## A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY:

TEACHER BIAS EFFECTS ON EARLY EDUCATION ASSESSMENTS

by

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A Dissertation Proposal Presented in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological case study explored the lived experiences of a purposive sample of 20 current and past early education teachers who have experience in assessing children through observational assessment. The purpose of this study was to determine if bias affects the documentation of observational assessment and the implementation of the graduatedteacher’s teaching methods. The study included 20 interviews of teachers who spoke verbal responses to qualitative open ended questions in recorded sessions. Data from interviews, literature, and theory were transcribed and analyzed by using the Nvivo9 program. Five themes emerged from the triangulated Nvivo analysis. One of the significant findings was the unexpected outcome found that 55 percent of teachers identified an influence of oral bias. The discovery of the findings left several new unanswered questions that are recommended for further study to continue the improvements of Early Education assessments: Further research is recommended to find what influence teacher bias has on child development, the last recommendation for further study includes a study that will prove or disprove the new model (Appendix K) created with this study.

## DEDICATION

## Throughout my life I have encountered many angels that I firmly believe were put into my life to give me courage, hope, and joy. This is dedicated to my God and those angels sent from heaven: Beverly Willett, who helped raise me; the teachers and counselors who guided me through a very difficult childhood; my friends who gave me the joy of security a family would provide; my children, who gave me the reason to continue when all other hope was lost; my Christian family at Cross and Crown Church. Without their constant support I would have been without a home. This is dedicated to those people who I met along the way who had an encouraging word to say or a smile to share. This is also dedicated to my husband Manny. Without Manny’s constant support throughout this process I would have lost faith in myself.ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several people that I would liketo thank include Dr. Joe Saxton my mentor whoguided me and supported me through this process; Misa Alexander, my academic advisor who continued to give me encouragement throughout the entire process and talked me past quitting; and my committee, [Kelley McLauchlan](http://javascript:WebForm_DoPostBackWithOptions(new%20WebForm_PostBackOptions(%22ctl00$ctl00$rightColumn$CommitteeGrid$lnkbtnCommittee2Name%22,%20%22%22,%20true,%20%22%22,%20%22%22,%20false,%20true))), and Robert Smallfoot, who stuck with me through several years of rewrites. Without their unyielding efforts of reminding me that I could do it, and remain faithful to this study, this study may have not been possible. I give a special thank you to my husband who gave his constant support and to my children who hugged me reminding me daily why I work hard. A special thank yougoesto my brother John Jensen whodied three days after high school graduation. He was the very first person in my life to tell me, “I just know you will make something good of yourself! I have faith in you.”

To God I owe all the praise.TABLE OF CONTENTS

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As of January 2007, more than three million American families have depended on childcare, Head Start, preschools, nursery schools and other childcare facilities to care, and assess children’s growth and development (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2007). The same American families that have used childcare centers for the care of children depend on childcare centers to assess the children’s development. “Functional assessment procedures have proven useful for developing effective individualized interventions for a wide variety of populations…” (Dufrene, Doggett, Henington, Watson, 2007, p. 368) including young children. Choosing the correct assessment for accurate measurement of young children’s development is essential. Professionals must choose between traditional assessment methods and observational assessment with the understanding of each option, traditional and nontraditional.

The election of an assessment often lies under the purview of an educator who may have a certain bias toward one of the multiple assessments available today. According to Dyson (2002) meaningfully interpreting data is the responsibility of teachers deficient in knowledge of the interpretation of data. The government, administrators, and teachers are among the stakeholders who have differing opinions on how to implement the proper assessment and how to record teacher’s assessments of children’s development. “After the standard has been set, it is important to ensure that stakeholders view the results as credible…” (Norcini, 2003, p. 464). Unbiased documentation of early education assessments is essential, if a goal of early childhood educators, is to aid family members, and to “enhance their understanding of their children and support the continuing development of their skills as parents” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2005, p. 4). The administrators, a third stakeholder, musteducate the teachers on proper practice of unbiased documentation and keep communication flowing between the educators and the parents. The administrators must also answer to policy makers and implement educational law.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of 20 teachers in their experience of bias in assessment documentation of preschool children. The study used 23 mixed participants: three pilot study participants and 20 final study participants in Chicago area preschools. Data was collectedusing open ended questions and analyzed and coded for emerging themes and patterns.   The study attempted to bring a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding testing at the preschool level. The findings include a mixed response with themes and patterns found in identifying how bias affects documented observational assessment.

Chapter One introduces the background, problem, purpose, research questions, significance, nature of study, theoretical framework, scope and, limitationsfor the intention of exploring teacher experience in transferring documented bias in the assessments of children from other early education teachers. Observational assessment documents the developmental growth and processes of each child. According to Baltes, Reese, and Nesselroade (1977), the developmental processes in the pattern of human life, lifespan developmental psychology is an “orientation.” When a teacher documents observations, procedures must be developedand recorded about what has been observed.

The decisions about documentation need to consider the bias of teachers because, “observational studies make important contributions to the knowledge” (Hammer, Prel, Blettner, 2009, p. 664) affecting the decisions early childhood leaders make in administering assessment tools.

## Background

Caring for children 250 years ago was a study for nursing. According to Levene (2006), early childhood education is a new stand-alone area for study. The last 250 years of early childhood education has assisted in developing early childhood assessment formats (Levene, 2006, p. 31). Assessing children in the early years relied heavily upon reading, sitting for long periods, or answering questions by writing the answers onto an answer sheet (Falk, Wichterle, Moirs, 2007). Kama (1990) states, tests used for assessment perform a poor job of measuring “the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical” (Kama, 1990, p.1)competencies of young children.

Teachers record observations with the goal of creating an environment whichchildren receive a complete education. According to Wood (2005), recorded assessments identify purposes, classify, assess, and carry information that includes teachers' predictions of student behavior. Assessment formats are beginning to include the taking of anecdotal notes while observing children’s play. Children in the younger years demonstrate their learning capability through daily activities of play including make believe play.

According to McEntire (2009) children produce make believe scenarios during play by negotiating with peers using representational props, and assisting children in creating specific roles-and rules for make-believe activities. “Play has the potential for fostering young children’s social and cognitive development,” (McEntire, 2009, p. 208)with assessment of young children. With examples of assessment methods that include

“…recorded conversations, author summaries, and children's writing samples (which include notes, e-mail messages stories, and journal entries), we are given a glimpse into the shared experiences of ...learners...” (McMahon-Giles, 2009, p. 200).

Literature gaps in education topics including assessments demonstrate the ebbs and flows of societal trends (Schultz, 1990). Trends in the late 1980sincluded change in education, values taught in schools, equal opportunity, and special education reform (Schultz, 1990). Trends in the early 1990sincluded education reform (Schultz, 1990), and assessment (National Association for the Education of the Young Child). Literature dating from the middle 1930s until the 1990s does not show how bias in observational assessment affects the recording and interpretation of what has been recorded. A gap in literature leaves many questions pertaining to observational assessments. The change in trends creates gaps in research and literature. Unanswered questions include variations in assessing multicultural and multi-lingual children as urged by Dr. Espinosa to “the administration to formulate a national policy statement to help guide the states about first and second language development in young children” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

## Problem Statement

Teacher bias written into documented observational assessments that follow children from one age group to the next is the general problem. “Developmental assessments play an important role in the placement of children in different tracks in educational systems” (Schölmerich, Leyendecker, Citlak, Caspar & Jakel, 2008, p 188). The specific problem is the inclusion of teacher bias in assessments of children enrolled in early education centers because, “if a teacher holds a negative expectation for a child, the child's school performance may not be accurately perceived” (Foster & Salvia, 1977, p. 533). In the problem of bias, the responsibility of leaders is to set an example of unbiased decisions, cultivating a new model of leadership. “Cultivating a new model for leadership requires courage and emotional maturity as much as it does skill and effort” (Lyons & McArthur, 2007, p. 30); these leaders can be aware and curtail the impact of bias in the documentation of observational assessment. Understanding and eliminating bias will help alleviate stress that will affect children in the early education classroom while creating the new model (Lyons, 2007).

A phenomenological case study of the Chicago Illinois area early education centers was been done to explore the influence teacher bias has on the documentation of assessments given to enrolled preschool children of early education centers. This qualitative phenomenological case study involved three pilot study participants and 20 recorded interviews from teachers of early childhood classrooms to assess the perceptions of early education teachers from the north, west, and southsides of Chicago, Illinois, creating a geographical triangulation. Each teacher’s perceptions were taken from the individual experiences of and observations of teachers experienced in observational assessment.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of 20 teachers in their experience of bias in assessment documentation of preschool children. The study used 23 mixed participants: three pilot study participants and 20 final study participants in Chicago area preschools. Data was collectedusing open ended questions and analyzed and coded for emerging themes and patterns. The study attempted to bring a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding testing at the preschool level. The findings include a mixed response with themes and patterns found in identifying how bias affects documented observational assessment.

Interviews of 20 teachers and secondary data of theory and literature provided comprehensive and in-depth understanding of teacher’s opinion of the perceived meaning of teacher’s assessment experiences and beliefs about bias projected onto each child’s assessment when documenting. Twentyinterviews accomplished a comprehensive and in-depth phenomenological case study that consisted of the opinions of early education and care teaching staff of the Chicago Illinois area. The content of these interviews was recordedand analyzed using the Nvivo9 program that identified themes of thought from all 20 teachers (Heslinga, 2009). “The aim of this study is to broaden our understanding of the phenomenon…” (Lindblom-Ylänne, 2003, p. 63) By privately interviewing individual teachers, documentation of lived experiences was collectedfor analysis. The assessment outcome of preschool children is dependent on teacher observation and documentation.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of the problem is documented bias of young children’s assessments that lead to the individual isolation of children by teachers. The information in children’s observational assessments can follow a child throughout the ages and class level of each child. The research accomplished the search of how teacher bias affects children’s assessments. Information gleaned from this study will enable early childhood educational leaders to create a system to assess teacher bias and other suggestive teacher tendencies in a diverse urban environment. Increased knowledge about the documentation of children’s assessments will assist leaders in ensuring that, “…equitable, respectful, and confidential services are given” (Holcomb, 2009, p. 137) to students.

This phenomenological case study expanded the awareness of the effects of bias in the Early Education classroom. Asking teachers about personal experiences when receiving children’s assessments from other teachers, gives leaders information that will guide the process of restructuring assessment formats to reduce the incorporation of teacher bias. The research will add information to the body of knowledge by assisting in finding solutions for decreasing the inclusion of teacher bias involved in children’s assessment, giving early childhood educational leaders new information to use for teacher assessment and training. The benefactors of this qualitative phenomenological case study include leaders of early education programs. Leaders will benefit by using the results to formulate the most appropriate assessment format for the assessment of preschool aged children. “Scholars, educators and policy makers have advocated the use of developmentally appropriate assessment approaches…” (United States Constitution, 1997).

Information gained from this study will help leaders prevent teacher bias from affecting new teacher’s perceptions upon the transfer of children’s assessments. The documenting placed into assessment formats are subject to the opinions and biases of teachers. The knowledge found may also demonstrate how teacher bias effects assessment documentation, making an original contribution to the field.

## Significance to Leadership

This study will help educational leaders adjust ways of documenting assessments to ensure accuracy without the manipulation of teacher bias. This study provided educational leaders a better understanding of the early education teacher’s ability to assess students without recording a biased opinion unto the observational assessments. This qualitative phenomenological case study’s approach may give leaders insight into the problem of teacher bias given to young children by teacher observation. With this increased insight, leaders can gather data to be used to develop a training device to reduce bias or to train teaching staff to reduce bias in the documentation of observational assessments. The knowledge gained by studying teacher bias is important to educational leaders to train educators to ensure accuracy of documentation of children’s educational records.

**Nature of Study**

The pilot study assisted in identifying and anticipating categorization, and order of questions used. Participants for the pilot sample chosenwere from a population of early education professionals experienced with documenting observational assessments as well as possessing seniority status in Early Childhood Education. Seniority status was established as a professional who has worked in the Early Education for more than 10 years in the role of classroom teacher or has been promoted to a position of an early education administrator. Each participant in the pilot test has used an observational assessment format. Three pilot participants read and commented on each interview question with rating scale responses. The pilot participants signed a consent form and answered questions on a written questionnaire (Appendix C). All pilot participants provided consent before the study began. The responses were categorized, and then used to decide if changes were neededto happen to the questions that were asked to the teachers.

