. Lopez expressed that she was influenced both in teaching and further, that her perspective of teaching changed over time through the processes (Smith, 2007) and experiences she had with the teachers that she worked directly with during her tutoring experiences. The close relationships that she formed with her mentors also seemed to contribute to her teaching and her beliefs about teaching approaches and practices, as was similarly observed by Kwan & Lopez (2005).

Additionally, Ms. Dulcinea, and Ms. Bakerfield spoke about the significant role motherhood had on their teaching and beliefs about children. Palmer (1997) states “as I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together” (p. 15). Palmer strongly suggests that personal life experience influences teacher practice, and this is supported from the findings of this study. Both Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield noted the impact their experiences as mothers had on how they relate to the children in their classrooms. Ms. Dulcinea found that she became more patient with her students, and Ms. Bakerfield noted that her own children were her motivation for entering the field of teaching. Ms. Lopez was not yet a mother, and therefore she did not note this as a source of influence. Ms. Lopez focused more on the mentors that she did have in the specific context of her tutoring experiences and student teaching. She also mentioned several colleagues who have informally mentored her through her three years of teaching.

Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield have more than 20 years of experience teaching, and they both explicitly noted that every year they gained more knowledge and related Early Childhood field expertise which in turn influenced their current teaching. Ms. Dulcinea spoke
about another school in the borderland following a Reggio Emilia pedagogy within their curriculum. Reggio Emilia encompasses three subjects of education:

“for children to learn, their well-being has to be guaranteed; the well-being of the children is connected with the well-being of the parents and teachers. Children’s rights should be recognized, not only children’s needs. Children have a right to high-quality care and education” (Gandini, 1993, p. 5)

In the Reggio Emilia approach, the teacher’s role is to facilitate learning, and to learn alongside the children (Fraser, 2007; Edwards et al., 1998). Curriculum is based on the children’s interests in an emergent fashion; as interest arises, projects are created by the students that meet the learning goals and objectives (Edwards et al., 1998). Additionally, Reggio Emilia recognizes that children express their understanding through multimodal venues of communication (the Hundred Languages of Children). Within the systematic restrictions that Ms. Dulcinea experienced, including the limited resources, she made attempts to provide similar emergent curriculum, yet at the same time expressed frustration that she was not able to utilize more Reggio-inspired curriculum in the classroom.

Ms. Bakerfield was inspired to go into teaching based on her experiences with her own daughter’s attendance in a Montessori-based preschool. According to the American Montessori Society, Montessori “is a child-centered educational approach based on scientific observations of children from birth to adulthood.” Montessori included multiage groupings to foster peer learning, uninterrupted blocks of work time, and guided choice of work activity (Edwards, 2010). Work for a child in Montessori-based programs takes the form of hands-on exploration of a variety of materials. While Ms. Bakerfield’s classroom does not seem to resemble a Montessori classroom, she does utilize hands-on exploration experiences that are guided by
choice. Ms. Bakerfield has created the activities and the students are making the choice as to which activity they participate in at that time, which is in line with Montessori pedagogy.

While both Ms. Bakerfield and Ms. Dulcinea both spoke about different approaches to early learning, both felt they were unable to provide this type of approach in their classrooms due to the systemic restrictions place on them. These more experienced teachers viewed the systemic restrictions as stifling their decision-making ability in the classroom, and hindered their ability to provide best practices through developmentally appropriate practice.

Although no one specifically mentioned their teacher preparation beyond student teaching, the findings suggest that Ms. Bakerfield and Ms. Dulcinea were influenced by the specific pedagogical knowledge content commonly covered in teacher preparation programs and prevalent in professional development in the early childhood education field.

The findings of this study suggest that the most influential factor impacting actual teaching practice, and seemingly contradictory to all three participants stated beliefs, is the systemic restrictions that consistently arose during data collection. Despite clearly expressing tensions over these restrictions, Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield’s actual practice aligned with their beliefs. Both Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield’s beliefs reside heavily on the process side of the continuum as well as both of their classroom practices resided heavily on the process side of the continuum. Their observed practices seemed to match their stated beliefs. Conversely, Ms. Lopez’s stated beliefs spanned across the entire continuum. However, her actual practices resided heavily on the product side of the continuum, not matching her stated beliefs. As previously noted, I speculate that this mismatch comes perhaps from her own described school experience and her stated stronger expressed belief in submitting to the authority of the standards and expectations of the district, in combination with her newness to teaching. Ms. Lopez
identified that she was taught in an authoritarian style throughout her schooling. Ms. Lopez is perpetuating the cycle even though it contradicts many of her expressly stated beliefs.

