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## School-Age Child Care Teachers' Perceptions of Quality Programming in Southeastern Michigan

Angelita S. Jacobs

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Angelita S. Jacobs

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Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education  
Doctorate of Education Program

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School-Age Child Care Teachers' Perceptions of Quality Programming in Southeastern  
Michigan

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Transformational Leadership

Heather Miller, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Concordia University–Portland

2018

## **Abstract**

Parents look to child care programs to provide supervised oversight for their children when they are unable to provide care. Quality school-age care is important because program type and staff-student interactions can affect the participant's engagement and belonging as well as promote social-emotional and character development. Perceptions of quality programming with school-agers have not received the same attention and research interest as services for younger children. I examined school-age child care teachers' perceptions of their experiences and challenges when operating quality programs in one school district in southeastern Michigan to better understand their perspectives. The study was guided by two research subquestions: How do school-age child care teachers define quality programming? What are the experiences of school-age care teachers with staff turnover and quality programming? A purposeful sample of 13 school-based teachers with varying years of experience and education participated in this study.

Semistructured face-to-face interviews, program observations, and field notes were used for data collection. An inductive approach was used to analyze data from the interviews and an interpretive approach was used to analyze data from observations and field notes. The key findings were that participants thought quality programming occurred when trained and engaged teachers used students' preferences to structure environments that supported creativity and where teachers were able to positively adjust to the challenges of high staff turnover. The participants viewed competent leadership as an essential component of quality programming and that training and experience are needed to build capacity, so they can competently perform their jobs.

*Keywords:* quality programming, school-age child care, staff turnover

## **Dedication**

In dedication to:

God for blessing me with wisdom, strength, and perseverance, through this journey.

My sons, Anthony Jr. and Austin, for their sacrifices and support in word and deed.

My husband, Anthony, for his confidence, patience, and understanding.

My amazing Faculty Chair, Dr. Heather Miller, for her tenacity and unwavering support.

My friends near and far who kept me inspired.

With a humble and grateful heart, I thank you.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge my Faculty Chair, Dr. Heather Miller, for her encouragement, support, and instrumental role in helping me fulfil this dream. Dr. Miller guided me when I was lost, nudged me to keep moving forward, and never withheld her support when unexpected life events temporarily derailed my journey. She may never know how much her gentle yet firm guidance kept me motivated and how indebted I am to pay her acts of kindness forward.

I would also like to acknowledge my dissertation committee, Dr. Tom Cavanagh, Dr. Jillian Skelton, and editors Jeff Zuckerman and Kevin Schwandt for all their advice, insight, and constructive critiques which made my dissertation publication worthy.

Finally, I am blessed to be able to acknowledge my family for their love, laughs, patience, and cooperation with tasks great and small. I will never forget their spoken and unspoken words of encouragement that have been restorative to my heart.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

During the early 1990s, researchers explored the needs of working families and their decisions regarding after-school care arrangements such as self-care, relative care, and organized program care (Frazier, Mehta, Atkins, Hur, & Rusch, 2013). Before-school and after-school programs were once a vital resource for working families, a need that remains inadequately addressed (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014; Hand & Baxter, 2013; Payne, Cook & Diaz, 2012). Developing quality school-age child care programs is important because program type and staff practices can affect students' cognitive engagement and belonging (Akiva, Cortina, Eccles, & Smith, 2013; Akiva, Cortina, & Smith, 2014). High-quality programs can also promote youths' social-emotional and character development (Moroney & Devaney, 2017). Yet, identifying the key aspects of a quality program is difficult because quality is not a finite concept and thus difficult to measure (Baldwin & Wilder, 2014; Hirsch, Mekinda, & Stawicki, 2010). In a review of nine different assessment tools that measured how quality was defined, Yohalem and Wilson-Ahlstrom (2010) found the reviewed instruments differed in terms of the type of data collected, but measures appeared to focus consistently on youth engagement and supportive environments between individuals. Such relationships characterize youth work as seen in the youth-serving industry where adults work with youth through purposeful engagement in various activities, yet child care workers' longevity is often not consistent because of the high level of staff turnover (Asher, 2012; Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, & Shim, 2011).

Engagement and supportive environments were not seen as the only measures of quality. Akiva, Li, Martin, Horner, and McNamara (2017) examined moments of staff-child interactions and concluded that having staff who are equipped to work effectively with children was an important aspect of program quality. Huang and Dietel (2011) considered programs that

performed well and found they tended to have low staff turnover rates and high staff stability, which helped enable students to build relationships, trust, positive attitudes, and efficacy toward learning.

Previous researchers have examined early childhood child care teachers' experiences regarding staffing and quality programming (Boyd, 2013; Brebner, Hammond, Schaumloffel, & Lind, 2015; Landry et al, 2014), but little attention has been given to the school-based child care teacher population and their perceptions of quality programming in a school district in southeastern Michigan. To understand their perspectives in more detail, I examined school-age child care teachers' perceptions of quality programming in southeastern Michigan.

### **Background, Context, History and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

In the mid-1990s, the federal government committed to dedicate funding specifically to after-school programs across the country through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. The decision was based on the premise that after-school programs keep children safe, offer academic enrichment, and support social-emotional and occupational development (Smith & Bradshaw, 2017; Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2010). Adding to the research and demonstrating the use of after-school programs, the Afterschool Alliance (2014) chronicled a decade of how children spent the after-school hours between 3 and 6 p.m. and reported that participation in afterschool programs increased almost 60% from 2004 to 2014.

How children are cared for and supervised outside the family has been influenced over the past decade by an influx of women participating in the labor market (Hand & Baxter, 2013; Morrissey & Taryn, 2011). Hand and Baxter (2013) focused on mothers' decisions about employment and child care for their school-aged children. The authors found that child care

decisions varied according to maternal employment characteristics as well as other family characteristics.

In 2015, 89.8% of families who had children between the ages of 6 to 17 were employed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Employment has been defined as work for pay whether through an employer or oneself (Hand & Baxter, 2013). With many parents of school-age children working, the potential demand for child care can be sizable, and balancing work and family time can be challenging. To help meet the need, families look to after-school programs to provide a safe, adult-supervised environment for their children. This supervision allows parents to work without worrying about their child's well-being during the hours beyond the bell (Durlak, Mahoney, Bohnert, & Parente, 2010). Despite possible peace of mind that can come with adequate supervision, Christensen, Schneider, and Butler (2011) described many taxing scheduling demands that school-age children place on working parents, such as attendance at school functions, sports, weather, emergencies, holidays, and school absences.

Working parents need reliable child care to meet the supervision needs of their children beyond school hours. Formal school-based care outside school hours is the most common care arrangement provided on school grounds and involves children participating in activities while supervised before and/or after school or during school holiday periods (Hand & Baxter, 2013). There is a wide range of after-school programs and a variety of goals, missions, and foci (Young, Ortiz, & Young, 2016). School-based care has the potential to meet the needs of working families by offering programming located at the child's school. Such care also provides a safe environment, reduces parental burden, extends the function of school education, and provides wrap-around care for parents whose hours are not compatible with school hours (Hand & Baxter, 2013; Tien Tsai & Shih, 2012). Although school-based programs are beneficial, such programs

are challenged to find and retain qualified staff because of problems related to budget, licensing, professional development, lack of career advancement, and scheduling, all of which can affect program quality (Asher, 2012; Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014; Hill, Milliken, Goff, Clark, & Gagnon, 2015). Researchers have examined the experiences of early childhood teachers regarding staffing issues and quality programming (Boyd, 2013; Brebner, Hammond, Schaumloffel, & Lind, 2015; Landry, Swank, Anthony, & Assel, 2011; Landry et al., 2014), but few have examined school-based child care teachers' perceptions of quality programming in a school district in southeastern Michigan. To understand their perspectives in detail, I explored school-age child care teachers' perceptions of quality programming in Southeastern Michigan.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Qualitative research involves close attention to the interpretive nature of inquiry and has several common characteristics, including the collection of data in a natural setting, use of multiple forms of data (e.g., interviews, observations, and documents), and data analysis that goes between inductive and deductive reasoning (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research begins with assumptions and uses interpersonal/theoretical frameworks to address the meaning people attribute to them (Creswell, 2013). Constructivism, sometimes called social constructivism, is one approach to qualitative research that explores how the social and cultural world and their meanings are created in human interactions (Creswell, 2008). Constructivism was inspired by Dewey's (1986) theory about inquiry, which refuted the idolization of the concept of correct knowledge but instead focused on people taking an active part in constructing information. Dewey (2004) believed that neither activity nor cognition alone constituted an experience; it is the connection of doing something and having it act on a person that measures the value of the experience. Dewey (2004) concluded that the backward and forward connection between actions



and the consequences of the actions frames people's perspectives and speaks to their reality (Dewey, 2004). In this qualitative study, constructivism was the guiding framework through which the participants shared their views and unique realities.

Constructivists believe multiple, inherently unique realities exist because each perspective is formed by the individual's own orientation (Hatch, 2002). As a paradigm, constructivism seeks people's points of view, frames of reference, and value commitments, and allows both the researcher's and the participant's views to be part of the research (Stake, 2010). Constructivism's approach to inquiry is an inductive method of obtaining consensus. As researchers and participants work together to derive knowledge, they work in close proximity during data collection (interviews and observations) in a natural setting to yield interpretations reflective of their experience (Creswell, 2012; Hatch, 2002). This case study used a constructivist framework of qualitative data collection and analysis methods. Stake (2010) suggested a well-done qualitative research design can be interpretive, holistic, and allow researchers to interpret their personal curiosity and inquiry.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem this qualitative case study addressed is understanding what the perceptions of school-age child care teachers of quality programming in southeastern Michigan are. School-age child care has transitioned from just providing supervision of students before and after school to an environment rich with opportunities to engage students and contribute to aspects of positive youth development. A school district in southeastern Michigan wanted to make the most of its before school and after school informal learning environments by offering quality programs to participants. The southeastern school district changed structural components, organizational aspects, policies, and procedures to achieve the level of quality desired, but efforts

have not produced the level of quality desired at the program level. The program administrators needed additional research to understand what quality programming looked like at the sitting level in their school-age child care programs. Various components can contribute to a quality program and it is beneficial to understand how the teachers working directly with students viewed quality programming, so appropriate components can be incorporated and opportunities to positively impact youth are maximized.

### **Purpose of the Study**

A school-age child care program operates before school or after school outside of typical school-day hours. School-based programs have challenges like those seen in the early childhood field, as well as additional challenges with funding and retaining qualified staff due to budgetary, licensing, professional development, and scheduling issues (Alliance, 2014). Even when potential employees are found, school-age child care jobs are marginally desirable, given the few opportunities for advancement, part-time work, irregular hours, and lack of formal education required (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2016-2017). Landry et al. (2014) examined early childhood teachers' experiences regarding quality programming, but studies of school-age child care teachers' perceptions of quality programming can be further explored. The purpose of this study was to examine school-based teachers' perceptions of quality programming in a school district in southeastern Michigan.

### **Research Questions**

The central research question is: What are the experiences and challenges of school-age child care teachers from a school district in southeastern Michigan with operating quality programs? School-age child care provides an environment where teachers can provide

supervision and additional benefits towards student's growth and development through quality programming. Two subquestions guide understanding their perspectives:

1. How do school-age child care teachers define quality programming?
2. What are the experiences of school-age child care teachers with staff turnover and quality programming?

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

At different stages of development, parents use a variety of child care options, such as relatives, sitters, school-based care, and eventually self-care, depending on their available resources and the age and maturity of their child, to meet their child care needs (Hand & Baxter, 2013; Liu, 2013). Self-care, seen in later years, may become more important as children grow and gain more independence, but self-care must be safe, and children must be able to adequately care for themselves (Hand & Baxter, 2013). Resources for child care outside of family members may be relevant because family patterns change over time, and families comprised of dual earners have decreased the options for full-time child care at home (Tien Tsai & Shih, 2012). Regardless of which type of care is chosen, a quality care provider should provide children with a suitable area in which to study and be the kind of person with whom parents could have confidence leaving their child (Tien Tsai & Shih, 2012).

Brebner et al. (2015) investigated the relationships between early childhood educators and children in their care. Brebner et al. (2015) found that caregivers believed their role was to meet children's emotional, physical, and educational needs and that the caregivers play an important educative role in promoting the communicative, cognitive, physical, and emotional development of the children. Similar findings have suggested high-quality early childhood programs with consistent attendance can positively influence a child's future development and

school success (Herndon & Waggoner, 2015; Landry et al., 2014). Herndon and Waggoner (2015) also demonstrated that private funding can combine with public-sector child care programs to provide better service to at-risk children. Studies such as the above have focused on quality of early child care programming, but few studies have focused on child care program quality during the school-age years (ages 6-13).

Although school-age care services meet a diverse range of needs for children and families and have been around for more than 100 years, they have not received the same amount of attention as services for early childhood, possibly because associated societal attitudes and policies are linked to a lack of understanding and appreciation of the role of school-age care (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). This study contributes to a greater understanding of quality programming during the school-age years and its importance in providing additional benefits to youth beyond supervision. Quality programs during the school-age years are essential because, as mentioned above, a sizeable portion (89.8%) of families of children between the ages of six to 13 are employed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), and supervision is needed during the out-of-school hours.

School-age child care has been termed *after-school* care (Finn, Yan, & McInnis, 2015), *beyond the bell* care (Bradshaw, 2015), *out-of-school time* (Lobley & Ouellette, 2013), *latchkey* (Ekot, 2012), *school age care* (Dockett & Perry, 2016), *extension programs* (Garst, Baughman, Franz, & Baughman, 2014) and, more casually, *extended care*. While the terms vary, the concept that they refer to are the immediate hours before and after the typical school day, roughly 7:00 to 9:00 AM and 3:00 to 6:00 PM. These hours allow children to pursue interests and endeavors not covered in the school curriculum, develop or enhance skills, receive supplemental classroom assistance, and mature in healthy ways (Think Outside the Clock, 2011).

While general supervision by an adult would meet the basic need for supervised child care, out-of-school time programs that include program quality as measured by observations of a supportive environment, purposeful engagement, and structured interactions are more beneficial (Leos-Urbel, 2013). Out-of-school time programs can occur in community centers, family child care centers, or schools (Leos-Urbel, 2013; Tien Tsai & Shih, 2012), but school-based centers, in particular, have the added potential to meet the needs of working families by offering quality programming and services with the convenience of being located at the child's specific school.

The need for and development of quality school-age child care programs is important to families because program type and staff practices affect cognitive engagement and belonging differently (Akiva et al., 2014). The specifics of program characteristics and staff qualifications have come to the attention of lawmakers in addition to programs being a valuable resource to meet academic and social needs. Baseline criteria for staff qualifications and training were developed using two federal funding sources: The Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), the general term for all discretionary and mandatory federal child care funding, and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which has a budget of \$1.1 million devoted solely to after-school programming (Cole, 2011). Although policy makers recognize the contribution of after-school activities, the specific focus of the components remain debatable with options ranging from an academic focus (e.g., math and reading achievement based) to a nonacademic focus (cultural, recreational, and life skills based; Leos-Urbel, 2013). After-school programs need not be exclusive; they can combine recreational and academic components. Finn et al. (2015) combined physical activity and science learning in fun activities and demonstrated how physical exercise and educational achievement could be integrated and gains could be made in both areas with proper delivery. To aid in determining quality on various levels, agencies such as the David

P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, the National AfterSchool Association, and the National Institute for Out of School Time have established standards for after-school services (Smith, Akiva, McGovern, & Peck, 2012). Programs that incorporate researched and evidenced-based practices in programming, may prove beneficial to families and other invested stakeholders (Payne et al., 2012).

Organizations that focus on best practices and core components of quality out-of-school programs, such as youth engagement programs, are successful when there is an engaged, consistent, and competent workforce (Cassidy et al., 2011; Curry, Lawler, & Schneider-Muñoz, AJ, Fox, 2011; Greene, Lee, Constance, & Hynes, 2013). High functioning programs tend to have low staff turnover rates and high staff stability, which is an important basis for students to build relationships, trust, positive attitudes, and efficacy toward learning (Huang & Dietel, 2011). Similar research has found programs with high quality staff and affective environments had high levels of youth engagement and self-reported enjoyment (Hirsch et al., 2010) and that content related to the future (e.g., learning about college) may be more engaging for older youth (Greene et al., 2013). In the child care industry, the high rate of teacher turnover continues to be an ongoing concern that influences quality (Cassidy et al., 2011). Cassidy et al. (2011) noted that when teachers experience turnover, parents, children, directors, and the remaining teachers must adjust agency business and interpersonal relationships.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms and definitions are provided for this study:

*Case study:* a study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth in its real-world environment (Yin, 2014)

*Constructivism*: the premise whereby a teacher helps a student find his or her own solutions through problem-solving strategies (Popkewitz, 1998).

*Engagement*: the extent to which youth enjoy, are interested in, and are challenged by their youth program (Greene et al., 2013).

*Program quality measures*: factors assessed using activity observations, including supportive environments, opportunities for purposeful engagement, and structured interactions. (Leos-Urbel, 2013).

*School-age child care*: all aspects of nonparent, nonschool care including the hours before and after school (Laird, Petit, Dodge, & Bates, 1998).

*Self-care*: elementary or middle school children who are without adult supervision during the after-school hours whether they are at home, a friend's house, or in public places (Ekot, 2012).

*Staff turnover*: the rate at which an organization gains or loses employees, or it may also be determined in how long employees stay in their employment positions (Currie & Hill, 2012).

*Transactional constructivism*: the belief that the knowledge constructed by people is produced during the individual's activity and the environment for action (Sutinen, 2008)

*Work volition*: measures whether people believe they can navigate or persist through constraints on their occupational choices (Blattner & Franklin, 2017).

### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

In this section I discuss the assumptions, situations, and circumstances that may affect or restrict my research methods and analysis.

## **Assumptions**

Qualitative research is based on the assumption that reality is not singular or objective but numerous, subjective, and diverse because it is based on participants' perspectives. I assumed participants provided honest analysis from their perspective because there is no consequence or benefit to providing an inauthentic report. I further assumed there is a certain level of structural stability based on clear, documented organizational policies and procedures, which each teacher received at orientation. I assumed the participants are familiar with the company's expectations that specify what needs to be happening at the sites on a day-to-day basis. Another assumption I made was that the participants' perceptions of quality programming will focus on site-level practices, that is, practices within their control versus organizational factors beyond their direct control.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations define the boundaries of a study. I selected 13 teachers to participate in this study, which delimited my sample size (Stake, 2007). Brebner, Hammond, Schaumloffel, and Lind (2015) mentioned that self-selection processes are subject to unintended bias in recruitment. After receiving a recruitment invitation, teachers self-selected whether to participate, which biased results as some teachers may have chosen to participate for reasons beyond a desire to assist with the study. I wanted a cross section of teachers with average size programs, so I recruited teachers working at centers that have an average of 30 enrolled students. The study was delimited because no data were gathered on teachers who chose not to participate, and data were not obtained for lower enrolled sites. The results are best interpreted as suggestive rather than generalizable. In addition, my study is also delimited based on the fact that I had a finite amount of time to conduct the study, which limited my ability to gather data over an



extended period. The child care programs in this study comprised a diverse cross-section of students from the greater district. Programs located in elementary schools that were more homogenous were not represented, which created an additional delimitation scope of my study.

### **Limitations**

As I researched school-age child care teachers' perceptions of quality programming, certain limitations beyond my control affected the study. One limitation was that I did not gather published quantitative child care enrollment data from the school district and did not have a direct measure that assessed staff members' social relationships with each other or how long individuals worked together. As such, this study was limited to the participants' perceptions of program quality. Another limitation was that I did not assess how long teachers had worked together and how collegial relationships influence their perception of a quality experience. Length of working associations can vary, and relationships, a fun atmosphere, and meaningful social ties at work in themselves can affect emerging adult employees' willingness to stay on the job (Ellingson, Tews, & Dachner, 2015; Tews, Michel, Stafford, & Stafford 2013).

The transient nature of entry-level, low wage positions is another limitation. Asher (2012) indicated a transient workforce can lead to high turnover rates because workers are less likely to be invested in the sustainability of the program. If teachers are minimally invested, their perceptions of quality may only be based on a snapshot of what they have had time to observe versus known practices. Teachers with minimal investment in the job may also not be invested in working hard to incorporate components that contribute to quality and thus may limit my study.

## Summary

To answer the research question posed, I used a qualitative instrumental case study. I chose a qualitative research design because this study's research occurred in natural settings, allowing data to be collected where the participants experienced the issue first hand (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2005). The study was conducted in the local school-affiliated community education department where I have an oversight but indirect supervisory role of the participants from 18 elementary schools. Teachers from 18 elementary schools from a district in southeastern Michigan that serves about 1,000 school-age child care participants of varying schedules were invited to participate. Face-to-face audiotaped interviews (see Appendix A) of the site directors, program observations, and field notes provided data for analysis. The audiotapes were transcribed and categorized and analyzed inductively.

Teachers' perceptions of what quality programming looks like at the site level were explored and are the focus of this research. This chapter discussed the background, purpose, and significance of this study and introduced the central research question. Chapter 2 will explore the foundational literature for this study including how school-based care provides a way to meet working families' needs and additional opportunities for short- and long-term youth benefits. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth description of the methodology including the research population, sampling method, instrumentation, data collection, analysis procedures, and expected findings. Chapter 4 provides a description of the research sample and each participant used in this study, a summary of the findings, and presentation of the data and results. Chapter 5 provides an overall summary of the research and includes a discussion of the results in relation to literature as well as and implications for practice, policy and theory.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The current focus of school-age child care services is to offer working parents care and protection for their children (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). The more satisfied parents are with their child care arrangements, the less likely it is they will worry about their child during the workday, reducing strain on the family (Payne et al., 2012). School-based child care services are intended to balance parents' and students' needs, offer a safe, secure environment, and provide supplemental learning and activities beyond the school day (Tien Tsai & Shih, 2012). This literature review begins with a discussion of the need and purpose of child care and the benefits of child care for youth and families. Next, I discuss aspects of programming that help meet the needs of youth and families, and how staff turnover can influence program quality. The review will end with a summary of teachers' perceptions of quality programming and related aspects of quality programming.

### Conceptual Framework

Constructivism was established by philosophers such as Kant, Dewey, James, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Kuhn (Kivinen & Ristela, 2003). Constructivism has been thought of as a broad term where some educationalists view constructivism as referring to how individuals construct learning in their minds while others are more interested in the general construction of human knowledge (Kivinen & Ristela, 2003). For example, Dewey (1916) discussed the belief that the word *life* includes basic physical aspects as well as a range of our experiences such as customs, institutions, beliefs, victories, defeats, recreations, and occupations. *Life*, to Dewey, was a self-renewing process because of how it interacted with the environment, and the philosopher believed that no one person was responsible for its continuation (Dewey, 1916). In similar fashion, Dewey viewed *experience* as something that reflects a social group's self-renewing

process that is made possible through education, and that it is the unavoidable birth and death of people that make such education a necessity. *Social groups* used in this context, according to Dewey (1916), refers to a collection of affiliated people based on shared characteristics, likes, unifying agendas, or interactions.