Mixed method and quantitative studies were not appropriate methods of study; this study did not test for a relationship between different factors and was not analyzing with numerical values (Bassous, 2010). The current qualitative phenomenological case study sought to describe and analyze the experiences of participants (Cope, 2005; Moustakas, 1994). A voice recorder and the *Naturally Speaking 10 Dragon* program assisted in writing dictation of the recorded interviews. Data from interviews, literature, and theory were transcribed and analyzed together using the Nvivo9 program, to capture in-depth teacher opinion of the perceived meaning of participants’ program experiences and beliefs.

Focus groups were a possible method of study. Interviews were chosenin place of focus groups to obtain non-influenced opinion. A qualitative inquiry into the perceived contributions of participation and self-efficacy beliefs is appropriate to address evaluation questions about the influences that affect child assessment outcomes (McCormick, 2001; Patton, 2002). Teacher opinion should be assessed to locate any bias involved in the dependency of teacher opinion being placedinto documented observation, “…it seems appropriate to assess the opinions of classroom teachers” (Aluede, Egbochuku, 2009, p. 47). The sample population included teachers whohave had experience with written observational assessments in early education classrooms. A qualitative method applied “a more holistic and natural approach” (Powell & Connaway, 2004, p. 59) for resolving the problem than did a quantitative approach. Each teacher’s opinion of assessment format framed the study for an in-depth exploration of experiences (Patton, 2002).

Dialogue was achieved using unstructured face-to-face open-ended interviews. The questions led to an understanding of teacher experience promoting in-depth descriptive detailed opinions. The first two questions were designedfor data gathering, ensuring the qualifications of the interviewees. In developing the research questions (Appendix E), open-ended questions created for individual interviews were developedby asking what problem or need will be addressed by the information gathered during the session. Each session was expectedto last 45-60 minutes. However, interview times were overestimatedand lasted up to 23 minutes. The expectation of 45-60 minutes did not take into consideration that teachers interviewed are typically short on time and prefer to address questions quickly.

The qualitative phenomenological case study was appropriate for gaining an in-depth understanding of teacher opinion about assessing young children because qualitative methods envelop a collection of background factors grounded in individual’s experiences and become available in the course of exploration (Bass, 1990). Qualitative study is an inductive progressionof building from data to broad themes to cultivate patterns for comparison with existing literature (Creswell, 2002). Qualitative methods are a reasonable, stand-alone way of assessing what happens (Patton, 2002). A case study gave the insight of a representation of the population. Exploring the assessment experiences of participants addressed the research questions that sought to understand how teacher opinion effects the assessment of preschool children.  The coding and analysis program Nvivo9 was usedfor the coding and analysis of collected qualitative data transcripts from interviews. With the Nvivo9 program collected material including the literature review documents, documents of theory and interview audio files were codedas nodes or sets that represent themes, ideas, people or places.

A qualitative inquiry into the perceived contributions of participation was appropriate to address evaluation questions about the influences that affect child assessment outcomes (McCormick, 2001; Patton, 2002). The interviews for this study only included 20 Early Education teachers to gain the personal opinions of each teacher.

## Research Questions

The two central research questions that relate to how teacher bias may affect early education assessments are:

1) How do teachers feel the bias of other teachers influence the recorded documentation of children’s assessment when a teacher documents the observations of children in the classroom?

2) How do teachers feel the assessment from a previous teacher affects the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group?

Both research questions guided the interview questions. The focus of this study included how teacher bias is involvedin the recording of observational assessments. According to Becker (1992, p. 166), “a good research question evokes memories of events that have been lived through rather than thoughts about the phenomenon.” The research questions relate to the study’s interview questions. The research questions guided the interviews in forming a cumulative assessment of the process. Then data was analyzed with the development of identification of each category creating a thematic content analysis (Cayne, 1995).

## Theoretical Framework

How teacher bias influences the recorded documentation of children’s assessment, and when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group, is subjugatedby three areas of theory. The framing theories of teacher bias consist of child development, observational assessment, and bias. The major models framing teacher bias influence of recorded documentation of children’s assessment include child development theory, child development, observational assessment, and bias.

Child development knowledge is requiredfor accurate observational assessment to happen (Yoon, & Onchwari, 2006). Teachers need comprehension in three main areas of child development: “(1) knowledge of child development and learning, (2) knowledge of individual differences, and (3) knowledge of the social cultural context a child lives in” (Yoon, et.al., 2006, p. 219). Observational assessment has objectives and activities to share information (Epstein, Boisvert, 2006) and documents the chronological development of children. The third influence, “Teachers' bias attitudes and behaviors affect…development” (Guo, 2008, p. 44) and classroom function.

## Child development

Subtle differences exist between theorists of early childhood, among theorists of today and theorists from the late 1800s. Vygotsky was born in 1896 and “has inspired generations of psychologists and educationists to re-conceive learning and teaching” (Kirshner & Kellogg, 2009, p. 45). Vygotsky believed children’s development unfolds within the environment in which learning happens. Vygotsky’s discussions lead into how children’s internalization of socio-cultural processes comes into play (Kirshner & Kellogg, 2009). Children learn through observing other people’s behavior and experimenting with the newly learned behavior while at play “By observing and doing, children learn, learning is experiencing” (Tzuo, 2007, p. 33). Each new behavior learned can create a new learning experience, which can be observedand documented.

Piaget, born in 1896, brought another perspective. In the preoperational stage, the second of Piaget’s four stages of cognitive development, (Brown, Campione, Webber, McGilly, 1992) observed sequences of play. Piaget established the knowledge that a qualitatively unique type of psychological performance happens towardthe end of the second year. Piaget’s theory introduced the idea of cognitive development, “a constructive socially-mediated process…” (Brown et al., 1992, p. 37). As children progress to Piaget’s preoperational stage of play, at approximately age two, the development of play becomes increasingly important in the progressionof children’s “cognitive and social development” (Berk, 2001, p.3). Sensitivity to children’s readiness to learn, discovery learning, and the acceptance of each child as an individual, are included in the main beliefs resulting from Piaget’s theory (Berk, 2001). In discovery learning, a child learns through spontaneous interaction with people, other children and the environment (Berk, 2001). While including a complete understanding of children’s readiness to learn, classroom teachers need to establish a working knowledge on the current development of each child in care. According to Berk (2001) Piagian theory believes that each child goes through the same sequence of development, each child at a diverse rate. This working knowledge can first be established by the use of children’s previous teachers’ assessments.

## Observational assessment

Observational assessment is observing children and using the documented observations to define each individual child’s level of development. Important issues to divulge include the need for the observation of developing children. Observational investigation is a qualitative, non-numerical, linguistic way that can provide for a naturalistic observational format, similar to initial studies and natural observation (Berk, 2001) providing guidelines for using observation as an assessment tool. Investigations into how young children think and learn need to be established.

The particulars of how documentation of children’s assessments with or without bias brings controversy to early childhood education. Debate can arise “…about explored new ways of assessing students authentically, the need for accountability while formative assessment is seen as more valuable to teaching and learning” (Shepard, 2000, p. 5). Observation is the “backbone” of a valid assessment system. Observation provides continuous information about a child’s execution in the classroom (Mindes, Ireton, & Mardell-Czudnowski, 1996).

## Bias

Controversy can emerge during the documentation of the observations done for the children’s assessments. Teacher perception and bias can affect the documentedinformation. “There are many factors affecting the teachers’ prejudiced attitudes and behaviors, such as teachers’ stereotype, differences between male and female students, gender role expectation, Teachers’ bias attitudes and behaviors affect students’ studies and development” (Guo, 2008, p. 44). The Self-perception Theory (SPT) “proposes that individuals infer their attitudes, internal states, and dispositions by observing their own behavior and that of others, providing individuals with feedback about their behavior” (Vogt, Hall, Hankins & Marteau, 2009, 175). Bias can also happen based on external influences that also affect teacher’s. These influences can include the student’s skin color, culture, a dislike of the child’s parents, and the religion of the children in the classroom (Downey & Pribesh, 2004).

## Definitions

This study contains six key terms. The terms include: (a) Authentic assessment, (b) Bias (c) Early Education Center, (d) Graduated Teacher, and (f) Observational Assessment. Definitions and descriptions of these terms as they relate to this study are as follows.

*Authentic Assessment (AA)*: According to Cook-Benjamin (2001), an authentic assessment process to assist in the use of a criterion-referenced measure is presumably the best assessment model to ensurean association involving assessment and curriculum for accountability. The “assessment drives the curriculum” (Mueller, 2010). The “teachers first determine the tasks that students will perform to demonstrate their mastery, and then a curriculum is developed that will enable students to perform those tasks well, which would include the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills” (Mueller, 2010).

*Bias*:According to Swee-Choo (2008), people who are biased to others based on personal choice, show favoritism or unfair treatment.

*Early Education Center*: Grouping childcare centers that educate children includes preschool, nursery school, Montessori center, Reggio center, and Head Start. All children cared for by adults other than their parents, in a place other than their home (Blau, 1999) are consideredto be in a childcarefacility.

*Observational Assessment:* Observational assessment format uses observation, to fill in the information of developmental checklists, work examples, photographs and anecdotal notes to obtain a full picture of a student’s growth and development (Mc Lean, 1996).  *Assessment* is the methodical compilation and analysis of what the classroom teacher has observed.

## 

## Assumptions

One assumption of this phenomenological case study is that teachers in every type of early education center use similar formats of assessment for observational type assessments. Assumed based on Illinois law (Department of Children and Family Services, 2009 A), every early education teacher must have a continuous flow of education, including 15 or more seminar hours of training per year, causing Illinois teachers to gain the same education on observational assessment. Another assumption is that children’s performance in any situation can be altered because of the influences, emotions, or situations children experience. Another assumption is that the teachers are answering questions with honesty in sharing their perceptions. “Participant perceptions are individualistic and part of their lives; they make sense to the individuals, so the assumption is that participants use their own perceptions, free from influence” (Eberle, 2007, p. 19). The participants provided their perceptions based on the questions asked.

To prevent researcher bias, the same questions for each teacher interviewed were asked with the same words, and tone of voice. To prevent researcher bias further the interview remained on topic as much as possible and based on researcher experience, interviews were done in a non-classroom environment.

## Scope

Two parameters restricted this study: (a) The case study consisted of Chicago Illinois area based early education centers that care for children aged two through five years. (b) All participants are or were classroom teachers of an early education center of the present or the past. The focus of this study is on teacher opinion involved in the observational assessments that use teacher opinion to record what is physically seen while observing. “Early Childhood educators have been trained to observe carefully what children do and say...” (Hatch, Grieshaber, 2002, p. 227) and document the behaviors and words of the children in their classrooms.

With a qualitative phenomenological case study design, the perceptions and lived experiences of 20 teachers will consist of early education and care teaching staff. The limits of the focus were the particulars of the individual opinions of each teacher. The results of this study have yielded valuable information that may be usedby other Early Education leaders looking for methods to improve child assessment. Participants are teachers of children aged two through five who have had experience with observational assessment formats.

Teachers should record observational information about each child without bias, making the teacher the test that refers the documented information to the next teacher. As early as 1987 the teacher was seen as the testing tool for children. According to Shinn (1987) validity is impliedin the bias involved in the referral process of the teacher as a test. Once the next teacher receives valid or invalid observational documentation, the bias of the first teacher is recordedinto the child’s documented observations. The graduated teacher who receives the students from a younger age group, must use the documented observations as a guiding tool for curriculum planning. The documented observations that follow each child into the next classroom, give the graduated teacher, the teacher who receives the child upon the child’s promotion into an older age group, information about what to expect. Teacher expectation affects anticipation and interactions that happen between teacher and child.

An examination of the phenomenon of teacher opinion about bias may make it possible for educational administrators and teachers to develop and implement new educational policies and teaching techniques that may improve the observational assessment formats. This examination may also present educators with a different approach to early childhood assessment. The scope of this study was limited to those participants who agreed to discuss openly their opinion and to be recorded on a voluntary, non-compensatory basis. This study gathers the opinions of teachers, making this study applicable to teachers and not children.

**Limitations**

Limitations are to be anticipated in phenomenological case studies. Limitations are present to identify weaknesses that can occur in research. The case study portion limits this research to the Chicago land area. This research involves comprehensive responses from no less than three pilot study participants and 20 teachers from early care and education settings. To prevent a loss of teachers, 100 teachers were solicitedby phone call to volunteer for an interview withthe goal of obtaining 20 teachers. The

research was limitedto the validity of the instruments used to conduct the research. This research did not differentiate responses between male and female teachers. The research did not take into account socio-economic status of teachers being interviewed, or the students they work with.

