QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS:

VIEWS OF PRESCHOOL DIRECTORS IN RURAL HAWAI’I

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This project is dedicated to my mom, Caroline Fahlen and is in memory of my dad, Patrick McAvoy. You are loved very much.
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I would like to thank my partner, Chris, and our families for their encouragement and love.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, grounded theory study explored the views directors in rural Hawai‘i have about quality in early childhood programs and what influenced those views. The study included nine participants, all of whom were directors of rural preschool programs in Hawai‘i. Participants held four shared values that were viewed as meaningful in early childhood programs. Participants also viewed a quality program as having eight key defining components. Evaluation systems and being in a rural environment were viewed to positively influence quality in early childhood programs. The analytic tool “Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences” was developed by the researcher to understand different levels of influences on participants’ views of quality. The grounded theory that emerged from this study suggests that values, shared views of key components of quality and context have a major impact on directors’ views of quality in early childhood programs.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.................................................................................................................. iii
ABSTRACT......................................................................................................................................... iv
LIST OF TABLES.................................................................................................................................. ix
LIST OF FIGURES............................................................................................................................. x
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION........................................................................................................... 1
  Statement of the Problems.................................................................................................................. 3
  Purpose of the Study.......................................................................................................................... 3
  Research Questions........................................................................................................................... 4
  Significance of the Study.................................................................................................................... 4
  Definition of Terms............................................................................................................................ 5
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW................................................................................................... 7
  Introduction........................................................................................................................................ 7
    Definitions of Quality ..................................................................................................................... 8
    Process and structural aspects......................................................................................................... 8
    Why is High-quality Important?..................................................................................................... 9
    Benefits to society........................................................................................................................... 9
    Benefits to individual development............................................................................................... 11
  Approaches to Quality..................................................................................................................... 12
    Holistic and ecological approaches............................................................................................... 13
    Preschool Directors and Quality.................................................................................................... 14
    Formal education............................................................................................................................ 15
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specialized training in leadership</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director characteristics</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory Methodology</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary interview</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary interview</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding Process</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major themes</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant values</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Defining Components of Quality</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views of Evaluation</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a Rural Environment</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive influences</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views of Quality</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Description of Participants</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Sequence of Data Collection</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Duration, Time of Day and Purpose of Observation</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Participant Values</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Participant Evaluation Systems</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences (as an analytic tool) ..........................................................</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences (as adapted for this study) ...................................................</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences (an example of the symbiotic relationship between three levels)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The most important work to help our children is done quietly.¹

Leadership in early childhood education (ECE) is done quietly through the daily decisions of preschool staff. One of the most important roles in a preschool program is that of the center director. Center directors are ultimately responsible for the hiring and supervising of teachers and the distribution of resources. They also act as liaisons between the program, families and community (Nupponen, 2005). The “quiet” daily decisions that program directors make are influenced by their views of quality and impact how they choose to the implement what they believe quality to be in early childhood programs that support young children, families and staff (Nupponen, 2005; Mins, Scott-Little, Lower, Cassidy & Hestenes, 2008; Tsakoyia-Mendes, 2002; Sciaraffa, 2004).

As an early childhood educator, I have witnessed the influence directors views have on the implementation of the quality in preschool programs. From my experience it appears that most program directors value quality in early childhood programs; however it also seems that directors in different communities have different views of what quality means and looks like in early childhood programs. It is this observation that led me to do this qualitative study.

Two directors I have observed within the past five years can be used as exemplars of my experience. The first director “Mary” was the director of a large preschool program on a California University campus. She held a Masters degree in Early Childhood Education and had previous experience as a preschool teacher at

the preschool before becoming director. She implemented quality by subscribing to the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation standards. NAEYC standards are specific in their approach and guide daily practices in a preschool program (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). They provide a specific framework for defining the components of quality in early childhood programs.

When explaining why the program was high quality to staff and community members, Mary would refer to the fact it was accredited by NAEYC. From this observation I inferred that she viewed a high-quality program as one that meets NAEYC standards.

The second director, “Ann”, was a director of a small, rural preschool in Hawai‘i. Ann took an approach to quality that differed from Mary’s approach. Although her values were similar to Mary’s, such as the importance of building relationships with families, other values—like professional development of staff—were not as strongly emphasized. Because of her strong value of family involvement, Ann strove to implement quality in her program by ‘talking story’, or verbally communicating with families and staff at the end of the day. Family participation and family-teacher meetings were encouraged regularly. Because of the steps Ann took to include and encourage family participation in her program, I inferred that Ann viewed the implementation of daily communication with families and other staff as a key component in the definition of a high quality preschool.

As the above descriptions demonstrate, the different views of quality the directors had influenced what they emphasized in their programs. The purpose of this explorative grounded theory study was to better understand how directors who work in the context of
rural preschool in Hawai‘i view quality in early childhood programs and what influences those views. The purpose of this study was also to build a theory regarding the components that influence directors’ views of quality in rural preschools in Hawai‘i, as well as to develop a conceptual framework for understanding what influences those views from the words of directors like Ann. Constructivism, a worldview that describes phenomena through the meanings and understandings participants have constructed about the phenomena (Cresswell & Clark, 2007, p.22), provided the philosophical framework for this study.

**Statement of the Problem**

This qualitative research study addressed three problems in the field of ECE. The first was the need for a more finely calibrated understanding of the defining components of quality in ECE programs. The second was the need for diverse views to be taken into account in the formulation of those defining components, including the views of directors’ in rural Hawai‘i. The third was the need for a conceptual framework of understanding what influences the views directors have about the defining components of quality in early childhood programs.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was two-fold. The primary purpose was to explore the views directors’ of preschool program in rural Hawai‘i have about quality in early childhood programs in order to address the need for a more finely calibrated understanding of the defining components of quality in ECE programs. The explorative nature of the study allowed for the need for directors’ views to be included in ECE literature to be addressed. The secondary purpose of this
qualitative study was to begin the design of a conceptual framework that could possibly be used as a guide for exploring influences on director views of quality in early childhood programs.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study was: “What are the views directors’ in rural Hawai‘i have about quality in early childhood programs and what influences those views?” In the tradition of qualitative research, the primary research question was followed by sub-questions that narrow the focus of the study (Cresswell & Clark, 2007). The research sub-questions of this study were:

1. What meanings have directors of rural preschools in Hawai‘i constructed about quality in early childhood programs?
2. How do directors of rural preschools in Hawai‘i define quality in early childhood programs?
3. How do directors of rural preschools in Hawai‘i evaluate quality in their own programs?
4. How do directors of rural preschools in Hawai‘i view the state of being in a rural environment influence their programs?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides a guide for the emerging ECE profession to describe and understand the views directors’ of rural preschools in Hawai‘i have about quality early childhood programs and what influences those views. It also provides a conceptual framework describing the influences on directors’ views about quality in early childhood programs.
One objective of grounded theory is to build a “language” in order for professionals in a field to talk about a phenomenon through the development of a conceptual framework. The development of the conceptual framework and exploratory nature of this qualitative study may allow for directors’ voices to be heard as the emerging profession of ECE arrives at a “shared understanding” of what the defining components of quality in early childhood programs are and what influences leaders’ views of quality in early childhood programs. This study is also significant because it may help different professional organizations in the ECE field gain a better ability to contextualize professional resources. Although the results of the study cannot be generalized, it may provide a foundation and useful conceptual framework for further research in similar and different contextual locales.

**Definition of Terms**

*Rural.* According to the US Census Bureau, a rural area is one that does not exceed a population of 2,500 people (US Census Bureau, 2010). Of the early childhood programs in this study, eight of the nine meet this definition for rural programs. The one exception is a program that is in an area with a population of 10,506 people (US Census Bureau, 2010). Though this area would be defined as an “urban cluster” according to the census, literature focused on education in rural Hawai’i has defined this area as rural (for example, see Lemke & Harrison, 2000). The participant director also perceived her program to be in the context of a rural community. For these reasons—precedent set by prior research in
combination with participant's perception—I have included the program in my study.

Quality. A general definition of quality is “degree of excellence” (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2011). It is the intent of this study to more finely calibrate the defining components of quality as it relates to early childhood programs and to explore the views directors' of rural preschools in Hawai’i have about quality in early childhood programs.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The need for high quality early childhood programs has caught the attention of public as the demand for childcare grows (Nupponen, 2005). National legislation and local organizations have concentrated on kindergarten readiness as an indicator of high quality early childhood education. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is an example of national legislation that has put pressure on early childhood programs to prepare children for kindergarten. (Westervelt et al., 2008). The Good Beginnings Alliance (GBA) is an influential early childhood research, resource and referral organization in Hawai‘i and has responded to national pressure by focusing on school readiness as an indicator of quality in their research of Hawai‘i’s early childhood programs (Good Beginnings, 2010).

As the demand for early childhood programs continues to grow, local research suggests that preschools are not meeting the need for high-quality education and care. The growing number of children attending kindergarten in Hawai‘i who have had preschool experience is indicative of the growing demand for early childhood education in the United States. In the year 2000, for example, about 45 of 100 of Hawai‘i’s children who went to kindergarten attended preschool. In 2005, 5 of 10 children attended early childhood programs in Hawai‘i (Good Beginnings, 2007). Over the course of five years there was a 5% increase of children in Hawai‘i in need of high-quality early childhood education and care. In May 2010 the GBA issued a brief report stating that three of four children in Hawai‘i do not have the pre-kindergarten skills needed to succeed in school.
Definitions of Quality

The definition of a high quality early childhood program are subject to many interpretations (Ceglowski, 2004; Cryer, 2003; Leach, 2008). The definitions range from ambiguous to specific. An example of an ambiguous definition of a quality early childhood program in ECE literature is a program that is described as "good for the child" (Ceglowski, 2004, p.103). This ambiguous description of a high-quality program is elaborated on slightly by Hawai‘i's family resource and referral agency PATCH. PATCH (2010) refers families to programs with trained, experienced staff that demonstrate "warmth, love and guidance" (para.3) to children.