Social groups pass information from older to younger generations by communicating their preferences, expectations, opinions, and habits that are necessary for the group to survive (Dewey, 1916). While every social arrangement has an educative effect, Dewey (1916) viewed schools as the primary vehicle to transmit both formal and informal information and that their main function was three-fold: to provide a simplified environment, eliminate undesirable influences, and provide opportunities for students to experience a broader environment. In addition to education serving as a social function, Dewey (1916) also saw education serving as direction, control or guidance, growth, preparation, unfolding and formal discipline, and conservative and progressive. Explained in more detail, education serving as direction has simultaneous and successive aspects and requires the focusing and ordering of action so the resulting response produces the desired outcome. Education serving as growth requires plasticity (power to learn from experience), which can lead to the formation of habits involving thought, invention, and initiative when used. Education serving as preparation, unfolding, and formal discipline involves equipping people in anticipation of the future, development, and training through repeated exercises. Lastly, education whose service is conservative and progressive speaks to learning that relies on the past as an asset toward developing the future.

Vygotsky (1978/1930), like Dewey (1916), was interested in establishing individuals as autonomous thinkers, but Vygotsky and Dewey looked at the issue differently. Dewey (1916) focused on community and believed it was an individual's interactions with the environment that

created knowledge, whereas Vygotsky focused on language and how individuals' internalization of it constructed their knowing and subsequent behaviors (Popkewitz, 1998). Language was considered a vehicle people used to develop their individual knowledge, and as such, thought was viewed as an activity versus an uninvolved process (Popkewitz, 1998). Vygotsky (1978/1930) discussed how the perception of real objects become known at very young age. Vygotsky (1978/1930) believed before children could master their own behaviors, they first had to master their surroundings with the help of speech. According to Vygotsky (1987/1930), prior to using speech to solve problems themselves, children relied on the speech of adults to carry out actions. Then, at some point during their development, children develop a method of guiding themselves with speech that was previously only used with someone else (socialization speech). When children's socialization speech turns inward, language takes on an intrapersonal function and children begin to guide themselves more independently (Vygotsky, 1978/1930). The author described this period as a time when speech moved closer and closer toward the beginning of an activity so that now speech actually preceded the action rather than following it, which means speech now guides, influences, and controls actions. Vygotsky (1978/1930) concluded that when children figure out how to guide themselves in ways that were previously only done with an adult, they have applied a social attitude to themselves. Speech thus allowed children to learn how to solve practical tasks because it produced new relationships and new organizations of behavior which helped them master their environments (Vygotsky 1978/1930).

Similar to Dewey, Piaget (2003) also believed social life had an educative affect and from his perspective, impacted intelligence through signs (the media of language), intellectual values (content of interaction), and collective logical or prelogical norms (rules imposed on thought). Piaget (2003) thought the social environments people are immersed in from birth

change their structure by modifying their thoughts with ready-made systems of signs, values, and obligations. Piaget (2003) addressed the mechanisms of intellectual development and discussed how social environments create interactions between developing individuals and others, how those interactions differ considerably between people, and how early knowledge or intelligence is parallel to the social environment. Piaget (2003) explained that the rhythm (periodic repetitions), regulations (limits or perceptual adjustments), and groupings (coordination of actions) connect intelligence with the changing possibilities of life itself and enables it to realize unlimited adaptations.

The idea of possibility is believed by constructivists to be one of the most important things a student can learn (Peterson, 2012). Piaget's (1971) concept of constructivism referred to how achieving intelligence is constantly conquered by its subsequent states and has meaning when considered in concurrence with the real activities of the learner. Piaget (1971) explained that valid knowledge is more of a process from a lesser to greater validity versus a state of being. Constructivism was chosen as the framework for this qualitative study because it allowed participants to share their views and unique realities from their individual orientations.

### **Review of the Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

The initial literature review focused on the major domains of school-age child care, quality, and turnover. Keyword searches of *school-age child care*, *out-of-school time*, *before-and after-school*, *turnover*, *teacher experiences*, *staff*, *quality programs*, *employee development*, *job satisfaction*, *turnover*, *low wage/low skill jobs*, and *retention* were conducted via a search ERIC and Dissertation & Thesis Global Education databases via the ProQuest search engine, as well as Taylor & Francis Online and Wiley Online. Several multidisciplinary and noneducation databases, including ProQuest Central, JSTOR, Sage Journals Online, and ABI/Inform, were

searched. The searches yielded more than 50 relevant peer-reviewed articles for the years 2011 to 2016.

Most articles relating to child care and turnover focused on preschool and the early childhood years (Bridges, Fuller, Huang, & Hamre, 2011; Cassidy et al., 2011; Lee & Hong, 2011). Yet many working parents need coverage for out-of-school hours during the primary school years (Christensen et al., 2011). Key term combinations yielded mixed results, and the most useful search, *afterschool programs* on ProQuest, yielded 124 articles. The ProQuest basic search of key terms *professional development* and *turnover* yielded 148 potential articles, several of which addressed organizations and professional learning communities and their involvement in preventing turnover (Ball, Ben-Peretz, & Cohen, 2014; Bryan, Hazel, Blunden, & Jillian, 2013; Wang, Yang, & Wang, 2012).

ProQuest peer-reviewed journal searches of *child care and turnover* yielded only five articles; searches of *child care and job satisfaction* yielded only seven. ERIC searches of both *school-age child care and turnover* and *school-age child care and job satisfaction* yielded no articles, nor did *out-of-school time and turnover* or *out-of-school time and job satisfaction*. *Out-of-school time and quality* yielded 751 articles, of which about 20 were related. A search for *out-of-school time and turnover* conducted via Search@CULibraries yielded 295 articles; about 15 were related to the school-age child care population. Additional searches of *youth program turnover* yielded 25 articles with few pertaining to the school-age population. Additional searches of *out-of-school time and quality* conducted later in this study through ERIC via the ProQuest search engine yielded 75 additional peer-reviewed articles between the years 2017 and 2018.

## **Need for School-Age Child Care**

Working parents of school-age children too young to care for themselves need to provide supervision when they themselves are unavailable. Payne et al. (2012) speculated that the task of directing various child care responsibilities depletes time and energy resources of parents, thus hampering them from fully using those resources at their places of employment. Payne et al. (2012) suggested child care is a time-related resource that temporarily emancipates parents from child care responsibilities and allows parents to work. Over the past 15 years, significant changes have affected how child care is used, the degree to which services are available, and the content of programs offered (Hynes & Sanders, 2010). Formal care has been offered through outside school hours programs located in schools or neighboring centers, family day care centers, or public agencies, such as family care homes, youth serving centers, or schools (Morrissey & Warner, 2011). Informal care has often been provided by a grandparent, other relative (including siblings or parent in another household), or by friends or neighbors (Hand & Baxter, 2013; Morrissey & Warner, 2011). In an Australian study that focused on working mothers and the care of school-age children, participation rates of formal and informal child care tended to increase based on higher maternal employment hours, and children whose mothers were permanently employed were the most likely to be in care (Hand & Baxter, 2013).

The average parental workday is from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, necessitating early morning and/or late afternoon out-of-school coverage. Out-of-school, a common phrase in the literature, refers to the immediate hours before and after the typical school day. Out-of-school time programs can be beneficial not only to working parents but to other stakeholders, such as youth and the community. Such programs help keep children off the streets during highly unsupervised, high crime periods (3:00 PM–6:00 PM); support working parents; enhance school



reform initiatives; provide mentoring of young people; promote prosocial norms; and enhance democracy by providing youth with input and a voice in programs that matter to them (Hirsch, 2011). In general, multipurpose afterschool programs tend to offer multiple organized activities with diverse content such as academic support, enrichment activities, arts, sports, and service (Akiva et al., 2013).

Today, out-of-school programs provide more than supervision and general benefits; programming has broadened into targeted educational and social-emotional interventions aimed at improving long-term youth development outcomes (Blattner & Franklin, 2017). When nonparental supervision is required, after-school programs can provide both oversight and added benefits to youth, parents, and the community.

### **Satisfaction with School-Age Care**

Time may be valuable to busy working parents. After-school child care has been provided by public schools, family homes, or commercial care centers, each of which may differ in hours of operation and program offerings (Tien Tsai & Shih, 2012). The program size varies based on the type of care chosen, but in general, commercial centers had the largest classes, provided a standardized and regulated system of care, and complied with state licensing ratio requirements (Tien Tsai & Shih, 2012). Regardless of choice, parents look for programs that will meet their desired need.

Child care satisfaction has been defined as parents' evaluative judgment of their child's caregiver and the arrangements, which means even after child care arrangements have been made, their perceptions can be a source of anxiety and strain (Payne et al., 2012). Payne et al. (2012) proposed that child care satisfaction has both time-related (caregiver dependability and convenience) and quality-related (caregiver attentiveness, communication, and cost) dimensions.

Payne et al. (2012) found that the dissatisfaction with the inconvenience of child care leads to higher levels of time-based work conflicts, which employees seek to reduce by not physically attending work. Caregiver convenience was related to employee well-being and turnover intentions through both time- and strain-based sources of conflict (Payne et al., 2012).

Another way to measure child care satisfaction was parents' attitudes of whether their needs were met based on their cognition of after-school care services, course content, and satisfaction (Tien Tsai & Shih, 2012). Parental satisfaction was based on whether the program had homework guidance and teacher instruction during after-school care. Tien Tsai and Shih (2012) noted attitude and satisfaction involve subjective judgments of human affairs and that the thinking and feelings of most people are complex, making it difficult to answer with a firm yes or no to posed questions. While parental satisfaction is difficult to measure with finite terms, Dockett and Perry (2016) concluded families who visited the care setting in advance, received information about the program, and thought the school and child care educators worked collaboratively together had fewer concerns and better transitions.

### **Benefits of Youth Programs**

Afterschool youth programming has provided child care services to families beyond the school day. School-based programs offer convenient child care, defined as care when and where parents need it the most, allowing them to conserve time, effort, and resources (Payne et al., 2012). Over time, out-of-school services have transitioned from mere child care for working parents to an essential component of the school day and attention has shifted to improving program quality (Devaney, Smith, & Wong, 2012). School-administered programs can include extracurricular, academic, and recreational focused activities in addition to provide protection for students (Young, Ortiz, & Young, 2016).

Hirsch (2011) identified various types of after-school youth programs including ones that emphasized academic support, mutual or “clubhouse” learning between the participant and instructor, and those centered around extracurricular activities where soft skills such as teamwork and communication and built into the activity. Hirsch (2011) concluded that after-school programs complement school learning efforts, and as these programs continue to grow, they will increasingly provide nonacademic supports for students. Kenney et al. (2014) considered the afterschool program setting an understudied arena for the promotion of healthy behaviors due to its potential influence on millions of U.S. children. Out-of-school time programs have included general physical fitness activities or programming centered around targeted interventions for specific populations, such as having a fitness-focus for overweight children (London & Gurantz, 2013; Slusser et al., 2013; Zarrett & Bell, 2014). London and Gurantz (2013) encouraged communities to consider ways to assist academically focused programs to include fitness segments into their programming. Zarrett and Bell (2014) examined longitudinal relationships of out-of-school activity participation and obesity of middle-to-late adolescent youth and found that when sport activities occurred more often than other out-of-school activities, youth had lower overall odds of being at risk for obesity. Considering the potential influence on millions of children served in after-school settings, Kenney et al. (2014) demonstrated that targeted after-school interventions could improve written policies, which in turn could direct sustainable program practices to promote physically healthier after-school environments.

In addition to potential physical health benefits, students’ mental, social, and emotional health showed some improvement when they participated in programs geared toward enhancing prosocial behaviors (Frazier et al., 2013). Frazier et al. (2013) found that academic enrichment,

coaching, activity engagement, and behavior management each modestly influenced the prosocial behaviors of participants. Programs that tended to be more outcome-focused benefited youth when they had an academic/literacy emphasis (Sheldon, Arbreton, Hopkins, & Grossman, 2010) or skill acquisition (Akiva et al., 2014). Another benefit of out-of-school time programs is the opportunity to creatively be used to advance possibility thinking (Kane, 2015). In an action-based research study, Kane (2015) and school-age child care staff demonstrated how planning to play with concepts and practice allowed for ideas usually taken for granted to be questioned, leading to new possibilities.

Out-of-school time programs have provided a valuable resource for families, and academic, health, and prosocial behaviors benefits for children (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014; Sheldon et al., 2010; Zarrett & Bell, 2014), and well-run programs have enhanced positive outcomes as well as diminished the chance of negative behaviors. Atherton, Schofield, Sitka, Conger, and Robins (2016) examined the prospective effect of unsupervised self-care on conduct problems and concluded that the more time children spent unsupervised, the more likely they are to engage in negative behaviors such as lying, stealing, bullying, and fighting, and have school difficulties. The after-school setting can serve as a buffer to various toxic influences as long as sufficient structure and supervision are present to ensure prosocial norms remain an important component (Smith & Bradshaw, 2017). Adolescents, in particular, are aware of their cultural fit even though person-environment fit is relevant throughout a lifetime (Simpkins, Riggs, Ngo, Vest Ettekal, & Okamoto, 2017). Given that adolescents' cultural practices and identities change over time due to acquisition of experiences and evolving surroundings, Simpkins et al. (2017) discussed the need for culturally responsive activities. Thus, it is important to understand out-of-

school time teachers' perceptions of quality programming so additional beneficial components can be incorporated as appropriate.

### **Science, Technology, Engineering and Math in Out-of-School Time**

Out-of-school time (OST) programs (e.g., after-school, summer camp, enrichment programs) can exist within and outside the school setting, and programs located outside the school settings may have added variability, challenges, and opportunities for access to scientific tools and practices (Young, Ortiz, & Young, 2016; Thiry, Archie, Arreola-Pena, & Laursen, 2017). Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) after-school programs are relatively new compared to traditional after-school programming and STEM related activities are designed to either increase achievement and/or foster interest in STEM content (Young, Ortiz, & Young, 2016). Exposure to STEM content is important because STEM occupations have had above average growth over the past half-decade, a trend that is expected to continue (Fayer, Lacey, & Watson, 2017). An essential concept tying out-of-school time activities to a career path in the STEM field is STEM interest, so collaboration between formal school time and out-of-school time programs is important so exposure is maximized (Beymer, Rosenberg, Schmidt, & Naftzger, 2018). Experiences with STEM after-school content can cultivate students' interests and help them stay motivated to learn STEM subject matter in school (Papazian, Noam, Shah, & Rufo-McCormick, 2013). More is known about the implementation of structured after-school science related activities and the impact on students than unstructured activities, as unstructured activities are more personal by nature and more likely to occur outside of school; it is important to recognize that different levels of interest are inspired from structured and unstructured activities (Dabney et al., 2012).

Interest has been defined as psychological state that, in later phases of development, is also a predisposition to reengage content that applies to in-school and out-of-school learning and to young and old alike (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). There is an affective (positive emotion) component and a cognitive (perceptual and representational activity) component that accompanies engagement. As such, interest as a motivational variable has been defined as the psychological state of engaging or as the willingness to reengage with specific classes of objects, events, or ideas over time (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Hidi and Renninger (2006) believed the potential for interests is internal to people but its direction is defined by the content and the environment, both of which also contribute to interest development. Their belief is similar to Greene et al. (2013), who noted youth differ in what they find interesting and enjoyable based on personal preferences. Their personal preferences combined with their capabilities and opportunities offered by the environment is what makes youth engage on a certain level or find someone/something enjoyable or not. This variation in interests highlights the importance of measuring the subjective youth experience of engagement and perceptions on an individual level (Green et al., 2013).

To describe learner interest, Hidi and Renninger (2006), developed a four-phase model of interest development that can be used when considering how learners engage with content and is useful for educational implications. The first phase of interest development is a *situational interest* triggered by the moment due to environmental stimuli. The second phase, *maintained situational interest*, evolves if situational interest from phase one is sustained. Phase three, *emerging (or less-well developed) individual interest*, may result from phase two, and the final phase, *a well-developed individual interest*, is the cumulative effect if situational interest is supported and sustained through efforts of others or a personal response to task challenges and/or

opportunities (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Illustrative of this model is research by Huang and Dietel (2011), which noted students in a science-art-technology focused after-school program tended to have more autonomy and input in programs offered compared to academic focused programs, and consequently took ownership in their learning and remained engaged.

The after-school STEM world does not have a standardized governing body or formal criteria for teachers so often youth workers tasked with implementing programs have a range of backgrounds and educational experiences, which may or may not include specific science knowledge (Shah, Wylie, Gitomer, & Noam, 2018). In order to support those teachers who need to understand science learning, Shah et al. (2018) believed it is important for informal environments to have clear definitions of quality for science teaching, learning, and STEM measurement. To address this issue, Shah et al. (2018) created the Dimensions of Success (DoS) assessment tool which was specifically designed to assess quality indicators in STEM environments under four domains: *features of the learning environment; activity engagement; STEM knowledge and practices; and youth development in STEM*. Shah et al. (2018) cautioned that DoS is designed to be used with programs that have preplanned activities, a designated facilitator, and some form of structure (e.g., science camp), and should not be used in free choice, student-led environments where students lead themselves through activities.

Out-of-school time programs have been located in venues such as schools, neighborhood centers, or public agencies such as youth serving centers (Morrissey & Warner, 2011). Beymer, Rosenberg, Schmidt, and Naftzger (2018) looked at choices, affect, and engagement in summer STEM programs and found that youth who participated in the classroom experienced higher levels of engagement as compared to youth participating in field experiences, implying the place of learning mattered. Thiry et al. (2017) looked at how “place based” learning elements

influenced who participated in out-of-school time science, engineering, and technology programs (SET), particularly underrepresented minorities and females. “Place-based” elements refer to organizational characteristics (location, resources) and programmatic features (structure, staffing, curriculum) that influence student learning outcomes and might also influence who participates and has access to opportunities. Thiry et al. (2017) noted design elements are important because the learning environment gives structure to how students experience the program’s social and cultural interactions and scientific practices. In addition, Thiry et al. (2017) found successful SET programs lived out their mission statement through recruitment practices and program design, and that differences in participation were largely based on the program’s mission and location.

### **Program Quality**

After-school programs are intended to provide two functions for youth, a prevention strategy to avert risky behaviors and a service that can promote positive development and academic achievement (Smith, Witherspoon, & Osgood, 2017). Such programs do not have a standard format or operating procedures and can vary regarding goals, location, hours of operation (weekday, weekend, or summertime), the number of children they serve, and the number of staff employed (Durlak et al., 2010). Millions of parents, children, and adolescents across the country depend on out-of-school services. Formal out-of-school hours care is the most common care arrangement and entails children participating in various program activities while supervised beyond the bell and during holiday breaks periods (Hand & Baxter, 2013).

Interest in youth program quality has increased among important stakeholder groups, including researchers interested in the design and implementation of programs, policy makers and grantors who strive to channel resources toward impactful program, and practitioners who



look for effective practice tools to incorporate and improve their programs; (Hirsch et al., 2010; Thompson & Shockley, 2013; Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlsrom, 2010). Program quality, however, is not a finite concept like enrollment, which can be easily measured, hence it an elusive concept and difficult to describe and assess (Baldwin & Wilder, 2014, Hirsch et al., 2010). Observing programs systematically and reliability is one way to assess high or low program quality, but even as such, the observations need a good definition of what embodies quality to be beneficial (Papazian, Noam, Shah, & Rufo-McCormick, 2013). In some cases, quality assessment has been tied to regulatory entities with external raters responsible for monitoring accountability systems, and in other cases, professional development (workshops, classes, certifications, mentoring, and coaching) is used to measure quality assessment (Baldwin & Wilder, 2014; Cole, 2011).

Program quality in general has been defined based on the emphasis of program aspects such as structure, physical environment, activities, staff-participant interactions, youth engagement, and staff competencies including skills and implementation style (Baldwin & Wilder, 2014; Bean, Forneris, & Elmer, 2016; Frazier et al., 2013; Hirsch et al., 2010).

Bean et al. (2016) proposed best practices for program quality be based on global features rather than age. In this model, all elements are critical to creating a high-quality program, and the structure of a program can be adapted based on the age of the participants (e.g., more emphasis on structure for younger participants and more emphasis on expansion for older participants). In contrast, Olsen and Kowalski (2010) suggested program quality be enhanced through supervision by staff, meaning the program staff are responsible for the oversight of the physical environment and activities in the program. Quality programs from the perspective of Olsen and Kowalski (2010) entails leaders providing training opportunities, supporting staff in their learning, and the yearly evaluation of supervisory practices.

While views regarding the best practices for program quality vary, Akiva et al. (2017) suggested that regardless of the aspects or goals of an out-of-school time program, the relationships between the adults and participants are of central importance. The Akiva et al. (2017) research model used a learning process focused on simple interactions (SI) to look at staff-participant interactions from a strength-based perspective with the assistance of a video, to guide training aimed at improving quality. Akiva et al. (2017) found that using the SI tool to facilitate discussion and reflection among staff helped improve connections with youth, reciprocity, and participation (Akiva et al., 2017). Staff interactions, practices, and program type have been found to affect youth cognitive engagement and belonging differently (Akiva et al., 2013; Akiva et al., 2014; Akiva et al., 2017). Akiva et al. (2013) looked at antecedents' cognitive engagement and sense of belonging as a part of youth involvement experience. Akiva et al. (2013) defined youth's involvement experience as their in-the-moment psychological perceptions of the interactive climate and activities presented. Youth's experience included their emotional reactions to social context and their mental involvement in individual and group tasks presented (Akiva et al., 2013). The study backed the importance of welcoming practices and active skill building in youth programs.

Research by Greene et al. (2013) also supported the importance of staff-participant interactions and found that youth were more engaged in programs where they found staff caring and competent. On an academic level, research by McCormick and O'Connor (2015) emphasized the need for teachers to form and maintain close relationships with elementary students. The researchers found students from teachers who created emotionally supportive relationships showed gains in reading, and students who had conflictual relationships with teachers had lower average levels and growth of math achievement. McCormick and O'Connor

(2015) thought the teacher-student relational component could be improved if teachers reflected on information received about their teaching practices and used it to inform their work. While the outcome interest of various stakeholders (e.g., student, teacher, parent, stakeholder group) is different, quality programming is the common goal.

Out-of-school time program components can vary and emphasis on design can range from ordering the day's hourly schedule to impacting learning objectives by focusing on specific areas. Most programs offer academic assistance combined with personal, social, or cultural activities in accordance with the program's goals (Durlak et al., 2010). Other programs offer services helpful to parents such as language learning or parenting classes (Durlak et al., 2010). People in the educational field believe quality after-school programs should focus on academic activities, whereas people in the developmental field feel experiences that differ from an academic focus would be more beneficial to children (Leos-Urbel, 2013).

After-school quality ideas in the past were heavily drawn from the field of early childhood, but developmental principles taken from settings serving younger children may not translate well for older youth (Baldwin, Stromwall, & Wilder, 2015). Yohalem and Wilson-Ahlsrom (2010) reviewed assessment tools that looked at how older youth quality is defined based on certain features. Older youth programs had varying degrees of the following elements: (a) relationships (connections among youth and adults); (b) environment (program climate and setting); (c) engagement (full involvement in activities); (d) social/behavioral norms (expectations and responses to positive and negative behaviors); (e) skill building (engagement in intentional learning activities); and (f) routine/structure (overall organization including pacing, transitions, and routines).