Second, the reliability and validity of the study is limiteddue to human error and possible bias from the interviewer and the individuals involved in each interview, and the limitations of the questions themselves. Reliability and validity can be distortedby the interviewer’s suggestions, word emphasis, and tone of voice, body language, and rephrasing of questions. Reliability and validity may also be limited to the authenticity and accuracy of the participants, even though the interviews were conducted in confidence and participants will remain anonymous. Limitations included“time constraints, lack of resources, lack of knowledge of available assessment instruments, and negative attitudes toward formal assessment appear as the main other reasons why practicing Early Childhood Professionals do not use any formal assessment” (Brown, Rolfe, 2005, p. 195). Researcher bias, another possible limitation mayhave an impact on research because “tacit researcher bias may be inherent” (Facilities, 2007, p. 554). According to Safyan, (2006) researcher bias impacts validity of research results and prejudice the analysis and findings. The final limitation includes the honesty of the responses of the participants. The selected study design uses open-ended questions in a free-flowing-un-structured format. No scientifically viablemethods of measuring the truthfulness of each participant’s responses were possible. The interview questions were designedto reflect conceptual alignment with the research questions and were written to counterbalance this limitation. However, unavoidable errors are still possible to have occurred in the interview process.

## Delimitations

Four delimitations are present in this study. First, because of life experience only past and present teachers of children aged two through five were invited to participate. Second, the participants are required to have experience or be employedin an Early Education center, to prevent capturing a current trend rather than typical experiences. Third, the participants are early education teachers who live and work in the Chicago land area of Illinois. Fourth, the students of each teacher involved represent the total population, including the inclusion of special needs children, racial and, culturalbackgrounds, and the inclusion of all other diverse populations of the Chicago land area. The minimum sample size of 20 early education teachers represents three or more early care and education centers. A minimum of 20 teachers were chosento gain a basic insight into a possible trend of opinions, which have the potential for more research. Before questioning the pilot study participants, a language and subject matter expert reviewed the interview questions for validity, word choice, and potential errors in question formulation such as double-barreled questioning and for relevance to the research question.

In qualitative research, participants who can help are selected to explain the central phenomenon by exploring their lived experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2002). Qualitative inquiry is not intended to generalize individuals’ experiences, but rather, to illustrate in-depth explorations of the central phenomenon. Time will impact the study. The interviews were conducted during a time chosen by teachers, typically during the traditional naptime of early education centers to give the teachers an uninterrupted day with their students.

## Summary

Bias demonstrates an authentic risk but is rarely documented (Munafò, 2007). This study examined the perceptions and lived experiences of 20 teachers who have worked in early education classrooms of children aged two through five. These participants were selected basedon their teaching and experience with observational assessment.

The problem presented defined the need to address the assessment outcome of early education center children as being dependent on teacher opinion.Teacher opinion demonstrated change in the “communication behavior and engagement in the curriculum” (Adams, Lloyd, Aldred, Baxendale, 2006, p. 41). The goal of this research was to examine the lived experiences of early education teachers who used observational written assessments for their students. By asking the graduated teachers their perceptions of the documentation they received from the children’s previous teachers, the intent to determine how bias influences what is documentedonto children’s observational assessments has begun with this study. The sample was selected basedon the employment and experience of early education teachers past and present.

Literature discussing bias has been found dating as early as 1935 (Dollard) and as late as 2010. No literature dating from 1977 until 1998 were found that discusses bias in the classroom. A gap in literature from 1977 until 1998, leaves observational assessment with questions like, how does bias affect documented observational assessment?

Twenty teachers were interviewedto gain insight into a trend of opinion, showing prospectivefor more research. One language and subject matter expert reviewed the interview questions for validity, word choice, and potential errors in question formulation such as double-barreled questioning and for relevance to the research question. Three pilot study participants included three professionals in Early Childhood.

The literature review integrated research with discussion across the early education assessment format domains into a coherent background description framed in theory. Child development theory, bias theory and self-perception theory are discussed. Child development theory is relevant to the teacher’s knowledge of how and what to

document while observing for observational assessments to be finished correctly. According to Morales (2009), when gauging assessment**,** reliability, and validity, bias is critical to the process. The self-perception theory (SPT), of Bem in 1972 gives insight into how individual teacher’s perceptions affect and influence behavior.

The results of this studies triangulation of theory, literature, and interviews may assist educational leaders in training classroom teachers in determining how to become more decisive and more objective in recording observational assessments. Chapter 2 will discuss the relevance teacher bias has on children’s observational assessments as recorded by a current teacher and used by the graduated teacher. A literature review of applicable literature covers theoretical development of small children, teacher bias, and observational assessment formats supporting the need for this study.

**CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of 20 teachers in their experience of bias in assessment documentation of preschool children. The study used 23 mixed participants: three pilot study participants and 20 final study participants in Chicago area preschools. Data was collected using open ended questions and analyzed and coded for emerging themes and patterns. The study attempted to bring a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding testing at the preschool level. The findings include a mixed response with themes and patterns found in identifying how bias affects documented observational assessment.

In this Chapter, the following sections are presented: literature review, historical overview, current findings and descriptions, input of assessment formats, informal observation assessment tools, examples of assessment formats, recording methods, validity and reliability, child development, theories of perceptions of bias, the effects of bias, gaps in literature, and a conclusion. A qualitative inquiry into the perceived contributions of participation and self-efficacy beliefs is appropriate to address evaluation questions about the influences that affectchild assessment outcomes (McCormick, 2001; Patton, 2002). A qualitative phenomenological case study of the early education teaching staff perceptions of at least 23 early education teachers is appropriate to the proposed study because assessments performed by teachers can be influencedby personal bias. According to Swee-Choo, (2008) teacher bias can create distortions in the job descriptions of teaching practices, slow the approaches to learning, and include insincere teaching.

The literature review is an examination of credible literature from topics that are relevant to the subject of teacher bias. The literature review is separatedinto 10 sections: data search, historical overview, current findingsand descriptions, input assessment and formats, informal observation and assessments formats, examples of assessment formats, child development, theories of perceptions and bias, the effects of bias, and gaps in literature. This search provided an in-depth and comprehensive presentation and critical analysis of the variables in the study.

## Literature data search

An exhaustive, purposeful search was conductedover a 30 month period using traditional and electronic data sources including online, ground public and university libraries, websites, the University of Phoenix online sources that included EBSCO Host ®, InfoTrac®, and ProQuest ® and Digital Dissertations. The Literature Review is a relevant part of research. The literature review must also be comprehensive and focusedwhile developing an argument that describes the need for the current research and analysis” (Sherblom, 1994, p. 65). Parameters for investigations were arrangements of words that addressed topics across the fields of early childhood education, teaching, bias, and childcare. The literature reviewed includes peer-reviewed articles, professional websites, books, and studies. Appendix A shows the key words implemented in the number of works reviewed within each source category.

References to authors, studies, publications, other works, and related terms in the original sources reviewed became the parameters for specific exploration of central and associated topics. Searched subtopics in Early Childhood assessments were theories, Early Childhood programs, and teaching requirements. Searched subtopics within Early Childhood Education were observational assessment and classroom transitions. Searched subtopics within the instructional design were learning theories, training effectiveness, and training evaluation.

This literature review included 172 of the 498 works reviewed. Works published within the last 10 years were significant to the study and represented the ending criteria for inclusion in the literature review. The literature review integrated research and discussions both past and present across the early education assessment format domains into a coherent background description framed in theory. Research dating as early as 1935 (Dollard) and as late as 2010 are integratedto assist in demonstrating the found literature gap, signifying the exhaustive search accomplished for this literature review.

## Historical overview

Observation originated from ethnography and sociology. Observation has been associated to the epistemological beginnings of “ethnography, ethnomethodology, and grounded theory” (Paterson, Bottorf & Hewat, 2003, p. 1). The methods of ethnography, ethnomethodology, and grounded theory include naturalistic investigations of social processes, including that of care giving and teaching (Muller, 1995). Many influences affected the assessment process of young children. Theory is one influence that demonstrates a continual affect. Piaget’s theory is an active theory. Piaget assumes children to be active beings, interacting, exploring, and discovering. According to Kama (1990), children need to play in environments rich in resources, exploring, testing, and learning from feedback from their own actions in a resource-rich environment. Assessing children in the early years is difficult in a format that relies heavily on reading, and sitting for long periods. Children young enough to meet the age requirement of preschool have not yet learned to read, write, and attaina long enough attention span to accomplish the task of filling in answering sheets, “cognitive measures may become more reliable and valid with age” (Roberts, 1999, p. 51).

Piaget concentrated on the physical environment and the assumption that children are active beings who interact, explore, and discover their environment. Vygotsky concentrated on social interactions that each child experiences and did not believe in set stages of development. Vygotsky wrote about stages of Mastery and Self-Regulation (Gredler, 2009). Erik Erickson studied the inner struggles of children at different milestones of development influenced by psychodynamic theory ([Zimiles](http://javascript:__doLinkPostBack('','ss%7E%7EAR%20%22Zimiles%2C%20Herbert%22%7C%7Csl%7E%7Erl','');), 1997). The first two years of life Erickson considers to be Stage 1, Trust versesMistrust (Yount, 2009). Trust verses mistrust is the first stage of human development when infants learn to trust or to mistrust the world and people around them (Yount, 2009). Stage two addresses autonomy verses shame and doubt and covers children aged two to three years, when the beginning of independence begins to show in the behaviors of children. In the third stage of Erickson’s psychodynamic stages, initiative verses guilt is addressed (Yount, 2009) when children learn to express pride, guilt, or shame in themselves.

While Piaget concentrated on the physical environment, Vygotsky concentrated on social interactions that each child experiences. According to Geonnotti et.al, (2007) Vygotsky was born in Czarist Russia in 1896, and investigated child development and educational psychology with Marxism influence. According to Peters (2003), Marxism influence shows each person’s social beginning in the scheme of producing an important role. The objective of education, according to Vygotsky, is to generate and lead maturity, the result of social learning through internalization of culture and social relationships, possibly influencing how a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group, and influencing the children’s new classroom teacher’s opinions. Teachers must be educatedon child development, and be responsible for documenting the growth and development of each child. According to Meller (2001) P.L. 99-457 of 1986 provides official federal support to use assessment in identifying young children with delays. This federal requisite began an explosion in the advancement of tools for formal assessment. Assessing one domain at a time is a possible way of measuring one area of development. However, other tools are available. Assessment tools used to assess multiple domains often include more than one domain. Possible domains could include “physical health and well-being, social knowledge and competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, general knowledge and communication skills” (Corter, Patel, Pelletier, Bertrand, 2008, p.773).

Teachers are the typical administrator of early childhood testing. “Tools that are administered to a child by a trained examiner” (Allen, 2007, p. 456) usually ask children to perform a specific task in a testing environment like standardized testing. Standardized testing, used for many years, has been over used and is often interpretedincorrectly. “Standardized testing has been over-used and misinterpreted, particularly when tests do not have established reliability and validity …and when tests are used for purposes they were not designed for” (National Association of School Psychologists, 2002). Trained examiners need to carefully “score, administer, and interpret” (Allen, 2007, p. 456).

## Current findings and descriptions

Screening tools can be usedto locate potential developmental delays. The screening tools used can begin “intervention services early” and “is an important part of the child’s assessment process” (Allen, 2007, p. 456). The need to identify delays in small children early and the sophistication of children’s future learning potentially drives the need for assessment of children in childcare centers (Horton & Bowman, 2002). Anecdotal notes received through teacher observations and checklists are what assessment normally consists of (Schappe, 2005). Assessing multiple domains of development should be comprehensive and use developmentally appropriate tools including checklists and observational techniques. Care giving environments need to help children develop to their full potential to deepen the understanding of children and resources (Meisels, & Atkins-Burnett, 2000). Four factors complicate the task of developing “age-appropriate assessment strategies” (Carter, Briggs-Gowan, Davis, 2004, p. 111). First, Carter states, “strategies include the rapid pace of developmental transitions and growth in early childhood” (p. 111). The second reason is a lack of procedures for incorporating information collected from different sources using different methods. The third is “limited information for determining levels of impairment both within the child and within the family system and finally the fourth, “…difficulty assessing child functioning within the relevant relational and cultural contexts” (Carter, et. al, 2004, p. 111). Documenting development in the social context in each classroom needs an organizational method. Observational assessments typically include a broad sampling of items that are categorized into domains. Screenings are a brief and inexpensive assessment of more early childhood domains (Cohen & Spenciner, 1994). The domains are organized into a portfolio containing information of each domain typically in chronological order.

Locating developmental delays is the focus of screening. Since 1940, “The use of screening tests of one type or another has been a common practice in American schools,” (Gredler, 1997, p. 99). Each assessment tool can be categorized into an observational portfolio or screening. Assessment formats may include teacher input, administrator input, and parent input. Many forms of assessments can be included into a portfolio.