Literature in the early childhood field has sought to specify the definition of a high quality early childhood program since the 1970s. More specific defining components of quality have included themes of receptive adult-child interactions and staff characteristics (Ceglowski, 2004; Gunner, 1992). Other studies have focused on strong family-staff communication, curriculum philosophy and classroom composition in defining the components that make up the quality in early childhood programs (Ceglowski, 2004).

**Process and structural aspects.** Process and structural aspects of quality in early childhood programs provide the foundation for defining specific components of quality (Espinosa, 2002; Ishimine & Wilson, 2009; Leach, 2008). Process quality refers to the components of quality that children directly experience. Examples of process quality include the organization of the environment, the activities and learning opportunities for children, and the quality of teacher-child interactions (Espinosa, 2002; Leach, 2008; Westervelt et al., 2008). Structural quality refers to the components of support systems...
that enhance process quality (Espinosa, 2002; Leach, 2008; Westervelt et al., 2008). Teacher education levels, beliefs about teaching, wages, ratios, class size and overall management of the program are all structural quality. Structural and process components of quality work together to create the level of quality in early childhood programs (Espinosa, 2002; Leach, 2008; Westervelt et al., 2008). Researchers assess the process and structural components of quality through utilization of different rating scales.

Different rating scales are used to assess varying components of quality by researchers. The *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale*, for example, assesses the process components of quality (Espinosa, 2002). Technical aspects of structural quality (such as ratios and class size) are regulated by state licensing standards. These standards often do not match up to the expectations for a high quality programs as defined by national professional organizations, like NAEYC (Espinosa, 2002). The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an assessment tool that is used to assess interactions between the student and the teacher (Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2010). These different rating and scoring systems do not provide a framework for understanding perspectives of staff in different contextual settings; rather they provide a guiding framework for evaluating quality in programs that are part of larger organizations which have complex standards of quality and accreditation systems (for example, see Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

**Why is High-quality Important?**

**Benefits to society.** Recent longitudinal research projects have repeatedly reported the economic benefits of high-quality programs for young children (Belfield, Nores, Barnett and Schweinhart, 2006; Masse & Barnett, 2010; Reynolds, Temple,
Roberson & Mann, 2001). The Chicago Child-Parent Center Program is one example of a longitudinal preschool and early intervention project for low-income children whose societal benefits far exceeded the costs. In a cost-benefit analysis of the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program, Reynolds, et al. (2001) found that "Overall, $7.10 dollars were returned to society at large for every dollar invested in preschool" (para. 6). Like the Chicago Child-Parent Center program, the Carolina Abecedarian Project is a well-respected longitudinal study that explores the outcome of high-quality ECE for children from low-income families. In a cost-benefit analysis of the study, Masse and Barnett (2010) estimated that the benefits of the program exceed the cost four-to-one. Masse and Barnett (2010) concluded that for every dollar that was spent to provide children with high-quality ECE, society saved four dollars. A third cost-benefit analysis assessing the societal benefits of intensive high-quality early education explored the benefits of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Participants of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project study were forty years old when the analysis of societal benefits of their early childhood education was conducted. The cost-benefit analyses of this project, Belfield, et al. (2006) estimated societal benefits to include up to $12.90 for every dollar spent on the program.

High-quality early childhood programs may help close the achievement gap between children who come from low-income and high-income families. In response to national pressures, the RAND corporation, a nonprofit institution dedicated to research and analysis, recently launched the California Preschool Study in order to better understand the potential impact of high-quality early childhood programs specifically addressing the achievement gap. In the summary of the results of one component of this
study, researchers Cannon & Karoly (2007) argue that high-quality preschool programs should be one component of "a multipronged strategy to close achievement gaps in California" (xxii). The economic and social benefits of high-quality early childhood programs, as exemplified in these studies, are complemented by research on how high quality early childhood programs influence individual wellbeing during the early years.

**Benefits to individual development.** High quality preschools and other early childhood programs influence healthy brain development of very young children (Thompson, 2008). As young children develop, their brains alter and adapt to novel experiences. High quality early learning experiences promote healthy brain development by providing experiences that are interesting and engaging to children. High quality early childhood education programs also provide opportunities for positive social interaction with sensitive adults that provide appropriate stimulation for healthy brain development (Thompson, 2008).

Other aspects of development are also influenced by high quality early learning experiences. Studies show that high-quality early childhood programs may positively influence social, emotional, cognitive and language skills. In their longitudinal study examining the relationship between socio-emotional and cognitive development of 733 children, Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, Kagan and Yazejian (2001) found a positive correlation between high-quality early childhood programs and children’s cognitive development. A large study of an enriched intervention program in forty-four Head Start classrooms also exemplifies the potential positive benefits of high-quality early childhood programs for young children. In this study, Biermman, Domitovch, Nix, Gest, Welsh, Greenberg, Blair, Nelson and Gill (2008) found significant
growth in children's social, emotional and vocabulary development and literacy skills over the course of one year. As these studies reveal, high quality early childhood programs may address national and state issues of school readiness, which require young children to have strong cognitive, literacy and social-emotional skills.

**Approaches to Quality**

Formal definitions of quality by early childhood education programs are often followed by minimum to complex standards to implement in the classroom to ensure quality. Many minimum standards for quality in early childhood programs in the United States are the standards set by state law as represented in child care licensing regulations. According to the State of Hawai‘i (2010), a quality early childhood program is one that meets basic health and safety regulations. Although state licensing sets the minimum standards for quality, it is generally agreed upon in literature and by professional organizations that licensing does not guarantee the program to be of high quality.

Accreditation is used as a measurement of a high program by national organizations, like the National Association of Education for Young Children. Accreditation systems differ from licensing standards because they set higher standards for quality and implement a system for assuring programs meet those high standards. According to a research report conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) (Espinosa, 2002) and the best practices described by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), high quality programs provide a variety of opportunities for children to learn, develop and be challenged individually and socially. Both sources also posit that children should be given opportunities to make decisions throughout the day. According to
NIEER and NAEYC, high quality programs support and recognize strengths of families and teachers. Family partnerships and professional development opportunities are included in this definition of high quality programs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Espinosa, 2002). The NIEER and NAEYC, like many national ECE organizations, agree that there are specific defining components that characterize a high-quality early childhood program.

**Holistic and ecological approaches.** Some researchers have taken a holistic approach to defining the components that make a high-quality program. In an influential study, Bloom (1987) conducted a large survey of 629 early childhood workers. This study explored the organizational climate of early childhood programs. The organizational climate of an early childhood program refers to the interactions of personalities, values, belief systems, attitudes and perceptions in the program. The researchers found that all of these interactions influence the structural components of a program and together create the quality of a program (Jorde-Bloom, 1987). An ecological perspective of quality in ECE also considers influences like teacher belief systems and perceptions in defining high-quality early childhood programs (Sciaraffa, 2004).

An ecological perspective of quality in ECE emphasizes the individuals’ objective reality, experiences, and interactions within an early childhood program and their relationships with external, structural aspects of a program (Sciaraffa, 2004). The results of Jorde-Bloom's (1987) influential study of teachers and administrators in classrooms revealed significant differences in views of quality of the organizational climate of the classroom between these two groups. In a more recent study, Ceglowski (2004) explored the defining components of quality according to three hundred and thirty three
stakeholders. Participants of the study included teacher educators, parents, legislators, and childcare administrators and staff. Ceglowski’s research also revealed differences in participants' views of important defining components of quality. For example, families and childcare staff noted the importance of communication of families in a high-quality program, but childcare staff emphasized the importance of training more than families did (Ceglowski, 2004). According to Ceglowski, understanding multiple perspectives of quality in childcare is important so that "we might better understand the child care landscape and influence the choices available to families, program types, and staff support and professional development opportunities" (p. 110). Exploration of views of the defining components of quality is one step in the approach of this understanding.

**Preschool Directors and Quality**

As the early childhood field more finely calibrates a greater understanding of quality in early childhood programs, scholars and researchers should pursue an understanding of what the views of leaders working in early childhood programs are, and what influences those views. Although their individual perspectives are often overlooked, program directors are the "gatekeepers to quality" (Bloom, 1992, p. 138). As leaders of early childhood programs, program directors' views of quality set the tone for implementation of quality in their programs. Directors of preschools have a multitude of responsibilities in the development, implementation and evaluation of their programs. According to Bloom and Sheerer (1992), directors should be knowledgeable about programming, leadership, fiscal and legal issues, public policy, advocacy, and research in the early childhood field. Through the implementation of their role, directors are also
called on daily to respond to the needs of staff (Sheerer & Bauer, 1996) and families (Winton, McCollum & Catlett, 2008).

A study conducted by Rafanello, et al. (1997) suggested that directors feel satisfaction in having high quality programs. According to Nupponen (2005) to many directors “quality care is about meeting the needs of the children” (p. 355). The little literature that outlines how directors’ view the defining components of quality in early childhood programs, and what influences those views, indicates that program administrators often look to the training and professionalism of the staff in order to provide quality care (Ceglowsky, 2004).