In another study examining program design but from the perspective of persistent low quality, Baldwin et al. (2015) identified eight critical features that inhibited quality improvement. Features included: (a) volume of youth—number of enrolled youth; (b) enrollment and attendance policies—policies that define the number of hours/how frequently a youth attends; (c) facility space and room resources—space that is available on a daily basis; (d) youth activity or classroom grouping—how youth are grouped (e.g., age) and how they move between activities; (e) schedule—a written, consistent routine; (f) staff activity planning and implementation—regular planning time, creation and implementation of lesson plans; (g) sufficient and capable staff—staff to youth ratios, staff qualifications and experience; and (h) behavior management capabilities and policies—policies in place, staff training and implementation of policies. Thus, from examining program design in combination with process and structural quality, it was revealed that program features and quality were dynamically related and furthermore, aspects that supported important developmental principles, such as youth-centered choice were interconnected with program design features (Baldwin et al., 2015). Baldwin et al. (2015) concluded that low and persistent quality is composed of dynamic structural quality connected with specific program features.

Youth engagement in a supportive climate is another element linked to program quality (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlsrom, 2010). Engaged, caring, and competent staff are important in youth engagement in out-of-school time programs (Greene et al., 2013). Youth involvement experience is especially important where attendance is optional because if a youth has an unfavorable experience, they may attend less and thus be less exposed to program content, and programs cannot produce effects without sufficient exposure (Akiva et al., 2013). Asher (2012) linked program quality directly to quality staff with the belief that great staff will run a great

program. Henderson Hall and Long Dilworth (2005) believed that most researchers and practitioners agree that after-school staff are an important, if not the most important, element in determining program quality. One reason program quality is dependent on engaged, competent staff is because significant sharing of knowledge is required as school-age child care services are formed and maintained (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). Oh, Osgood, and Smith (2015) examined the observational measures of the setting-level quality of afterschool programs and found an increase in the number of observations gave much greater information to workers than having data based on more observers. They also found students' behavior, attitudes, skills, and competences are likely improved by positive experiences and activities available in high quality afterschool settings, which in turn lead to better learning in school.

Whether such youth programs are independent or school-based organizations, quality programs have communication styles of listening, trusting, and sharing which form the basis of effective teams (Parker, 2006). Difficulties arise when values, beliefs, and interpretations of social norms and systems held by school-age care educators are in contrast to those held by school staff (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). More specifically, Cartmel and Grieshaber (2014) pointed out communication issues can center on everyday issues of equipment use, resources, spaces within schools, and face-to-face contact with families. Resolution involves each party understanding the other's perspectives and remaining mindful of communication styles when making decisions and solving problems (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). Lack of engagement or ability to communicate with stakeholders as necessary will influence the staff's ability to provide quality programs and run school-age services (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). To maintain quality programming in school-based programs, Cartmel and Grieshaber (2014) recommended

weekly meetings, focused conversations about professional practice and collaboration regarding the development of joint projects.

### **Professional Development Considerations**

As youth serving organizations have grown and matured over the last two decades, attention to professional development needs of youth workers has increased (Garst et al., 2014). Researchers use various words to describe professional development such as *training* (MacFarlane, Wharf Higgins, & Naylor, 2018), *skill development* (Sheldon et al., 2010), and *workforce development* (Thompson & Shockley, 2013); an outcome of professional and personal growth is expected as the outcome (Garst et al., 2014). Various descriptive words can apply to different disciplines when describing professional development, and as such, Garst et al. (2014) preferred the term professional development when referring to educational opportunities meant to enhance the competencies of youth program providers.

Whether youth programs are center or school based, program staff need ongoing training to stay knowledgeable about resources that will keep them current with changes in the field and enhance student learning (Bradshaw, 2015). Out-of-school time program quality depends on properly prepared staff, and for many, professional development may be the only accessible way to develop the new knowledge, skills, and practices needed to provide high-quality programs. (Garst, Baughman, Franz, & Baughman, 2014). There are two types of professional development models currently common in the out-of-school time field: the general training approach and the quality improvement system (Akiva et al., 2017). The general training approach is the most common and consists of topic specific professional development workshops typically offered in a one- or two-hour block of time for the purpose of disseminating information and usually does not have a follow-up or integration component. Effectiveness can

be limited and short-lived, especially considering most out-of-school workers are employed a short time (Akiva et al., 2017; Asher, 2012). The second is known as the quality improvement system (QIS) approach, which tends to involve a needs assessment for the purpose of identifying growth areas and a plan to address them through coaching or consulting. Issues with the QIS include that typically long lists of standards are recommended, which may be difficult to implement without sufficient resources, and given external experts developed the measurement tools and systems, youth workers may not be involved in defining quality (Akiva et al., 2017). A third type of training model, known as the strengths-based approach, is less common but shares some features of QIS and begins with identifying existing strengths in program or staff practices (Akiva et al., 2017). The focus is on identifying positive practices already occurring at the site and using guidance to grow those practices. The strength-based approach uses intuitive assessment and judgements from staff and program leaders, which differ from the prescribed measurements of quality like QIS or the “stand and deliver (content)” format of the general training approach (Akiva et al., 2017).

While out-of-school time staff and leaders are knowledgeable about the need for continual professional development, a difference between intention and implementation is experienced (Bradshaw, 2015). Several factors make the provision of training difficult for out-of-school time workers, such as their part-time schedule (Buehler & O’Brien, 2011), high turnover rate (Tews et al., 2013), and transient nature of the job (Asher, 2012). Even training scheduled for a morning or evening session is not ideal, as conflicts are always present, such as the limit of two hours due to the perception that any shorter period would not be worth bringing attendees together and any longer period may cause participants to fade, causing the training to lose its efficacy (Cooper, 2013). Cooper (2013) recommended content specific trainings based

on the belief the content of a program drives youth engagement. The author further suggested out-of-school time staff can pair their background youth development knowledge with content specific expertise and create content-specific activities which, in turn, will create an experience rich environment that will push youth to achieve and engender enthusiasm and longevity among staff.

Out-of-school time youth workers need training that is relevant and able to be implemented in the short term with a straightforward utilization. While traditional professional development has been overseen by a host organization, Garst et al. (2014) recommended a more innovative approach in the use of a personal learning environment (PLE). PLEs can integrate a variety of learning components, including online courses, webinars, communities of practice, blogs, and artifacts of traditional courses and trainings (Gast et al., 2014). Similar to a PLE is a professional learning community (PLC). PLCs are identified by professional collaboration to improve learning and first originated in the business sector with the belief organizations can learn (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). Thompson, Gregg, and Niska (2004) believed schools must understand and practice the five founding disciplines of a learning organization to be a true PLC and that the school leadership plays a central role in creating a community that enhances student learning.

PLCs are relatively new in the out-of-school time field and are growing in popularity (Vance, Salvaterra, Michelsen, & Newhouse, 2016). Vance et al. (2016) noted facilitators must employ different training techniques than usually seen in traditional workshops to maximize a PLC's benefit. The researchers interviewed experienced PLC facilitators to get guidance on structuring a PLC in the out-of-school time field and were instructed to first understand the model including the three essential elements of practice, reflection, and collaboration. Practice



was needed to help knowledge take hold, reflection was to be modeled so participants understood they needed to identify a take-a-way, and collaboration occurred so participants could connect with peers and share (Vance et al., 2016). PLCs are unique in that teachers now have the opportunity to create their own meaning and understanding about a new strategy or practice and dialogue with peers about the advantages of the strategy and personal beliefs about student learning (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). If knowledge is power, building systems of professional development directs that function toward the practitioner (Moore, 2013). PLCs can offer out-of-school time youth workers a multifaceted professional development experienced to support the multifaceted layers of their work (Vance et al., 2016).

### **Turnover and Program Quality**

Staff or workforce turnover is the rate at which an organization gains and loses employees, or it may also be determined in terms of how long employees stay in their employment positions (Currie & Hill, 2012). A high rate of turnover means that employees have a shorter average tenure at their place of employment than similar organizations with low turnover, where employees stay in their positions longer (Currie & Hill, 2012). Turnover (loss of personnel) and turnover intention (thoughts about quitting one's job) are influenced by individual and organizational factors such as attitudes, low salaries, inadequate benefits, and difficult work environments (Cassidy et al., 2011; Chawla & Sondhi, 2011), as well as constituent attachment (Ellingson et al., 2015). Schnitzlein and Stephani (2016) indicated that having the noncognitive skill of an internal locus of control in the context of low wages can help people move from low-wage positions or avoid them all together. Schnitzlein and Stephani (2016) argued individuals who firmly believe they are in control of the events in their lives have a lower probability of being low paid. Employees mainly leave their place of employment because of work-related

stress and dissatisfactions; otherwise, they would have preferred to stay and be engaged in personal growth and development (Laddha, Singh, Gabbad, & Gidwani, 2012).

While turnover is common in all levels of an organization, it is especially prevalent in the low-wage/low skill service workforce (Ellingson et al., 2015). Low-wage/low-skill jobs in fields such as child care, nursing, home health aides, and the hospital industry are often entry level positions and comprised of varied work hours, few fringe benefits, minimal training requirements, and few opportunities for advancement, which contribute to chronic workforce shortages and high turnover rates (Currie, 2012; Lerman, Eyster, & Kuehn, 2014; Tews et al., 2013). When high turnover rates occur, managers are frequently left to quickly fill vacancies and often resort to hiring staff without the necessary qualifications to keep the business running, a dynamic Tews et al. (2013) indicated plagues the hospitality industry.

In the child care field, regardless of education level, certification, or professional development training, educators continue to be among the poorest paid professionals, and the field is dominated by women being paid low wages and receiving few if any work-related benefits (Boyd, 2013). Boyd (2013) also found that an increase in professional qualifications and skills without a corresponding increase in professional status, benefits, and wages led many early educators to consider leaving the early education workforce. Fewer than half (47%) of the survey respondents had definite plans to remain within the early childhood workforce despite saying that they loved their jobs and really wanted to stay. Employers who adopt policies that provide fringe benefits to part-time employees and give access to career advancement through training and promotion could have positions beneficial to employees and parents (Buehler & O'Brian, 2011).

Attracting and hiring quality program staff can be a difficult undertaking because school-age child care positions are usually low wage, frontline, and come with limited benefits.

Attraction and retention of staff can be difficult, and the issue of high staff turnover in the out-of-school time field is problematic from an educational standpoint, managerial perspective, and youth viewpoint, as workers appear to have a revolving door (Asher, 2012). During times of transition, continuity of relationships with child care teachers can add to a student's sense of security and stability, but that relationship stability is challenged by the field's high staff turnover (Dockett & Perry, 2016).

In an action research study aimed at providing technical assistance to six after-school programs, Baldwin et al. (2015) observed several quality problems that caused chaos and strain for the staff. The researchers noted the number of staff members required to meet ratio requirements were minimal; therefore, when a staff member called in sick, programs did not have sufficient time or resources to find a replacement, causing the program to operate with a higher than optimal youth-to-staff ratio. Also noticed was program staff regularly arriving 10-30 minutes after their scheduled start time, leaving the other staff member solo with 60 students for a period at the beginning of the program.

Despite the known difficulties associated with part-time positions, Buehler and O'Brien (2011) found that part-time work appears to have some advantages over full-time work. For example, mothers with dependent children perceive fewer conflicts between work and family life when they commit fewer hours to employment. Buehler and O'Brien (2011) suggested part-time work may contribute to the parenting strength and well-being of families. High employee turnover undermines an organization as managers continually face recruiting and training new employees (Ellingson et al. 2015).

In addition, such jobs with nonstandard work hours can make social and family lifestyles difficult. Martin, Sinclair, Lelchook, Wittmer, and Charles (2012) examined work schedules and retention and found employees on the afternoon, mixed, and night shift had a respective 43%, 87%, and 136% greater risk of turnover compared to day-shift employees. Employee turnover is one of the largest, though widely unknown, costs organizations face, and employee turnover costs companies 30–50% of the annual salary of entry-level employees, 150% of middle-level employees, and up to 400% for upper-level, specialized employees (Laddha et al., 2012). Retaining employees can save on company costs and improve quality by maintaining a consistent workforce.

Turnover is not just costly to employers; employees bear costs as well. Employee turnover can cost the worker time, income, and stability, and as such, employee retention is beneficial to both the employee and employer (Laddha et al., 2012). Leaving a position can be temporary or permanent depending on numerous personal circumstances, and it is difficult to determine a single cause outside of what can be a complex of interrelated reasons (Currie & Hill, 2012). Leaving for personal reasons is most often associated with conflicts surrounding home and family commitments, as seen in industries such as child care and nursing, because they are still a predominately a female workforce. That means women have to reconcile the demands of work (Currie & Hill, 2012).

Employees who can develop social bonds at work tend to stay in their positions longer, as peer relationships help workers improve their day-to-day experiences and distinguish one workplace from the next (Ellingson et al., 2015). Ellingson et al. (2015) showed that initially employees sought employment to earn money and gain experience, but if they successfully formed relationships with coworkers, they end up staying at that job for longer periods. Leaving

can bring feelings of uncertainty regarding whether high quality constituent attachment will occur at the new place of employment. Ellingson et al. (2015) concluded that interpersonal ties are important, and constituent attachment can effectively reduce turnover intentions.

A key to successful and effective organizations is retention of their staff, a topic that has received significant discussion and analysis (Chawla & Sondhi, 2011). Huang and Dietel (2011) shared findings from a policy brief synthesizing 20 years of program evaluation and found high quality programs had after-school leaders who were able to retain staff and achieve lower turnover rates than other programs because staff felt respected, supported, autonomous, and confident in their ability to reach their students. In turn, warmth and mutual respect characterized staff and students' relationships with each other (Huang & Dietel, 2011). Competent, consistent staff is an important aspect of quality programming, yet attraction, retention, and turnover of such workers make staffing programs difficult.

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

As I reviewed the various research designs available, including narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study (Creswell, 2013), I decided an instrumental case study was best suited for my research because my focus was to develop an in-depth description and understanding of front line out-of-school time teachers' perceptions of quality programming. Selecting an instrumental case study design allowed me to address my question within a bounded system as I sought to answer illustrate their perceptions.

An analysis of literature allows for an in-depth understanding of how researchers have approached their studies. Several quantitative studies focused on measuring aspects of quality programming including several from the lens of early childhood. My study, however, focused on quality programming of school-age children from a qualitative approach. Qualitative inquiry

and quantitative inquiry sometimes look very similar, but they differ fundamentally by their goals (Stake 2010). It is an epistemological difference, one based on the perception of personally-constructed knowledge versus discovered knowledge and, by nature, unique to the subjects studied (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995).

Supervisory responsibilities of elementary aged children are often deferred to alternate caregivers when parents themselves are unavailable, but workers are often not consistent because of the problematic high level of staff turnover in the youth serving industry (Asher, 2012; Cassidy et al., 2011). Turnover transitions affect all individuals involved, and both teachers and parents perceive that permanent and temporary changes in classroom staff affect their relationships. The teacher-child relationship can lead to parents' heightened concerns for their child's welfare (Cassidy et al., 2011).

The reviewed literature focused on early childhood child care, school-age child care, out-of-school time programs, quality programs, teacher experiences, job satisfaction, retention, and turnover. The most common methods of qualitative research are observation, interviewing, and examination of artifacts (Stake, 2010). The implication of teacher turnover has been examined in early childhood child care using qualitative or mixed-method approaches (Cassidy et al., 2011; Schudrich, Auerbach, Liu, Fernandes, McGowan, & Claiborne, 2012). Qualitative measures of assessment in the reviewed studies consisted of semistructured interviews, in-person questionnaires, observations, and field notes. Quantitative measures used in mixed method approaches involved environmental and relationship rating scales. Because of the close relationship between caregivers and participants, frequent turnover among the workers inhibited the growth of a close, nurturing relationship (Schudrich et al., 2012).

High turnover in youth serving organizations affects program consistency and subsequent quality. Research methods in examining quality child care programs incorporated the traditional qualitative methods of analysis mentioned above, as well as reflective notes and discussions (Baldwin, 2014), video data collection (Brebner et al., 2015), home visits (Durden, Mincemoyer, Crandall, Alviz, & Garcia, 2015), and conference calls and checklists (Landry et al., 2011).

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

Although the benefit of case studies as a research method has been questioned (Creswell, 2013), based on the literature review, case studies are a popular choice when examining research for out-of-school programs. Having information about former studies allows researchers to understand what the field takes to be known, future possibilities, and areas that could use further investigation (Hatch, 2002). Qualitative research, like quantitative and mixed method approaches, is not without limitations. Studies examined had limitations due to subjectivity. Inquiry in a case study is to promote understanding as expressed through explanations and personal perceptions.

Qualitative research is a method for exploring and obtaining an experiential understanding of the meaning individuals ascribe to an issue. Several researchers (Akiva et al., 2013; Blattner & Franklin, 2017; Hand & Baxter, 2013; Hynes & Sanders, 2010; Payne et al., 2012) looked at aspects related to the need working parents have for child care. Needs for care ranged from adequate, safe care because their child was too young to be left alone and care for themselves, to supervision coverage when parents or relatives were not able to be present and coverage was desired to keep children off the streets during highly unsupervised, high crime periods (3:00 pm – 6:00 pm). The majority of studies were mixed method and highlighted parental need for care and through interviews, rating scales, and surveys presented parent and

caregiver perspectives that, regardless of the program choice or offerings, adults needed to be satisfied with their selection of providers. Satisfaction was relative to work impact (convenience and dependability), caregiver quality (attentiveness, communication), and strain-based resources (cost, program content) dimensions.

A second finding from the literature was the perceived benefit of youth programs for out-of-school time programs. Researchers (Davaney et al., 2012; Hirsh, 2011; Kenney et al., 2014; London & Guarantz, 2013; Payne et al., 2012; Zarrett & Bell, 2014) used qualitative and quantitative studies to examine how child care has moved from basic supervision to providing supplemental services as an extension of the school day including health, fitness, academic, prosocial skills such as teamwork, and prevention (e.g., obesity), with a goal and/or quality focus. Out-of-school time locations varied from school buildings to community building to specific clubs both within and outside the school setting. Unlike the literature exploring satisfaction with care services, these researchers incorporated more youth and managerial voices in their assessments and analysis.

All studies incorporated aspects of measuring quality. Quality is not a finite concept, and program measurements tended to focus on experiential understandings relayed through thoughts in response to interviews or questionnaires or the presence or absence of qualifiers from a measurement tool. One area of particular interest was the relatively new out-of-school time focus on STEM related programming. Researchers (Beymer et. al., 2018; Papazian et al., 2018; Thiry et al., 2017; Young et al., 2016) made positive claims of the benefit of exposure to STEM related materials in out-of-school time youth programs, their impact on stimulating interest, and possible long-term benefits of possible interest in STEM related careers.



## Critique of Previous Research

The importance of high-quality child care has been shown to positively contribute to children's development and academic success (Herndon & Waggoner, 2015). In a study examining at-risk children, Herndon and Waggoner (2015) concluded that children who participated in consistent high-quality child care appeared better prepared for kindergarten relative to peers without such care. Brebner et al. (2015) backed the importance of high-quality child care by examining the relationships of early childhood educators with children and perspectives of their roles to meet the physical, emotional, and educational needs of the children. Brebner et al. (2015) concluded early childhood educators use relationships as a tool to facilitate children's development. Previous researchers (Boyd, 2013; Brebner et al., 2015; Landry et al., 2014) have examined early childhood teachers' experiences and quality programming, but lesser attention has been given to school-based child care teachers' perceptions of quality programming

The provision of child care during nonschool hours is important to parents of school-age children, much like it is to preschool children (Bryne, 2016). School-age child care services are aimed at meeting the needs of families and children by balancing their needs, reducing parent burden, providing a secure environment, extending school learning, and offering enrichment activities (Tien Tsai & Shih, 2012). The label *afterschool* program has been used to describe programs of different content, duration, and goals, and school-based programs have become more and more popular over the past decade (Hynes & Kathryn, 2010). When school-age care services are housed in school buildings, considerable communication and information sharing is needed due to possible contested relationships over space, resources, and equipment (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). School-age care located outside school buildings offers additional options for variability and opportunities to engage in scientific tools and practices, with the additional

possible benefit of stimulating interest in the STEM field (Thiry et al., 2017; Young et al., 2016) While there are differing views on how to assess program quality (Baldwin & Wilder, 2014; Bean et al., 2016; Frazier et al., 2013; Papazia et al., 2013), communication among the stakeholders and participants is essential. While both the positive influence quality programming has on outcomes and early childhood teachers' perspectives on quality have been explored, studies examining quality programming based on teachers' perspectives at the school-age level can be further explored.

### **Chapter 2 Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed how school-based child care programs provide a convenient service to meet working families' needs by providing supervision at their child's school beyond the school day. I reviewed the literature by discussing the need and purpose of school-age child care, the need for quality programming, the benefit and valuable resource it provides youth and families and how new or extra exposure to STEM programming can possibly produce short- and long-term benefits. I looked at factors involved in quality programming and discussed how turnover rates, while although common in all organizations, is especially problematic in low-wage, frontline jobs such as child care.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology for Qualitative Research**

This study was an instrumental qualitative study in which I explored the perceptions of school-age child care teachers regarding high staff turnover and quality programming in a public-school system located in southeastern Michigan. Qualitative research is a method for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups attribute to social or human problems (Creswell, 2008). A case study was the most effective design for my study because I collected the data directly from participants documenting their experiences. Working families of school-age children look to before- and afterschool programs to provide a safe, adult-supervised environment so they can work without worrying about their child's well-being (Durlak et al., 2010). This chapter includes additional rationale for choosing a qualitative instrumental case study design and a description of how the study was conducted with respect to the setting and selection of participants. My role as a participant researcher, ethical considerations, and the procedures and measures used to collect and analyze the data are discussed.

#### **Research Question**

The central research question was: What are the experiences and challenges of school-age child care teachers from a school district in southeastern Michigan with operating quality programs? Two subquestions guided understanding their perspectives:

1. How do school-age child care teachers define quality programming?
2. What are the experiences of school-age child care teachers with staff turnover and quality programming?

#### **Purpose and Design of the Study**

The next section covers the site description, research population, sample, and the instruments that will be used to conduct the study. The purpose of this qualitative instrumental

case study was to understand school-age child care teachers' perceptions of high staff turnover and quality programming in southeastern Michigan. Before-school and after-school child care programs provide a significant resource for working families by providing a safe, supervised setting for their child when their work hours are not compatible with school hours (Hand & Baxter, 2013; Tien Tsai & Shih, 2012). School-based centers, in particular, have the added benefit of meeting those needs by offering quality programming and services with the convenience of being located at the youth's specific school. The development of quality school-age child care programs is important to families because program type and staff practices can affect cognitive engagement and belonging differently (Akiva et al., 2014).