## Input of assessment formats

Each assessment format has individual guidelines that describes who provides the input required for implementation. Schweinhart and Epstein (1997) created an extensive list of assessments. Appendix B illustrates the list of 15 assessments devised by Schweinhart, and Epstein (1997) demonstrating the provider for each assessment, with the inclusion of who performs each assessment.

Each assessment tool listed in Appendix B needs to be recorded without bias, typically by a teacher or administrator. Children’s assessments follow their immediate education. For example, the use of assessing and recording language development immediately can be usedas a good forecaster of reading achievement among naturally developing children. Individualizing assessments have proven to be useful for developing “effective individualized interventions…” (Dufrene, et. al. 2007, p. 368). Assessing young children’s language development has shown to predict children’s reading skills in later years. This prediction can create opportunity for recording observational assessment that may influence assessment outcomes, and the teaching methods of teachers of higher age groups. According to Flax, (2009) the “early stages of reading,” include both factors of “phonological awareness and oral language” and supply information “about reading outcomes with oral language abilities playing an even stronger role in reading success as the children got older” (p. 63).

## Informal observational assessment tools

Informal non-observational assessment tools and informal observations are both used with varying differences. The process for implementing formal non-observational assessment tools include children sitting for long periods of time, answering verbal questions, reading and writing (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2002). A concern for the use of non-observational tools includes the inability of preschool children to read and write and stay focused for long periods of time. Informal observational assessment tools are being usedto record observations of children in the classroom environment, preventing the children from needing to read, write, and attain. Informal observations must meet the educational standards of the government. Educational standards were identified by “state governments, the national government…advocating" accountability "through content standards and testing” (Derthick, Dunn, 2009, p. 1016) with federal Head Start and public schools. Standards and testing results follow children from one age group to the next. “…educational standards must customize the learning process to respond to the teaching–learning environment...the delivery of the school curriculum realizes the learningoutcomes defined in the educational standards” (Griffith, 2008, p. 99).

Objective tools and subjective strategies for measuring students performance are regularly appliedbecause standardized measures are accepted (Wereley, 2006). “In

order to create instruments that produce reliable scores, testing organizations must work to make sure that the items on the test help to maximize reliability” (Jones, 2010, p. 1). The challenge is in creating norm-referenced tools that prevent bias from becoming a part of the recorded assessment. According to McKeone (2005) the ground work for assessment is laid out by decisions to make educational improvements and “to derive standards-referenced judgments, performance descriptions and exemplar materials” (Newton, 2007, p. 149).

### Examples of assessment formats

A full understanding of each assessment format used by teachers gives guidelines and regulations into the requirements needed for documentation. Early childhood professionals must understand each assessment option to choose between traditional assessment methods and observational assessment. Four examples of assessment instruments included here for additional exploration into the documentation process: Creative Curriculum (CC), Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL), Head Start Outcomes Framework (Head Start), and Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ).

In the Creative Curriculum a complete Developmental Continuum Assessment System includes thecurriculum. DIAL, Head Start Outcomes and ASQ, are assessment models that do not include a curriculum. The Developmental Continuum Assessment System is an instrument used to assess preschool children in six domains: language development, emergent literacy, emergentnumeracy, cognition, general knowledge, and social competence, and is used in conjunction with Creative Curriculum (Teaching Strategies Inc, 2010). The main five early childhood areas screened using the DIAL system are motor, language, concepts, self-help and social development (Mardell & Goldenberg, 2009).Head Start implements a child assessment system with the intention of aligning assessment with curriculum in eight domains: language, literacy, mathematics, science, creative arts, social, and emotional development, approaches to learning, and physical health and development. Each Domain has Elements that define the domains milestones.

In the Head Start Outcomes Framework, the Outcomes (developmental goals) are linkedto the curriculum, lesson plans and observational tools. “If teachers use an instrument that is linked to the Head Start Outcomes Framework then using that assessment to guide their curriculum planning should link their planning to the Framework as well” (Grisham-Brown, Hallam, Brookshire, 2006, p. 50), creating a data bank of many assessments to compare to each other, creating validity and reliability. While the ASQ is a questionnaire assessment tool used as a partnership between teachers and parents (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 2010), both family physicians and pediatricians can use Ages and Stages to identify children with development delays so that children can be referredto necessary resources for full assessment and intervention program. The ASQ is direct opinion from the parents, not from teachers.

Federal Head Start of Illinois uses the Creative Curriculum to assess development of children cared for while gathering information to assess the various programs offered. “The Continuum meets all of the assessment standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of State Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education” (Teaching Strategies Inc, 2000-2010). DIAL is an assessment format chosen by the Federal Head Start programs of Minnesota to record and measure the development of the children and to gather information about program success and growth. “Early Childhood Health and Developmental Screening…created to assist parents and communities improve the educational readiness and health of all…children through…early detection of children’s health, development, and other factors that may interfere with a child’s learning and growth” (Minnesota Department of Health, 2008). Head Start has performed several kinds of assessments to evaluate both programs and individual children. Federal Head Start assembled the Frameworks Outcomes to meet the initial goal of Head Start and to give intervention to low income and high-risk children. “Intervention is a framework for organizing planned sequences of prevention…Plans might increase or decreases in intensity depending on risk status and outcomes. If interventions are well sequenced and technically adequate, these outcomes can be interpreted (with other sources) as evaluation data concerning educational needs” (Barnett, 2006, p. 568). Since 2000 Head Start has required all programs to report children’s progress toward a customary “set of standards that children should achieve” (Grisham-Brown, et.al. 2006) before graduating the Head Start program. In contrast the ASQ format starts with parents filling out questionnaires for children with the goal of finding developmental deficits or delays in the areas covered by the ASQ: communication skills, gross and fine motor skills, problem solving skills, and personal-social skills. The ASQ feedback given to the teachers from the parents. The teachers use the information gathered by the ASQs of each child to add documentation to the already growing amount of assessment material of each child.

## Recording methods

Requirements of recently enrolled children, within 90 days of enrollment in the Federal Head Start program, “are to have an up-to-date, age appropriate preventive health care checkup” (Minnesota Department of Health, 2008). Every screening must integrate the needs of the state’s program schedule and the federal requirements."In addition, within 45 days of enrollment, agencies must perform or obtain linguistically and age-appropriate screening procedures to identify concerns of child’s development, sensory (visual and auditory), behavior, motor, language, social, cognitive, perceptual, and emotional skills” (Minnesota Department of Health, 2008).

The requirements for Creative Curriculum include each child’s observational assessment being recordedonto a website offered by CreativeCurriculum, creating a continual assessment of each child's development integrating a continuum online (Lambert, 2006). This system, used for reports, assists in program planning, and offers parental communication tools. The constant reporting assists the government in assessing federally funded programs.

The *Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning* (DIAL)is a standardized screening tool, involving age-appropriate activities keeping students engaged. This standardized format does need to be recorded based on teacher observation, giving the opportunity for recorded bias. This assessment is to demonstrate the growth and areas of need for each Head Start center. The DIAL assessment included teacher and parent opinion. The inclusion of parent opinion can be helpful; researchers can attempt to control potential bias by comparing teacher and parent assessment. Language bias also can be an inherent issue (Mardell & Goldenberg, 2009). To assist in preventing language bias DIAL includes Spanish material in one kit to involve the Spanish-speaking students.

Possible ethical and legal issues related to the outcomes or procedures could include the parent questionnaire. The parent questionnaire gives information about health history, background, self-help and social development (Mardell & Goldenberg, 2009). Parents and teachers need to follow federal regulations giving laws to the requirements, “experienced researchers alike need to understand the professional and legal rules regarding the conduct of ethicalresearch” (Artino, Brown, 2009, p. 599)**.**

**Validity and reliability**

*Creative Curriculum for Preschool* is scientifically based and researched (Teaching Strategies Inc, 2000-2010). The Philliber Research Associates for The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Department of Defense Sure Start program, the Louisiana Department of Education, and The Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) (Teaching Strategies Inc, 2000-2010) have evaluated *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool*. The Philliber Research Associates for The Hartford Foundation evaluation includes findings of statistical growth “in the cognitive/language profile, motor profile, and the self-help profile” (Teaching Strategies Inc, 2000-2010). The Department of Defense Sure Start program engaged 100 “children in 10 randomly selected classrooms using *The Creative Curriculum”* (Teaching Strategies Inc, 2000-2010) had used data collectors trainedin administering child assessments, classroom observations, and parent questionnaires. The information from these assessments whichused “to determine the quality of classroom teaching practices and to assess children's developmental gains” (Teaching Strategies Inc, 2000-2010). Of *The Creative Curriculum* gains were found in allthree developmental areas including: “social/emotional development, cognitive development, and physical development” (Teaching Strategies Inc, 2000-2010) by The Louisiana Department of Education.

Reliability and validity is necessary. Proper documentation of the children's developmental progress reporting child outcomes recordedaccurately (Morales, 2009, p. 31), “when evaluating the quality of an educational assessment**,** reliability, validity and item bias are critical to the process” (Morales, 2009, p. 31). Bias placed into assessment formats by teaching staff is recognized as possible in the Creative Curriculum. The same conclusions reached while using the same instrument to measure reliability by different assessors that give the same conclusion demonstrates reliability (Morales, 2009, p. 31). *Creative Curriculum* has been used by many assessors with the same results, and “ is based on the latest research on how children learn best and has been shown through experimental and quasi-experimental studies to improve classroom quality and promote the school readiness of preschool children” (Lambert, 2006).

Neuman (2003) stated that validity develop researchers identify a solid relationship in facts. DIAL gives scores for motor, concepts, language, and behavior. DIAL also gives a parent questionnaire to help standardize scores for Self-Help and Social Development. DIAL gives a constructive and effective early screening method” (Mardell & Goldenberg, 2009). DIAL “provides a positive, nonthreatening environment essential to effective early screening (Mardell & Goldenberg, 2009). Stimuli presented one at a time used fine motor manipulatives and other developmental material. With the use of the DIAL-R version assessing takes “15 minutes to administer and yields one total score (Mardell & Goldenberg, 2009). The early childhood field has placed an importance on reliability in early care and education programs. “The field of early childhood education has emphasized naturalistic assessment strategies, such as observation and parent interview, as the most appropriate ways to gather meaningful assessment information for young children” (Hallam, Grisham-Brown, Goa, & Brookshire, 2007).

Validity and reliability of The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) relies on the input of both parents and teachers. “The first step in studying the validity of a screening tool such as the ASQ is to select optimal cut-off scores, maximizing agreement between concurrent measures” (Heo, Squires, J., & Yovanoff, P 2008, p. 200). Potential bias inherent in the assessments and research can begin with the input of parents - recognized since 1935 (Dollard, 1935). Parents struggle to deliver “a picture of the growth of the child” (Dollard, 1935, p. 94) removing parental bias “to which all unguided reports of children by their own parents are liable” (p. 94). Including parents input can have a positive effect. However, the possible ethical and legal issues related to the outcomes or procedures can lead to insufficient data.

Child Development

The beginning of school readiness is an issue that unbiased assessment can assist with. According to Ionescu, school readiness has become a hot topic (2007). “school readiness is a very important concept for re-conceptualizing education at present time…” (Ionescu, 2007, p. 49). School readiness begins with the very first experiences children have because “it is appropriate to think about what happens before an infant is born” (Driscoll & Nagel, 2008, p. 38). According to Driscoll and Nagel (2008), there are eight influences on un-born children’s development: family economics, family support system, family health, community, and dominant themes, educational levels of family members, cultural background of family, family size, and family attitudes (Driscoll & Nagel, 2008). No matter what the influences children develop with the same milestones that continue to affect child development throughout childhood. Each influence listed has an impact on each child’s school readiness.

Stages of development also have an influence on school readiness. Each child must be in the correct stage of development to succeed in school. Jean Piaget “argued children passed through four stages of development: sensori-motor, primary operations, concrete operations, and formal operations in which they successively constructed their own knowledge of the world through interactions with the environment” (Beatty, 2009, p. 446).

* Sensory-motor stage: Birth through age two. By the age of two the infant develops object permanence, the ability to know an object exists even if he or she cannot see the object.
* Preoperational stage: Two years through age seven. Children are egocentric and full of curiosity.
* Concrete operations stage: Seven years through 11. Children begin to develop higher thinking skills are able toprocess mental operations, beginning to classify objects by their distinctiveness: color, shape, or size. Children at this age learn in present time.
* Formal operational stage: 11 years through 16. Children begin to think about the future, the abstract, and the hypothetical (Singer & Revenson, 1996).

Piaget’s ideas and theories were rejectedin the 1920sand 1930s, and reappeared in the 1960s(Beatty, 2009). “Unlike experimental psychology, behaviorism, and psychoanalytic psychology, Piaget’s developmental psychology has been largely ignored by historians of education, perhaps because Piagetianism was largely confined to preschool education” (Beatty, 2009, 443).