Scholars in the early childhood field have recognized the important role directors have in the implementation of quality in early childhood programs. According to Fleming and Love (2003), directors have the potential to empower staff through systematic changes by building important relationships with teachers and other adults in the community. Leaders of early childhood education programs must have both strong leadership skills in order to implement and maintain high quality early childhood programs (Bloom, 1990), as well a vision of what the defining components of a high-quality program are, and how high-quality early learning experience can be implemented in their programs. Research trends that have focused on directors have primarily focused on professional education and training (Mins, et. al., 2008; Bloom, 1990) and personal characteristics (Sciaraffa, 2004).

**Formal education.** According to scholars in the early childhood field, formal education, experience, and training play important roles in directors’ abilities to
provide strong leadership (Bloom, 1990). For example, one component of an assessment conducted by Mins et al. (2008) of the North Carolina Rated License system revealed a positive relationship between directors’ education level and program quality. According to Mins et al. (2008), directors’ education levels may influence the levels of support and guidance of teachers in high-quality ECE programs.

**Specialized training in leadership.** Research has suggested that specialized training in leadership may also improve the role perceptions, job performance, and career decisions of an early childhood program director. A recent comparative analysis of two leadership training programs by Bella and Bloom (2003) explored the impact of graduate level coursework and technical assistance on career decisions, role perception and job performance of 182 center directors. In this analysis, Bella and Bloom (2003) discovered an improvement the role perceptions, job performance, and career decisions of the participants in both programs, as well as positive influences the training had on directors’ feelings of competence and empowerment (Bella & Bloom, 2003).

While there is a perceived need by researchers and experts in the field for formal education and specialized training in leadership for program directors, the availability of professional development opportunities for program directors is lacking, especially in remote and rural areas. In Hawai‘i, for example, there are few formal education and leadership training opportunities for center directors. The Castle Colleagues is a professional development program for early childhood program directors in Hawai‘i that is funded through The Samuel and Mary M. Castle foundation (Castle Colleagues
Program, 2010). Trainings take place on the island of Oahu in Hawai‘i. In 1999, graduates of Castle Colleagues founded Kia‘i ka ‘ike, one of the few statewide professional organizations that provide continued professional development and support stems for directors in Hawai‘i. Currently there are over 75 members of Kia‘i ka ‘ike (2009). Despite opportunities like these, center directors are not likely to have specialized training in program administration (Bloom, 1990) and the quality of training and education for directors varies (Culkin, 2000).

**Director characteristics.** Director’s personal characteristics and skills, along with formal education and specialized training in leadership, may also be indicators of quality in ECE programs. According to Sciaraffa (2004) directors must have leadership skills in addition to positive characteristics to be a strong leader of an early childhood program. While there is limited research on this relationship (Mins, et al., 2008), a qualitative study by Sciaraffa (2004) demonstrates that personal characteristics and values that influence directors of high quality programs include: “concern for children and families, high expectations, value of trust, respect, sense of professionalism, belief in teamwork, nurturing the nurturer, and high demands” (p.130).

Research on directors’ feelings of competence in their leadership role suggests that directors draw on four general skills to provide effective leadership in their program. These include skills in interpersonal communication, staff development, group facilitation, and decision-making (Bella & Bloom, 2003). The demonstration of these skills by directors may contribute to overall quality of care provided by an early childhood program.
Despite the important leadership role directors have in the implementation of high-quality programs for young children, little is known about the individual perspectives of directors’ about the defining components of quality in early childhood programs. Research has repeatedly demonstrated a need for implementation of high-quality ECE in early childhood programs. National and local trends in legislation and research have reflected this demand. Program directors, as leaders of programs educating young children, define the components of quality in their programs on a daily basis. Hearing the voices of directors in diverse settings would be an important contribution to emerging literature that addresses components of quality in early childhood programs. It would also further our understanding of this topic if we had a conceptual framework for understanding what influences directors’ views of quality in preschool programs.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to explore views directors’ of early childhood programs in rural Hawai‘i have about quality in early childhood programs and to provide a conceptual framework for understanding what influences those views. The primary research question for this study was: “What are the views directors have about quality in early childhood programs in rural Hawai‘i and what influences those views?” The four sub-questions for this study were:

1. What meanings have directors of rural programs in rural Hawai‘i constructed about quality in ECE programs?
2. How do directors of rural preschools in Hawai‘i define quality in ECE programs?
3. How do directors of rural preschools in Hawai‘i evaluate quality in their own programs?
4. How do directors of rural preschools in Hawai‘i view the state of being in a rural environment influence their programs?

Research Design

Research design is guided by multiple influences, including the "philosophical orientation” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 1) or “philosophical assumptions” (Cresswell & Clark, 2007, p.20) of the researcher and the nature of the research question itself (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Cresswell & Clark, 2007): “Behind each study lies assumptions the researcher makes about reality, how knowledge is obtained, and the methods of gaining knowledge” (Cresswell & Clark, 2007, p. 23).
The central research question of this study, “How do directors of rural preschool programs in Hawai‘i view quality in early childhood settings and what influences those views?” explored the understandings that directors working in rural Hawai‘i have constructed about quality in preschool programs. The philosophy of constructivism orients itself with the worldview of this research question: “The understanding of or meaning of phenomena, formed through participants and their subjective views, make up this world view [of constructivism]” (Cresswell & Clark, 2007, p.22). In the case of this research question, the ‘phenomena’ in study was quality in rural preschool programs and the participants are the directors, who are asked about the their subjective views of this phenomena.

**Grounded Theory Methodology**

Working within a constructivist worldview, this research utilized grounded theory methodology. The purpose of this kind of grounded theory methodology is to construct theory from raw data to allow for a shared understanding of a phenomenon. Grounded theory also allows for theory to be constructed when there is no prior theory available to explain a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory is the most appropriate method to use in this study that explores directors’ of rural preschools in Hawai‘i views of quality in early childhood programs, and what influences those views, because no available conceptual frameworks were found in a review of ECE literature for describing directors’ of rural preschools in Hawai‘i views and the influences of those views. The raw data that is constructed into theory in this study comes from interviews with directors of
rural early childhood programs in Hawai‘i, as well as researcher observations of programs.

Method

Participants

Ten preschool directors from rural preschools in Hawai‘i were selected to participate in this study. This sample represents a small portion of directors of rural preschools in Hawai‘i—a community that is not represented in prior research on quality in early childhood programs. Seven directors were recruited from a public list of preschools in rural Hawai‘i available through an early childhood referral organization. Four program directors were suggested by recommendation of ECE professionals in Hawai‘i who had heard about the study. Of the four that were recruited through recommendation, one dropped out of the study after one interview. A total of nine directors working in rural programs in Hawai‘i participated in the study.

Five different program settings are represented in this study. One participant worked at a religious-affiliated preschool; one participant worked at a secular, independent preschool located at a church; one participant worked at a preschool located in a hospital setting; two participants ran the preschool from their homes and were also the owners of the programs; three participants worked at preschools that were part of larger educational institutions; one participant worked at a preschool that was a part of a larger non-profit organization for low-income families. For confidentiality purposes, the participants were labeled P1 through P9. Table 1.1 provides a description of the participants in the study, including the type
of program in which they work, their role in their program, the number of years they have been at the program, their formal educational background and training in ECE and what inspired them to be in ECE.

Table 1.1 Description of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Type of program</th>
<th>Role in program</th>
<th># of years have been in program</th>
<th>Educational background/Training</th>
<th>Inspiration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Private, religious-affiliated</td>
<td>Teacher/Director</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 degrees, including BA in ECE, Castle Colleagues</td>
<td>Family in ECE field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Private, secular (located at a church)</td>
<td>Teacher/Director</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CDA, AA in ECE</td>
<td>Enjoyed being with children—parent volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Large, non-profit for low-income families</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Degree in Teaching, Castle Colleagues, MEd ECE student</td>
<td>Working with teenage moms, teaching child development and parenting classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Private, part of larger school</td>
<td>Director/Adult</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Formal education in pedagogy</td>
<td>Having a child, reading about different philosophies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Private, home-based</td>
<td>Director/Teacher/Owner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>AA in ECE</td>
<td>First having a child, then going to school for ECE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Private, home-based</td>
<td>Director/Teacher/Owner</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>AS in ECE</td>
<td>Desire to be with her own children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Private, part of larger school</td>
<td>Educational Coordinator of multiple sites</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>BA, Elementary Education</td>
<td>Enjoyed being with children—parent volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Private, part of larger</td>
<td>Teacher/Director</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>MEd Private School</td>
<td>Having a child, reading about</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Procedure

**Data Collection**

Two common data collection techniques found in qualitative research are interviews and observations (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007). According to Bogdan & Biklin (2007) “If you want to understand the way people think about their world and how those definitions are formed, you need to get close to them, to hear them talk and observe them in their day-to-day lives” (p. 35). In order to explore how directors in rural Hawai‘i view the defining components of quality in preschools, and what influences those views, data for this study was collected from nine primary interviews, seven follow-up interviews and seven observations from nine program directors in rural preschools in Hawai‘i. Table 1.2 illustrates the sequence of data collection for each participant.
All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher, with assistance from the program *Transcriva 2.014* (Bartas Technologies, 2004-2009). *Transcriva 2.014* is a program that stores and formats typed transcriptions. Participant’s confidentiality was strictly maintained during the entire course of the study. Confidentiality was discussed and assured, and the *Consent Form* (see Appendix A) was signed before the primary interview.