Several researchers relevant to my study (Akiva et al., 2014; Frazier et al., 2013; Kane, 2015) have conducted data collection in a natural setting while remaining sensitive to the people and places under study, using complex reasoning skills (Creswell, 2013, Stake, 2005). Creswell (2013) outlined five approaches to qualitative inquiry: narrative (i.e., individual life history), phenomenological (i.e., understanding the essence of the experience), grounded theory (i.e., constructing a theory grounded in field data), ethnographic (i.e., describing a culture-sharing group), and case study (i.e., providing an in-depth understanding of a case). A narrative approach was inappropriate because my study does not involve the lived and told experiences of individuals. A phenomenological study was not suitable because the study does not involve a universal experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). Although high turnover can be a common experience in places of employment (Ellingson et al., 2015), a phenomenological study would limit the research to a specific common perception. In like manner, grounded theory was determined not to be applicable because my study will not generate an explanation of a process, action, or interaction constructed by the participants (Creswell, 2013). An ethnographic

approach was not selected because the participants are not a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2013). I chose a case study for my approach because I explored programs from several research sites over time by collecting data from multiple sources of information.

Stake (2010) noted that qualitative case studies are distinguished by the size of what is being studied. A single instrumental case study involves exploring a selected case to study the issue, a collective case study involves multiple cases, and the intrinsic case study focuses on the case itself because of its uniqueness. My research was an instrumental case study because it focused on information gathered from several programs within a single school system.

## **Research Population and Sampling Method**

### **Site Description**

The context for this study is a public school system in southeastern Michigan that serves its local community and eight surrounding townships. The school district is located in an educationally rich community with major and minor universities and a community college. The 2015 school data indicated the school district selected for my study has a student body of approximately 17,000 students served in over 30 schools consisting of a preschool, elementary schools, middle and high schools, and an adult education program. Students in the district represent over 80 countries of origin, and over 60 languages are spoken. Demographic data of students indicate slightly more than 50% of the student body is White, less than 15 % is Asian or African American, less than 10% Hispanic/Latino, and approximately 10% is two or more races. Approximately 20% of the student body is economically disadvantaged, around 10% of the students have disabilities, and in general, the district has a graduation rate of around 90%.

The district has the largest school-based community education organization of the neighboring townships and a budget that is self-sustaining with no district subsidy or taxpayer

dollars. Out of the district's elementary schools, the community department oversees child care programming in the majority of the schools and provides care during the before and after school hours, as well as on select days when school is not in session. At the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, the school-age child care program had over 1,000 enrolled students, and individual school programs ranged from the mid-teens to around 70 students.

### **Population**

Across the 18 child care programs, the majority of lead teachers have varying degrees of education, including professional and provisional teacher certifications, child care professional associate degrees, and degree equivalencies based on years of experience in a child-related field. The assistant teachers have varying degrees of formal training, including associate and bachelor's degrees in nonchild-affiliated fields and various amounts of hands on experience. Most staff work between 14 and 26 hours per week based on availability and program need. The child care programs selected for this case study have teachers and students representing similar diversity as mirrored in the greater district. Teachers who work at schools with large, diverse programs are employed four or more days a week per shift and have worked at least one year with the organization or in a closely related field were invited to participate in the study.

### **Sample**

A purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002) was used to determine the nature and number of the participants. Invitations were sent to all teachers with programs of 30 or more students. From those who consented, I selected 13 teachers with varying educational levels, experience, and program size to explain their perspectives on quality programming. One teacher had a master's degree in guidance and counseling, five teachers had bachelor's degrees: two were in elementary education and one each in sociology, communication studies, and special

education. Two teachers had child development associate credentials and one had a liberal arts associate degree. The remaining five teachers completed college courses in early childhood or elementary education but had no terminal degree.

### **Instrumentation**

The three instruments used for this study were (a) semistructured interviews, (b) program observations, and (c) detailed field notes.

#### **Semistructured Interviews**

1. Thirteen teachers each received an approximately hour-long, face-to-face, semistructured interview consisting of the same set of 11 base open- and closed-ended questions from a researcher-developed interview guide (Appendix A).
2. Using the interview guide (Appendix A), I collected data while providing respondents an opportunity to express their views.
3. In addition to predetermined questions (Appendix A), I asked the selected teachers probing questions to more deeply develop issues of interest, explore ideas further, or reshape the direction of the interview segment (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Harding, 2013; Hatch, 2002).
4. Closed-ended questions (Appendix A) were asked regarding demographic information such as education, job classification, and length of time working in out-of-school-time programs.
5. Open-ended questions (Appendix A) were asked to assess the teachers' experiences, challenges, and perceptions of staff turnover and quality programing.

## **Program Observations**

1. Observations were used to develop a narrative of observed behaviors and conducted in a natural setting to maximize usefulness of data.
2. During individual site observations, Observers looked at quality programming guided by quality indicators from the School-Age Program Quality Assessment (PQA) developed by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (2012; see Appendix B).
3. Site observations were documented on the school-age child care observation guide adapted from the School-Age YPQA, 2005 subscales (Appendix C). The School-Age PQA is an evidenced-based assessment tool designed for children in Grades K-6 that assesses seven program quality indicators through observations and interviews and is used to inform leaders about program and staff practices to improve quality and performance (Smith & Hohmann, 2005).
4. Findings from the YPQA validation study indicated reliability on both interview and observational scales, and subscale validity confirmed by factor analysis (Smith & Hohmann, 2005).

## **Detailed Field Notes**

1. Field notes were taken throughout the interview and observation periods and reviewed as soon as possible following the experience, so a more complete description could be remembered from the setting (Hatch, 2002; see Appendix B).
2. Notes were stored in a retrievable electronic format and analyzed to determine any themes.



## **Data Collection**

Once I received approval from the Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board, I sent recruitment letters (Appendix C) to teachers at child care programs which fit the scope of my study. Teachers who agreed to participate in my study signed an informed consent letter which outlined the nature of their participation. I collected data in three phases. First, I conducted face-to-face semistructured interviews using an interview protocol (Appendix A). Second, program observations were conducted, and third, detailed field notes were used to provide more complete descriptions of the observations. This section provides details regarding the data collection methods I used for this study.

### **Semistructured Interviews**

The goal of the interviews was to gain perspective and understanding of participants' lived experiences in a relaxed, conversational format. Although two hours were allotted for each interview, respondents shared their thoughts in approximately 45 minutes to hour long sessions. Interviews were conducted at an agreed upon, convenient time and location for each participant. Open-ended questions (Appendix A) were asked so responders could freely share their opinions and experiences to generate rich and thick descriptions (Creswell 2013). Eleven questions were asked of each participant. The first three questions were demographic in nature, Questions 4-6 assessed teacher's views on quality programming, Questions 7-8 assessed roles and accountability, and the remaining three questions assessed perspectives on turnover. The following sequence is how I conducted semistructured interviews for data collection.

1. Permission to conduct the research study was sought and obtained from the district's superintendent's office via the human resources department (see Appendix D).

2. Invitations via a recruitment letter (see Appendix E) were sent to all teachers with programs of 30 or more students located within the public-school system in southeastern Michigan.
3. Thirteen consenting teachers were contacted via email or phone to review the purpose of the interview, discuss confidentiality and anonymity of the responses, and obtain written consent prior to beginning the interview.
4. An interview date and time was agreed upon at a convenient location with minimal distractions.
5. The semistructured interviews were standardized so participants were asked the same questions in order and the data could be compared systematically. Two hours were allotted for interviews (Yin, 2014) to capture participants' perspectives in response to the interview guide. Responses were audio-recorded with a cell phone, and notes were taken on my copy of the interview guide.
6. Prompts and probes were used as appropriate, so participants could talk more about particular concerns or be reflective which can add to the depth and richness of interview data (Hatch, 2002).
7. Interview recordings were transcribed, contextual information added, and interview logs created.

### **Program Observations**

The goal of observation was to understand the participants' world as seen through their culture, setting, or social phenomenon, and direct observation permitted a better understanding (Hatch, 2002). My colleagues were asked to conduct the program observations on account of the

IRB reviewer's concern that disciplinary action could result if I witnessed an inappropriate action by program staff.

1. Observers were given a copy of the School-Age PQA Form A to use as a reference and indicator guide as they observed program quality and activities. Four of the seven quality indicators will be used as the remaining three indicators focus more on organizational components (see Appendix B).
2. Observers were given an observation protocol (see Appendix C) to record their observations and perceptions in the presence and absence of regular child care teachers.
3. Observers were asked to record observations during separate observation periods noting engagement, activities, ratios, and interactions.
4. Observers were asked to spend additional time completing their observations and perceptions by filling in additional detailed information before close of the next day. I met with the observers to assist with identification of areas that would benefit from additional information.
5. Observers were non-participant observers and recorded data without direct involvement with the program activities (Creswell, 2013).
6. Observers transcribed their notes immediately following the observational periods incorporating rich and thick descriptions.

Stake (2010) suggested researchers triangulate their evidence to either confirm that the derived meaning is correct or highlight the need to examine differences to see important multiple meanings. This case study triangulated data from semistructured interviews, observations, and detailed field notes. Interviewing used in conjunction with observations allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives and provided a gateway into events and

experiences that have not been observed (Hatch, 2002). Reflexivity kept me mindful of how my knowledge and experience with out-of-school time programs and quality programming influenced the findings, conclusions, and interpretations made.

### **Field Notes**

Field notes were taken during the observations at site visits and were composed of written notes. The goal of taking field notes was to record moments, interactions, and experiences that occurred to better help interpret and provide additional detail of what the observer witnessed in the natural child care setting. Field notes were taken on the observation form, and additional thoughts were added afterwards.

1. Raw descriptive notes were written simultaneously with the interview and observation guides.
2. Notes were used to describe the contexts of the study, and care was taken to keep notes descriptive and specific to participant's statements.
3. Notes were reviewed as soon as possible so a more complete description could be remembered from the setting.

### **Identification of Attributes**

As I studied school-age child care teachers' perceptions of quality programs, the following terms and definitions are provided for the attributes of this study: constructivism, engagement, program quality measures, school-age child care, self-care, and staff turnover.

*Constructivism*: the premise where a teacher helps a student find his or her own solutions through problem-solving strategies (Popkewitz, 1998).

*Engagement*: the extent to which youth enjoy, are interested in, and are challenged by their youth program (Greene et al., 2013)

*Program quality measures*: factors assessed using activity observations, and includes supportive environments, opportunities for purposeful engagement, and structured interactions (Leos-Urbel, 2013).

*School-age child care*: all aspects of non-parent, non-school care including the hours before and after school (Laird et al., 1998).

*Self-care*: elementary or middle school children who are without adult supervision during the after-school hours whether they are at home, a friend's house, or in public places (Ekot, 2012).

*Staff turnover*: the rate at which an organization gains or loses employees, or it may also be determined in how long employees stay in their employment positions (Currie & Hill, 2012).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

In this section I describe the data analysis procedures for the semistructured interviews and observations. Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning, which often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesis, comparison, and pattern finding (Hatch, 2002). As I analyzed the data to generate meaning, each review provided greater insight which helped me communicate the findings.

### **Interviews**

An inductive approach (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002) was used to analyze the interview data from this qualitative study. The inductive process entailed working back and forth between the data to identify codes until I established a comprehensive set of themes (Creswell, 2013). To aid in this analysis, I followed Hatch's (2002) nine-step inductive method, specifically: (a) identification of frames of analysis, (b) creation of domains based on the frames reference, (c) identification and coding of salient domains, (d) refinement of domains based on relationships

found in the data, (e) deciding whether the data supported or contradicted the identified domains, (f) analysis within the domains, (g) identification of themes across the domains, (h) outlining the associations within and among the domains, and (i) selection of data excerpts to support domain choices.

Inductive data analysis began with a solid data set broken down into analyzable parts called *frames of analysis*, which were the specific parameters through which the data were examined (Hatch, 2002). Participants' specific words and general statements were separated from the individual and grouped with others according to similarities. New frames that emerged as the data were collected were incorporated as appropriate or replaced existing ones based on what the data supported. The frames of analysis I identified included perspectives on (a) quality programming, (b) program quality as influenced by staff turnover, (c) teacher and assistant roles and relationships, (d) teacher-participant interactions, and (e) teacher competency.

1. Within the identified frames, domains were created from categories of meanings that reflected relationships represented in the data. Domains are a way to express semantically an understanding how participants understand their worlds (Hatch, 2002). Once domains were identified, the data were read and reviewed to find examples of domain relationships.
2. Domains were coded for organizational purposes. Codification of data were where various codes were assigned to the data and where each code represented an interesting concept or abstraction (Yin, 2014). Hatch (2002) suggested assigning a Roman numeral to the domain and a capital letter to elements of the domain to aid in keeping the data organized in the data itself and on a separate domain sheet which would function like an outline.

3. The data were reviewed looking for relationships among certain terms and by exploration of expanded domains.
4. The data were analyzed to see whether it supported or contradicted the identified domains and statements incorporated as appropriate.
5. Data within the domains were evaluated for complexity, richness, and depth.
6. Themes across domains were explored for relationships among relationships.
7. An outline was completed showing how all the analysis fit together.
8. The data were revisited once again to search for examples that can be included in the text of the findings.

### **Program Observations**

Hatch's (2002) interpretive model was used to analyze the program observation data. The model was comprised of seven steps: (a) immersion in the data so impressions reflected the overall data set, (b) documentation of impressions obtained while gathering data, (c) documentation of spontaneous memos, (d) study of memos for salient interpretations, (e) creation of a draft summary, (f) review of interpretations with participants, and (g) revision of summary and identification of excerpts that supported interpretation. When interpretive analysis processes are used in conjunction with inductive processes, such as the one used in the interview analysis above, studies are richer, and findings are more convincing because interpretation permeated everything that was done inductive (Hatch, 2002).

Program observation steps of analysis follow:

1. Read through the observation data repeatedly to get a sense of what was and was not included.

2. Reviewed impressions generated during observations to identify insights that might be beneficial for systematic interpretations.
3. Studied the impressions noting memos of what was happening within the social contexts and looked for new impressions that could develop into interpretations.
4. Compared the spontaneous impressions (c) and the systematic impression (b) to see which ones were worthy of inclusion in the final report.
5. Looked for places that related directly to the interpretations in the memos.
6. Wrote a summary that communicated my explanations, insights, conclusions, and understandings in a story like format, so readers could understand.
7. Conducted a member check (Koelsch, 2013) where participants were invited to give feedback on the interpretations.
8. Revised summaries based on member checks and looked for quotes to include.

### **Field Notes**

Field notes were reviewed and analyzed using aspects of Hatch's (2002) interpretative model. The field notes steps of analysis follow:

1. Raw field notes documenting as much information as possible were taken in the moment within the constraints of the environment.
2. Notes were later converted into research protocols through a process of "filling in" the original notes by making a more complete description based on what was remembered (Hatch, 2002).
3. Impressions and preliminary interpretations beyond the field note record were noted.

In the next section I discussed possible limitations and delimitations of the research design.



## **Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

In this section I discuss the situations and circumstances that may have affected or restricted my methods and analysis of research data.

### **Limitations**

As I researched school-age child care teachers' perceptions of quality programming, certain limitations beyond my control may have affected my study. One limitation was that I did not gather published quantitative data and did not have a direct measure to assess staff members' social relationships with each other nor how long individuals worked together. Relationships, a fun atmosphere, and meaningful social ties at work can affect emerging adult employees' willingness to stay on the job (Ellingson et al. 2015; Tews et al., 2013). The transient nature of entry-level, low wage positions was another limitation. Asher (2012) indicated a transient workforce could lead to high turnover rates because workers were less likely to be invested in the sustainability of the program.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations define the boundaries of a study. My study was delimited by the sample size of 13 teachers who worked in one public school district in southeastern Michigan. Teachers self-selected participation which confined the data to those willing to participate. The study was also delimited by programs with an average of 30 students, which restricted data on lower enrolled sites. Data gathered consisted of interviews, as well as member checks, observations, and fieldnotes. Additionally, finite time was allowed to complete this study, which provided another delimitation.

## **Validation**

This section discusses how I aimed to avoid bias and conducted research ethically with high standards.

### **Credibility**

Qualitative studies do not have finite or concrete answers, but offer explanations, information, and descriptions regarding the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). Given the data collection procedures in qualitative case study research are not routinized, there are judgment calls regarding the continuous interaction between the data being collected, as well as theoretical and ethical issues (Yin, 2014). I was mindful of my judgment calls and carefully collected and reported the data in a credible manner by trying to avoid partiality. Bias could occur on my part involving the interview questions, use of probes for additional information, and interviewees. Avoiding bias is one part of a broader set of research ethics (Yin, 2014), and to provide credible and valid research, I avoided overgeneralization, conducted member checks (Koelsch, 2013), and remained open to contrary evidence. In addition, I used well established research methods (interviews, observations, field notes, and member checks) to conduct this study and had a wide range of informants so the information obtained was constructed based on the contributions of an array of people (Shenton, 2004).

### **Dependability**

Dependability, accurate data collection, and interpretation were essential to access the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2013). To assist with dependability, I used purposeful sampling, conducted systematic semistructured interviews with prepared guiding questions, and retained all written and audio, observation, and transcript recordings. I also conducted member checks (Koelsch, 2013) to determine if participants' stories were portrayed accurately by

providing them with the write-up and offering the opportunity to provide commentary. Participant input on their transcripts increased the level of transactional validity (accurate reporting of information) and contributed to the transformational validity (mobilization towards action) of the research (Koelsch, 2013).

Credibility and dependability were increased by triangulating data from the study (Stake, 1995). I used semistructured interviews, program observations, and field notes to derive descriptive and interpretive summary statements. London and Gurantz (2013) indicated that any observational study is subject to potential bias from omitted variables. Member checking helped triangulate the observations and interpretations (Stake, 1995). This section discussed the precautions I took to approach credibility and dependability. The next section describes my expected findings.

### **Expected Findings**

This section describes what I expected to find prior to researching child care teachers' insights and perceptions of quality programming. Out-of-school time programs do not have a standard operating format and can vary regarding program staff, number of participants, hours, location, and goals (Durlak et al., 2010). Because such programs surround the school day, positions are usually part-time, split shift, have limited hours, and offer low wages, all of which often translates into transient front-line workers. Quality programs have been measured using regulatory entities and professional development opportunities (Baldwin & Wilder, 2014; Cole, 2011) and defined based on emphasis of program aspects such as structure, physical environment, activities, staff-participant interactions, youth engagement, and staff competencies, including skills and implementation style (Baldwin & Wilder, 2014; Bean et al., 2016; Frazier et al., 2013; Hirsch et al., 2010).

I expected to find that front-line workers defined program quality as having the ability, resources, and staffing to successfully plan and implement activities. I anticipated programs with high staff turnover would have programmatic issues from an oversight and implementation standpoint. In programs with high staff turnover, I predicted teachers would report having difficulty implementing plans consistently because the classroom routine, structure, and predictability would be difficult to maintain amongst continual staff changes. In addition, I expected to find teachers would prefer to operate programs short staffed (when possible) rather than spend time training a new person who might likely only remain for a short length of time. Understanding quality programming from a ground level could inform the literature by providing an inside perspective on quality programming from a teacher's perspective.

### **Ethical Issues of the Study**

The ethical concerns included potential conflicts of interest, my position in the organization, how I planned to minimize risk and bring benefit to all parties concerned, and measures to reduce the negative impact of bias. I followed the recommended policies regarding human research subjects as outlined by Concordia University's Institutional Review Board. Personal names and specific site locations were removed from inclusion in this study. Voice recordings were erased from my phone once transcribed using an internet-based voice recorder. I will save the hand-written program observations and field notes in a locked secure location for three years following the conclusion of this study and shred the files thereafter.

### **Conflict of Interest Assessment**

Researchers have a moral responsibility to respondents and future researchers to conduct ethical studies and ensure their projects have a potential for a beneficial outcome (Harding, 2013). Given that I worked with human participants, I needed to provide full disclosure of the

nature and intent of my research and what I intend to do with the results. Before I conducted my research study, I obtained approval from Concordia University–Portland’s Institutional Review Board and my school district. Once permission was obtained, participants were provided a recruitment letter (Appendix E) detailing the purpose of the study. Those who agreed were given a letter of informed consent to sign which indicated their willingness to participate in the study (Creswell, 2013). Teacher participation was completely voluntary, and there were no incentives for participating teachers or repercussions for those who chose not to participate. All personal and identifying information was removed so participants could not easily be identified. Pseudonyms were given so identities would not be revealed, and any disclosure of personal or private information not directly related to the study was dissuaded (Stake, 2010).

### **Researcher’s Position**

The relationship between the researcher and respondent was crucial to the success of the interview. I was especially mindful of my ability to observe and hear the respondents which could bias interviews, especially face-to-face ones (Harding, 2013). Participants selected for the study were given a chance to ask questions prior to the interview and observations. Beginning and termination options were made clear. The interview guide (Appendix A) and observation form (Appendix C) guided my inquiry. The interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed upon setting chosen to maximize the responsiveness of participants being interviewed (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). I conducted, transcribed, and interpreted all the data, except for the program observations per the IRB’s preference, and allowed participants to review for completeness and accuracy. I have an oversight but indirect supervisory role of the school-age child care teachers at the 18 schools. Pseudonyms were given to the schools and interviewees to help maintain confidentiality.

## **Other Ethical Issues**

Research with human subjects should be safe, effective, and conducted ethically guided by the principles set forth by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's Belmont Report (U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978). The Belmont Report outlines the three basic principles that should guide research involving humans as respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. To apply these principles to my research, I assured participants received sufficient information about the study in a comprehensible manner, informed participants of the voluntary nature of the study, provided an assessment of risks and benefits, and received informed consent.

The close but indirect oversight I have over the out-of-school time programs is beneficial because it gives me a good working knowledgeable of aspects that contribute to quality programming and some awareness of the issues teachers face regarding staff turnover. Having a level of understanding allowed me to make interpretations about the issue, but also contributed to my bias as a researcher. Given that all qualitative analysis involves interpretation, I kept in mind the possibility that alternate interpretations were possible (Harding, 2013). All researchers have bias (Stake, 2010), and my aim to avoid it took constant awareness to be sure I asked good questions, listened well, stayed adaptive, and remained open and sensitive to contrary evidence (Yin, 2014).

## **Chapter 3 Summary**

In this chapter I justified my choice of a qualitative instrumental case study design for the purpose of studying perceptions of high turnover and quality programming. I explained how I conducted the study and its overall design, including the data collection and analysis procedures. In addition, I discussed how I avoided bias and conducted research with high standards, the

limitations and delimitations of my research design, ethical considerations, and my expected findings. In Chapter 4, I document the findings.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

In this section, I present the analysis of the data I collected in this qualitative instrumental case study and discuss the findings. This study examined the question: What are the experiences and challenges of school-age child care teachers from a school district in southeastern Michigan with operating quality programs? The study was also guided by two research subquestions: How do school-age child care teachers define quality programming? What are the experiences of school-age child care teachers with staff turnover and quality programming? Semistructured interviews, program observations, and detailed field notes were used to collect the data. A description of each participant is included, followed by a summary of the findings, the data and results, and a concluding summary. In Chapter 5, I evaluate the research by lending my voice to discuss how it contributed to the community of practice and contributed to the literature.