According to Vygotsky (1978), the specific social and cultural surroundings where the young children are living and learning, discover “through interactions with other people in their immediate social world,” the people around them affect the children’s learning. Children learn about the world and relationships through the unique way they play. “promoting make-believe play should be seen not as competing with academic learning but rather as enhancing it” (Bodrova, 2008, p. 358). According to Erickson, children assimilate the information of the world around them, “into their own mental and physical frame of reference, which in turn change over time as they progress through different stages of development” (Loo, 2005, p. 20).

## Theories of perceptions and bias

Perception is individualized. Gathering information about each teacher’s perception to categorize and locate similarities of possible documented bias assisted in organizing the individual perceptions of at least 20 teachers. Clements (2010)writes about Saul Bellow’s “Refreshed Phrenology” “…the goal is to attain a level of perception in which meaning is found within the world, rather than imposed upon it.” The self-perception theory (SPT), of Bem in 1972 gives insight into how individual perceptions affect and influence behavior. “SPT proposes that individuals infer their attitudes, internal states, and dispositions by observing their own behavior and that of others” (Vogt, et., al., 2009, p. 175). Based on SPT, each teacher who documents with observational assessment is affected by his or her own individual attitudes “Self-perception theory posits that people sometimes infer their own attributes by observing their freely chosen actions” (Goldstein, Cialdini, 2007, p. 402).

Individuals come to “know” their own attitudes, emotions, and other internal states partially by inferring them from observations of their own overt behavior andthe circumstances in which this behavior occurs. Thusto the extent that internal cues are weak, ambiguous, or un-interpretable, the individual is functionally in the same position as an outside observer, an observer who must necessarily rely upon those same external cues to infer the individual’s internal states (Bem, 1972).

Melone (1990) “pointed out…common bias…behavior is completely determined by beliefs and attitudes” (p. 89) the bias, beliefs, and attitudesof each teacher affect teacher competence. According to Evangelista, Owens, and Golden (2008) "It is important to understand if the bias generalizes the perceptions of others” (p. 780). Teachers are expected to have a level of competence. “Classroom teachers exert considerable influence on the intellectual, academic, and social development of the children entrusted in their care” (Foster, 1980, p. 27). Teachers do have an influence on the children’s behavior and academics as well as the academic records.

## The Effects of Bias

The lack of literature about teacher bias effects on observational assessment demonstrates that no research methodology has been used to study this phenomenon. The effects of bias are difficult to measure “Moustakas recommended that a protocol be created and followed that documents personal bias and protects research integrity throughout each phase of the research and reporting processes” (Fletcher, 2009, p. 22). The effects of bias described using the interview method will assist in describing the effects of bias.

Bias affects the behavior of classroom teachers as “…unfair treatment, being biased and personal, and showing favoritism” (Swee-Choo, 2008, p. 68). Teachers hold the responsibilities of teaching, observing, documenting, lesson planning and implementing the lesson plan. Other responsibilities include and are not limited to communication with parents, individualizing lesson plans, and journaling information about each child.

Teachers hold the responsibility of recording valid information while documenting each observation without bias, making the teacher the test that refers the documented information to the next teacher. “Implicit in the bias involved in the referral process is the validity of the teacher as a test” (Shinn, Tindal & Spira, 1987, p. 37). Once the valid or invalid observational documentation is givento the next teacher, the bias of the first teacher is recordedinto the child’s documented observations. The graduated teacher who receives the students from a younger age group must use the documented observations as a guiding tool for curriculum planning. The documented observations that follow each child into the next classroom give the graduated teacher information about what to expect. Teacher expectation affects anticipation and interactions that happen between teacher and child.

A common goal needs to include bias reduction because “it is not right for teachers to hold bias” (Guo, Zhou, 2008, p. 47). According to Guo (2008) teachers’ bias affects students’ studies and development. “Teachers “are required to make great efforts to overcome their bias during the teaching” (Guo, Zhou, 2008, p. 47). The aim is to reduce bias so that when standardized tools are used, they are viewed as supporting data to provide evidence about what is already known, rather than providing new information (Fraine, 2009). With the reduction of bias in observational assessments, children being assessed will have an exact assessment. According to current literature, Charlesworth and Lind (2007) suggest that teachers concentrate on: assessing where the child is now, choosing the objectives to reach, planning experiences, selecting materials, teaching while following the plan and the materials that fit the expectation as indicated by the objectives, and evaluating what has been learned and what has been taught (Allen, 2007).

Figure 1: Evaluating, What has been learned and what has been taught

## Gaps in literature

A gap in literature exists along with limited information about perceptions surrounding the awareness of bias involving the documentation of observational assessment. This study seeks to fill the gaps in the literature by describing the perceptions of early education staff responsible for observational assessment documentation. Literature dating from the 1930s until current dates does not show how bias in observational assessment affects the recording and interpretation of what has been recorded. Material dated as early as 1935 (Dollard) is usedto demonstrate the gap in literature.

The relevant gap found in literature and practice is the influence teacher bias has on the outcome of the evaluation and teaching methods formed by graduated teachers based on child observational assessments and tools. Observational assessment tools need to be designed and used “by a person familiar with the child, based on observations of the child, in the school” (Allen, 2007, p. 456). According to Allen an observational performance based tool is a cost effective method for assembling information on a large number of children. Choosing the correct assessment tool is a challenge, with many tools to choose from. Existing assessment tools vary with respect to who provides information about the child, the method of assessment employed (e.g., questionnaire, interview or observation), and the timeframe that is covered (e.g., last two weeks, last year, lifetime). According to Allen (2007) experts view screening tools as useful for the original preliminary screening. “Children identified by screening tools as having developmental concerns are generally referred to trained examiners for further assessment” (Allen, 2007, p. 456). A trained examiner who has not worked with the children may not be an effective method of assessment. Selecting the correct assessor and tools for assessment are essential to success. “Given the multiple domains of child development and the proliferation of assessment tools, selecting tools and developing a child assessment system that screens young children for delays, assesses developmental progress and learning is critical” (Allen, 2007, p. 456). The possible bias that follows the assessed preschool children into the graduated teacher’s classroom and influences the daily teaching routine is being studied.

A possible outcome of the teacher bias influence could be the referral into an intervention program. “Very young children and clinically referred children with poor attention are more likely to produce responses if the tester actively engages with them” (Chiat, 2007, p. 429), quality assessment tool is the key to any systematic review as it

allows original research to be objectively appraised and evaluated, to inform subsequent decisions” (Wong, Cheung, & Hart, 2008, p.2) When placing children into tracks of the educational system, developmental assessments are important (Schölmerich, et. al., 2008, p. 187).

## Conclusion

This literature review was an extensive study of all available resources that affect bias in early childhood observational assessments. The literature review was divided into 10sections. The sections include data search, historical overview, current findings and descriptions, input assessment and formats, informal observation and assessments formats, examples of assessment formats, child development, theories of perceptions and bias, the effects of bias, and gaps in literature.

The historic overview includes past theories that affect child development thought today. Piaget and Vygotsky, two historical child development theorists, are discussed. Piaget describes children to be active, interacting, exploring, and discovering while growing though a sequential path of development. “Piaget’s key contribution

to the field of child development is his notion that all children pass through a fixed sequence, through a series of universal stages of cognitive development” (Agbenyega, 2009, p. 31). Piaget concentrated on developmental psychology and the physical environment, while Vygotsky concentrated on social interactions of each child’s experiences.

The “experts emphasized that individualized assessment through informal methods can contribute to understanding skills and knowledge” (Allen, 2007, p.776)of children. The exploration into the influence teacher bias has on the outcome of assessments given to enrolled preschool children explored teacher experience in receiving the assessments of children from other teachers. The literature explored shows a gap in the study of the influence teacher bias has on children’s observational assessment outcomes. To address the lack of research, the goal of this qualitative phenomenological case study is to explore teacher experience in documenting observational assessments and receiving the assessments of children from other teachers. The assessment outcome of preschool children is dependent on teacher observation. Critical to answering evaluation questions is customizing an evaluation approach that addresses the purpose and context of the assessment format studied (Vellutino, Tunmer, Jaccard & Chen (2007); Patton, 2002).

## Summary

The problem presented defined the motivation behind this study, specifically, the need to address the assessment outcome of early education center children as being dependent on teacher opinion. The goal of this research is to examine the lived experiences of early education teachers who use observational written assessments for their students. The intent is two-fold: to ascertain whether bias is written in observational assessments from classroom teachers, and to determine if teacherbias has an effect on how the children’s future teachers perform the task of teaching.

The literature review consisted of an exploration of teacher bias in early childhood education observational assessments providing the groundwork to answer the research questions: how does teacher bias influence the recorded documentation of children’s assessment and Howdo teachers feel the assessment from a previous teacher affects the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group?

The research in chapter two address’ the relevance of teacher bias using research of similar topics because of a lack of sources that directly address the topic of teacher bias, with a statement and surrounding literature describing a gap in literature. Chapter 2’s review of applicable literature covering teaching bias and observational assessment formats support the need for this study. A criticism commonly stated of “teachers’ assessment is that they are subject to bias according to factors such as general ability” (Hoge & Butcher, 1984, p. 777). The research and methodology is presented and described to document participants’ experiences and biases in chapter 3. Chapter 3 provides details for how the study executes this qualitative phenomenological case study experience.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of 20 teachers in their experience of bias in assessment documentation of preschool children. The study used 23 mixed participants: three pilot study participants and 20 final study participants in Chicago area preschools. Data was collectedusing open ended questions and analyzed and coded for emerging themes and patterns.   The study attempted to bring a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding testing at the preschool level. The findings included a mixed response with themes and patterns found in identifying how bias affects documented observational assessment.

Interviews and secondary data from theory and literature have captured in-depth teacher opinion of the perceived meaning of participants’ program experiences and beliefs about their biases projected onto each child’s assessment. The topics discussed in this chapter are population and sample, informed consent, confidentiality, measuring instrument, data collection, data processing, instrument reliability, internal validity, external validity, reporting, interpreting results, and summarizing.

A qualitative phenomenological case study of the early education teaching population perceptions of 20 early education teachers is appropriate to the study because according to Swee-Choo, (2008) teacher bias can create issues in the descriptions of teaching practices, slow approaches to learning, and include insincere teaching deficient in eagerness. Informed consent was obtained and confidentiality will be kept with identity locked for five years. The measuring instrument included interview questions and the recording of interviews for data collection used for processing data that was transcribedand analyzed for themes with the software package Nvivo9. Instrument reliability and internal validity was assuredby a pilot study. Then the results were reportedand interpreted by triangulating the interviews of 20 teachers and secondary data of theory and literature giving a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of teacher’s opinion.

## Method appropriateness

Each teacher’s opinion allowed an in-depth exploration of their experiences (Patton, 2002). The qualitative phenomenological case study is appropriate for gaining an in-depth understanding of the teacher bias that affects the assessing process of young children. Recorded interviews assisted in information gathering. The interviews were analyzed with content analysis. A qualitative content analysis was “conducted to categorize responses, contrast perspectives among these groups…a qualitative research method was chosen to study the natural occurrences of the phenomenon of teacher bias,” (Gallant, Schwartz, 2010, p. 1). To gather a complete understanding of the phenomenon performed a complete examination. Broad themed, open-ended questions assisted in exploring general aspects of program evaluation experiences, and promoting in-depth descriptive detailed opinions. Specific questions based on participant’s responses were asked to gain a deeper insight into each individual teacher’s opinions about assessment bias.

The goals of quantitative studies are to give numeric value to variables or to compare “factors unique to individual cases” (O’Sullivan, Rassel, & Berner, 2002, p. 38). Differences among qualitative and quantitative studies can be recognizedthroughout the research process. The rationale for using qualitative instead of quantitative is that quantitative studies are usedto ascertain explanations or associations between variables whereas qualitative studies explore further and create an understanding of problems about which little is known (Creswell, 2005). With minimal research in the area of teacher bias involvement in children’s observational assessments, an exploration completedan initial understanding of the problem. A qualitative study allowed a flexible design and produced verbal data that was content analyzed(O’Sullivan, et. al., 2002) with the assessment program Nvivo9.