Table 1.2. Sequence of Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Primary Interview</th>
<th>Secondary Interview</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>2 Interviews, 1 Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>2 Interviews, 1 Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>2 Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>1 Interview, 1 Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>2 Interviews, 1 Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>1 Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>2 Interviews, 1 Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>2 Interviews, 1 Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>2 Interviews, 1 Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9 Primary Interviews</td>
<td>7 Secondary Interviews</td>
<td>7 Observations</td>
<td>16 Interviews, 7 Observations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1.2.* The numbers in parenthesis indicated the sequence for each participant. For example, for P1, the primary interview occurred first (1), and then the observation (2). Following the observation was the secondary interview (3). A backslash (/) means no interview or observation took place.
**Semi-structured interviews.** Interviews in this study were “used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (Bogdan & Bicklin, 2007, p.104). In qualitative studies it is common that the structure of the interviews varies depending on the purpose of the interview, and what stage the interview is at in the course of a study (Bogdan & Bicklin, 2007). The purpose of this study was to explore how participants view quality in early childhood programs, and what influences those views. Though both interviews were semi-structured, the openness of the structure of each interview varied depending on the stage of the study the interview took part.

**Primary interview.** Data from nine primary interviews was collected at the time and location of convenience for the director. Eight primary interviews were conducted in person. One primary interview was conducted over the phone at a convenient time for the director. The primary interview was a semi-structured interview with the same guiding questions for all participants (see Appendix B). Questions used in the primary interviews were developed from discussion with professional early childhood educators who did not participate in the study, including other program directors in Hawai‘i, prior to data collection. As the interviews and study developed, clarifying questions were added to what was learned in the primary interviews.

The purpose of the primary interview for this study was to build a rapport with the directors, collect general information about the participants and collect data for the study. The duration of the primary interviews were between 45 and 75
minutes. Up to an additional 20 minutes was expended to allow for the participants have time to “warm up” (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007, p.105) to the researcher as well as to answer questions the participant may have about the study.

**Secondary interview.** The purpose of the secondary interview was to follow-up on themes developed in the primary interviews and observations. New questions were asked as the study evolved. The structure of the secondary interview was more open-ended then the primary interview. The secondary interview generally consisted of two parts. The first was to open the discussion of any questions or clarifications the director would like to make about the primary interview. The second part was open for the researcher to make clarifications or follow-up on emerging themes of the study. For an example of secondary interview questions, see Appendix C. The duration of the secondary interviews was between 20 and 60 minutes.

**Observations.** The purpose of observations of this study was to complement the findings of the interviews and gain better understanding of program environments. Seven directors consented to observation of their program. The purpose of each observation evolved as themes emerged during the course of the study. Table 1.3 indicates the duration, time of day and the purpose of the observation. The duration of observations was between 45 minutes and eight hours.

Table 1.3 Duration, Time of Day and Purpose of Observation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P#</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Time of day</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>Circle time (with children)</td>
<td>To observe the director in the ‘teacher role’ &amp; understand context of work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>Circle time (with children)</td>
<td>To observe the director in the ‘teacher role’ &amp; understand context of work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>NO OBSERVATION</td>
<td>role’ &amp; understand context of work environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>Open House (with families, children and other staff present)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To observe the physical environment of the school. Beauty, nature, art and natural materials are important aspects of this school’s philosophy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>Circle time (with children)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To observe the director in the ‘teacher role’ &amp; understand context of work environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>NO OBSERVATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>8 hour (including 90 minute teacher meeting)</td>
<td>Full day observation of program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To observe for a ‘sense of place’, as described in the interviews, as well as gain a better sense of the roles and responsibilities of the director.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>Free play for children in classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To observe the director in the ‘teacher role’ &amp; understand context of work environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>NO OBSERVATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

Data collected from interviews and observations were initially examined and open-coded for emerging themes. Open-coding refers to a process of categorizing raw data into conceptual themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). As data was collected, it was open-coded line by line, paragraph by paragraph and section by section. As the data was open-coded for themes from raw data, it was simultaneously coded axially. Axial coding refers to “the act of relating concepts/ categories to each other” (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p.198). The open and axial coding process helped to clarify gaps in emerging themes and guide interview questions.

Corbin and Strauss (2007) define the constant comparison method as “the analytic process of comparing different pieces of data for similarities and
In the constant comparative method, codes that are found to be conceptually similar are grouped together under a higher-level category or theme once the data has been compared for similarities and differences. This study used the constant comparison method to develop major themes and sub-themes throughout data collection and analysis, as well as to inform the research questions. According to Corbin and Strauss (2007), “this type of comparison is essential to all analysis because it allows the researcher to identify properties and dimensions specific to that category/theme” (p. 73).

After the initial coding process, data was analyzed to inform the four research sub-questions: 1) What meanings have directors’ of rural programs in rural Hawai’i constructed about quality in ECE programs?; 2) How do directors of rural preschools in Hawai’i define quality in ECE programs?; 3) How do directors of rural preschools in Hawai’i evaluate quality in their own programs?; and 4) How do directors of rural preschools in Hawai’i view the state of being in a rural environment influence their programs?. After each sub-question was addressed, the primary research question was separated into two parts for more thorough analysis. These two parts were “What are the views directors have about quality in early childhood programs in rural Hawai’i?” and “What influences those views?”.

Data was analyzed from the sub-questions were integrated into theory to inform the primary research question. Integration is “the process of linking categories around a core category” (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p.263) and constructing theory. The preliminary thematic categories and data analyzed from sub-questions one (“What meanings have directors’ of rural preschools in Hawai’i constructed about quality in
early childhood programs?”), two (“How do directors’ of rural preschools in Hawai‘i define quality in early childhood programs?”) and three (“How do directors’ of rural preschools in Hawai‘i evaluate quality in their own programs?”) were used to inform the first part of the primary research question (“What are the views directors have about quality in early childhood programs in rural Hawai‘i?”). The preliminary themes and data analyzed from research sub-questions one (“What meanings have directors’ of rural preschools in Hawai‘i constructed about quality in early childhood programs?”) and four (“How do directors’ of rural preschools in Hawai‘i view the state of being in a rural environment influence their programs?”) were used to inform the second part of the primary research question (“What influences those views?”).

The ecological theoretical framework was used to “complement, extend, and verify the findings” (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p.39) during the integration stage of the second part of the primary research question (“What influences those views?”). From the data analysis process, which included coding raw data and the use of the constant comparative method, an analytic tool for understanding what influenced participant views of quality in early childhood programs was developed. The ecological theoretical framework was used as a guide for the development of this analytic tool. Through the data analysis process of the primary research question and four research sub-questions, the purpose of this study was realized.

**Coding Process**

Fifteen preliminary and two major thematic categories emerged through the initial coding process. The 15 preliminary thematic categories were:

1) Background.
After the 15 preliminary thematic categories emerged, the constant comparative method was used to compare the data for conceptual similarities. Data from the preliminary thematic categories that were found to be conceptually similar were then grouped into two major themes. These two major themes were 1) Participant Values and 2) Context.

**Participant values.** After grouping the data from the preliminary thematic categories into two major themes, the constant comparative method was used to explore sub-thematic categories of the major theme ‘Participant Values’. According to Feeney
and Freeman (2005) “values are qualities that individuals believe to be intrinsically desirable or worthwhile and that they prize for themselves, for others, and for the world in which they live” (p. 4) Relevant themes from the data that were related to participant values were grouped into four sub-thematic categories: 1) The value of children’s wellbeing; 2) The value of education; 3) The value of relationships; and 4) The value of diversity. Table 3.1 “Participant Values” indicates the relevant themes as they related to the four sub-thematic categories.

Table 3.1 Participant Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The value of</th>
<th>Relevant themes related to values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Children’s wellbeing.</td>
<td>Children are happy, healthy, socializing, supported, intrinsically motivated, “right fit” for program, engaged, independent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2) Education (professional development and education for children). | • Professional development; “constant striving” for professional/ personal improvement  
• Assist children's learning and/or preparation for kindergarten |
| 3) Relationships (with children, families, between staff and in the community) | • Staff act in caring, nurturing way; are stable, communicative, dependable & trustworthy; value teamwork; longevity of staff  
• Families have access to and are supported by resources; are “right fit” for program; participate; are happy; communicate with program  
• Participation in local community events for children and families; participation in community conferences; emphasis that program should “give back to” community. |
4) Diversity

- Desiring socio-economic, cultural, national, religious diversity in program.
- Multicultural curriculum
- Respect Hawaiian, Portuguese, Chinese, Caucasian cultures (families in program), encourage participation/culturally appropriate communication.

Something is meaningful when it valued to be worthwhile and desirable unto itself. Therefore, data analyzed relating to values are also related to meanings, and what participants’ viewed to be intrinsically desirable and worthwhile in a quality early childhood program. Data related to values was used to inform the first research sub-question of this study, which explored the meanings participants have of quality in early childhood programs.

**Key Defining Components of Quality**

After participant values were explored, data was analyzed to inform the second research question, which focused on participant definitions of quality in early childhood programs. The constant compared method revealed little consistency among participant formal definitions of quality, however, eight themes of key components of quality emerged as a result of the grounded theory analysis. According to participants a high-quality program:

1) Supports children’s wellbeing.

2) Supports educational opportunities for children and staff.

3) Supports relationships with children, families, between staff and in the community.

4) Has a strong philosophy
5) Supports the ‘rightness of fit’ of staff

6) Supports and provide resources for the physical program environment.

7) Supports the curriculum of the program.

8) Provides formal and/or informal evaluation systems.