### **Description of the Sample and Participants**

The context for this study is a public-school system in southeastern Michigan with approximately 17,000 students housed in over 30 schools, two thirds of which are elementary schools. The district's Community Department oversees the before and after school programming in the majority of the elementary schools, and across those programs, the lead teachers had varying degrees of formal education and/or experiences in a child-related field. Assistant teachers had a broader range of training and/or experience in child and nonchild related fields. A purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002) was used to determine the nature and size of the participants. Invitations were sent to all teachers with programs of 30 or more students, and 13 teachers consented to participate. There were 10 women and three men representing a range of ethnicities: seven teachers were Black, three were White, two were Multiracial, and one was Mexican. Teachers were diverse in ages, with three in their 20s and



40s, two in their 30s, four in their 50s, and one in her 60s. Education attainment ranged from some college/life experience to bachelor's degrees.

**Brenda.** Brenda is a Multiracial woman in her early 20s. She has a reassuring face, bubbly personality and was very chatty infusing her infectious laugh throughout the interview. Brenda was easy to engage and willingly responded to questions and inquiries. Brenda is new to this district and works as a supervisor both before and after school. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and early childhood and has worked with children for the past 9 years.

**Amber.** Amber is a White woman in her late 40s and has experience working with special needs children. Amber has a wide face, rosy cheeks, and eyes that readily shared her nervousness with speaking in formal settings. Amber diffused warmth and would often seek clarification by repeating a word or statement when asked questions as if she needed more time to gather and process her thoughts. Amber completed several college courses and has earned her child development associate credential. She has worked as a lead teacher in daycare, preschool and child care settings for over 25 years. Amber has been with this district for a couple years.

**Samantha.** Samantha is a White woman in her late 30s. She was laid-back and consciously used a significant portion of her energy to push past her physical discomfort and remain connected. She was down to earth, easy to engage and had a back-to-basics approach to quality programming. Samantha holds a bachelor's degree in sociology, works as a supervisor before and after school, and has been working with this school system for the past 5 years with only a short break in between.

**Rebecca.** Rebecca is a Black woman in her early 60s. She was sincere, passionate, and attentive as she eagerly responded to questions. Rebecca spoke from a practical stance and had frank answers, elaborating when prompted. She shared firm viewpoints on items she was

passionate about while thoughtfully presenting her position. Rebecca holds a master's degree in guidance and counseling and has years of related experience from her former career. Rebecca choose to work with elementary aged students to broaden her knowledge of developmentally appropriate programming and has been a part of the district for the past year and a half.

**Cheryl.** Cheryl is a mid 50s-year-old Mexican woman whose speech was soft spoken and courteous to the point that it almost seemed apologetic. Cheryl was sincere in her attempt to understand and be understood. She sought clarification when needed and often ended her statements with the question "You know what I mean?" in an attempt to ensure understanding. Cheryl works as an assistant in the before school program and has a bachelor's degree in communication studies with a minor in sociology.

**Mary.** Mary is a Black woman in her mid-20s. She was easy to engage and has a welcoming broad smile. She came prepared to the interview having thought about possible questions and answers. Mary gave clear, concise responses but willingly elaborated when requested. She was pleasant, upbeat and overall optimistic in her approach. She works as an assistant in the before and after school program and is currently in school working towards a degree in education after a recent switch from political science.

**Hannah.** Hannah is a Black woman in her mid-50s with a wealth of experience. She has a warm, inviting demeanor and thoughtfully responded to questions. She carefully chose her words and reflected on her statements as she spoke. She has a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and works as a supervisor before and after school.

**Rose.** Rose is a Black woman in her early 50s who works as a paraprofessional in addition to a school-age child care assistant and has over 15 years of experience. She expressed herself in a clear, coherent manner and was analytical throughout the interview. Rose has

relatives who have participated in out-of-school time programs the majority of their formative years, so she was able to speak from both the teacher and parent perspective as she gave a holistic yet detailed view of her viewpoints. Rose has an associate's degree and is working towards her bachelor's degree in special education with a concentration in emotional impairment.

**Connie.** Connie is Black woman in her mid 20s and early in her career. She has a bubbly personality, spontaneously interjected comments, and had a story/example to illustrate her words. Connie had no difficulty talking at length on questions she found more interest in. She had a positive outlook which was projected during in her animated display of gestures as she spoke. Connie successfully completed several college courses in early childhood education but has yet to complete her degree. She works before and after school and subs as a teacher's assistant during the day.

**Susan.** Susan is a seasoned White woman in her 50s with years of experience working with children. She was easy to engage, spontaneously verbal, and pleasant throughout the interview. She provided detailed responses with plenty of examples making it easy to imagine what her program looks like on any given day. Susan has worked at several schools and often drew examples from several locations. She has completed college classes in elementary education but not her degree. She works as the supervisor before and after school at two different sites.

**Ryan.** Ryan is in his mid 40s and a tall, slender man with dark chocolate skin. He is mild mannered and responded to the questions with a slow, steady pace. He tended to answer with single word responses or short statements. Ryan carefully considered each word before speaking and reflected on his thoughts from time to time making small revisions. He seemed

slightly reluctant to talk as if to avoid misspeaking. As time went on, however, he became more comfortable speaking and had more detailed initial responses, but prompting was still needed to elicit a more in-depth reply. Ryan has years of child care experience and attended college but is not currently working towards a degree.

**Charles.** Charles is a White man in his mid 40s. He was polite, charming, and had a calm demeanor, which made him come across as self-assured. His friendly even-tempered style was evident throughout the interview. Charles was confident answering questions and provided candid feedback. He addressed each question thoroughly and often provided analogies to further his perspective. Charles has a business background and works as an assistant before and after school. He is relatively new to field of education, pursuing youth work as his second career with hopes of becoming a special education teacher.

**Henry.** Henry is a Black man in his late 30s, of slender build and a jovial personality. Henry was initially reluctant to be interviewed as he considered himself not a good interviewer, but to his satisfaction, he spoke clearly and had well-developed thoughts. Although he would often respond with one-word answers, when prompted, he readily provided more detail. Henry has worked as a paraeducator and an after-school assistant for many years. He has an associate's degree in liberal arts and is currently continuing his education with hopes of completing his bachelor's degree in a couple years.

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

I used a qualitative case study to explore the perceptions of school-age child care teachers' regarding quality programming in a southeastern Michigan public school system. My research was an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) because it focused on information gathered from several program sites within a single school system. Specifically, the study

centered on the research question: What are the experiences and challenges of school-age child care teachers from a school district in southeastern Michigan with operating quality programs? I used semistructured interviews, program observations, and detailed field notes to collect the data for this case study. The audiotapes were transcribed, categorized, and analyzed inductively.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

This section provides additional clarity to data collection and analysis. I collected data in three phases: semistructured interviews, program observations, and detailed field notes. First, I conducted face-to-face interviews with 13 child care teachers. Member checks were conducted with each participant by means of requesting their feedback on the transcribed interviews. Second, three administrative colleagues conducted before-school and after-school program observations at various child-care sites to comply with an IRB's directive. Third, detailed field notes were taken during program observations, and child care staff were given an opportunity to comment on what was noticed. Data were analyzed using an inductive approach (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002) where I worked back and forth between the data to identify codes and subsequent themes.

#### **Semistructured Interviews**

Once I obtained the required permission from my school district, I scheduled and conducted face-to-face interviews with 13 child care teachers. I developed an 11-question interview protocol consisting of three demographic questions; Questions 4-6 related to the participant's views on quality programming and component relationships; Questions 7-8 related to roles and accountability; and Questions 9-11 related to teacher turnover. Interviews were administered between October 20 and December 30, 2017, and on average lasted approximately 50 minutes. Clarifying questions were asked as needed. For example, Rebecca talked about an

instance where she was not seen by colleagues as the program supervisor despite being assigned to that role. I asked her to share additional thoughts about the role perception played in quality programming. Rebecca responded:

It's all about perception because it's a problem with all issues. If they don't see you in the role that you're in, it affects how the children relate to you. It affects how other staff people relate to you. It affects how people outside the program relate to you, and it affects what you can basically get done.

Each interview took place at an agreed upon time and location convenient to each participant and in a place that provided confidentiality. Discussions were conducted in coffee shops, administrative offices, and restaurants. I recorded the interviews with my cell phone and sent them to the REV voice recorder service for transcription within minutes of concluding the interview. Each participant was given a copy of their transcript to review and provide commentary, also known as a member check (Koelsch, 2013). Three participants wrote additional thoughts on their transcripts and a few others contacted me to add additional details. Member checks (Appendix I), seen as a vital process to qualitative research (Stake, 2010), allowed participants the opportunity to give input, and helped increase the level of transactional validity (accurate reporting of information) and transformational validity (mobilization towards action) of this research study (Koelsch, 2013).

I used Hatch's (2002) inductive analysis to analyze the interview data. I read each transcript and after each interview question (Appendix A), I made notations on the transcription of both the general and main ideas of each participant's response. I read the transcripts again and noted any concepts I overlooked as well as supporting thoughts of the participants' ideas. As I worked back and forth through the data, I created five frames of analysis: (a) understanding what

makes a quality program, (b) understanding what makes a competent child care teacher, (c) understanding how teachers provide a quality experience for children, (d) understanding how staff work together to maintain quality, and (e) understanding how changes in staff influence the program. These frames of analysis served as the specific parameters that allowed me to examine the data more thoughtfully (Hatch 2002).

I studied the data through each frame of analysis and created a block chart which listed participants' main ideas and concepts to each question across the 13 participants. Each frame had a comprehensive list of resulting perspectives. Responses that were similar based on words or concepts were grouped together under a domain name. For example, participants identified aspects such as runs smoothly, clean environment, and aware of allergies as relating to a domain of safety. I assigned each concept a specific code for organizational purposes. I then reviewed the data again and looked for relationships across the codes. I made a separate notation for cross code relationships and reviewed the data one last time and looked for supportive ideas and quotes that illustrated the codes. This process of analysis resulted in 19 identified codes (Appendix G).

Next, I took the 19 codes and looked for patterns within and across the codes and divided the data based on themes. Through this process the following five themes emerged: (a) quality, (b) interactions with children, (c) teacher qualifications, (d) staff relationships, and (e) staff turnover. I reviewed the data one last time and looked for supportive and illustrative statements of each theme.

### **Program Observations**

Initially, I planned to conduct all program observations. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) requested I have colleagues obtain the data due to concerns I could inadvertently penalize

participants if I witnessed something that required legal or formal follow-up. I verbalized concerns of reliability and informed the IRB that the program staff were used to direct observations from me because part of my responsibilities required program oversight, which included routine program observations. Despite my viewpoint, the IRB maintained their position. Thus, three colleagues recorded observations of program activities, teacher-student, and teacher-teacher interactions on the School-Age PQA Form A (Appendix C). Observers visited child care programs with more than 30 enrolled students, and I used Hatch's (2002) interpretive model to analyze the data.

Administrative colleagues were nonparticipant observers and recorded their descriptive notes without direct involvement with the program or activities. Before-school and after-school programs were visited for prearranged observation sessions. After observations, my colleagues filled in additional interpretative notes that enhanced the guide with rich and thick descriptions (Creswell, 2013). For example, one colleague observed a situation where two siblings were engaged in an activity and something occurred that led the students to start "swatting at each other." The observer noted the site supervisor was smiling as she went over to the students and addressed the behavior. While the observer could not hear the specifics of what was said at the time, she overheard the staff person's voice tone and stated it was "warm and respectful." The situation was resolved within minutes and the siblings returned to cooperative play. My colleagues discussed the general program observations with teachers prior to leaving when time permitted or within 24 hours. I met with my colleagues following the site observations and discussed their experiences and clarified aspects of the observation.



## **Field Notes**

Descriptive notes were written during the interview and program observations. Notes were reviewed shortly afterwards so more information could be remembered from the site (Hatch, 2002; see Appendix B). Care was taken so information gathered remained descriptive and specific to participants' statements or observations. Stake (2010) suggested researchers triangulate their evidence to either confirm the derived meaning is correct or draw attention to the need to examine differences for possible multiple meanings. I triangulated data from semistructured interviews, observations, and detailed field notes by looking at each data set independently, and then looking across the data. I examined the codes and themes created from the interviews, descriptive statements from what was seen and heard during the observations, and the expanded, detailed notes based on impressions and what was remembered. I concentrated on patterns within and across the three sources of data using constant comparisons as I divided the information based on the emergent themes.

## **Summary of the Findings**

The findings revealed teachers thought safety was the key component of quality programming. Programs needed sufficient structure to make sure the environment was physically safe for students and have emotionally supportive components, so students felt mentally and emotionally safe as well. Safety was seen as everyone's job. Physical safety involved monitoring the physical environment, practicing safety drills, and being aware of allergy and medication issues. Mental and emotional student safety took place when teachers were compassionate and consistent in their interactions with student.

In addition to safety, teachers said quality programs allowed students to have a voice and choice in the activities offered and provided a variety of learning opportunities to keep multiage

students engaged. Teachers believed allowing students to be part of the decision-making process helped convey the importance of student's opinions. In addition, engagement was seen a positive way to avoid negative behaviors due to boredom. Participants noted both formal and informal training were valuable aspects of quality programming, and that knowledge could be obtained through formal coursework and/or life experiences. Regardless of how learning was obtained, prepared teachers were needed to provide good program content.

The findings also suggested quality programs had teachers who worked cohesively together and as such served to buffer against the effects of turnover. The degree to which turnover's influence was perceived as positive or negative depended on how the staff worked together throughout the transition. Program observations supported the teachers' perceptions in that programs with good communication had less disruption with when a new staff member was present. Five themes emerged from the findings: quality programming, interactions with participants, teacher qualifications, staff relationships, and staff turnover.

### **Presentation of Data and Results**

I used an inductive approach (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002) to analyze the data collected from the semistructured interviews, and an interpretive approach (Hatch, 2002) to analyze the data collected from the program observations and detailed field notes. The data and results of my analysis are presented below.

#### **Semistructured Interviews**

Working back and forth between the interview and observation data allowed identification of codes which subsequently helped identify a set of themes (Creswell, 2013). Nineteen codes (Appendix G) were revealed from relationships among the data which served to support five emergent themes: *quality, interactions with children, teacher qualifications, staff*

*relationships, and staff turnover.* The five themes were each supported by codes as described by participants.

**Theme: Quality** was supported by codes *safety, variety of activities, structure, and engaged teachers.*

**Code 1: Safety.** The data demonstrated the majority of teachers identified safety as a primary aspect of quality. Susan viewed safety as essential; she stated, “Number one [a school-age child care program] needs to be safe, then it needs to be fun.” Ryan agreed by saying “Without safety, we can't do anything right. You know, we can't enjoy our day, or eat our food, or have fun.” Rose said, “Safety is all of our job. It's everyone's job to make sure that these kids are safe while they are in our care.”

Charles viewed safety as not only the teacher’s job but also a responsibility. He said, “I think we have a responsibility to make sure that the students are safe. The parents expect it. The State from a certification [standpoint] expects it, both the physical and emotional safety of the student.” Cheryl shared a similar thought, stating, “I think it's important for [programs] to be safe, [a] safe place mentally for them, and also safe physically.” Cheryl was seen modeling a supportive emotional climate when interacting with two girls playing a board game where there was a disagreement in the rules. Cheryl asked the girls to use “I” statements, so the other “friend” would not get offended from feeling blamed. Brenda shared an example of how the topic of safety is discussed and practiced at her school. She said:

Right now, our kids are really into safety. And it's all about the fire drill, the storm, the severe weather and a lock-down drill. So, all they wanna know is if they're safe and how are we gonna do this? "Can we practice a fire drill? Can we practice a fire drill in the hallway? Can we practice a fire drill in the gym? Oh, [and] what if an intruder [is] in here

[and] we need to leave, can we practice the [how] we'll walk [or] if we needed to run to the church.

Teachers also highlighted cleanliness and tidiness of the physical environment as aspects of safety. Mary said:

I think clean goes along with safe. We try to minimize spreading germs and sharing cooties in our program. . . . We always sanitize when the kids leave. We clean everything. . . . I think it's just one less worry for parents. . . . I think the parents appreciate that their kids are in a clean environment every day, and that makes the parents happy, which keeps the kids happy and it keeps us happy.

During several site visits, teachers were observed cleaning and sanitizing tables prior to serving the children snacks but wiping down surfaces following was inconsistent. It was also observed that eating surfaces received more attention than floors. Some sites relied on the custodial staff to clean and prepare the floor space for the next program.

Similar to Mary, Connie said, “Making sure the playground is safe [by] making sure there's no chips in the slide or chairs that will tip over. [Basically] making sure the furniture is all safe.” Cheryl discussed safety as it pertains to allergies. She said, “Everything's clean, you know, everything's in place, kids in there have allergies [and] you have their medicine. Everybody's on board, [and you] know who's allergic to what.” Connie echoed a related thought, “Having a list of the children, having their allergies [listed], [and] being able to know the needs of each child.” Allergy attentiveness was modeled during a couple observations. Teachers had students with life-threatening allergies and required rescue medications handy at all times. Staff at these sites were observed to be carry the medication in a sling back backpack and to trade it off to other program staff depending on the child’s activity (e.g., gym, outdoors)

Mary summarized her thoughts on safety by stating:

When things are safe, everything runs so much [more] smoothly. Also, [with] our safety, it provides a little bit of structure for the kids, so they know what to do in any situation where they might get hurt or someone else might get hurt. It just makes the program flow a little bit more because we're more on top of things and the kids are more on top of things, and they are more comfortable with us.

**Code 2: *Variety of activities.*** Teachers identified giving students a choice of age appropriate materials and projects contributes to a quality program. Cheryl said, “I think it's important to have activities, age appropriate activities, like for the kids. . . You have to have activities and games, for everyone, for all ages.” Rebecca shared an identical thought, “I would define [a quality program] as a program that's able to offer a variety of activities, a variety of learning experiences, a variety of creativity as far as different types of art projects, just basically having multiple types of projects that a child might be interested in or may be able to learn about in some type of degree.” Connie thought variety meant offering choices and said, “Actually giving them something that they have a choice [in]...making it a choice program. [We should be] giving kids different stations to go to, not really making them do it, but just giving them the opportunity to have a creative side and maybe make a craft or do some science or do some social studies.” Multi-choice activities were noted in a program observed to have four activities in the main space simultaneously occurring on different tables plus a separate reading area. The observer also noted structured activities were present in the gym and outdoor play was free choice.

Offering students a voice in the type of activity provided was also identified as important. Samantha stated, “Having them be a part of the decision-making process for what they would

like to choose, activities that they would like to participate in . . . , [and] how they want to spend their time [matters].” Connie said, “You want to make sure that you're going to give them the materials that they want to use, so you can kind of see what their imagination is going to be, what they're going to create if you give them [for example] these blocks.”

**Code 3: Structure.** Teachers noted structure contributed to quality by providing parameters for students to have consistency and fun while being safe. Henry thought children understood boundaries and expectations better with structure. He said:

With structure, children will understand. For instance, at child care, we have a routine where the children will sit down [or] sit on the stage, wait for us to take attendance, and they know at this time not to go and play games or walk off. They know a specific area to be, so we make sure that they're safe and they're all there. With that consistency and structure, the children know to actually be there, and it's consistent and makes it safe for them, and it makes the job actually easier, as well.

Mary viewed structure as a byproduct of safety. She thought safety “provides a little bit of structure for the kids so they know what to do in any situation where they might get hurt or someone else might get hurt.” Brenda believed a structured program involved having age and developmentally appropriate targets. She said:

If you have age appropriate targets, the development[al level] has to be appropriate for the kids [so] they know what to come in and do. Without such targets, kids are gonna start, and be bored, they're gonna lose interest, a bunch of things are gonna come up. [For example], if you already know where they're at in [the game] scrabble, maybe now you can take scrabble to hangman. Instead of having the letters and stuff you have to start guessing riddles to it.

Connie thought structure made the difference between “Having a program that's just kind of thrown together versus a program that's like ready and the kids are engaged, and things are running a lot smoother. . . .If you have everything kind of written down and you're organized, and the program has that quality that you're looking for, [structure] comes natural[ly] and you won't have to worry about it.” Ryan and Samantha’s programs were observed to have a good balance of structure and opportunities for students to make authentic choices within the activities. Observers noted planned art materials and activities were available, but students were encouraged to engage with the materials as desired.

***Code 4: Engaged teachers.*** Participants thought teachers who were engaged by being present in body and mind contributed to quality programming. Hanna believed teachers were “the key component because if you don't have a good quality staff you don't have a good program.” Susan thought teachers who honestly cared for children are needed. She said:

You need to have a staff that really likes children. There are people that think they can do the job, but they don't like children and that makes it very, very uncomfortable for kids as well as other staff. You really need to like kids. You need to be able to relate to the kids as well and make sure that you want them to have fun. Again, you have to show that you care about them and that you're there to listen to them. This is their time.

Observers noted several teachers engaging with children in positive ways, such as sitting with students during activities, maintaining eye contact, interjecting questions, lowering their body to eye level and Ryan in particular was very conscious to let the students do most of the talking. Brenda characterized engaged teachers as “dedicated to work” and “present in the work that they do.” She defined dedicated as “Someone that says they're gonna be there when they're gonna be

there. They're gonna do something that they said they're gonna do.” To illustrate her thoughts, Brenda said:

Someone that's, you know, they're not always thinking about the job but if they see something that we're doing that they're dedicated to bringing something in. Like if we're doing a tree study and trees are turning colors. But in our neighborhood, there's no red trees, maybe they'll be dedicated to collect a bag of red leaves to bring in. To show us different things.

Samantha thought engaged teachers should “have a passion for working with kids and have the energy and outgoingness to get kids excited.” Similarly, Connie thought engaged teachers should be able to intrigue children by extending activities to the point where “They don't even want to take [their project] home, they want to leave it, so they can keep working on it every time they're in the program.”

Research participants thought students should be engaged on all levels. Charles said, “It's the teacher's role [to have] engagement on all levels.” He continued, “Programs where there's more engagement with the staff and kids...runs a little bit more effectively. The kids who may be having more fun may get more out of the program. I think that staff seems to be having more fun and getting more out of the program [as well].” He added “I think that engagement really is the difference, I would say, if I were to summarize it.” In a parallel thought, Rose said, “I think that when we're working with children, we need to make sure that we are academically teaching them, [but also] emotionally, [and] mentally [as well]. I think we need to help them grow in all those areas...we [should] teach to the whole child.” Ryan thought formal education was [an] important [part of engagement] but other skills contributed as well. He said, “Sometimes not having a college degree or anything might not always matter at the time, maybe



just [the] experience of them being a mother or grandmother, or father or grandfather, or uncle [is beneficial].”