Another possible influence factor that arose from the results seemed to be the difference in age and experience, although this study was not a strict cross-comparison of the participants. That said, Ms. Lopez has three years of teaching experience and her own personal experiences in school were more recent than Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield, who both had more than 20 years of experience teaching and whose own personal experiences as a student were longer ago, before standardized tests in early grades were common place. Additionally, Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (1999) state that teachers “learn from their own practice…teachers gain new knowledge and understanding of their students, schools, curriculum, and instructional methods by living the practical experiments that occur as a part of professional practice” (p. 191). Thus, the trials and errors gained through their many years in teaching provided Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield an additional bank of practical classroom knowledge not yet achieved by Ms. Lopez due to her being, relatively, a novice teacher.

**DAP versus Systematic Restrictions**

Teacher’s ability to make decisions in their classroom is a main tenet of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). When the traditional characteristics of DAP is mapped on the process-product continuum, it remained heavy on the process side, with “specific individual development” residing in the middle of the continuum. DAP is the standard for early childhood best practices, as outlined by the NAEYC (2009) position statement. Yet, the mandate for school readiness, as defined in chapter 2, is a direct result of academic pushdown, and was a prevalent topic addressed by the participants. In fact, the characteristics of school readiness was mapped heavily on the product side of the continuum, in opposition of
developmentally appropriate practice. This provides a visual indicator for how academic
pushdown may be hindering the quality of teaching approaches and practices that the participants
in the study are able and might otherwise choose to provide. The tension between
developmentally appropriate practice and school readiness is further complicated by the
academic pushdown. Academic pushdown refers to the standards that was once required for first
grade in the past now being required for kindergarten, and what was once required for
kindergarten is now expected for prekindergarten. As aligned with Goldstein’s (2008) findings,
the teachers in this study were explicitly conflicted between wanting to provide play-based
developmentally appropriate practices and their obligation to teach the academic standards Ms.
Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield expressed their frustration and concern for the lack of freedom to
manipulate their own teaching practices in the classroom to include more play-based strategies
and to include more child-led activities. They felt a pressure from the district and from their
peers to prepare their students for test taking; this result provides a clear example of tension
and/or uncomfortableness with academic pushdown. Ms. Lopez, believed that she demonstrated
play-based approaches, she also perceived tests as a normalcy of school culture. Perhaps this is
due to the fact that Ms. Lopez is of a younger generation who was brought up herself in the test-
taking school culture, where academic pushdown has been an educational trend since before she
began school (Cawelti, 2006).

As a result of the academic pushdown, the participants stated that they experience
students that have high levels of immaturity when looking at what is expected of these students
in the Texas State early learning guidelines and standards in comparison to current knowledge
from child development research. For example, Miller and Almon (2009) as commissioned by
the Alliance for Childhood states that “there is today a significant gap between what the
standards dictate and what developmental experts recommend for kindergarten children” (p. 33). Miller and Almon’s (2009) report cautions that inappropriate standards [such as the ones stated in the Texas State early guidelines] is likely to result in children who do not and will not meet these prior to advancing to the next level. They continue by saying that the standards for kindergarten, first grade, and second grade continue to also be developmentally inappropriate and may result in the retention of children, who are being required to meet standards they are not cognitively ready to meet. Additionally, Brown and Gasko (2011) found in their study that the effort of Texas districts to provide school readiness for children in prekindergarten and kindergarten classes put extreme pressure on the teachers and additional administrative work not directly related to teaching. In line with the findings from this study, Spodek and Saracho (2003) found that prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers often abandon play-based curriculum in favor of rote memorization and test-taking strategies, like those lesson structure practices demonstrated by Ms. Lopez. Ms. Bakerfield, and Ms. Dulcinea (the more experienced teachers) displayed more play-based strategies, but also continually expressed concern that they were not providing enough developmentally appropriate practices due to the pressure for their students to perform on the required district assessments. Thus, findings from these teachers confirms previous research, which suggests that decisions made and expectations set by the district can interfere with individual teaching approaches and classroom practices (Brown & Gasko, 2012; Scott-Little, 2006).

Overall, the findings indicate that Ms. Lopez’s beliefs did not align with her practices. She believed that some of her practices were more process-oriented and yet upon examination, her practices were heavy on the product side. Ms. Lopez spoke about her beliefs on the process end of the continuum [such as her use of 21st century technology and the “friendly competition
requiring her students to communicate and collaborate], yet during classroom observations, the lesson was presented in a product-oriented manner. For example: the observed use of the Mimio board and the students working alone to answer the specific questions without collaborating with the team. The student was then rewarded with external reinforcement. This correlates with Chi-Hung’s (2012) and Cheng’s (2012) studies that found that teacher’s own beliefs on what is DAP in theory and what they perceive DAP actually is in practice often differs.