**Views of Evaluation**

The eighth key defining component of quality participants shared (“Provides formal and/or informal evaluation systems”) was analyzed further to inform the third sub-question, which explored how participants evaluated quality in their own programs. The constant comparative method was used to compare for similarities and differences in data in relation to evaluation systems. This analysis revealed that all programs had either formal or informal systems of evaluation and all participants emphasized the desire for continuous improvement of their programs. The constant comparative method also revealed that all of the smaller programs used only informal systems of evaluation, such as self-evaluations and family feedback, while larger programs (or programs associated with larger entities) used formal evaluation systems. Table 3.2 outlines the type of evaluation system each program used.

**Table 3.2. Participant Evaluation Systems.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Type of Evaluation System: Formal</th>
<th>Type of Evaluation System: Informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Private, religious-affiliated, associated with larger organization</td>
<td>• NAEYC accreditation</td>
<td>• Family feedback • Surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Private, secular, independent (located at church)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>• Self-evaluations • Staff meetings/input • Family feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Large, non-profit for</td>
<td>• Working towards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Evaluation System</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Private, part of larger school</td>
<td>• Private accreditation from affiliated private school organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Private, home-based</td>
<td>None • Family feedback • Growth demonstrated in children's portfolios</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Private, home-based</td>
<td>None • Family feedback • Feedback from colleagues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Private, part of larger school</td>
<td>• NAEYC accreditation • Observations of staff throughout the school year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Private, part of larger school</td>
<td>• Private accreditation from affiliated private school organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Private, independent (located at hospital)</td>
<td>None • Frequent staff-evaluations • Growth demonstrated in children portfolios • Staff feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2. Program type and type of evaluation system for each participant.

Of the five programs that were evaluated formally through accreditation systems, two were formally accredited by NAEYC, one was working towards accreditation by NAEYC and two were privately accredited from affiliated private school organizations. Informal methods of self-evaluation included family feedback, surveys, self-evaluation and input, growth demonstrated in children’s portfolios, feedback from colleagues and staff and evaluation of staff throughout the school year.

**Being in a Rural Environment**
After data was analyzed to explore evaluation systems in programs, the fourth research sub-question, which looked at participant views of how being in a rural environment influenced quality in their programs, was addressed. The constant comparative method revealed thirteen themes related to being in a rural environment. When compared for similarities and differences, the thirteen themes were grouped into two thematic categories: 1) Positive influences and 2) Challenges of being in a rural environment.

**Positive influences.** Ten themes were grouped into the thematic category “Positive influences”. According to participants, rural communities positively influenced their programs because rural communities were viewed as:

1) Community-oriented.
2) Family-oriented.
3) ‘Home-like’.
4) Culturally-oriented.
5) ‘Ideal’.
6) Natural.
7) Relaxed.
8) Safe.
9) Spacious.
10) Quiet.

The ten themes were grouped into two thematic sub-categories. The first four themes (1) Community-oriented; 2) Family-oriented; 3) ‘Home-like’; 4) Culturally-oriented) were found to be conceptually similar and grouped under the first thematic sub-category
“Cultural Values”. Themes five through ten (5) ‘Ideal’; 6) Natural; 7) Relaxed; 8) Safe; 9) Spacious; 10) Quiet) were found to be conceptually similar and grouped under the second thematic sub-category “Physical Characteristics of the Environment”.

**Challenges.** Three themes emerged as challenges of being in a rural environment. These were challenges of:

1) Access to resources, including technology, materials and professional development.
2) Isolation.
3) Unemployment of families.

These challenges were condensed into the single thematic sub-category “Access and Isolation”.

**Views of Quality**

After each sub-question was addressed, the primary research question was divided into two parts. The first part explored how participants viewed quality in early childhood programs. Data analyzed from sub-questions one (which explored meanings of quality), two (which explored definitions of quality) and three (which explored evaluation systems) were used to inform the first part of the primary research question. Three themes of participant views of quality emerged during the data analysis of the first three research sub-questions: 1) participants viewed a program to be quality when it was aligned with the participant values; 2) participants did not hold a shared formal definition of quality; rather, participants understood quality to consist of eight key defining components; 3) informal and/or formal evaluation systems were viewed as important in sustaining and supporting quality in a program.
Influences of Quality

The preliminary themes and data analyzed to inform the first sub-question (which explored meanings of quality) and fourth sub-question (which explored how being in a rural environment influenced views of quality) were used to inform the second part of the primary research question “What influences those views?”. The constant comparative method revealed four higher-level themes. The researcher took these higher-level themes and grouped them into different levels of influences, using the ecological framework as a guide. From this analysis, the analytic tool “Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences” was developed by the researcher. The analytic process that was used to develop this framework is explained more thoroughly in the next section.

The four higher-level themes that emerged after constant comparative method was used were: 1) Individual Perspective and Experience; 2) Within Program/ Interpersonal Relationships; 3) Environmental/ Macro-level Influences; 4) Changes over time. The ecological model, outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1979), is often used across disciplines to develop theory of how environmental, interpersonal/ social and individual factors influence individual development over time (Jenson & Fraser, 2011). The researcher used the ecological model as a guide to determine the properties and dimensions of the four higher-level themes.

The first, second and third higher-level themes were categorized into three levels of influences. The constant comparative method was used to determine the sub-themes of each level of influence. The first level of influence, “Level 1: Individual Perspective and Experience” included the included five relevant sub-themes: 1) Background; 2)
Background of Interest in the Field; 3) Education and Training; 4) Values; and 5) Support Systems. The second level of influence, “Level 2: Within Program/ Interpersonal Relationships” included six relevant sub-themes: 1) Curriculum; 2) Philosophy of Program; 3) Roles and Responsibilities; 4) Evaluation; 5) Implementation; and 6) Families. The third level, “Level 3: Environmental/ Macro-level Influences” included three relevant sub-themes: 1) Type of Program; 2) Rural; and 3) Population Served.

The fourth higher-level theme was “Changes over Time”. Three sub-thematic categories emerged under the higher-level theme “Changes over Time”: 1) Personal and Professional Development; 2) Program Development; and 3) Cultural Development. Figure 3.1 “Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences” depicts the analytic tool developed by the researcher after the properties and dimensions of the higher-level theme “Changes over Time”, three levels of influences, and relevant sub-themes were determined.
Role of the Researcher

It is important in qualitative research to report any biases that the researcher may have had that may have influenced the outcomes of the study (Cresswell & Clark, 2007; Bogdan & Biklin, 2007). My role as the researcher of this study was as an interviewer, data collector, and observer. My goal as a qualitative researcher was “to add to knowledge, not to pass judgment on a setting” (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007, p.38). As I entered into an interview or an observation, I kept this goal in mind and took active steps to avoid unconscious judgments about the directors and the programs being studied.

Assumptions and Limitations
As a qualitative researcher, I am obligated to acknowledge any judgments I may have had. As an early childhood educator who works towards providing high-quality care in my work, as well as a student who has academic training in early childhood education and child development, I began the study with an assumption that preschool program directors work toward providing high-quality ECE. To minimize the potential consequences of unconscious prejudices or opinions that I have, I asked clarifying questions throughout the data collection process.

I had never formally worked in a preschool program in rural Hawai‘i, nor did I build relationships with the directors I planned to ask to interview. Despite this lack of relationship, I assumed that participants gave honest and complete answers in the course of the interview process to the best of their ability. This lack of relationship, in connection with my status as a student of higher education, presented the complication that directors may have only told me what they expected I wanted to hear. In order to mitigate potential discomfort, I introduced myself and answered any questions that they had concerning my education and training as an early childhood educator and student of ECE during the primary interview. I also emphasized that I was open to discussing any issues or questions they may have had during the course of the study.

Additional limitations of my study included that the data were collected from a small number of preschool programs in rural Hawai‘i and was not meant to be representative or generalized to any other areas. The data collected was limited in the time frame of the study. Differences in personal communication styles between
participants and myself also may have caused discrepancies in how I asked or interpreted participant responses to the interview questions.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

A key finding of this study was that participants’ values impact their views of quality. Participants shared four values: 1) The value of children’s wellbeing; 2) The value of education; 3) The value of relationships; and 4) The value of diversity. Participants viewed eight key components to be essential in a quality program. Evaluation systems for assessing quality in early childhood programs were viewed as an important component of quality in early childhood program environments. Participants’ views of quality were positively influenced by being in a rural environment, despite challenges of access and isolation. Three levels of influences emerged as a result of grounded theory analysis. The three levels of influence were: (1) the influence of individual perspective and experience; (2) the influence of within program/interpersonal relationships; and (3) the influence of environment and macro-level influences. Changes over time influenced these three levels. The conceptual framework “Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences” was developed by the researcher as an analytic tool that was used to understand how values and context influenced participant views of quality.

Values and Key Defining Components of Quality

Participants shared the view that there are eight key defining components that make up a quality early childhood program. The first three key defining components were aligned with the values participants shared. The first of the key defining components was that a quality program “Supports children’s wellbeing”. This key component of a quality program is in alignment with the first shared participant value, the valuing of children’s wellbeing. P1 summarized the valuing of children’s wellbeing in her statement: “Besides
it being external, I think quality can also be found internal in the happiness of the children, or the wellbeing of the children.” P8 reflected this value when she stated; “I think a quality program [is one where]…children are happy [and] children are engaged.” P2 stated that the staff in her program was all working towards “one goal… [that children are] to be balanced and ready for kindergarten.” One way her program encourages children to “be balanced” is to support them in ways that help them “feel good about themselves”. If children feel good about themselves, engaged, and happy, it is an indicator that their wellbeing is valued and supported in the early childhood program.