**Theme: Interaction with Children** was supported by codes *positive guidance, trust, and creativity*.

**Code 5: Positive guidance.** The data showed positive guidance contributed to quality programming when teachers followed the child’s lead and cultivated those interests. Mary thought teachers should be “Letting the kids be creative and fostering that creative instinct or gene in them.” Hannah thought children “Should be given choices because that helps in the whole process of thinking, it says you're important, [and] it helps them later on in life also because as adults they'll be able to make choices.” Following the student’s lead was based on having understood the children’s needs/choices and having figured out, as Henry put it, “How you can connect what it is that you do at your program to them and their best interests to make it successful.”

Rose said, “I think it's our job to make child care inviting and enjoyable for the kids.” She thought to do so, teachers needed to let kids identify what they are interested in. She said, “I can say let's do mosaic art [and] you might have x amount of kids. But if the kids say, ‘Hey, why don't we do this?’ And all their friends are interested in it, you're gonna have a table full of kids doing art and then you have kids that are waiting for their turn because it's something that they are interested in.” Another way to provide positive guidance was by a connection with students. Henry said, “A lot of times if you interact and you engage, and you build a relationship with the children, you're able to have a more positive attitude. You understand what the children want.” He referred to connecting as having a rapport with students which he thought was “Definitely one of the most important things to have.” Brenda thought connecting with students occurred

when a staff member had the ability to just be present and aided in “Guiding their interests or being a part of their interest or taking their interest to the next level.” When children took the lead and had the support of the teachers, Henry believed “You [would] have a lot of children that want to step up and help others. With that, it also can become a domino effect for other leaders to grow amongst the child care program.” One teacher was observed to model a helpful behavior and then redirected a student through encouragement to hold the door open for others following afterwards. Observer noted that simple acts became more spontaneous later in the program while moving to another activity that required passing through doors.

**Code 6: Trust.** Participants said trust was built through time and communication and fostered a sense of safety. Henry said, “Trust is very important with working with children. . . The kids need to be able to feel safe around you. They need to understand that, if you tell them something, that it is for their best interest.” He believed “Communication is also very important, [because] through communication, you build trust. You have to make sure that you're being honest and open with people, so people understand and have a clear view of where it is that you're coming from.” Once established, trust should be cultivated. Rose said:

You basically start from scratch every day with a child who doesn't trust you. So, it's important that you build that trust. Get to know that child. What does this child like? What do they dislike? What are they interested in? By talking to a child and finding all these things out, they start building trust. They're gonna see you as someone they can come to and talk to and that's important.

Trust was also built by keeping the environment clean according to Mary. She said, “During our program, we always sanitize when the kids leave. We clean everything. At least once a week, all the toys get cleaned, so the kids don't have to worry about getting sick.” She further stated, “I

think it's just one less worry for parents. Even though we only have kids all day, it is about the parents, too. I think the parents appreciate that their kids are in a clean environment every day, and that makes the parents happy, which keeps the kids happy and it keeps us happy.” Observers noted children readily approached teachers and were generally responsive when asked questions aimed at resolving issues.

**Code 7: Creativity.** Teachers thought the environment should be conducive to providing a creative outlet for students. Rose thought an essential part of programs is “Letting the kids be creative and fostering that creative instinct or gene in them.” Brenda said, “Programs should have children's likes and dislikes...different things that children can adapt to, learn to do. . . [basically] just take what they know and keep digging deeper and making fun out of it. It's growing and learning the whole time.” Connie enjoyed the flexibility a creative environment provided because it allowed plans to be extended. She said, “I thought it was a one-day activity and it turns into a two-week activity . . .so [by] getting the kids being engaged, they got to the point where they don't even want to take it home, they want to leave it, so they can keep working on it every time they're in the program.” Flexibility was in fact one of Samantha's favorite program aspects, she said, “One of the things that I really enjoy about my job is that I do have the freedom and the creativity to build [a less canned program].”

Teachers differed on whether particular curriculums should be used so creativity is fostered. Brenda made the point that child care teachers are only with the students for a limited amount of time, and as such, did not “Think there should be a set curriculum or set anything. But I definitely think that after a long day . . .we should be geared to have fun and get up and go outside and interact and talk and converse and play games.” Samantha differed; she preferred no set curriculum based on thoughts that teachers should have children “be a part of the decision-

making process for what they would like to choose [regarding the] activities that they would like to participate in . . .empowering them to sort of make decisions regarding, you know, how they want to spend their time and [which will] get them excited to come back.” She added:

I think it stimulates the engagement. They're more excited. It takes away the pressure and anxiety that might otherwise be there in a more pressured situation where they're being evaluated in some way. But when it's just for fun, I think that there's a greater chance for quality. Because there's just no stress there, it's removed.

Charles agreed with both options. He said, “I think that students should actually have that particular curriculum that they have to cover in their every day school environment, I think that not necessarily an extension of that but being able to provide them with different exposure. A creative outlet that they may not get during the day.” He thought access to quality materials enhanced the curriculum, smaller ratios enhanced the experience for children and said that creativity was:

A stocking element [that] comes down to their gifts and their abilities. Somebody could take a very limited amount of resources and make the program just as good, if not better, then somebody who has all the access in the world. It's both. It's bridging that gap between utilizing the resources and ability to utilize those resources.

Observers noted programs had plans posted but most did not follow aspect as outlined. When asked, some teachers attributed the change due to the absence of regular staff or students opting out for a different activity or nothing at all.

**Theme: Teacher Qualifications** was supported by codes *trained, prepared, committed, passionate, role model*.

*Code 8: Trained.* Participants noted it was important teachers had formal or informal training and/or experience. Quality programs should have the “right staff” according to Rebecca who said, “When I say right staff, I'm saying staff with experience, and a staff that's willing to learn about children and about different topics. . . . But my strongest thing is just educating the staff in areas that they lack in.” Rebecca added, “You have a lot of people that have been with kids for years, decades, and I think the experience has a lot to do with the quality of your program, the experience people bring to the table.” Charles was in favor of formal training. He stated:

I think formal training is important. . . It's one thing to be passionate on what it is that you want to do and what it is that you bring to the table, whether it's a love of kids. It's another thing to make sure that you have the knowledge and resources to be able to deliver that. That's what I mean when I say adequate training, not so much instruction, necessarily, but safety. [For example] being able to lead a group of students in an art activity [and] having that knowledge to be able to execute it effectively. I think [it] enhances their experience. That [skill set] can be obtained through some training.

Hanna favored formal training as well, such as in early childhood, or at least “trained period in dealing with young children.” She said, “In a perfect world, the staff would have either an associate degree or an undergraduate degree. [I say] In a perfect world because then you know they've received the training.” She believed formal training provided knowledge about developmental stages and physical and cognitive development of the student as well as aided in “Gear[ing] your equipment towards that. Like, you just don't come up with an activity [be]cause, “Oh, it's so much fun.” But also, [you should think] does it help with the fine motor and large motor, what's the cognitive process, and does it help with the process of thinking.” Hanna was

concerned there were “A lot of people who are not trained in the field, their training comes because they are in the field . . .because that's the field they want to go into.”

Ryan valued both types of learning, whether it be “some type of educational background or some type of trade where they're knowledgeable of some things, or just being able to contribute something to the quality of the program. You know, sometimes, you don't have to always be enrolled in a school to get quality teaching or learning something. You can be reading [and] learning yourself.” He explained further, stating, “Sometimes not having a college degree or anything might not always matter at the time, maybe just [the] experience of them being a mother or grandmother, or father or grandfather, or uncle [is beneficial].” Formal or informal training/education was not displayed overtly according to observers based on general program functioning.

**Code 9: Prepared.** A prepared program was important for organizing the staff and student’s time according to teachers. Charles thought adequate planning was essential and done by “Making sure that we're planning ahead. Normally [planning is done] to make sure that everybody's on the same page [and] that we're taking advantage of things like the change of seasons or different events that are coming up throughout the school year or the calendar year.” Cheryl spoke of preparedness in terms of clear expectations. She thought clear expectations were needed so the teachers “know what's expected of them, like to be on time, or, everybody needs to pitch in . . .The supervisor may create a chore chart, like you know, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday you do the snack, and then Tuesday and Thursday you do the, you clean up.”

Preparation to Susan was a way to provide good program content. She said:

To have quality, you have to have good content because if you put out coloring sheets and a puzzle every single day, no one's going to want to do that. They're going to get very bored easily and bored kids tend to act up more than kids that are being challenged and have something to keep them busy and something new all the time. . . When kids come in interested in what's going to happen today, then they come in ready to go.

Observer's noted students seemed better engaged when rooms were structured with activities ready to go when they arrived, and that more non-purposeful interactions and accidents occurred when spaces were not prepared.

Susan believed teachers need flexibility and did not need to “Have the same things every day” or “Reinvent the wheel” because of the many internet resources available and that people “Can't always do things you've planned, things happen, but backups are always a good idea.” She summed her thoughts by stating, “Not every day, every plan is going to happen, and you might have to change on the fly, due to whatever circumstance come up. If you kind of have an idea and you really want to make sure the kids are having fun, and you want to have fun with them, things are going to happen much easier.”

**Code 10: Committed.** The data showed teachers should be committed to the field of teaching and working with kids. Charles thought staff who are committed to working with kids have a different level of investment. He said:

It's one thing to have the staff that enjoys what it is that they do. If you have an engaged and committed staff, it's going to be reflected in their interactions with the parents and with the kids. That's going to help add strength to the program. [Think of it as a] job versus a career. There's a difference how they approach [each one].

He elaborated, “We all have obligations. . . A job is what you need to do to be able to meet those obligations. A career is your pursuit of purpose.”

Connie said, “You can tell when a person wants to be here and who doesn't, kind of from the passion, kind of just off of their activities.” Hanna believed committed teachers also needed to honestly “like kids” and be more than just “babysitters” while working. She said, “If you don't have a good quality staff you don't have a good program, you just got babysitters there. This program, from my understanding, is supposed to be a school of choice, a learning environment, if we have a staff that. . . don't even like kids, [but] they just got this job, then it just becomes a babysitting place.”

Susan agreed a genuine fondness of children was important. She said:

You need to have a staff that really likes children. There are people that think they can do the job, but they don't like children and that makes it very, very uncomfortable for kids as well as other staff. You really need to like kids. You need to be able to relate to the kids as well and make sure that you want them to have fun. Again, you have to show that you care about them and that you're there to listen to them. This is their time.

Susan thought when teachers made “Sure kids are heard, and feel valued, then it matters a lot. It makes them happy [and] it makes another person happy to hear it.”

Brenda believed teachers were dedicated if “They're gonna be there when they say they're gonna be there. They're gonna do what they say they're gonna do.” Charles gave a nice summary by his statement, “Programs that have that higher level of engagement tend to run more efficiently and provide a better program, tend to be more effective, and the students seem get a lot more out of the program than just programs where the staff is less engaged.” Observers noted some programs had students eager to see staff evidenced by children running in to greet and



high-five staff, and that those staff appeared more enthusiastic in general and often greeted students at the door. These behaviors were compared to other programs where staff were observed as being more passive and only engaging if students engaged them first.

**Code 11: Passionate.** Participants noted teachers needed to have a passion for working with children. Ryan thought passion was important, “Because I have worked with people that have been experienced with kids, and graduated from school and everything, and I can't even tell if they really like working with kids, [similar to] like [when] they say they was [just] qualified for it. I think you just got to be passionate about it.” Ryan also thought people with passion were a better fit for the routines of quality programs. He said, “If the person is a little more passionate about their job, or even like, a friendly person, they might be able to fit into the regular routine of the quality program.” Employees who “Have a passion for working with kids and have the energy and outgoingness, I guess, to get kids excited” was what Samantha said was important. Charles believed passion and the knowledge to execute it effectively was what mattered and contributed to quality. He said, “It’s one thing to have passion, it’s another thing to have the knowledge too that will come from formal training to be able to actually deliver [what you bring to the table].” Teachers were observed to vary with levels of engagement with some active and involved and others who were more sedentary and passive.

**Code 12: Role model.** Data showed quality programs had teachers who served as role models to the students. Hanna said, “The staff would know their role, how important their role is, and [its importance when] dealing with the child[ren] and building relationships, and [building] relationships with families.” Rose said, “The children need to have good role models. And it helps if you have a staff who are working, you know, hand in hand together. You don't show them that you are not getting along [even it that is the case].” Henry concurred with

Rose's thoughts about working together and thought "It's all our jobs to help each other out." He believed "The staff are the role models to go ahead and teach and be consistent on how they go about teaching what the boundaries are and structure, so the kids understand what it is they're supposed to be doing when they're in child care." Being a good role model was simple in Susan's eyes; she said, "Make sure you come to work with a good attitude...[and] be that smile that keeps everybody smiling, even when they don't feel like it." One observer noted Ryan smoothly and successfully modeled calming down a student by telling them to "Use your words so I can help you" and how it changed the dynamic in that moment.

**Theme: Staff Relationships** was supported by codes *respect*, *teamwork*, *oversight*.

**Code 13: Respect.** The participants noted it was important teachers showed respect toward each other and interacted with a sense of unity as they worked in the program. Susan said, "It's really helpful and the program runs really much more successfully if people respect each other and work well together." Mary concurred, she said:

I think that's really important when staff is always on the same page, because the kids, they look up to us, and they're watching us all the time, and kids pick up on everything. If the staff isn't working together, then I think that falls apart in the kid category, because they notice that stuff, and they start to feel a certain way about certain staff. They can feel the vibe of the situation, and it's just not good.

Mary later commented, "I think if the kids see that you respect someone else, that they'll respect them, too. I think respect goes a long way on just every end because you get stuff done. It's just less chaotic in a way, because usually if there's no respect, lines get crossed, wires get crossed, and the ball is dropped in certain areas."

Rebecca thought respect occurred when teachers had a useful working relationship with colleagues. She said, “. . .One of the most important aspects of running a good program is to have some type of effective relationship with your staff. . . to know your individual staff's strengths and their weaknesses, and to work with them on that.” Mary also thought in terms of relationships. She said, “If someone's not happy with the way you're doing something, we have to come to an agreement, and meet in the middle, and try to find a solution instead of letting it go, because that's how staff communication drops, and then it trickles down to the kids, and it's just not a happy environment after that.”

Good working relationships were sometimes difficult to form according to Rebecca who said, “A lot of folks won't confront people or their coworkers in a way that will get things done. But they're mad about it. They're walking around mad and frustrated about it, but it's unspoken word.” She thought there were perception and relational aspects involved especially when roles were shifted. Her thought was “People probably are hesitant to confront a coworker that they've worked with in the same capacity. . . It does get complicated, it really does. The shifting of roles, it's not as easy as it appears, and you know that.” Observers noticed some teachers engaged in ongoing conversations with colleagues throughout the program where as others only conversed around task assignments and completion.

***Code 14: Teamwork.*** Support of colleagues was identified by teachers as an important aspect of quality. Connie said, “We [have] got support each other like a team, together everyone achieves more. So, if we work as a team, then the kids would get more out of the program. Versus it's one person just kind of doing everything.” Henry also thought teamwork was essential. He said:

Teamwork is so important. It's so important because we all need to help each other. We all need to be able to work together for the children. Everybody has different experiences that they share, and everybody can learn from each other. Just like every individual doesn't always have the answers, someone else might be able to fill in that area for them. Hanna spoke of team effort with her statement, "We [have] got support each other like a team, together everyone achieves more. So, if we work as a team, then the kids would get more out of the program, versus it's one person just kind of doing everything. You can't leave all the decision, all the work up to the lead teacher, you know, we need input from all the teachers to make this program successful, and so you need cohesiveness across the staff."

Lack of cohesiveness was noticed by the children according to Susan. She said:

When there's a lot of tension between people working together, kids can feel that. Kids can see tension. They hear things that people are saying. That doesn't make for a quality program. You have to work together to make it successful. I can work myself to death to try to make this work, if the staff isn't working together, it doesn't matter how much I try something, it's not going to fully work, because it takes everybody to be part of the team. If you have crabby pants over here, just with an attitude all the time, none of the kids want to go hang out with that person.

Samantha had similar thoughts and commented how relationships influenced the environment. She said:

I think that one of the things that keep people going back to their job every day is enjoying their co-workers and also enjoying what they're doing. So... as long as you have a quality program that's fun and stimulating, is usually pretty easy and usually pretty enjoyable and fun. And so that's not really the issue, but when you fall into sort of

like the trap of having animosity, or resentment, or problems like that with your co-workers then it makes it a lot more of a drag. Like, "Ugh, I gotta go deal with this person again today."

Observers witnessed most teachers automatically offered assistance and some appeared to purposefully wait to be asked. Connie thought support of colleagues made programs more cohesive and also strengthened relationships, she said, "Because we're a team, so we might put more on our plate because we want to help out another team member. So that's just working together as a team."

Henry believed communication was big part of teamwork. He said, "Communication is important. I think that people need to have a good understanding of what it is that they're expected to do, and how they're going to be able to work together to get the goal accomplished when it comes to working with kids." When staff did not work together as a team, Cheryl thought kids noticed. She thought when a colleague did not treat another colleague well, that person "Is not going to want to come to work and they're not going to be happy, and they're not going to want to work with that person, and we have to all work together. Like you can't have four adults in the room, and two not talking to each other because the kids will pick up on that, they pick up on everything, like the copy machine."

**Code 15: Oversight.** Participants thought teachers needed defined roles where leadership was visible and present. Rebecca said colleagues had "Equal but different [roles]." She stated, "A lot of staff just need leading...they need leadership to make it a quality program, and that's on [the supervisor]." Rose said supervisors "Have to lead or you'll be listening to what everybody else tells you to do all the time." Brenda thought supervisors needed to "Oversee everything" by noticing what the kids liked and disliked and talked to her assistants about what was observed.

Connie thought supervisors “Have the overall picture” and their team [should] “branch off and actually do the things.” With a related thought, Samantha thought lead teachers should make “Sure that the assistants feel like they're a part of [the plan] and they're engaged [enough] to carry out those specific activities.” Ryan said, “The supervisor needs to take initiative, directing and guiding, whatever that program needs. Not just by speaking it, but also, actually getting involved and doing it. The supervisor sort of plays a role in setting the tone and making and establishing that culture.” He thought the “Assistant's role is very similar, taking leadership [but] also cooperating.”

Although teachers had different roles, it was not necessary they functioned separately.

Susan stated:

We're more of a team than supervisor[s] and assistants. We know what our job descriptions are, and they look to me more as a supervisor, but we work more as a team and we work together, and we talk about things and we make decisions together. I think that makes a lot better flow. Everybody can do what everybody else does, so that doesn't make it like, “my job's more important than your job.”

Despite their equal but different roles, Rebecca believed both needed accountability. She said assistants “Need to be just as accountable as I do as far as their roles. I have to be accountable for my role to somebody. They have to be accountable for their roles as well.” Henry summed it up nicely by stating, “I think the supervisor's position is to oversee [the program], but I also believe, it's all our jobs to help each other out.” Observers witnessed leadership seemed to vary across programs as some children deferred to one staff person over another regardless of the formal roles.

**Theme: Staff Turnover** was supported by codes *consistency, disruptive, competence level, adjustment*.

**Code 16: Consistency.** Data indicated the consistency of teachers contributed to quality programming by having increased program predictability, cohesiveness and flow. Cheryl said, “It's just important to have consistency so that, you've got a flow, and everybody knows each other, and you have a way to communicate, and the kids know their boundaries, and they know that you're going to be there.” Brenda said, “I do think that if you're there every day you get to know the kids and their backgrounds, and their past, and what they bring so you're able to give them what they need.” Rebecca said, “I just think steady staff, you can't beat it.” Ryan commented:

I think when you have someone there every day, they're reliable. You're not having missing parts and missing understanding. Sometimes if you have someone that's not there, it makes it harder because that person might not know exactly what to do. If someone is new and just has come in for a day and doesn't know the routine, sometimes children might take advantage of that, of course.

Consistent teachers helped make programs more cohesive according to Rose who stated, “I think when our core group is together, we are on point.” Consistency produced a positive impact according to Ryan who said “You get impacted in a good way, because kids see the same faces there's not a lot of new faces, they might be uncomfortable with. And the same people that's coming, they know the procedures, the safety procedures, they know the parents.” Rebecca said better programming occurred “When you're dealing with a full staff, versus lacking even one staff member, lacking one staff member can affect it.” Observers witnessed programs with

their full typical staff engaged in less discussion about the when or how things are done, and instead seemed to have “rolling” conversations.

Participants noted parents appreciated consistency as well. Rose said parents “Are comfortable with the consistency of seeing the same people so they know what to expect when it comes to the type and quality of care for their kids.” Brenda, however, brought a different perspective. She cautioned against too much dependence on consistent staff. She said, “I think if you get too dependent on consistency or dedication from certain people it gets hard. Because it's like if they're moved or they're needed elsewhere you gotta be flexible, but it is hard.”

When consistency was absent, both the teachers and students felt it. Sam said:

When people aren't there, or they're there some of the time, or their schedule is conflicted it definitely makes it a lot harder to get any kind of routine. And I think it effects the kids, too, because they don't know what to expect. It does make a big difference when someone's absent and the kids do notice.

Mary shared similar thoughts, she thought some children did not like when things changed and thus warns them “Things are about to change so they don't get overwhelmed, because it causes anxiety for a few of them. [I think] just having things consistent is easier for everyone.”

**Code 17: Disruptive.** Participants noted staff turnover is disruptive to the program, students and teachers. Rebecca said, “I think the whole program suffers.” Connie agreed based on her similar statement, “Sometimes we have to really alter the whole program when we don't have our staff in place, which is not good because I like to tell the kids ahead of time what we're going to be doing for the week. So, then they come in [and ask], where's our grilled cheese? [I have to say] we didn't get that today.” Hanna thought turnover was disruptive because it affected



the programs flow in that “You may have to stop what you're doing to instruct the new person on how to do [something].” She added:

A classroom should flow easily, there shouldn't be a tension in there. Every staff person knows what they're there for, and see, that's what happens when people are pulled, it breaks up the flow of the class, of the planning, it's like you can't do what you want to do, and things should just flow so easily, [and] effortless when you come into the classroom.

Along those same lines, Charles said, “All aspects of programming are impacted when staff turnover, because voids need to be filled.” He stated, “There could be a difference in the way the staff interact with one another whenever that new person is added, or whenever that other person has been taken away. There's the staff dynamic and there's the staff-student dynamic that gets disrupted whenever there's high turnover, which could have a negative impact.”

Samantha described turnover's disruption in terms of “Just the energy that it takes to get used to someone else's styles and their approaches. She added, “I think that when someone in a supervisory position has to sort of step back and tailor their communication styles for certain individuals, then it's just more of that type of work that needs to happen every time that there's someone new.”

Teachers noted effort was required to get acquainted with new or substitute staff. Susan said turnover affected teachers because “You don't know what you're in for. You don't know how that new person is going to mesh with the program and with the kids and especially when you've got something that's running very smoothly, and everybody knows what they're doing and there doesn't have to be direction every minute.” Hanna said, “It affects the teachers, [be]cause we're on the edge of, ‘Can't do this, gotta do that.’ [It's] like, you can't relax.”