According to Creswell, the literature review for quantitative research is exhaustive. In a qualitative study the review must be significant in terms of justifying the research. The purpose in quantitative research is precise and constricted, seeking measurable and observable data. The purpose in a qualitative study is general and broad, seeking to understand the participants’ perspectives (Creswell, 2005). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological case study was to understand the perspective of the teachers involved. In quantitative research numerical data is analyzed, and in qualitative research text analysis is usedto develop themes. In quantitative research, an objective and unbiased approach to report findings is used, whereas qualitative researchers use a reflective or subjective approach to report (Creswell, 2005). A quantitative approach would not have been effective for the current study because the purpose of the research was to understand the influence teacher bias has on the outcome of assessments given to enrolled preschool children of early education centers. The statistical approach of a quantitative study would not have been the optimal approach because the intent was to explore the perceptions of the participants as opposed to measuring specific relationships between variables. Creswell (2002) explained that quantitative studies make it difficult to capture participants’ experiences fully unless narrowed to a minimum number of specific variables. In qualitative studies, the participants provide information in answer to broad, general questions giving information to the research design.

## Interviews as the best data collection instruments

The interviews were electronically recordedand transcribed verbatim onto a computer with the use of *Dragon Naturally Speaking 10* software,analyzed and subjected to content analysis with the qualitative software package Nvivo9. With visual contact at an agreed upon location, the interviewee did not become distracted, and focused on giving direct answers to each question. “In-person interviews permit visual contact between interviewers and respondents” (Acierno, Resnick, Kilpatric, Stark-Riemer, 2003, p. 645). Focus groups were another option. According to Williams (2009) focus groups offer in-depth user input. However, focus groups were not used because of the participant’s inability to provide information without the influence of input and opinion from other teachers.

Triangulating interviews of 20 teachers, theory, and literature, gave a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of teacher’s opinion of the perceived meaning of teacher’s assessment experiences and beliefs about bias. As stated by McCormick (2001) and Patton (2002) a qualitative inquiry into the perceived contributions of participation and self-efficacy beliefs is suitable to address evaluation questions about the influences that affect child assessment outcomes. A qualitative phenomenological case study of early educators gathered information on the perceptions of 20 interviewed Early Education teachers about bias.

The research was accomplished by conducting a pilot test of three participants and 20 interviews. Then data from all 20 interviews, literature and theory were triangulated to capture in-depth teacher opinion of the perceived meaning of participants’ experiences about their biases projected onto each child’s assessment given by early education and care teaching staff. “Beyond the unique knowledge sought by means of these exploratory interviews, the overarching rationale of the research project was considered in light of and with regard to the human phenomenon investigated” (Troshynski & Blank, 2008, p. 35). According to Troshynski and Blank, (2008) numerous advantages exist in the exploratory interview approach.

## Defense of methodology

Procedures used in this phenomenological case study included open-ended interviews, and anecdotal records. “Because the study focus was on understanding the experiences…phenomenological approach was used with open**-**endedquestions that encouraged participants to describe events they perceived to be important,” (Shih-Yu & Wiess, 2009, p. 268). Facilitating in person interviews with electronic assistance allowed expressive data to be accessible for quick collection. The phenomenological case study (Powell, 2008, p. 9) allowed the research participants to describe their interpersonal communication experiences (Powell, 2008, p. 9). The study used an organized method to assess perceptions from the interview session for common themes and patterns instead of using the results as a source for statistical analysis. Statistical analysis is more common in quantitative research (Suddaby, 2006) and does not give a qualitative answer. A statistical analysis gives a numerical assessment. Under these circumstances, data from a large number of interviews will lend more credibility to the discernment of patterns and trends. The appropriateness of a given program evaluation design determinedthe contextual circumstances in the evaluation environment.

Reasons for selecting a qualitative approach includes emphasis of the programs studied on experiential learning, the desire to explore topics deeply, and given limited research, qualitative methods offer a starting point for understanding outcomes (Wituk, Warren, Heiny, Clark, Power, & Meissen, 2003). Secondary data sources substantiate the data collected from participants through interviews (Russon & Reinelt, 2004).

## Research design

“There are three research methods, which could have been used to conduct the research. The methods include: (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative, and (c) mixed method” (Ezeokeke, 2009, p. 9). The quantitative method is not able to “produce verbal data” (O’Sullivan, et. al., 2004, p. 38). “The mixed method involves collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data” (Ezeokeke, 2009, p. 9), thus increasing the amount of time and money needed to complete the study. A qualitative phenomenological case study was chosenfor the ability of defining opinion, and further explaining the lived experiences of early education teachers. A non-experimental, qualitative research design was usedto gather information and explore teacher opinion. The research design relied on data that permitted conclusions that answer the research questions designed to guide the research. Qualitative interviews with early childhood teaching staff assisted in processing teacher perception by gathering program information, processing data, and identifying "lessons learned" that can be usedto refine and modify early education programs. An interview with open-ended questions determined the perceptions of the influential factors that impact possible teacher bias. The qualitative study will result in the culmination “of an exclusive set of data” (Khan, 2009, p. 45) that can be usedin later studies.

## Population and sample

## The selection criteria for this purposive sample of early education teachers, was having current or past employment as a classroom preschool teacher with experience in observational assessment. The participant sample included 20 teachers taken from Chicago area early education centers. A sample was solicited by phone calls using phone numbers provided by Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Agencies of Illinois, contacting early education centers from the North, West, and South sides of Chicago Illinois. The concentration on Chicago as a case study gives insight into other large populated areas. Interviewing 20, or.1 percent of the available early education center (EEC) teachers of Illinois to discuss personal experiences involved in observational assessments of young children will give an idea of the opinions of the population. The chosen sample was early education teachers who have worked with young children and used an observational assessment format in paid employment. According to the 2009 National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) report, there are 891,315 children in Illinois childcare. The Percent requests for pre-school age care at 32% is equal to 285,221 preschool children in or seeking childcare (NACCRRA). According to The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, the child teacher ratio for preschool aged children is one teacher per 10 children. Based on the current number of preschool children and a ratio of 10 to one, Illinois has 28,522 preschool teachers. Interviewing 20 preschool teachers from Chicago based childcare centers will give 1% of the Illinois population (Department of Children and Family Services, 2009 B) representing the population, and giving possible information for further research.

In the study, the use of recorded interviews, the *Naturally Speaking 10 Dragon* program, and the Nvivo9 data processing program served as primary research tools. Tovalidate the interview questions, a pilot study of three early childhood educators in an open-ended unstructured interview took place. This was followedwith 20 early education teachers’ interviews. Interviews were chosenbecause of their flexibility and the ability of achieving in-depth responses. Questions were developedon the basis of the literature reviewed, the research questions, and bias theory. Questions were sequencedto create an interview guide. A conversational approach was implementedwith the organization of lead questions, letting the flow of each interview follow the lead of the interviewees.

## Informed consent

Using a four-step process for gaining consent ensured “the protection of the participants’ rights” (Fryer, 2010, p. 70). The first step was to gain approval of the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Second step included phone calls to introduce the researcheras a doctoral student and to make an appointment to introduce the study to early care and education centers, and to community colleges that offer early childhood education as a major while providing a consent form (Appendix F) to establish consent for the use of premises and subjects. The third step was to introduce the topic, the study, and inform possible participants of the research and benefits to each participant. The fourth step consisted of bringing a consent form (Appendix D) to the scheduled interview session to be signed before the interview began. All participants signed an informed consent form.

## Confidentiality

Each participant was givenan informed consent guaranteeing anonymity for participation (Appendix D). Confidentiality and anonymity are concerns in research when the research involves attentive populations such as students, prisoners, employees, and teachers. According to Human Subjects Research Office at Miami University, this research study qualifies as an exempt study.“Research involving the use of education tests, survey or interview procedures, or observation of public behavior” (University of Miami, 1997-2009) qualifies for exemption status. Every participant was protected from physical and psychological harm. Protection for confidentiality and privacy was provided with protection against deception.

The statement of agreement serves as a legally binding agreement between the researcher and participants as a public statement of confidentiality. For the purpose of the study, confidentiality means that the researcher will hold the names attached to information in confidence. This statement reassures each teacher interviewedthat everything shared for the duration of interviews will be confidential. The American Psychological Association (Kraut, Olsen, Banaji, Bruckman, Cohen & Couper, 2004), provided comprehensive deliberations on the ethical issues and concluded that informed consent and anonymity is crucial for effective data collection. Confidentiality protective measures are composed of safeguarding the participants’ names and identifying descriptors. Each participant was assigned a numeric identifier. All identifying data will be stored in a locked file for a total of five years and will be destroyed by fire after fiveyears.

## 

## Measuring instrument

Focus groups were considered for use as the primary instrument. However, to encourage honest answers and confidentiality, interviews were designated as the primary tool. The primary data collection instrument, un-structured interviews (Cooper &Schindler, 2006; Creswell, 2002) was implemented with three pilot study participants and 20study participants. The first three participants participated in the pilot study. The remaining 20 participants participated in the un-structured interviews. The pilot test consisted of a population from early education professionals who did experience documenting observational assessments, and hold seniority status in the Early Education field. To qualify for seniority status each Early Education professional has worked in Early Education for more than 10 years in the role of classroom teacher or worked through to promotion as an early education administrator with experience in observational assessment.

The central research questions are: How does teacher bias influence the recorded documentation of children’s assessment? and How do teachers feel the assessment from a previous teacher affects the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group? In developing the research questions, shown in Appendix E open-ended questions were created for non-structured interviews. The questions listed in Appendix E were developed by asking what problem or need will be addressed by the information gathered during the session, the research questions, and research findings. Each interview was expected to last 45 to 60 minutes. Each interview lasted an average of 20 minutes each, including time for follow-up questions in response to the teacher’s answers. Teachers were concise with answers and had very little time available. Interview questions are listed in Appendix E.

The matrix shown demonstrates how the interview questions (IQ) relate to the research questions (RQ).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Interview question  (IQ) | Research question  (RQ) or background |
| IQ#1 | RQ#--background |
| IQ# 2 | RQ#--background |
| IQ#3 | Bias influences recorded documentation |
| IQ#4 | Bias effects new teaching methods |
| IQ#5 | RQ#s 1 and 2 |
| IQ#6 | Bias effects new teaching methods |

Table 1: Relating Matrix

The interview process occurred in person with the exception of one interview. One interview occurred with an interpreter to assist a participant who was deaf. The questions were asked to the participants who volunteered. The validity of the information gathered was assured by using the triangulation of data. Triangulation in qualitative research is a process of verifying evidence from various individuals, data types, or different approaches to data collection in descriptions and themes (Creswell, 2005). The data collected consists of the personal experiences of early education teachers and their perceptions relating to the bias written in the observational assessments of preschool children, theory of child development, and the literature review (Creswell, 2005). This study engaged “multiple methods, such as,observation, interviews, and recordingswill lead to more valid, reliable, and diverseconstruction of realities” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 597). Theory and a literature review will be usedto confirm, modify or disconfirm any projected or possible outcomes the interview data will discover.

## Data collection and processing

Interviews were solicitedwith telephone calls to individual teachers and childcare centers. The individual teachers were asked to sign a consent form giving permission to the interviewer to record and document the interview. Directors from childcarecenters granted permission to ask the teachers for interviews (Appendix F).

Interviews, scheduled to last between 45 to 60 minutes, were held at locations designated by participants. Each interview scheduled according to the needs of each teacher gave needed flexibility to every participant. All interview sessions were recordedon audiotape and transcribed, after written permission, a signed consent form was signed. All unstructured interviews gave the teachers the ability to speak freely. The only expected similarity in each interview will be the actualquestions asked.

Interviews are important in providing data that will articulate each teacher’s personal opinions about how bias affects documentation and interpretation of written observational assessment. The use of qualitative data gathered with interviews gave the needed personal experience the value this research is looking for. The individuals involved share the personal perspectives involved in documenting observational assessment. The second activity was to record original data from answers that were gathered through open-ended questions and dialog with participants (Gadamer, 1994), generating a need to be alert to preconceptions and prejudices when questioned. Researchers need to connect the questioning with research questions that search for insight rather than confirm opinions (Gadamer, 1994). The researcher asked the teachers to describe the observational assessment formats they have experienced using the open-ended questions developed for this research study, and verified valid by leaders in the early childhood field.

The third action was to organize the gathered information. Organization happened by downloading the agreed upon (Appendix D) recorded interviews into a computer using the *Naturally Speaking 10 Dragon* program, coding the information using the Nvivo9program. The coded data found coded common themes in the teacher’s responses.