The second key defining component of quality participants shared was that a high-quality program “Supports educational opportunities for children and staff”. This view is alignment with the second value shared by participants, the valuing of education, including professional development and education for children. P2 summed up the shared value of educational opportunities for children in her discussion of the second component of the ‘one goal’ of her program—to prepare children for kindergarten: “If they have the opportunity to explore science, math, physical games languages… hopefully we’re giving them those tools to have a successful education”.

P4 stated the relationship between quality and the value of teacher development succinctly: “Ongoing personal development is a tenant in [the school’s] education[al philosophy]. The teacher never becomes stagnant.” P5 and P6 were directors/ owners/teachers of small home-based preschools and also reflected the value of education, as well as the desire for continued professional development. P5 often presents at the annual island HAECY conference and has a passion for on-going professional development. She talked about how she “miss[ed] going to school” and how she
“enjoyed” being a part of her local ECE community. After a reflection of how she desired to work towards a Bachelors in Early Childhood Education, P6 talked about why she participated in professional development conferences and workshops: “It’s just good to go out there and meet different people and get different ideas”.

The third key component of a quality program was a program that “supports relationships with children, families, between staff and in the community”. This was reflective of the third and fourth values shared by participants, which was the valuing of relationships and diversity. P2 discussed the importance of having “a good, solid foundation with the staff—and they know my expectations, and I allow them a space to breathe and to grow also”. P8 talked about the importance of relationships between staff and families. According to P8, an early childhood program should not be viewed as “just a place that the child’s being dropped, but that there’s a relationship [between families and the program]…I feel it needs to be a team approach of individual’s who love this child”. P8 stated that a “sign of a quality program” is one where the “staff and teaching staff, administrators and teaching staff… are cohesive” and have a strong relationship with families.

Participants sought to build strong relationships with families through respect and encouragement of diversity in the program. P2, P4, P6 and P9 emphasized the importance of a strong multicultural curriculum. Children in their programs learned about the language, music, art and holidays of different cultures throughout the year. P8 observed that “The thing that could make us more ideal would be to have greater diversity. And I think it’s something we strive for, and it’s always at the forefront of what we all want”.

P3 believed her program to be in a community with the highest Hawaiian
population in the state. She stressed the desire for people from the mainland, specifically accreditors from the accreditation program her preschool subscribed to, to respect the diverse cultural and physical environment of the school. P2 also noted the different cultures between herself, who was from Hawai‘i, and her co-teacher, who was from the mainland. She underlined the need for communication and a strong relationship that respected the different cultures of the teaching staff, so that they may work together to provide quality early learning experiences for the children. P7 summarized the value of diversity in her belief that a quality program is one that is “respectful of cultural background, spiritual, emotional ‘place’, and ‘sense of place’ of families and staff”. P7’s idea of “sense of place” may also be interpreted as “rightness of fit”, which is discussed in the next section.

**Philosophy, Staff and ‘Rightness of Fit’**

A strong philosophy was the fourth key component of a quality program participants shared. P8 discussed her belief in a strong program philosophy in the following way; “I think that is really a component of a quality’s setting, regardless of what you’re method is, you have a philosophy. That is your core…I think you have to have that core at your being as an entity of a school, and it keeps you centered. And it keeps you going.” In this statement, P8 implies that staff, as entities of a school, should have beliefs that are in alignment with the school’s philosophy. P10 attributed quality in her program with the stability of the staff and their belief in the school’s philosophy, “I think that’s one of the components of quality is a stable staff…I feel really lucky up here that I’ve had such a stable staff that believes in our philosophy”. P1 talked about the role a teacher’s philosophy has in a recent hiring experience for staff at her program; “These
people came in with a set philosophy, or a set idea and I knew it wasn’t with our philosophy” so they did not get hired.

Staff alignment with the philosophy of the program is also an indicator of the fifth shared view of a key component in a quality program, which is a program that supports the ‘rightness of fit’ of staff. All directors highly valued the staff at their programs. P5 stated; “I like to show my teachers that I value them and so I pay them more than other preschools because I would ask for quality”. P2 stated; “for me, high quality would mean that your staff- you have a really nurturing and caring staff [who are] also on the same page as you”. For P7, quality “begins with staff and… the willingness on their part to work with children and families.” P4 stated that staff “need to be worthy of imitation” because the teacher is “the representation for the human being standing before the child.”

Participants discussed how individual characteristics of staff must meet the qualifications of the job and be a ‘right fit’ for the program. P4 cited that staff in her parent-teacher early childhood program “needs to be able to work with parents too. Cause not all teachers can work with parents, you know. Some are really good with children, but tongue-tied when it comes to having to talk to parents.” P1 exemplified the rightness of fit in her reflection of a recent hiring experience for staff; “We had so many inquiries. But when you interview them it’s hard because you have to think about, not only their credentials, but do they fit it?...Did this person fit?...So we actually ended up hiring someone who didn’t have a Masters- or a Bachelors. It was just an entry level, but that person (we’re so blessed) fits in…This person is willing to grow with us and be a team with us.”
When P7, a director of multiple preschool sites, was asked about quality in her programs, she stated they were high quality. When asked about the differences and similarities in each place, she responded; “I think the difference has to do with that sense of place—where they are, and who the people are, and what their backgrounds are. And where they come from. Not just the physical environment, but the inward space that we come from”. P7’s belief that staff should have a ‘sense of place’ in a program is in alignment with P1’s belief that staff should ‘fit’ into the context of the program. Both views reflect the belief that quality early childhood programs will support a ‘rightness of fit’ for the staff.

One director, P3, felt “burnt out” and unsupported in her program. She attributed her state of being ‘burnt out’ to feeling disempowered and subjugated in the workplace, as well as overwhelmed with responsibilities and accreditation standards of the program. Feelings of disempowerment and subjugation are indicative of a weak ‘sense of place’ and ‘fit’ with the program. Though her views of the components of quality were aligned with views reflected in the program mission statement, she felt disempowered in her ability implement those components. The other eight directors described themselves as “lucky”, “happy” and empowered to support quality in their programs.

**Resources and Curriculum**

The sixth key component of a quality program participants viewed to be important is a program that supports and provides resources for the physical program environment, including ‘quality’ materials. When asked to define quality materials, P4 and P2 talked about toys made of natural materials. According to P4, natural materials are important in an early childhood program “so that everything [a child] touch[es] is real. It’s not fake.”
Some of the physical components of the early childhood setting P4 worked at include space for gardens and outdoor art activities, and all of the toys were made from natural materials. When asked how she would like to improve her program, P2 explained that if there were enough funding, she would like to change all of the plastic toys at her program to natural materials. P5 discussed the importance of teachers putting “some thought behind” the material. According to P5, materials should be “thought-provoking” and child-sized. P3 valued “up to date” materials that could be rotated on a regular basis. P3 also noted that it is easier to have a quality program when the program has financial resources.

The view that a key a component of quality is a program that “Supports and provides resources for the physical program environment” is indicative of how participants’ views of how to implement quality varied in emphasis and were sometimes contradictory. For example, for P8 a “prepared environment” was a salient component of quality, whereas P9 emphasized “a stimulating environment” where “spontaneity”, “flexibility” and “excitement” are encouraged. Despite this contradiction, both participants emphasized the important role the physical environment played in the implementation of a quality program.

The seventh key component of quality participants’ viewed as important in an early childhood program was the components of a program that “Supports the curriculum of the program”. The specific components that support the curriculum of the program participants viewed as important in their programs varied according personal values and the type of curriculum that was implemented. For example, P1 valued the “religious aspect” of her programs curriculum because she was allowed to practice her personal
beliefs with the children, whereas P2 valued language and literacy in the curriculum because she loved to tell stories; “I make up all these strange stories and they love to hear that. I love that they can use their imagination to hear the story”. The value of diversity was reflected in the curriculum for the different types of programs through the use of multicultural art, music, cultural celebrations and language and literacy.

**Evaluation Systems**

Whether through formal or informal evaluation systems, all participants valued evaluation as a means to improve quality and viewed it as a key component of a quality program. The importance of some form of evaluation is summarized by P8 who stated: “I think every institution needs to reflect on how they can constantly be growing and getting better”. P1 also reflected this value: “I’m so glad we have the check system, [NAEYC’s] check system, any check system to keep us moving… to keep us up to date with what is needed”.

All four preschools that were associated with larger organizations were accredited or working towards accreditation. P8 valued accreditation because “you take a look at yourself. Because you have to do a self-study and you have to be accountable…so it’s a constant commitment to renewal and improvement.” P1 stated; “there is a genuine value to that word ‘accreditation’ because we went through it and it just gives us pride. If you’re not an accredited school, I still think it’s valid and important to do an internal self-study. A reflection process that take you to the next level so that you can constantly be looking at how things can be done better.”

Communication with families played a strong role in providing an informal system for evaluation for smaller programs. P5 evaluated her program by communicating
with families; “It’s all about what the parents think. I really don’t judge my quality on anything else. …It’s all perception, you know. And if the parent’s perceive it as quality, then it is.” When families communicated issues with P5, she used that as an opportunity for self-improvement and growth. She gave the following example; “A little girl wasn’t eating. Her lunches were sent home full… I just wasn’t aware, I think. And so I had to reevaluate myself. Like, you know, … what am I paying attention to, what should I be paying attention to?”

Eight of nine participants believed that the evaluation systems of their programs were an adequate measure of the quality of their program. One participant, P3, felt the program’s choice of evaluation too expensive and was not appropriate to the cultural context of the program. In one interview she discussed a recent experience where the evaluator “counted [the program] down on family communication but [the staff was] communicating, but not in a way that maybe you do on the mainland.” How the context of being in a rural environment influence participants’ programs is discussed in the next section.