Teachers believed feelings changed when turnover occurred. Turnover contributed to people feeling “overwhelmed [and] burnt out” according to Rebecca. She said, “Your staff people are overwhelmed [and] burnt out, they feel they're having to do more with less. I think it burns people out, and that adds to the quality of the program because it trickles down to effectively working with the children and wanting to work with the children.” She shared additional thoughts with her statement that turnover “Impacts the morale of the staff.... It's the morale of the staff that's seeing people come and go, good staff seeing good staff go, that does something to you. It's a bitter-sweet type situation. It affects staff more seeing their coworkers leave and kids, too. It affects the kids.” Cheryl presented additional feelings with her statement, “I think it makes them [the staff] feel sad, because you know, you were a team with that person, you have shared experiences with that person, you laughed, you've developed a rapport of communication.”

Teachers remarked a disruption in staff influenced children emotionally and was confusing. Henry said, “A lot of times when there's staff change...the routine is sometimes lost. The children are expecting a certain thing to happen, and when it doesn't, they become antsy themselves, and they start to do their own thing.” Mary said, “I feel like [children] get more anxious and more worried, and they don't feel as comfortable because there's a new person in the room, and now they only have one person that they feel like they can go to instead of two, like when [x] is there. It's just more chaotic.” Mary added:

If a kid goes from seeing someone every day to not seeing them at all, I think it impacts them emotionally. I don't know. I've noticed in some kids at my old site that when someone left, that they start acting differently. They're more closed off because they feel like they can't talk to anyone. I think a lot of kids have their certain person that they

always go to, and once that person leaves, it's hard on them because now that person's not there.

Susan said:

Having different staff members every day is very confusing for them because they don't know what to expect and they don't know what's expected of them. The more people you have in and out, the more the rules change, partly because we don't have a nice across the board basics [policy], so say you can be at this school and this person's there and you can't run on the play structures. A new person starts tomorrow and says, "Yep, you can run on the play structures." Then that person's gone, and another person comes in and says, "Nope you can't." That's very confusing to the kids to have different rules every time someone new comes in.

Charles spoke of how turnover changed the teacher's relationship with students. He said, [Kids] get used to a level of consistency. When that changes and gets taken away, they're having to get used to a different relationship and a different dynamic. There may not be that same connection with that new individual or that other individual that was previously had, which could impact the quality of the program. Brenda shared similar thoughts, stating, "The bonding that the children will have with that adult or the conversation that they're looking to finish [will not happen]." While most teachers discussed the disruptive aspects of turnover, Charles pointed out that turnover "Could also have a positive impact. It depends on what's changing and who's being added and who's being taken away." Observers reported the presence of sub staff in general did not have a positive or negative impact during the programs observed if a knowledgeable staff member was present to provide guidance.

**Code 18: Competence level.** Participants stated the competence level of the replacement staff person made a difference to how turnover was experienced. Samantha said, “So obviously you'll feel lost if you lose someone good and their replacement's someone that's less capable. So that puts strain on the remaining employees.” Samantha continued, “I think you notice staff-wise, within co-workers, like whoever the replacement is just probably doesn't have the skillset or, you know, may not be as competent as the person that they've replaced. It effects morale I think, and the kids definitely pick up on that and are frustrated, as well.” Competence mattered from a safety perspective according to Ryan who said the replacement staff “Might serve the kids something they're not supposed to be given as far as milk, cheese, or something that we serve. And another part as far as safety is, [is] when the parent's picking up the kid...we'll know the parent. So, if I'm outside or at the gym, they're [in the room, and] they might hand out some wrong kids to the wrong parents.”

**Code 19: Adjustment.** Teachers thought the adjustment to turnover could be positive or negative depending on the communication level between the staff involved and how the replacement teacher filled the void. Mary thought communication during turnover was essential “Because you have a new person coming into the already established environment. You have to try to figure out how they work, let them know how you work, and hopefully you guys end up on the same page. You don't know what you're walking into, so that's definitely tricky.” Charles thought adjustments to staff turnover varied. He said:

It goes both ways, it can be positive, or it can be negative. It depends on who is coming in to fill that void, or if that person is being replaced. If that person is not being replaced because of staff isn't available, then it definitely adds to some tension, because they have to do more with less. I think that if the program is efficient and organized and has good

leadership, they can pick up the slack, for lack of a better way to put it, or pick up where that voids been created and carry on. I just think it depends on the program and it depends on how that turnover plays out.

Ryan thought the support or assistance shown towards colleagues in addition to communication aspects was impacted by relationships where “Both staff [did] not know each other [or have] never worked together.” Although the replacement teacher’s communication or work style might not be known, Cheryl said, “If we're all on the same page, it shouldn't be that big of deal if someone comes in.”

Participants noted students also experienced an adjustment to turnover. Susan said, “Staff turnover affects not only the staff that's there... but it [also] does affect the kids because the kids get attached. They get attached very easily to the staff members. It's really hard on the kids when new people are coming in and other people are leaving.” Mary said turnover “Could affect the way the kids interact with staff a little bit for a certain period of time, just because they see that there's a new staff member, and they know that the staff member doesn't know that much about the program, so they might take advantage of it or try to do things that they're not supposed to. Henry had a similar thought, evidenced by his statement, “If someone is new and just has come in for a day and doesn't know the routine, sometimes children might take advantage of that, of course.” Rose thought adjustment could just take time, she said, “Sometimes, some of our kids are so used to routine that it may take them a minute to warm up to the new person.”

Mary gave an example of a student’s reaction to a turnover event; she said:

At my last site, we had a staff member leave. I don't remember who it was, but there was a certain kid, a little girl who felt closer to that staff member. I guess the girl was going through stuff at school. During the day, someone was bullying her, and not all of us knew. The rest of the staff didn't know, and the girl felt like she was her happy-go-luck self in the afternoons after she was talking to her specific staff member. When that staff member left, she was down all the time. We didn't know what was going on until few weeks later. We discovered that this was happening during school, and she felt like she didn't have anyone to talk to any more about it after school.”

Susan provided an example of turnover’s influence on both a teacher and student. She said:

There's often been times when they don't get a chance to say goodbye, which is very, very sad for the kids. For example, when X left...They ended up sending him to sub at a different school for his last week, so he didn't have really a chance to say goodbye to the kids. They sent him to another place to finish out his last week. We didn't know that until they sent him to do his last week. The kids were very disappointed, and he was very disappointed not to be able to say good-bye to the kids.

Data showed participants had mixed views of staff turnover and quality programming. Some teachers thought that established programs were minimally influenced by turnover. Mary said, “I haven't seen [turnover] affect the quality of the program, because usually someone coming in, they see that things are already established. They just pretty much follow what has been going on prior to them coming there.” Hanna commented, “When you get somebody who knows what they're doing there really isn't that much of a hiccup, I should say.” Susan thought a program’s organization helped minimize the impact of turnover. She said “Most subs come in

like deer in headlights. They don't know what to participate in. If your site has stuff posted and it's in a spot that you can find things easily, there's less frustration. So, in the situation of a sub, you can still make the day fun and successful, as long as things are prepared for you.

Preparedness is the big thing here.” Charles alternately thought it was the individual, versus the program’s organization, that directed turnover’s influence. He said:

It's the individual that's being placed into a specific role or taken out of a specific role has a direct impact on the success or the failure of that particular day or that particular program regardless of how well organized and how efficient that program is run. So much of what we do outside of the organization and the planning is relationship based, interaction with each other, the interaction with the kids, the interaction with the parents, and that could be good or that could be bad based on that individual.

In contrast, other teachers thought turnover negatively influenced programming.

Samantha said, “Yeah, it's definitely disruptive. I think the quality definitely decreases every time you have to stop and redirect your energy just to rebuilding the strengths that you need to go forward as a team to create ... I mean, it's like endless stream of sort of like stop and go, stop and go. And then I think, also, there's a little bit of ...mourning the loss of when you do have a good flow and then you lose that.” Samantha added thoughts that program quality failed because “People are overwhelmed, burnt out, they feel they're having to do more with less. I think it burns people out, and that adds to the [decreased] quality of the program because it trickles down to effectively working with the children and wanting to work with the children. I just think steady staff, you can't beat it.”

Henry agreed staff turnover negatively influenced program quality. He said, “With the inconsistency of supervisors or assistants, it's hard for a program to really grow to its full

potential.” Rebecca thought turnover’s influence boiled down to a clear leadership issue because “You have to have somebody leading and making people accountable, the children, your staff, period.” She said, “Well it's a leadership issue... You've got to pretty much be able to lead people regardless if it's temporary or not.” Observers reported turnover occurred in several programs and that the adjustment at some sites was more noticeable than at others. Observers indicated the more permanent site staff tended to provide leadership when subs were present, but a couple teachers were perceived as hesitant in providing direction to teachers assigned to the supervisor role.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

In this chapter, I documented the findings of this study. Data analysis and results indicated participants thought quality programming centered around five emergent themes: *quality, interactions with children, teacher qualifications, staff relationships, and staff turnover*. Quality programming occurred when programs were structured to ensure physical, mental, and emotional safety for the students; consisted of a variety of activities which included students’ preferences and were student led; had trained and engaged teachers who offered a variety of learning opportunities, positively guided student’s creativity, and worked as team players with colleagues; and where teachers positively adjusted to aspects of staff turnover based on the utilization of good communication and throughout the process. In Chapter 5, I discuss and explain the findings.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

With many parents of school-age children working, the potential demand for child care can be sizable, and balancing work and family time can be challenging (Hand & Baxter, 2013). To help meet that need and minimize impact on their employment, families look to after-school programs to provide a safe, adult-supervised environment for their children (Hand & Baxter, 2013; Young, Ortiz, & Young, 2016). School-based child care has the potential to reduce parental burden and meet working families' needs by offering programming located at the child's school in a safe, familiar environment. Quality school-age care is important because program type and staff-student interactions can affect the participants' experiences regarding engagement and belonging (Akiva, Cortina, & Smith, 2014). Today, out-of-school programs provide more than supervision and general benefits; programming has broadened into targeted educational, health, and social-emotional interventions aimed at improving long-term youth development outcomes (Blattner & Franklin, 2017). When nonparental supervision is required, after-school programs can provide both oversight and added benefits to youth, parents, and the community.

To assess quality programming through a qualitative research lens, I explored the perceptions of school-age child care teachers. Participants in this study described five themes that influence programming: quality, interactions with children, teacher qualifications, staff relationships, and staff turnover. In this chapter I provide an overall summary and discussion of the results. I also discuss the results in relation to the literature described in Chapter 2, explain limitations, and consider implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory.

## Summary of the Results

This instrumental qualitative case single case study examined the central research question: What are the experiences and challenges of school-age child care teachers from a school district in southeastern Michigan with operating quality programs? The study was guided by two subquestions:

1. How do school-age child care teachers define quality programming?
2. What are the experiences of school-age child care teachers with staff turnover and quality programming?

The role and place of school-age care has been unsettled due to funding, staffing, and philosophical positioning factors (Dockett & Perry, 2016). While school-based programs offer convenient care in a safe and familiar setting, factors such as those mentioned above in addition to licensing, training requirements, and lack of career advancement make it difficult to find and retain qualified staff, which in turn affects program quality (Asher, 2012; Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014; Hill, Milliken, Goff, Clark, & Gagnon, 2015).

I analyzed data from semistructured interviews, program observations, and field notes to gain insight into the teachers' perceptions of quality programming. The results indicated teachers thought quality programming took place in environments that were physically, emotionally, and mentally safe for students, and where teachers were knowledgeable and mentally engaged. Participants noted quality programs included sufficient structure to meet the developmental needs and multi-age interest levels of students and allowed students a voice in the program's content and activities offered. In addition to environmental and content aspects, results indicated teachers thought the degree to which coworker's respected and supported each other was important and that competent leadership contributed to quality of a program.

Analysis of field notes revealed staff turnover had a positive or negative impression on program quality depending on how the turnover event played out. Turnover's influence on program quality was a combination of the competency of the replacement staff person, the welcome or acceptance by the program staff, and the adjustment of the children to the change. Participants noted staff turnover altered specific program features, such as a particular snack, and/or deter entire program plans, such as a specific activity.

### **Discussion of the Results**

Analysis of the data indicated teachers thought quality programming took place in environments that were physically, emotionally, and mentally safe places for students. In interviews, the majority of teachers thought safety was the most important aspect of quality programming and they defined safety from a variety of viewpoints. Physical safety meant monitoring the physical space from hazards, assistance with certain tools (i.e., glue gun), practicing safety drills, ensuring required medications were on hand, and ensuring that children were signed out to the right families. Mental and emotional safety was reflected when teachers demonstrated compassion, forgiveness, and were consistent in their interactions with children. Teachers also mentioned safety entailed providing clear expectations for the children and creating an environment where they could feel safe and play freely.

Data also indicated quality programming occurred when teachers were knowledgeable and mentally engaged when working with the children. Participants thought formal and informal education/training which centered around working with children was beneficial. Training was seen as a way to equip teachers and help them recognize the importance of their role, and aid in their ability to meet children where they were and take them to the next level. Mental engagement occurred when teachers stayed focused on the children by intentionally listening,

were present in the moment, were actively involved in the activities, and had respectful interactions.

Sufficient structure to meet the multiage interest level of the students and which allowed students a voice in the program's content and activities was noted by participants as important. Teachers thought students should be part of the decision-making process, so their likes and dislikes were represented. Teachers thought the provision of choices put the interests of the students first and made children feel their thoughts and opinions mattered. In addition, following the children's interest was seen by teachers as a possible deterrent to negative behaviors because the children would be engaged versus bored.

In addition to environmental and content aspects, results indicated teachers thought the degree to which coworkers worked as a team as evidenced by respect and support of each other was significant. Teachers believed a team mindset meant cohesiveness and that a cohesive staff obtained input from all colleagues, addressed issues before escalation, and reached mutual agreement on conflicting viewpoints before moving forward. A team approach was important as teachers recognized students were perceptive and could tell when the staff was not working well together. They believed the perceived tension imagined by the students decreased the quality of the program and negatively influenced the environment. Some teachers thought there should be no use of formal supervisor/assistant titles in a team environment, while others thought titles should be used but not affect how they worked together. Regardless of specific roles, participants thought competent leadership was important in a quality program. One teacher commented that despite the designated roles, the person selected to be in charge must be able to lead people and hold people accountable.

Analysis of the field notes revealed staff turnover had a positive or negative impression on program quality depending on how the turnover event played out. Turnover's influence on program quality was a combination of the competency of the replacement staff person, the welcome and acceptance of the program staff, and the adjustment of the students to the change. Teachers noted turnover was less disruptive if the replacement teacher was trained and knew what they were doing. Knowledgeable teachers were perceived as able to step in and assist without needing much additional guidance. Programs that welcomed the replacement staff made it easier for the person to be integrated in programming. Teachers also noted when they were familiar with the replacement teacher, it was easier to run programs as planned.

The students' adjustment to the turnover event was identified by teachers as important. Some teachers thought children who had positive or meaningful relationships with the departing staff person had a more difficult or longer adjustment time to the new person. Participants indicated children were more likely to experience anxiety and thoughts of being overwhelmed with turnover events due to feelings of discomfort and lack of familiarity. Some teachers pointed out that behavioral changes were also noticed until the children got to know the new teacher. Participants indicated staff turnover altered specific program features (e.g., particular snacks), and/or deterred entire program plans. (i.e., specific activities). Teachers thought staff turnover broke up the flow of the program and influenced quality program from the planning phase through implementation.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

The quality of out-of-school time care remains an important issue because quality programming contributes to children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, yet school-age child care services have not received the same attention and research interest as services for

younger children (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014; Plantenga & Remery, 2017). Although quality services are important, they are difficult to measure because clear standards are lacking and indicators are rated differently (Plantenga & Remery, 2017). This study contributed to the literature by examining quality programming from school-age child care teachers' perspectives, an area unexplored based on review of the literature. Interviews, observations, and field notes were used to triangulate the data. Teachers defined quality school-age child care programs as structured environments where children felt mentally, physically, and emotionally safe, and where teachers were knowledgeable, committed, and engaged in their work with students.

Participants identified safety as the primary aspect of a quality program. Safety involved monitoring the environment for hazards, keeping the area clean so the spread of germs was minimized, attending to the special needs of students (e.g., allergy awareness), and teachers interacting in a trustworthy manner so students felt comfortable bringing issues to their attention. Approachability and the ability to address concerns was also identified as important regarding the physical and psychological safety of older youth (Simpkins, Riggs, Ngo, Vest Ettekal, & Okamoto, 2017). Simpkin et al. (2017) looked at physical and psychological safety through the lens of culture and found a key aspect of creating a safe environment for older youth was when staff successfully managed inappropriate conflict and behavior. Simpkins et al. (2017) believed adults should intentionally create meaningful connections with youth and check in about their concerns to promote positive meaningful connections among activity participants.

Safety was also seen as a component of structured environments in that structured environments provided appropriate boundaries for students and permitted them to safely engage in activities with peers and adults. In addition, program organization was noted by participants as a key aspect that allowed for easier connection among peers and a better overall experience

for students and staff. Smith, Witherspoon, and Wayne Osgood (2017) found that children who participated in quality afterschool programs were able to thrive, engage, and connect to others.

Quality after-school programs have been positively associated with positive youth development outcomes such as competence, connection, caring, and culture (Smith, Witherspoon, & Wayne Osgood, 2017). Teachers in the study indicated quality programs were those that were child-led and fostered students' interests by offering them the opportunity to increase their unique creativity. Teachers noted that such programs gave students a voice and choice in the types of activities offered and empowered them to be part of the decision-making process, which further allowing them to be as engaged and/or connected as desired. Participant responses were consistent with the study by Smith et al. (2017), which showed that ethnic minorities who were allowed more engagement and freedom had increased respect for adults, which pointed to the value of encouraging youth to be active participants in their developmental settings.

Knowledgeable, engaged and committed teachers were noted as an integral component of quality programming. Formal education (i.e., a college degree), general training in the child development field, and informal experience working with children or just by being around them as part of a family were all seen as beneficial by participants. Training and experience provided knowledge about child development and helped build the teacher's capacity to not only lead students in their assignments but execute it effectively. MacFarlane, Wharf Higgins, and Naylor, (2018) found staff experience was critical to having the confidence and competence to offer good-quality physical activities. Competence is a key quality to have when teaching or guiding potentially unfamiliar subjects like in the STEM field. Making activities more readily available and attractive to students who may not explicitly indicate STEM interests provides them the

opportunity to explore, develop, and foster curiosity (Dabney et al., 2012). Similar to experience, participants identified engagement (presence in body and mind) and commitment (desire to work with children) on different levels as important. Study participants thought programs with more staff engagement ran more efficiently and provided better programming.

### **Limitations**

I acknowledge limitations to this case study, so readers are aware of credibility and dependability issues. Although participants represented various races, ethnicities, educational backgrounds, and a cross section of the district, this sample is only representative of one school district. Moreover, this study is limited to the selected participants' unique experiences and not depictive of all teachers, as not every elementary school within the district was represented. In addition, there were three schools in the district that were not invited to participate because the schools are run by private agencies contracted by the district.

A second limitation is observer-to-observer differences and observer variance. Program observations were conducted by multiple observers as per the request of the CU-IRB, and each observer made different judgements limiting this study. Using one observer would have increased observation reliability.

A third limitation is that I am connected to the child care program and as such not fully impartial. Interviewees may have agreed to participate because of the relationship they have with me and possibly tailored certain responses to the interview questions. All researchers have biases (Stake, 2010), and my familiarity to the program permitted a level of interpretation but also contributed to my biases. However, I minimized my biases by remaining mindful of my thoughts and impressions during collection and analysis, focusing on participant's statements and



avoiding overgeneralization, and conducting member checks (Koelsch, 2013). Additionally, I avoided same source bias by allowing multiple users to conduct observations.

### **Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

This study contributes to an empirical understanding of school-age youth workers' perceptions of quality programming in southeastern Michigan and was supported by constructivism as the conceptual framework. I discuss the implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory. Results are not generalizable but do suggest practical ideas administrators can explore to support program staff and enhance program quality.

#### **Practice**

School-age child care has transitioned from providing basic supervision and general benefits to an environment where there are considerable possibilities for engaging students and providing youth development. The name "school-age child care" is commonly shortened to "child care" and implies a slight degree of oversight above what inadvertently is termed babysitting. The name should be changed to out-of-school time (OST) program to be consistent with current research trends and more accurately describe the program's intent. When focusing on youth development, social emotional competencies are the underpinnings of a student's capacity to deal effectively with others. As youth matriculate, they should be given more structured leadership opportunities to interact with the program in creative ways that build inter- and intrapersonal skills and have those skills identified when evident. They should have opportunities to run the gathering meetings, navigate peer to peer disagreements, and lend their voice to program decisions within appropriate guidelines.

## **Policy**

Policy makers can create guidelines, courses of action, and regulations for people to follow. An important aspect of understanding how future policies can be helpful in the school-age child care field is to understand what the connection of turnover and quality is. Turnover is essentially the rate at which organizations gain or lose employees or can be thought of as how long employees remain in a specific position (Currie & Hill, 2012). Staff who regularly work in OST programs spend more time with students, and as such, have the potential to know them on a greater level and have quality interactions. As teachers spend time with students, they have the opportunity to become more aware of their personalities and be better able to engage with them and suggest change should they notice an unwanted behavior. As staff turnover in OST programs, the opportunity to be in position to connect with students on a deeper level with is lost and the quality of positive engagement can change. The continuity of relationships with child care teachers can add to a student's overall sense of security and stability providing a more quality child care experience (Dockett & Perry, 2016).

Given the part-time, split shift contractual commitment of the OST teachers and the "real feel" full-time job responsibilities they are expected to perform, administrators should develop policy and training that develop teachers as individuals and have the added benefit of positively impacting their work with students. School-based OST has systematic challenges with its nature of limited hours, minimal benefits, and relatively low wages. Across the board, teachers looked for leadership at the sites in the form of committed and engaged teachers that could navigate day-to-day challenges and make sound judgement calls.

The ability to make sound decisions speaks to competent leadership; thus, it is important to understand what defines competent leadership and how it is perceived. Teachers identified

mutual respect as being an important part of leadership. Respect for others was perceived as beginning with self-respect and having the ability to demonstrate that same respect outwardly. Teachers believed respect was demonstrated by showing support of others whether it involved an activity or interaction with a student. If teachers felt respected and supported, following a colleague's leadership was viewed as easier and they were more likely to be compliant. Participants felt a lack of respect or perceived lack of respect diminished a program's quality because students can become aware of the tension. Teacher discord was also noted to diminish quality because when staff are not getting along, communication decreases and general needs go unaddressed, including needs of the students.