**Data analysis**

The first step to analysis was to gather information from a language and subject matter expert (LSME) and redesign any needed changes based on the feedback of the language specialist. The language and subject matter expert determined if any language misrepresentations existed in the study. No redesigning was necessary. Then the pilot study was presentedto three Early Childhood professionals for suggestions on any possible wording clarifications needed. No needed changes were applied. Twenty Early Childhood professionals were interviewed face-to-face for their opinion on bias as biasrelates to the documentation of bias onto written observational assessments. The interviews were recordedand analyzed by the Nvivo9 program. The Nvivo9 program was used for the coding and analysis of collected recorded qualitative data transcripts from each interview linking themes together using content analysis. The content analysis describes what and how bias was experienced, synthesizing both the why and how of each teacher’s lived experience to communicate the lived structure common to the assessment experience in relation to bias. The intended outcome of the analysis was to reach a conclusion that identified if any bias is documented onto observational assessments, or if any bias influenced the implementation of the graduated teacher’s lesson plan.

## Research questions

The two major research questions in this study focused on understanding bias and the effects of bias in the classroom specifically for observational assessment.

**1.** How do teachers feel the biases of other teachers influence the recorded documentation of children’s assessment when a teacher documents the observations of children in the classroom?

2. How do teachers feel the assessment from a previous teacher affects the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group?

## Instrument reliability

A pilot test was conducted to validate the interview questions in support of the research questions. Pilot testing interview questions ensures the questions to be clear and easy to understand (Creswell, 2005). The pilot study assisted in identifying and anticipating categorization. The pilot test helped with any other issues that might appear during the analysis (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). Participants for the pilot sample were selected from a population of early education professionals experienced with documenting observational assessments as well as having seniority status in Early Childhood Education. Seniority status as a professional is someone who has worked in Early Education for more than 10 years in the role of classroom teacher or has been promoted to an early education administrator. Two participants in the pilot test have used an observational assessment format, and one pilot test participant was a language specialist.

Before presenting the questions to the pilot study participants, a language and subject matter expert reviewed the interview questions for validity, word choice, and potential errors in question formulation such as double-barreled questioning and relevance to the research question by rating each research question in relation to the interview questions. Changes were not needed based on the responses from the language and subject matter expert.

Three pilot participants were solicitedthrough telephone solicitation, to read and comment on interview questions with rating scale responses. The interview questions were physically presented in person. The responses were categorized and used to decide if changes were needed to the questions that were asked to the teachers. Responses were due five days after the questions were given and all three pilot study participants responded. Final wording changes were expected but were not suggested by the pilot study results. Beyond the validity of the research instrument, validity was establishedfor the research project to promote the precision, meaningfulness, and reliability of the research. Controls established to ensure the research would be applicable to the greater population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The control measures included teacher ability to choose the location for each interview to ensure the teacher’s comfort, the meeting place to be quiet, the meeting place to have no children present to prevent distraction, and the meeting place to be free from emergent distraction.

## Internal validity

Internal validity threats can exist due to changes “to the instrument and participants possibly changing their views” (Hughes, 2010, p. 79). A printed invitation explained the research, choices, and expectations of each participant while providing a setting of their choice in which the participants could communicate their perceptions of teacher bias. A lack of trustworthiness, the use of personal interviews and the examination of the participants’ perceptions of the effects of teacher bias as opposed to experiences with facilitating the bias of other teachers might represent a threat to internal validity. To assist in preventing possible threats triangulation of the interviews with literature and theory are described. Triangulationis a secure method in “determining internal validity in qualitative research” (Meijer, Verloop & Beijaard, 2002, p. 146), and was accomplished by putting three forms of data, interview transcripts, literature and theory into the Nvivo9 program, and locating five different themes with-in all three sources, authenticating the results.

## External validity

Regarding establishing external validity, Leedy and Ormrod(2004) stated, “[We]

contribute more to humanity’s knowledge about the world when we conduct research

that has implications that extend far beyond the specific situation actually studied.” The knowledge gathered from the lived-experiences of the preschool teachers can relate to teachers in any grade level that uses observational assessment. Early education teachers share a variety of demographic, socioeconomic, and educational characteristics with the larger society (Lievens, Hoye, & Schreurs, 2005). The present study can be replicatedalthough human research designs retain a certain uniqueness based on the opinions of the research participants. Neuman (2003) stated validity increases when the researcher identifies connecting details. The research methodology of the current study allows replication although the results might differ based on the participants selected.

## Reporting and interpreting results

Reporting the results was completed in line with a phenomenological case study. The participants’ experiences were described in detail with the themes derivedfrom the Nvivo9 program. The themes found were compared to the available literature and theory in search of commonalities and missing themes. This comparison was incorporated with literature and theory to organize the information from the specific to the general. The information gathered from recorded interviews and the *Naturally Speaking 10 Dragon* program was entered into the coding and analysis program Nvivo9. The Nvivo9 program was usedfor the coding and analysis of recorded collected qualitative data transcripts from each interview where similarities of themes will be searched for in comparison to theory and literature. The themes found will provide a guide that will enable the creation of an assessment format and trainings for educational leaders to use.

## Chapter summary

The problem statement meets the goals of the research. “Triangulation in social science research refers to a process by which a researcher wants to verify a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with or at least, do not contradict it” (Meijer, et. al., 2002, p. 146). The themes developed by a content analysis of recorded interviews with the inclusion of all three items in the triangulation; interviews, theory, and literature. This analysis gives Early Education a description of how bias affects the observational process of early education children from early education teachers.

This study of human behavior denotes a phenomenon of teacher bias following children from one classroom to another within the same school or childcarecenter, using multiple sources of information; including information gathered from the pilot study, teacher interviews, theory, and a literature review. The study researches a minimum of 20 early childhood educators in the Chicago area of Illinois, triangulating interviews with early education teachers, theory, and literature. The primary source of evidence will be early education professional’s contribution in interviews. The focus of phenomenological case study is to illustrate “the meaning of the lived experiences for individuals about a concept or...phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). The empirical phenomenological case study approach exists on two levels. The first is the original data obtained through open-ended questions and dialog with participants from the Chicago land area of Illinois. The second involves analysis of the interview data gathered through Nvivo9and triangulated with literature and theory where an individual participant experiences will provide the foundation for developing universal meanings with respect to the subject of the study.

Phenomenology studies the meanings of the lived experiences of a group of individuals about a phenomenon or concept (Creswell, 1998) by exploring the behavior and conscious thoughts of early childhood educators. Phenomenological studies find the “essential, invariant structure…or central underlying meaning of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). Interviewees participated in 10-30 minute open-ended interviews designed to elicit respondent statements regarding feelings, perceptions, and descriptions of their experiences. The research demonstrates that teacher bias follows young children from one classroom to another through teacher documentation using an observational assessment format. The study results serve as a guide to the inclusion of bias to other childcare centers and schools where observational assessment occurs. The present study examined the set of issues identified and the possible steps that could be taken by schools and early childhood educational and care centers to succeed in relinquishing the passing of teacher bias.

Chapter 4 includes discussions on the pilot study results, data collections, (Mason, 2010) findings, the significance of the study, and implications for leadership. The two research questions will assist in exploring the perceptions of the interviewed early education staff. Chapter 4 will also include the results of the Nvivo9 analysis. The purpose of the findings presented in chapter 4 is to supply an explanation of what is occurring with possible bias in observational assessment.

# CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DATA EXPLORATION

A distinctive phenomenological case study of the perceptions of teacher bias based on teacher opinion was conducted. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of early education teachers who have experience with documenting observational assessment. Organization of the chapter, a review of the data collection procedures and methods for analyzing the data are documented.

## Purpose statement

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of 20 teachers in their experience of bias in assessment documentation of preschool children. The study used 23 mixed participants: three pilot study participants and 20 final study participants in Chicago area preschools. Data was collected using open ended questions and analyzed and coded for emerging themes and patterns.   The study attempted to bring a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding testing at the preschool level. The findingsinclude a mixed response with themes and patterns found in identifying how bias affects documented observational assessment.

**Organization of chapter**

Chapter 4 reviews the data collection procedures and methodology used for analyzing the substance of the interviews. The sample population’s characteristics are expressed and thematized with the significance that emerged from the collected data. The themes are organized into three categories, research questions, emergent themes, and unexpected findings. The emergent themes includeBias is Present, Bias Influences Recorded Documentation, Bias Effects New Teacher’s Teaching Methods, and Working to Avoid Bias. The unexpected findingsincludethe Oral Transfer of Bias. Each theme is described with supporting data from the interviews. After the themes were explored, a conclusion completes the chapter.

## Review of data collection procedures

Face-to-face interviews were usedto collect data for this study. Early education teachers of two to five-year-olds with experience in observational assessment were interviewed. Each participant was introduced to the study with a description and a consent form to sign giving permission to audio record each interview. Each participant was made aware of their obligations and was given the ability to choose not to participate.

Prior to the study, all participants were given the chance to ask questions. The interviews were scheduled according to each participant’s needs, when the participant’s consents were signed. As soon as the consent form was received by the researcher, the interview began. Before the audio recorder was turned on the participants were given the opportunity to read the predetermined questions and ask questions to clarify any inquiries they had. Every initial interview question remained the same for each interview. The only structure to each interview was the interview questions. The conversations for each participant had differences based on the individual teacher’s answers.

The data was transcribedand imported into the Nvivo9program for further content analysis. The information transcribed into the Nvivo9program matches the responses the participants verbalized when asked the interview open-ended questions. The Nvivo9program automatically assigned unique identification numbers that correspond to the participants in the study. The unique identification numbers will protect the identity and confidentiality of each participant. The number identifier “Participant” identifies the interviewees, and the numbers one though 20 follow the “Participant” to inform the reader of who is being identified. The data has been saved on a disk and stored in a locked filing cabinet. The data will be kept for fiveyears and then destroyed.

## Demographics of the pilot study

The language and subject matter expert (LSME) is an English professor who has taught English for 13 years. The pilot study using the same research and interview questions were ratedby the LSME to evaluate the data collection methods (Phillips, 2010). Seniority Early Educators for the pilot sample were chosenfrom a population of early education professionals experiencedwith documenting observational assessments. Seniority status was established as a professional who has worked in Early Education for more than 10 years in the role of classroom teacher or has worked through to promotion of an early education administrator. Each participant in the pilot study had experience with observational assessment format. Three pilot participants were solicited to read and comment on interview questions with rating scale responses. The pilot participants were solicitedwith a verbal request, given a consent form to sign, and furnished a written questionnaire (Appendix C) to answer.

All participants, pilot, and others did provide consent before the study began. The responses categorized by averaging the rating responses and used to decide if changes were needed to the questions that were asked to the teachers. Two of the participants were female and one was a male. Two participants were promoted to administration, and two participants have more than 10 years of classroom experience.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Gender | Years of teaching experience | Promoted to administrator | English |
| Male | 10 | No | 1st language |
| Female 1 | 3 | Yes | 2nd language |
| Female 2 | 12 | Yes | 1st language |

Table 2: Pilot Study Demographics

## Pilot Study Analysis and Findings

The first step required for analysis and findings was to gather information from a language and subject matter expert (LSME) and redesign any essential changes based on the feedback of the LSME. The language and subject matter expert determined that no language misrepresentations were present. To determine any language misrepresentations the LSME answered the rating scale for the pilot study. The LSME rated each question two or above. Based on the answers given by the LSME the research and interview questions were not changed.

The second step for analysis of the interview questions was to gather information from three pilot study participants. The pilot study participants were asked to rate the research questions in relation to each interview question with a scale of one through three. Interview questions rated with a one did not address the research question. Interview questions rated with a two somewhat addressed the research question. The interview question rated with a three meant that the interview question fully addressed the research question. The pilot study answers were numerically averagedto find the answers for interview questions two through five. When the pilot study questions were answered with a two or above, each research question somewhat address each interview question, causing both research and interview questions to remain the same and not be changed for the study. Interview question number one was found to have the lowest average of 1.6 for each research question. Interview question number one remained the same because interview question number one is a clarification question togain a full understanding of each participants understanding of the study requirements.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Averages among answers of pilot test | Research Question 1 | Research Question 2 |
| Interview Question 1 | 1.6 | 1.6 |
| Interview Question 2 | 2.3 | 2.6 |
| Interview Question 3 | 2.3 | 2.3 |
| Interview Question 4 | 2.6 | 3 |
| Interview Question 5 | 2.6 | 3 |
| Interview Question 6 | 2.3 | 2.6 |

Table 3: Pilot Study Response Averages

## Preparation for data analysis

Preparation for data analysis included scheduling interviews, audio recording interviews as they naturally transpired and exploringthe interview transcripts with Nvivo 9, and finishing with the creation of visual support of findingsin graph format. Names were removed and replaced with labels. Each interview recording was labeledwith “Interview” and a corresponding number of one through 20 to protect the privacy of the participants. After the transcriptions were completely entered inNvivo9*,* the information went through a complete content analysis. The analysis results supplied the basis for identifying themes of significance within the data (Appendix J).