**Being in a Rural Environment**

Two positive influences participants viewed of being in a rural environment were the influence of cultural values and aspects of the physical environment. When reflecting on the different cultures of the multiple sites she directed, P7 shared her view of the positive effect of cultural values on her program that were in rural locations; “More rural programs have strong families, strong cultural components…There’s a nice feeling of ohana in more rural communities”. P7 noted that the families in her program, though “mostly Hawaiian”, were also Chinese, Portuguese and other cultures. These diverse
cultures contributed “strong families” and “strong cultural components”, which she attributed to being in a rural environment.

All nine directors directly stated or implied that the physical characteristic of being in a natural setting was a value of their program. Physical characteristics of a rural environment that were described as “spacious”, “relaxed”, “safe” and “quiet” natural environments. One director described these physical characteristics as “ideal” for a high-quality early childhood program. P9 believed that “Having a school on a rural environment really promotes the appreciation of nature”. All nine directors also stated directly or indirectly that the positive influences of being in a rural environment outweighed the challenges in its influence on quality in their centers. According to P8, a frustration of being in a rural environment was not being able to “make our weekly trip to the post office” or have other walks to town; “I would love to be able to have that, but the benefits I think of this rural setting and this beautiful campus we’re on more then make up for that”.

Issues of access and isolation included challenges in gaining access to resources and difficulties families have with accessing the program because of monetary difficulties due to unemployment. P6 discussed that the demographics of her families had recently shifted because “a lot of my local families lost their jobs.” P1 reflected that “Everyone is going through a hard time, so servicing them economically, I can’t. I see so many families I would like to enroll, but they just can’t make the payments. They can’t make the tuition so I have to let them go…I wish as a director…I would like everyone…can come in free. Free of charge. But I can’t…I can’t do that. So economics is a hardship as a director.” P8 shared how the economy impacted the ability to implement the value of diversity in her
program: “Maybe we don’t have the diversity we would love, because of the economic times” but, despite the hardships, “It’s always a goal of our to be building a larger more diverse socio-economic community”.

Access and isolation challenges also included the high cost and wait time when shipping materials from the mainland, as well as difficulties in finding health services when there was an outbreak of disease at the program. When P6 was asked about the challenges her program faced, she replied; “I don’t really have a lot. Mine is finding materials. Like my kitchen calendar. And getting them to Hawai’i without paying an arm and a leg. Finding little tykes structures for outside. You can’t get them here on the island.” P8 was observed checking preschool children for a viral disease in an observation conducted by the researcher. During the course of this observation, she expressed frustration of the lack of health resources and information available to families about the disease. Later in the day she was observed checking in with the communities health nurse to find out more about the disease and how to contain it. All participants faced challenges of access and isolation, but felt that the benefits of being in a rural environment outweighed the challenges.

**Three Levels of Influences and Change Over Time**

The analytic tool “Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences” developed by the researcher provided a framework for understanding the levels of influences that affected participant views of quality. Figure 4.1 depicts how the themes and subthemes that emerged from this grounded theory study applies to the analytic tool “Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences”.
“Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences” illustrates three levels of influences and how each level is influenced by changes over time. Level 1 consisted of influences dependent on individual perspectives and experiences. Level 2 consisted of influences of relationships within programs and/or interpersonal relationships. Level 2: Within Program/Interpersonal Relationships have a reciprocal relationship with Level 1: Individual Perspectives and Experiences. For example, the Level 1 influence of P4’s personal value that beauty is an important part of the learning environment was influenced by and, at the same time, influenced Level 2. P4 was influenced by the program philosophy, which reflected the value of beauty and provided materials for beauty-enhancing
materials, and—simultaneously—P4 influenced the program by implementing activities that enhanced the beauty of the environment. The importance of “a good solid foundation with the staff” and “a team approach of individual’s who love this child” are also examples of views that are influenced by Level 2 influences.

Level 3: Environmental/ Macro-level Influences have a symbiotic relationship with Level 2: Within Program/ Interpersonal Relationship influences. For example, the philosophy of P4’s program validated and provided resources to support the implementation of beauty-enhancing activities in the environment (Level 2 influences) for children of families in the community (Level 3: Environmental/ Macro-level Influences include community influences). At the same time, the macro-level influence the families with financial resources at P4’s program allowed for monetary resources to be available at the program, which then allowed materials to be available for beauty-enhancing activities. Figure 4.2 uses the example of P4 and the value of beauty to illustrate the symbiotic relationship of the three levels of influences.
In the “Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences” each level of influence is also influenced by changes over time. Changes over time that impacted Level 1 included personal and professional development, additional education and training, or changes in values. P5 discussed how her vision of her program changed because her personal views of quality in early childhood program changed; “I thought about expanding, and that was always my vision before. But now I think a quality program is quality because it’s smaller. And you get more individualized care. So my vision of my program is to keep it small.” Changes over time that impacted Level 2...
included changes in curriculum or evaluation systems. Changes over time that impacted Level 3 included changes in demographics or rates of unemployment.

P7 exemplified how Level 2 and Level 3 interacted together to alter her program’s approach to quality;

“I think that…families are not the same as the were in 1978, not the same in 1988 or 98… you know, you look at our times right now. We’re very economically challenged and families have…a lot of stuff going on and it- it ends up affecting children and their behavior. And their wellbeing in some way or another. If not physically, emotionally... how we approach that when we have problems with families and children is we now have a specific program… We have shifted our focus a little bit from more of a language and literacy academic-based program, which we were at one time, to a more social and emotional-based program.”

In this example Level 3 influences included “economically challenged” times. Economic downturn influenced a larger program to alter its approach to quality. The change influenced by the Level 3 factors impacted Level 2 factors. Consequently, the preschool began to provide a system for social and emotional support in the classroom. These changes presumably also impacted the participants’ personal views of quality in the program because of her reflection of the changing dynamics of families and their needs.

With the application of data from this study to the analytic tool “Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences” and the integration of data into a grounded theory, the views of participants about quality and what influences those views was understood and the purpose of this study was realized.

Summary
The grounded theory that emerged from this study was that values and context play an important role in influencing how directors’ of rural early childhood programs in rural Hawai‘i view quality in preschool programs. Participants held quality to be meaningful when it aligned with three values: 1) The value of children’s wellbeing; 2) The value of education; 3) The value of relationships; and 4) The value of diversity. The first three values were aligned with the first three key defining components of quality. Participants viewed a quality program to have a total of eight key defining components: 1) Supports children’s wellbeing; 2) Supports educational opportunities for children and staff; 3) Supports relationships with children, families, between staff and in the community; 4) Has a strong philosophy; 5) Supports the ‘rightness of fit’ of staff; 6) Supports and provides resources for the physical program environment; 7) Supports the curriculum of the program; and 8) Provides formal and/or informal evaluation systems.

All participants viewed evaluation as necessary for the growth and development of quality in early childhood programs. Preschools associated with larger programs were accredited, or working towards accreditation, with an outside agency. Smaller preschools valued self-evaluation systems and were not accredited. Participants also noted that the positive influences of being in a rural environment outweigh the challenges in how it influenced quality at their programs. Positive attributes included influences of cultural values and physical characteristics of the environment. Challenges of being in a rural environment included challenges of access and isolation. Influences of participant views of quality can be understood though the adaptation of an ecological systems model,
“Participant Views of Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Influences”, which was developed by the researcher.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was built on an understanding that (a) early childhood programs are beneficial for individual and societal development when they are high quality, and (b) directors are the “gatekeepers of quality” (Bloom, 1992, p. 138) in preschool programs. Prior to this study the views of directors who work in programs in Hawai’i and rural environments had not adequately been understood. The goals of this qualitative study were to provide a deeper understanding of program directors’ views of quality in early childhood programs and to create a conceptual framework for understanding what influences those views.

Discussion of Results

Views of Quality

The findings of this study contribute to the literature of how quality is viewed in early childhood programs. The results of this study suggest that early childhood program directors view a high-quality early childhood program as one that preforms beyond basic definitions of quality. P5 exemplified this belief in her statement: “In order to be a quality program you have to meet standards that are not necessarily required of you”. This view is in alignment with views set forth by early childhood organizations, such as NAEYC. NAEYC and other professional early childhood organizations, which are voluntary for programs to join, also view meeting standards that are “not necessarily required” as a component of a high quality program. NAEYC outlines standards for early childhood programs to meet through their accreditation system, which is based on process and structural aspects of quality (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).
Participants of this study viewed quality as meaningful when it was aligned with values. Participants who were directors’ of smaller programs shared similar views of quality as directors of larger programs through the reflection of shared values and views of key defining components of quality. This major finding suggests that values and context influence director views of quality. Values that emerged from this grounded theory study included values of children’s wellbeing, education, relationships and diversity. An unexpected finding of this study was that, though participants valued the diversity, they credited the ‘feeling of ohana’ to a strong sense of community influenced by being in a rural environment—rather than living in “the nation’s most ethnically diverse state” (Welch, 2011, para. 1).

How values influence program directors views of quality in early childhood programs is limited in early childhood research (Mins, et al.; Moyles, 2006). Sciaraffa’s (2004) study outlines common personal characteristics and values of early childhood program directors: “concern for children and families, high expectations, value of trust, respect, sense of professionalism, belief in teamwork, nurturing the nurturer, and high demands” (p.130). The shared values of participants in this study (1) the value of children’s wellbeing; 2) the value of education; 3) the value of relationships and 4) the value of diversity) validates the personal characteristics and values outlined in Sciaraffa’s (2004) study. This study builds onto the line of research about the relationship of values and directors views in early childhood programs by suggesting the impact of physical setting, such as
being in a rural environment, has a relationship with values and directors’ views of quality.