With minimal training or education, entry level teachers are expected to provide recreational, literacy, enrichment, academic, behavioral, and occasional STEM support to all, while being knowledgeably and appropriately responsive to state and organizational mandated rules and regulations to produce a quality program. Workers are transient, in part because employment expectations far outweigh the compensation and benefits, a dynamic that seems unlikely to change. Policy should focus on increasing buy-in through personal and professional development and creative job sharing. Organizational policies and practices that focus on training staff in areas such as problem solving, or effective communication skills may enhance teacher capacity to resolve issues more efficiently and have better coworker relationships, which in turn may create a more pleasant work environment for all involved. One area teachers consistently noted as difficult was navigating difficult coworker relationships. Problematic collegial relationships caused negative feelings to spill over into their work with students. In contrast, research has shown when colleagues want to work together, those positive relationships can improve constituent attachment and decrease turnover in low-wage service jobs (Ellingson et

al., 2015). Organizational policy could also focus on creative job sharing where OST workers also work in the classrooms as teacher assistants or paraprofessionals with special needs students. Creating more of a full-time job with better pay and benefits could assist with retention, buy-in, and perhaps job satisfaction in the field.

## **Theory**

Constructivist theory centers on how the social and cultural worlds and their meaning are personalized and that there is no one true meaning of an event, but multiple interpretations of experiences (Creswell, 2008; Stake, 2010). Constructivism was inspired by Dewey's (1986) theory about inquiry, which focused on people taking an active part in constructing information and recognizing that doing something and having it act on us is what measures our value of the experience (Dewey, 2004). Teachers in this study took an active part in constructing their perceptions of quality programming based on site components and how they intersected with students and staff. Teachers' experiences were based on their realities in the presence or absence of certain elements. A missing staff person did not sabotage quality in and of themselves. The person's interactive role or the replacement staff person's capability or lack thereof was felt as impacting quality and how the program ran.

Constructivists believe multiple, inherently unique realities exist because each perspective is formed by the individual's own orientation (Hatch, 2002). As teachers shared their thoughts during the interview process, their perspectives gave meaning to how they constructed their realities. People interpret events differently and often multiple interpretations provide a greater degree of understanding than the popular explanation (Stake, 2010). Turnover events are common to low-wage, front line service workers and often perceived as a loss (Asher, 2012; Ellingson, 2015; Tews, 2013). From a constructivism approach, participants noted

turnover events could be positive or negative depending on the replacement staff person, communication around the event, and how the event played out in the setting. Constructivism as the conceptual framework allowed for a deeper understanding of a turnover event's influence.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Assessment of settings is more complex than assessment at the individual level. Thus, as youth spend more time in OST settings, these arenas are increasingly viewed as a major social context for youth development and considerable interest to parents, educators, researchers, and policy makers (Oh et al., 2015). The diversity of OST offerings (e.g., academic, fitness, social-emotional, STEM), make programs difficult to assess as stakeholders have different points of interest (Cassidy et al. 2011; Greene et al., 2013; Payne et al., 2012). While curriculum and other educational design features are important for retaining students, features such location, organizational identity, mission, and partnerships within the community directly influence the participation of minority youth in OST programs (Thiry et al., 2017). Policymakers can explore ways to structure and fund programs that meet the diverse needs for mainstream and diverse populations, so youth participation is maximized.

I recommend additional research be conducted in the area of OST teachers' perceptions of quality programming through the lens of social constructivism as a paradigm versus constructivism, as was done in this study. Social constructivism has a similar research approach as constructivism in that it relies on an individual's understanding of his or her world and how a person's unique realities frame his or her view of the situation. Social constructivism, however, also brings into focus the importance of social interactions. A person's view is not developed in a silo but is formed through interactions with others as well as cultural and historical norms (Creswell, 2013). Thus, an individual's experience is not just their own, but a result of

individuals around them acting with them in the environment. In social constructivism, individuals are able use their personal experiences and combine them with aspects of engagement with others to arrive at their place of knowledge. Researchers who are familiar with the field of OST care would be in an advantageous position to explore this issue further as they would be able to use their experiences to assist with describing the experiences of others.

### **Parent and Youth Voice**

Additional research is needed to best understand the experiences of parents and youth of school-age programs and to explore aspects they feel contribute to quality programming. Payne et al. (2012) discussed the time-related (caregiver dependability and convenience) and quality-related (caregiver attentiveness, communication, and cost) dimensions of child care satisfaction. As the field has evolved, satisfaction may have evolved as well and encompass additional aspects such as social-emotional development potential. There is a limitation in the field for measures to capture youth voices, so a way to assess the K-5 population in terms of content and evaluation may prove beneficial (Vandell, Larson, Mahoney, & Watts, 2015). Local research could assess additional schools in the district as well as neighboring districts.

### **Youth Outcomes**

Currently, the ultimate goal of out-of-school interventions is to improve youth outcomes through the enhancement of quality programming (Oh et al., 2015). As programs grow, they will be poised to support students in nonacademic realms (Hirsh, 2011). Additional research could focus on introducing various career paths much like what is currently being done to stimulate STEM interest. Not every student will go to college for a professional degree. Introducing careers that provide a valuable service and require a skilled trade versus an advanced degree may help students consider alternate paths to fulfillment.

## **Special Populations**

While the majority of students attend formal schooling outside the home, several are home-schooled or have special needs which prevent participation in traditional after-school clubs and programs. Future research could explore how home-based students or special needs students engage in youth development practices and what opportunities there are to participate in community-based OST programs. Similarly, future research could explore how OST programming can be made more accessible to underresourced or outlying minorities.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to understand teachers' perceptions of quality programming in southeastern Michigan. Teachers thought quality programming occurred in environments sufficiently structured so students felt physically, emotionally, and mentally safe; teachers were engaged and present when with the students; activities incorporated students' opinions and were designed to appeal to multiple ages; coworkers respected and supported each other; and competent leadership was present. Turnover is an expected part of the OST field given the nature and systemic structure of the position. Teachers felt turnover could have a positive or negative impression on program quality depending on how the turnover event played out. OST services once began as a service to balance the child care needs of working families but today have evolved to be a prime environment to develop youth and stimulate interest in the world beyond the classroom and entertain STEM related careers.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. What is the highest level of school or degree you have completed?
  - a. High school Diploma or equivalent
  - b. Some College but no degree
  - c. Associates degree
  - d. Bachelor's degree
  - e. Master's degree
  - f. None of the above
2. Which job classifications are you most closely affiliated?
  - a. Lead teacher
  - b. Assistant
  - c. Paraprofessional
  - d. Substitute
3. How many hours per week do you usually work?
  - a. 5 – 14
  - b. 15 – 20
  - c. 21 – 25
  - d. 26 – 30
4. Please tell me how you define a quality school-age child care program?
5. Can you describe what you see as the main components of a quality program?
6. Can you explain what you see as the relationship between program content and quality?

### Accountability

7. Can you describe what you see as the teachers' and staff's role in providing quality programming?
8. What kinds of quality programming occur when regular site staff are in attendance daily?

### Significance

9. Can you describe how program quality changes when there is staff turnover, and can you give me an example?
10. Can you describe what aspects of programming are impacted with staff turnover?
11. What can you share about staff relationships and program quality when staff turnover?

## Appendix B: Detailed Field Notes

### School-Age PQA Observation Guide Summary of Scales Program Offerings Children Grades K-6

#### **Safe Environment**

Emotional Safety  
Healthy Environment  
Emergency Preparedness  
Accommodation Environment  
Nourishment

#### **Supportive Environment**

Warm Welcome  
Session Flow  
Active Engagement  
Skill-Building  
Encouragement  
Child-Centered Space

#### **Interaction**

Managing Feelings  
Belonging  
School-Age Leadership  
Interaction with Adults

#### **Engagement**

School-Age Planning  
School-Age Choice  
Reflection  
Responsibility

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## Appendix C: School-Age Child Care Observation Form\*

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

Lead Teacher\_\_ Assistant\_\_ Paraprofessional\_\_ Other\_\_ Regular staff\_\_ Sub\_\_

**\*Adapted from the School-Age YPQA (Smith & Hohmann, 2005)**

Summary of Scales Summary of Qualifiers	Rating	Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes Observer's Notes
<p><b>1. SAFE ENVIRONMENT</b>                      Staff help promote psychological and emotional safety.                      Staff monitor the physical environment for safety/free of health hazards.                      Staff are aware of emergency procedures and supplies are present.                      Staff serve a healthy food and drink snack as listed on the menu.</p>	/100	
<p><b>2. SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT</b>                      Staff provide a welcoming atmosphere.                      Session flow is planned, presented, and paced for youth.                      Staff provide activities that support active engagement.                      Staff support youth in building new skills.                      Staff support youth with encouragement.                      Staff use youth-centered approaches to reframe conflict.</p>	/125	
<p><b>3. INTERACTION</b>                      Staff help youth have opportunities to develop a sense of belonging.                      Staff help youth have opportunities to participate in small groups.                      Staff help youth have opportunities to act as group facilitators and mentors.                      Youth have opportunities to partner with adults.</p>	/75	
<p><b>4. ENGAGEMENT</b>                      Staff provide youth with opportunities to set goals and make plans.                      Staff help youth have opportunities to make choices based on their interests.                      Staff help youth have opportunities to reflect.</p>	/25	

\*Observation guide has been modified to exclude three YPQA indicators (Access, Youth-Centered Policies and Practices, and High Expectations for Youth and Staff), as they were not directly assessed.

**Overall impressions:**

## Appendix D: Permission Request to Conduct a Research Study

Request Date: June 26, 2017  
Principal Investigator: Angelita Jacobs  
Project name: School-Age Child care Teacher's Perceptions' of High Staff  
Turnover and Quality Programming

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at the Elementary building level. I am currently enrolled in a research class through Concordia University–Portland from whom I am seeking IRB approval.

I hope to recruit 10-15 volunteer school-age child care teachers who will complete a 1.5 hour interview and conduct program observations of their various programs. Participants will complete the interviews when the programs are not in session and program observations will occur during out-of-school time hours. The interview and observation process should take no longer than 2 hours per participant, and I plan to conduct program observations for up to 4 hours.

There is no cost to participants or the school district, and no risks are involved other than normal daily activities. Study results will remain confidential and anonymous, and will be provided to the district in written format. Results from the study may benefit the District by informing the practice of the School-Age Child care Administrators regarding the structure of how programs function at a site level with high staff turnover.

If approval is granted, please submit a signed letter of permission on the District's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study.

Sincerely,

**Angelita Jacobs**  
Angelita Jacobs, MS, LLP

## **Appendix E: Recruitment Letter**

Dear Child Care Teacher,

I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to help me understand how you experience high turnover and quality programming. As a teacher of school-aged children, you are in the best position to provide first-hand information. There are two parts to participation. I will set up a mutually convenient time and location to conduct a 1.5 hour long interview made up of open and closed-ended questions. The second part is an observation of your program by me for up to two hours on 3-4 separate occasions. Participation should no more than 4 hours of your time.

Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to keep it confidential. No personal information will be used during the analyses and write-up of findings.

There are no known risks outside of your typical daily activities, and there is no payment for participating in this study. Your participation, however, will be helpful to my research findings and could lead to greater public understanding of high turnover and quality programming in school-age child care programs.

I consider your potential input to be very beneficial to this research. Please understand that you are under no obligation to take part in this study and that deciding not to participate will in not affect your position.

If you are willing to participate, please contact me with a day and time that is convenient for you. Please feel free to send me any questions, comments, or concerns.

Thanks,  
Angelita Jacobs



## Appendix F: Data Table I

Emergent Theme	Supported by Codes	Selected Excerpts from Interviews and Observations
Quality	<b>(1) Safety</b> 1. Runs smoothly 2. Allergy aware 3. Clean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think we have a responsibility to make sure that the students are safe. The parents expect it. The state from a certification [stance] expects it. Both the physical and emotional safety of the student. (Charles)</li> <li>• Safety is all of our job. It's everyone's job to make sure that these kids are safe while they are in our care. (Rose)</li> <li>• Without safety, we can't do anything right. (Ryan)</li> <li>• I think it's important for [programs] to be safe, [a] safe place mentally for them, and also safe physically. (Cheryl)</li> <li>• I think clean goes along with safe. We try to minimize spreading germs and sharing cooties in our program. (Mary)</li> <li>• Having a list of the children, having their allergies [listed], [and] being able to know the needs of each child. (Connie)</li> </ul>
	<b>(2) Variety of activities</b> 1. Age appropriate 2. Multiple projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have activities and games, for everyone, for all ages. (Cheryl)</li> <li>• Have them be a part of the decision-making process for what they would like to choose, activities that they would like to participate in. (Samantha)</li> <li>• Have multiple types of projects that a child might be interested in or may be able to learn about in some type of degree. (Rebecca)</li> <li>• Give them the materials that they want to use, so you can kind of see what their imagination is going to be, what they're going to create. (Connie)</li> </ul>
	<b>(3) Structure</b> 1. Consistent 2. Routine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistency and structure is really important. I think kids need to understand what their boundaries are</li> </ul>

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and what they're expected to do.  
(Henry)

- If you have age appropriate targets, the development[al level] has to be appropriate for the kids [so] they know what to come in and do. (Brenda)
- Safety provides a little bit of structure for the kids, so they know what to do in any situation where they might get hurt or someone else might get hurt. (Mary)
- If you have everything kind of written down and you're organized, and the program has that quality that you're looking for, [structure] comes natural[ly] and you won't have to worry about it. (Connie)

**(4) Engaged teachers**

1. Dedicated
2. Mentally present

- It's the teacher's role [to have] engagement on all levels. (Charles)
- Have a passion for working with kids and have the energy and outgoingness to get kids excited. (Samantha)
- You need to have a staff that really likes children. (Susan)
- Someone that's dedicated to work. Someone that comes to work every day...Present in the work that they do. (Brenda)
- If you have an engaged and committed staff, it's going to be reflected in their interactions with the parents and with the kids. (Charles)
- I think we need to help them grow in all those areas...we [should] teach to the whole child. (Rose)

Interaction with  
Children

**(5) Positive guidance**

1. Education
2. Influence
3. Problem Solve

- Just take what they know and keep digging deeper and making fun out of it. It's growing and learning the whole time. (Brenda)
- Guiding their interests or being a part of their interest or taking their interest to the next level. (Brenda)
- Children should be given choices because that helps in the whole process

of thinking, that says you're important, it helps them later on in life also because as adults they'll be able to make choices...(Hanna)

- How you can connect what it is that you do at your program to them and their best interests to make it successful. (Henry)
- I think it's our job to make child care inviting and enjoyable for the kids. (Rose)

### **(6) Trust**

1. Follow through
2. Connection

- Trust is very important with working with children...The kids need to be able to feel safe around you. (Henry)
- You have to make sure that you're being honest and open with people, so people understand and have a clear view of where it is that you're coming from. (Henry)
- You basically start from scratch every day with a child who doesn't trust you. So, it's important that you build that trust. (Rose)
- At least once a week, all the toys get cleaned, so the kids don't have to worry about getting sick...I think it's just one less worry for parents. (Mary)

### **(7) Creativity**

1. Foster their interest
2. Child led

- Letting the kids be creative and fostering that creative instincts or gene in them. (Rose)
- Just take what they know and keep digging deeper and making fun out of it. It's growing and learning the whole time. (Brenda)
- I thought it was a one-day activity and it turns into a two-week activity. (Connie)
- Have children "be a part of the decision-making process for what they would like to choose [regarding the] activities that they would like to participate in ...empowering them to sort of make decisions regarding, you

Teacher  
Qualifications

**(8) Trained**

1. Knowledgeable
2. Willing to learn

know, how they want to spend their time. (Samantha)

- One of the things that I really enjoy about my job is that I do have the freedom and the creativity to build [a less canned program] (Samantha)
- I'm saying staff with experience, and a staff that's willing to learn about children and about different topics. (Rebecca)
- I think formal training is important...It's one thing to be passionate on what it is that you want to do.....It's another thing to make sure that you have the knowledge and resources to be able to deliver that. (Charles)
- Some type of educational background or some type of trade where they're knowledgeable of some things, or just being able to contribute something to the quality of the program. (Ryan)
- In a perfect world, the staff would have either an associate degree or an undergraduate degree. (Hanna)
- You don't have to always be enrolled in a school to get quality teaching or learning something. You can be reading [and] learning yourself. (Ryan)

**(9) Prepared**

1. Organized
2. Flexible

- It's essential the organization does adequate planning. Adequate planning, making sure that we're planning ahead. (Charles)
- When I say ready, I'm meaning that everything is prepared, meaning the snack, the activities. The kids are able to do things without a teacher, kind of like self-instruction. (Connie)
- Clear expectations of the staff, just so that they know what's expected of them, like to be on time, to, everybody needs to pitch in...(Cheryl)

- Can't always do things you've planned, things happen, but backups are always a good idea. (Susan)

**(10) Committed**

1. Engaged

- It's one thing to have the staff that enjoys what it is that they do. If you have an engaged and committed staff, it's going to be reflected in their interactions with the parents and with the kids. (Charles)
- You can tell when a person wants to be here and who doesn't, kind of from the passion, kind of just off of their activities. (Connie)
- If you don't have a good quality staff you don't have a good program, you just got babysitters there. (Hanna)
- They're gonna be there when they say they're gonna be there. They're gonna do what they say they're gonna do. (Brenda)

**(11) Passionate**

1. Knowledge

2. Energy

- I think you just got to be passionate about it (Ryan)
- Have a passion for working with kids and have the energy and outgoingness, I guess, to get kids excited. (Samantha)
- It's one thing to have passion, it's another thing to have the knowledge too that will come from formal training to be able to actually deliver. (Charles)

**(12) Role models**

1. Teach

2. Work together

- Staff are the role models to go ahead and teach and be consistent on how they go about teaching what the boundaries are and structure, so the kids understand what it is they're supposed to be doing when they're in child care (Henry)
- The staff would know their role, how important their role is, and [its importance when] dealing with the child[ren] and building relationships, and [building] relationships with families. (Hanna)

Staff  
Relationships

**(13) Respect**

1. Work together

- The children need to have good role models. And it helps if you have a staff who are working, you know, hand in hand together. (Rose)
- It's really helpful and the program runs really much more successfully if people respect each other and work well together. (Susan)
- I think if the kids see that you respect someone else, that they'll respect them, too. I think respect goes a long way on just every end because you get stuff done. (Mary)
- One of the most important aspects of running a good program is to have some type of effective relationship with your staff...to know your individual staff's strengths and their weaknesses, and to work with them on that. (Rebecca)
- People probably are hesitant to confront a coworker that they've worked with in the same capacity. (Rebecca)
- She said when a colleague does not treat another colleague well, that person "Is not going to want to come to work and they're not going to be happy, and they're not going to want to work with that person, and we have to all work together. (Cheryl)

**(14) Teamwork**

1. Support

- We [have] got support each other like a team, together everyone achieves more. So, if we work as a team, then the kids would get more out of the program. Versus it's one person just kind of doing everything. (Connie)
- Teamwork is so important. It's so important because we all need to help each other. We all need to be able to work together for the children. (Henry)

- We [have] got support each other like a team, together everyone achieves more. So, if we work as a team, then the kids would get more out of the program. Versus it's one person just kind of doing everything. (Hanna)
- You have to work together to make it successful. I can work myself to death to try to make this work, if the staff isn't working together, it doesn't matter how much I try something, it's not going to fully work, because it takes everybody to be part of the team. (Susan)
- I think that one of the things that keep people going back to their job every day is enjoying their co-workers and also enjoying what they're doing. (Samantha)
- Because we're a team, so we might put more on our plate because we want to help out another team member. So that's just working together as a team. (Connie)

**(15) Oversight**

1. Leadership
2. Involved

- A lot of staff just need leading...they need leadership to make it a quality program, and that's on [the supervisor] (Rebecca)
- Supervisors have to lead or you'll be listening to what everybody else tells you to do all the time. (Rose)
- Supervisors need to oversee everything" by noticing what the kids like and dislike. (Brenda)
- Have the overall picture" and their team [should] "branch off and actually do the things. (Connie)
- The supervisor needs to take initiative, directing and guiding, whatever that program needs. Not just by speaking it, but also, actually getting involved and doing it. (Ryan)
- I think the supervisor's position is to oversee [the program], but I also

believe, it's all our jobs to help each other out. (Henry)

- Clear leadership is so important for the quality of your programs because you have to have somebody leading and making people accountable, the children, your staff, period (Rebecca)

Staff Turnover

**(16) Consistency**

1. Routine
2. Dependable

- It's just important to have consistency so that, you've got a flow, and everybody knows each other, and you have a way to communicate, and the kids know their boundaries, and they know that you're going to be there. (Cheryl)
- I do think that if you're there every day you get to know the kids and their backgrounds, and their past, and what they bring so you're able to give them what they need. (Brenda)
- I just think steady staff, you can't beat it. (Rebecca)
- I think when you have someone there every day, they're reliable. (Ryan)
- I think when our core group is together, we are on point. (Rose)
- Parents are comfortable with the consistency of seeing the same people so they know what to expect when it comes to the type and quality of care for their kids. (Rose)

**(17) Disruption**

1. Interruption
2. Worry
3. Anxiety

- I think the whole program suffers. (Rebecca)
- Sometimes we have to really alter the whole program when we don't have our staff in place. (Connie)
- You may have to stop what you're doing to instruct the new person on how to do [something]. (Hanna)
- All aspects of programming are impacted when staff turnover because voids need to be filled. (Charles)
- There's the staff dynamic and there's the staff-student dynamic that gets



disrupted whenever there's high turnover, which could have a negative impact.” (Charles)

- Just the energy that it takes to get used to someone else's styles and their approaches. (Samantha)
- Impacts the morale of the staff... It's the morale of the staff that's seeing people come and go, good staff seeing good staff go, that does something to you. It's a bitter-sweet type situation. It affects staff more seeing their coworkers leave and kids, too. (Rebecca)
- I feel like [children] get more anxious and more worried, and they don't feel as comfortable because there's a new person in the room, and now they only have one person that they feel like they can go to instead of two, like when [x] is there. It's just more chaotic. (Mary)

### **(18) Competence Level**

1. Goodness of fit
2. Work load

- You don't know what you're in for. You don't know how that new person is going to mesh with the program and with the kids and especially when you've got something that's running very smoothly, and everybody knows what they're doing and there doesn't have to be direction every minute. (Susan)
- So obviously you'll feel lost if you lose someone good and their replacement's someone that's less capable. So that puts strain on the remaining employees. (Samantha)
- Might serve the kids something they're not supposed to be given as far as milk, cheese, or something that we serve. (Ryan)

### **(19) Adjustment**

1. Expectations

- You don't know what you're walking into, so that's definitely tricky. (Mary)
- It goes both ways, it can be positive, or it can be negative. It depends on who is

coming in to fill that void, or if that person is being replaced. (Charles)

- The support or assistance shown towards colleagues in addition to communication aspects would be impacted by relationships where “Both staff [did] not know each other [or have] never worked together. (Ryan)
- It's really hard on the kids when new people are coming in and other people are leaving. (Susan)
- Sometimes, some of our kids are so used to routine that it may take them a minute to warm up to the new person. (Rose)

### **Appendix G: Member Check Questions**

1. Does the transcription accurately reflect your responses?
2. Were your responses accurately presented?
3. Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to add?

## **Appendix H: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### **What does “fraudulent” mean?**

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### **What is “unauthorized” assistance?**

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

**Statement of Original Work (Continued)**

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University- Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Angelita S. Jacobs

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Name (Typed)

November 28, 2018

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Date