Further, all of the systemic restrictions the participants indicated as having an impact on their classroom practices is directly related to the three obstacles Kagan (1990) outlined regarding the implementation of play-based teaching practice: teacher’s attitudes towards play and the disconnect in its implementation (Ms. Lopez, for example, expressed that she had play in her classroom, yet it was only observed once during classroom observations, and the students were limited to two choices); structural limitations in regards to curricula, time, space, materials, and other resources (i.e. Ms. Dulcinea was providing many of her own materials out of pocket); and functional barriers of school and classroom context (Ms. Dulcinea, shared the same classroom with the other prekindergarten teacher). Additionally, Graue (2008) stated that DAP is no longer a relevant pedagogy for early childhood in the public school context, and school systems are abandoning DAP in favor of content-focused curriculum; this is forcing teachers and their decision-making ability to be guided by the student outcomes. The pervasiveness of systemic restrictions found in this study does seem to support Graue’s assertion of the abandonment of DAP at a system/district level; yet, this was not necessarily the case at the classroom level. However, the data did highlight the difficulty that early childhood teacher’s may face in expressing their personal agency and power to determine what takes place in their own classroom. In particular, two of the participants, Ms. Dulcinea and Ms. Bakerfield,
repeatedly reflected this struggle between advocating for DAP in their classroom while meeting the learning objectives/district standards. Thus the data from these two teachers mirrors the findings of Adcock & Patton (2001), who found similar frustration on the part of teachers regarding the impact of identified systemic restrictions, particularly the pushing down of curriculum.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study had several limitations: the participants were selected by the principal and only three participants were studied. Additional participants and other ways of recruiting those participants may have provided different outcomes. For example, other teachers from a larger and/or random sample of teachers may have produced different patterns of beliefs and/or practices when applied to the process-product continuum framework. Thus, it cannot be entirely ruled out that the results obtained are specific to the participants studied alone. Further, a study of teachers in a different district in this same borderland may also provide different findings. In particular, it cannot be assumed that the depth of tension exposed between this study’s participants and their particular district’s systematic restrictions if fully representative of all districts on the U.S.-Mexico border; other districts may have different standards, or definitions of best practices, or may prescribe to a different pedagogical approach for their public school based prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers which in turn impacts actual teaching practice. That said, it is likely that some of the findings with other samples of early childhood teachers in the borderland would be similar, as the dis-connect between DAP and academic push-down in a wide-spread phenomena in public early childhood classrooms (Goldstein, 2008; Graue et al., 2015; Little & Cohen-Vogel, 2016; Miller & Almon, 2009).
Recommendations for Future Research

Teacher beliefs have been shown in previous research to have a potentially strong impact on teacher practice (Akin, 2011; Chi-hung, 2012; Li, Wang, & Wong, 2011). While this may be true, this study suggests that more research is needed on potential influences on early childhood teaching practices beyond individual beliefs. The results indicate that influences that may be effecting teaching practices may additionally depend on systemic restrictions, previous experiences, students teaching, or other personal life factors such as parenthood, which have not been explored in detail in the Early Childhood literature.

Secondly, this study was an in-depth multi-case study with three participants. It would be beneficial to study more teachers in the district and school to further articulate the tensions experienced by these participants, and to explore what other tensions and beliefs are employed in the district and school.

Further, while this study shows that all participants employed teaching practices that spanned the entire process-product continuum, more research is needed on how process and/or product teaching approaches is really playing out in public schools. This includes in the unique contexts of this study (on the U.S.-Mexico borderland) and more generally across various geographic locations in the United States. The process-product continuum framework, through replication, may prove to be a valuable tool for this type of research.

Lastly, findings from this study indicated that additional research is needed on the potential tension and contradiction between public school Early Childhood teachers’ beliefs about best practice and administrator and/or district expectations: with implications for the learning of young children at the teacher and student classroom level, as well the effects it this disconnect may be having on the field of early childhood education as a whole. Specifically, a
further area of exploration of how preschool and kindergarten is actually playing out along the
process-product continuum in the public school context in comparison to alternative Early
Childhood contexts based on models generally accepted as DAP, such as Montessori and/or
Reggio Emilia.
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Vita

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Her research interests include: Early childhood education; Early childhood teacher education; Teacher identities; Teacher beliefs about pedagogy; Teacher beliefs about curriculum and instruction; Implementation of curriculum within different contexts; Art education; Creative arts immersion in early childhood education; Early childhood learning strategies and best practices; Policy in early childhood education; and Development of new theoretical framework of the Process and Product Continuum.

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