‘Rightness of fit’ and burnout. The need for staff alignment with the program’s philosophy, values and ‘rightness of fit’ with the program has not been adequately discussed in prior research, yet was an important finding of this study. Although all participants reflected an alignment between personal and program views of defining components of quality, one director felt ‘burnt out’ from supporting quality in her program. This feeling of ‘burn out’ may be attributed to a weak ‘rightness of fit’ with the program. The participant that felt ‘burnt out’ was frustrated with the evaluation process in her program because she viewed it to be financially unrealistic and culturally inappropriate. The findings of this study validated Lambert’s (1994) assertion that “Burn out is a multi-dimensional problem” (abstract). In a report of staff burnout of early childhood workers in Australia, Lambert suggests that research focused on burnout in early childhood programs should be focused on the areas of administration and management, staff well being and program quality. The findings of this study suggest that future research on staff burnout should also focus on values, level of personal resonance with program philosophy and ‘rightness of fit’ in the program.

Evaluation systems. In this study, all participants valued evaluation systems as a means towards the improvement of quality in their programs and standards of quality were evaluated through informal or formal evaluation systems. Larger programs subscribed to formal evaluation systems with specific defining components. Smaller, independent programs used informal systems for evaluation, such as on-going self-reflection and communication with families. Methods of
informal systems of evaluation used by smaller programs to evaluate quality are not adequately acknowledged in prior research of quality in early childhood programs. This study contributes to literature of evaluation systems in early childhood programs by reflecting the importance informal evaluation systems have on directors’ views of quality. More research is needed for a better understanding of the relationship between evaluation systems in large and small preschools, and the impact those systems have on the implementation of quality in early childhood settings.

**Education and training.** All participants valued professional development and formal education and training for staff. The importance of staff education and training is widely discussed in early childhood literature (Ceglowsky, 2004; Bella & Bloom, 2003), though opportunities for formal education and leadership training are lacking in rural areas. Education was a value system that was shared among participants and supports for educational opportunities for children and staff were a key defining component of a quality program—a view all participants shared. Education and training are Level 1: Individual Perspective and Experience influences that are impacted by personal and professional development. Some participants desired to continue their education, however issues of access and isolation stood in their way.

**Rural Environment.** The physical context of being in a rural environment significantly influenced participants’ views of quality. In the review of the literature no information was found about the relationship between physical contextual factors, such as the influence of a natural environment on the values and views of
quality of early childhood program directors. According to participants of this study, the positive influences of being in a rural environment outweigh the negative. Challenges of being in a negative environment include challenges of access and isolation.

**A Conceptual Framework**

An ecological perspective has been used in a limited number of prior studies in the early childhood field. Jorde-Bloom’s (1987) study of the organizational climate in early childhood programs took an ecological perspective, as well as Ceglowski’s (2004) study of how different stakeholders view the important defining components of quality in early child program. No prior research that was conducted from an ecological perspective was found in a review of the literature that focused explicitly on what influences directors’ views of quality in early childhood programs. The researcher of this study built on the research that focuses on an ecological model to understand dynamics of early childhood programs by using the ecological model as a guide for understanding the influences of participant views of quality. The analytic tool created by the researcher, which used the ecological model as a guide, outlined three levels of influences on participant views of quality in early childhood program. Each influence was impacted by the influence of changes over time.

**Recommendations**

**For Future Research**

This study suggests directors’ values play an important role in how quality is viewed in early childhood programs. Future research is needed to better understand the impact of values on views of quality, as well as on implementation of quality in early
childhood programs. A key finding of the grounded theory that emerged from this study suggests that context strongly influences views directors have about quality in early childhood programs. Future research should focus on the relationship between the influence of cultural and physical environments of programs, directors’ views and implementation of quality in early childhood programs.

Staff ‘rightness of fit’ within early childhood programs played an important role in how quality was viewed by participants of this study. One director’s experience suggested that director feelings of empowerment, rightness of ‘fit’ and ‘sense of place’ in an early childhood program can negatively influence a director’s views of quality and program evaluation systems. Further research is needed to understand the relationship between a director’s ‘rightness of fit’ in a program and the implementation of quality in early childhood programs.

Preschools associated with larger programs used formal systems of evaluation and smaller programs used informal methods of evaluation. The results of this study suggest that informal evaluation systems are widely used and implemented in small early childhood programs. Further research is needed to develop a more thorough understanding of the role informal evaluation systems plays in influencing quality in early childhood programs.

For Professional Educators and Organizations

The value of education implies that directors’ of rural preschools would attend professional development, education and training opportunities if resources were available. The value of education and issues of access and isolation, as outlined in the study, suggests that directors working in rural and isolated environments need more
resources to bridge the challenges of access and isolation in order to continue improvement of quality in their programs. Professional educators and organizations may find the conceptual framework developed in this study useful in contextualizing professional resources, particularly in rural and isolated environments.

**Limitations**

Descriptions of participant views of quality in early childhood programs is not meant to be generalizable of views of all program directors working in rural Hawai‘i. The programs represented in this study were limited in size, type and philosophical orientation. The number of interviews and observations was limited in time and number. Greater understanding of directors’ views of quality in early childhood programs in Hawai‘i, and what influences those views, may have been achieved with participation from more early childhood directors in Hawai‘i, including programs from a more diverse number islands and rural localities.

Data from program documents and further observation of program directors during their day-to-day activities may have been helpful in generating a more thorough understanding of directors’ views of quality in early childhood programs, and what influences those views. Interviews from staff may also have been helpful in understanding how directors’ implement their views of quality in their programs.
APPENDIX A. CONSENT FORM

Agreement to Participate in Interviews

Directors’ Perceptions of Quality Preschool Programs in Rural Hawai‘i

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The Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to understand directors’ perceptions about quality in rural early childhood programs in Hawai‘i, with an emphasis on how they support quality in their programs.

Who I am: I am a graduate student at University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. I am conducting this study for completion of my Masters degree in Early Childhood Education.

Description of the Study: For this study, you will be asked to participate in two interviews. The time and place of the interview will take place at your convenience. Each interview will last approximately one hour. Both interviews are intended to be open-ended and exploratory. During the first interview, you will be asked questions about your experience as a director and your ideas about quality in early childhood programs, including the preschool that you currently work with. During the course of the second interview we will revisit the content and analysis of the first interview and make any additions or changes as needed. If you agree, all
interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed in order to be as accurate as possible. Email correspondence may be used in substitute of physical interviews.

All interviews will be completely voluntary and confidential to the extent allowed by law. You have the right to leave the project at any time for any reason. All interview transcripts and data will be completely confidential in the research results. Code names or numbers will be used to assure confidentiality. Audio recordings will be destroyed immediately after the follow-up interview. All other records will be destroyed following the completion of the research project.

Benefits of the Study: This research may not directly benefit you, however this study may help strengthen the voices of directors’ in academia, policy, and rural Hawai‘i through exploration of perceptions about quality in preschools.

Permission: I ask your permission to be a participant in this study. Please sign and return the attached page if you are willing to participate.

Contact Information: If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact the Primary Investigator, Erin McAvoy, at (808) 283-7824 (emcavoy@hawaii.edu).

If you cannot obtain satisfactory answers to your questions, have comments or complaints about your treatment in this study or have question regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the UH Committee on Human Studies at (808) 956-5007, or (uhirb@hawaii.edu)
Consent Form
Agreement to Participate in Interviews

Directors’ Perceptions of Quality Preschool Programs

I agree to be interviewed about my experiences and perceptions concerning quality in early childhood programs. I understand my participation is completely voluntary and I may leave the study at any time for any reason.

I certify that I have read the above information and I have been given satisfactory answers concerning this research. By signing this form, I give my consent with the understanding that such consent does not waive any of my legal rights, nor does it release the Principal Investigator or the institution thereof from liability for negligence.

__________________________________________________
Print Name

__________________________________________________  __________
Signature                                      Date
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What should I call you?

2. Please tell me about your program.

3. How did you come to be a director of (name of the program)?

4. Please tell me about your previous experience(s) in early childhood.

5. How does your experience relate to your present position?

6. Describe your vision of a high-quality early childhood program.

7. How do you strive for quality in your program?

8. What are some strengths your program has in providing a quality program?

9. What are some strengths you bring, as a director, in providing a quality program?

10. What are some challenges you face as a director?

11. What are some challenges your program has with regard to offering a quality program?
12. How do you evaluate quality in your program?

13. How do you see your program in the future?

14. What are unique experiences that you have observed that are common to preschools in rural Hawai‘i that may not be commonly found in other areas of Hawai‘i? Why do you think these experiences are unique?

15. What can you tell me about the quality of preschools and what influences that quality in rural Hawai‘i?

16. Thank you!
APPENDIX C: SECONDARY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(P8) Secondary Interview Questions

1. What do you look for in staff- qualities and characteristics- in hiring and day to day work?

2. What areas of development does a high quality program focus on? (?

3. What kind of questions do you ask when interviewing for a staff?

4. Why do you use the curriculum you do? What are the strengths of that curriculum, the challenges?

5. What are some of the parents needs, and how does a high-quality program respond to those needs?

6. What are your responsibilities as a director?

7. Tell me about the demographics of the children in your program- how do you work with their diversity?
REFERENCES


http://www.goodbeginnings.org/index.php/site/IDCgrid/


Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., Burchinal, M. R., Clifford, R. M., Culkin, M. L., Howes, C.,