**Data collection**

The major models framing teacher bias influence on recorded documentation of children’s assessment include perception and bias theory, child development, literature, and observational assessment. Before collecting information, consent forms were signed by each school participating before the study began. Then each individual teacher was asked to sign a consent form, and data collection “began with...opening remarks and open-ended questions” (Phillips, 2010, p. 20). A voice recorder and the *Naturally Speaking 10 Dragon* program wereused to write dictation of the recorded interviews. Literature and text were taken directly from the literature review, and theory used was taken directly from the Theories of Perceptions and Bias described by Bem (1972) to complete the collected data and entered into Nvivo9.

**Scheduling interviews**

This qualitative phenomenological case study involved 20 recorded interviews from teachers of early childhood classrooms to assess the perceptions of early education teachers from the North, West, and South sides of Chicago, Illinois, creating a geographical triangulation (Appendix G). The owners and Directors of each childcarecenter were notified by telephone call when it was time to begin the interviewing process. Each interview was scheduledaccording to each individual teacher’s needs in accordance with time and location. Communication for scheduling was also individualized. Six teachers preferred to schedule through e-mail while 12 teachers preferred to schedule through the telephone voice mail system, leaving messages to confirm the location and time to meet for each interview.

**Data gathering and exploration**

Data collection assisted in capturing the perceptions of 20 interviewed teachers. Each interview took place at a location of the teachers choosing, “and were recorded and transcribed for each interview response” (Chamberlain, 2008, p. 71). Each interview consisted of asking the same questions to each interviewee. The interviews were given in the context of a conversation. All interviewees had complete freedom to answer openly and elaborate on any details they chose. Each interview transcription was importedinto the Nvivo9program. The Nvivo9program used collected material including the literature review, the definition of bias described by Bem (1972), and interview transcribed files, grouped as three different individual sources. The connection between the literature review, bias theory and the interview transcriptions found several common threads of bias. An extensive search in each of the three files conducted to reveal text describing five different nodes, bias is present, working to avoid bias, bias influences recorded documentation (Research question one), bias effects new teacher’s teaching methods (Research question two), and the oral transfer of bias. Bias is Present and Oral Transfer of Bias, are the two most common themes found. Bias influences recorded documentation and bias effects new teaching methods were included to create a common link between the research questions and the interview questions proving the existence of two more Nodes. Then the theme Oral Transfer of Bias was an unexpected theme discovered.

## Demographics of participants in the main study

Required demographics among teachers interviewed consisted of similar experiences in Early Education. Early education teachers share a variety of demographic, socioeconomic, and educational characteristics within the larger society (Lievens, Hoye, & Schreurs, 2005). The qualified interviewed teachers have similar experiences of teaching in classrooms of children aged two through five while using documented observational assessment as an assessment tool. No other restrictions were given to the teachers, lending to a variety of educational levels and cultural backgrounds (Appendix I). A full description of each interviewed teacher is listed in Appendix M.

## Study findings and data analysis

The three collected items, interview transcripts, bias theory described by Bem, and literature were entered into the Nvivo9 program and were grouped as three different individual sources. Five different nodes were created using all three sources by highlighting the relevant text and dragged into each node. Two of the nodes were namedto identify all responses that fit the category of answering research question one and research question two. Two of the nodes were namedto identify the two largest common threads. Bias is present and working to Avoid Bias. Then an unexpected theme found was the Oral Transfer of Bias. “Data sources were analyzed using an inductive method, a process that evolves from details to general themes” (West, 2007, p. 125), exploring all three sources giving chart results (Appendix J), describing that 18 out of 20 teachers work to avoid bias. Participant 16 states, “I want an equal playing field for every child”. An overlap of Bias is Present and Working to Avoid Bias was also found.

Eighteen of the 20 interviewed identified classroom experiences with bias present. Fifteen of the participants interviewed identified both Bias is Present and working to avoid bias. According to participant 5, “It's more a matter of kind of knowing where your bias lies so that you can watch out for them.” Further describing the results of the research questions directly, the results also showed, fourout of 20 or 20 percent of teachers described bias as affecting the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group. Teachers describe bias in documentationof observational assessment by fiveout of 20 or 25 percent of early education teachers. Then the unexpected result included the fifth theme, Oral Transfer of Bias. Eleven out of 20 (55%) teachers explain bias as orally transferred.

## Thematizing

Data from the literature, theory, and transcribedinterviews created five themes that entered as Nodes into the Nvivo9 program assisted each theme Working to Avoid Bias is Present, and Oral Transfer of Bias, to show similarities between each source and sorted the words and phrases of each transcribed interview, literature, and theoryinto the perspective Node; leading as the themes present. A reference number was assigned by Nvivo9to each highlighted relevant text dragged into each node creating a new reference for each statement spoken by interviewees.

### Theme one: bias influences on recorded documentation

The discovery of bias influences on recorded documentation assisted with answering the research questions directly. Research question number one: How do teachers perceive bias influences the recorded documentation of children’s assessment wasincludedto create a common link between the research questions and interview questions? Teachers describe bias as being documentedinto observational assessment by fiveout of 20 or 25percent of early education teachers.

Responsibilities of teachers include and are not limited to communication with parents, individualizing lesson plans, and journaling information about each child. Teachers hold the responsibility of recording valid information while documenting each observation without bias, making the teacher the test that refers the documented information to the next teacher. Bias theory is “based on Self-perception Theory (SPT)…each teacher who documents with observational assessment is affected by his or her own individual attitudes. Self-perception theory posits that people sometimes infer their own attributes by observing their freely chosen actions.” Participant 1 believes that teacher’s actions do influence the behavior and academic records of the children.

When unavoidable, bias does affect the documentation of observational assessment. Participant 1 states that information documented by the previous teacher is sent to the graduated teacher and that bias will be a part of the documented observation. Participant 1 states, “It has the potential to…even though we don't want it to. You will be looking for things that you might not have been looking for.” However, the teachers documenting the observations may be unaware of their own bias, “as evident to the person recording it. I definitely think that it does somehow affect the recording of observational assessment. In other words they may be putting bias in without intending to as opposed to someone who purposely does it.” Participant 12 agrees that bias does influence the documentation of observational assessment, “So… just doing an observation…could be definitely very…based on that person’s experience, past dealings with other children, etcetera…so I would say that observational assessment can be very helpful but they can also be very one sided based on the teachers experience.” In order for bias to be avoided in documentation, bias needs to be recognized and separated from the observation. Participant 20 believes “that it’s very difficult to separate your assessment with your personal bias...I don’t think it’s possible for bias to be completely out of the picture…anecdotal records I think is where you find the most bias.” Participant 1 wants “to know where a child has been”, sometimes deciding to depend on others observational assessment is not easy.

Objectivity being a goal in observational assessment is not always met. Participant 1 states “An opinion cannot be used or be assessed in the child's progress if it is not objective.” Preventing bias with documentation is a technique used to reach the goal of objectivity. “Obviously if you have a bias then that’s going to be part of your observation you will be looking for things that you might not have been looking for if you hadn’t already had that information planted in your head”.

Recording the observation without bias is difficult. Participant 3 will write down her observations and still wants to take notes from the information she hears from other teachers, writing an asterisks next to a judgment statement that is not objective. “But I don't put it as an observation…if I don't feel it's an objective observation.” Being careful of what is documentedis important because, “the portfolio transfers from one room to the next room.” An opinion statement cannot be used or mistaken for a factual statement. If an opinion statement is usedin place of a factual statement and transfers to the child’s graduated classroom, the bias of that opinion can have an effect on how the graduated teacher responds to or teaches that child.

### Theme two: bias effects on the new teacher’s teaching methods

The discovery of theme two, bias effects on new teaching methods, answers research question number two. The common link between the research questions and the interview questions were created showing how the teachers feel the assessment from a previous teacher affects the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group. Four out of 20, or 20 percent, of teachers describe bias as affecting the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group. Once the valid or invalid observational documentation is given to the next teacher, the bias of the first teacher is recordedinto the child’s documented observations. The graduated teacher who receives the students from a younger age group must use the documented observations as a guiding tool for curriculum planning. The documented observations that follow each child into the next classroom give the graduated teacher information about what to expect. Teacher expectation affects lesson planning, anticipation, and interactions that happen between teacher and child.

Knowledge of the children’s development when they enter the classroom can assist; but reaching your own conclusions can assist as well in developing and implementing a lesson plan. Participant 1 believes that to “know where a child has been” and to know if it were “easy to come to your own conclusions or” if “it was difficult to avoid everyone else's opinions” is worth being aware of. Knowing if a child needs help before the child starts in the classroom can be of assistance. Participant 1 observed both how observational documentation can be involved in transferring bias and howbias can be avoided in the transfer. “It is difficult to avoid the biases…everything…that the teacher had documented was available and passed on to you.” Participant 20 believes, “the assessments from the previous teacher can give you some very valid information. So without using it you could find yourself blindsided by some surprises.” Participant 12 and participant 20 agrees, to be aware of bias no matter what the source, including Participant twelve’s statement“your own bias’ getting in the way” or information received from the parents. Avoiding bias is a challenge.

Avoiding bias is a challenge when transferring observational documentation from one classroom to another. Participant 1 believes that any information about the children’s development passed onto the graduated teacher will influence the teacher’s teaching methods. When designing lesson plans communication between teachers can assist in ensuring the children’s needs are met. Participant 3 agrees, “Lesson plans to discuss with…coworkers about the challenges of… each…child in it. We use our lesson plan to reinforce what the child needs…I may want to start them at a different point if I feel they may need extra help.” Lesson plans are used“as my own personal tools it guides me”. Participant 1 uses lesson plans to assist in reinforcing lessons that a previous teacher has taught.

### Theme three: bias is present

Bias was described as being present in the classroom by 18 out of 20 participants. However, no consistent pattern has emerged to present the timing of the bias present, only that bias has been experienced. A total of one hundred and six references of all combined interviews were coded as “Bias.” “Implicit in the bias involved in the referral process is the validity of the teacher as a test.” When bias is documented into an assessment tool thattool is transferred with the child into the next classroom. Bias was identified as being present and transferred from classroom to classroom. According to Vogt (2009) the self-perception theory (SPT) describes individuals as understanding attitudes, thoughts and feelings by watching human behavior, and is affected by his or her own individual attitudes.

Participant 1 stated that, “everybody has biases; everybody's got some kind of bias. Everybody does,” Participant 1 identifies one recognizable source of observed bias outside of the classroom that affect the teaching staff, “during the training even people in an inner-city or in the minority class minority group can have biases about people who are part of their group I mean everybody has biases that everybody's got some kind of bias. Participant 1 further explains,

This lady who is African-American, one of our teachers I can't help it, my bias is if I walk past somebody who's got hood on I want to avoid them because the perception is the gang bangers-you wear a hood so you can see who they are. I was so surprised. I don't think so, because you know as a child you grow up with it even kids who go to school that's multicultural it doesn't matter it was from the same group the same teacher said, “I don't care if I get up and get on a plane with somebody who’s from the middle east I'm terrified. I am absolutely terrified, because I think you're on the plane to blow it up.” Allagree that as a good teacher you take a face value for each child. An individual might be Hispanic or African-American or white or Asian, it does notmatter take them on face value. Try to set aside whatever you have in your mind you may be very surprised, create an awareness. They have this bias about hiring anyone who is not bilingual, so when I hire themtheybetter be Mexican or Puerto Rican or something like that, butthere'sthis underlying current they each have a couple African American teachers at their sites but they don'twant anymore, andwe'veactually gone in and said we just promoted an African American teacher in the site director still complaining about it I'msorry she'squalified.

According to Participant 2, “Bias, it comes in many different ways. It can be spoken and unspoken in gestures and non-gestures and whatever you and I think, no matter what the human side of it, all brings some type of bias with.” Interview two believes that if some teachers were completely open about how their individual background affected them in the classroom. Participant 8 states that, “Even teachers are usually products of our upbringing and if we have been brought up in a white middle-class neighborhood we expect children to be like that.” Participant 8 also thinks, “You might be biased…you might look after the poor fragile kids and have assessed them higher than you would someone who's all spiffy.”

Bias in the classroom also emerges with students who stand out in some way. For example, students who have a connection with the teacher, often referred to as “pets” seem to have extra attention paid to them. Participant 4 also states, “This focus could also be on children who are difficult, having had judgments about misbehaviors passed on about them from one teacher to the next. Participant 6 states, “They definitely do exist. You with everyone I think everyone has a bias especially with challenging kids so I think that, that has skewed observation.” Then continues, “You may record your observations more negatively than you would of other children, or of children that are really difficult you may want; you know, like intervention purposes you may be a little bit more harder and write more definitely.” Continuing, “I think everyone has a bias especially with parenting kids so I think that has obscured the observation sometimes aggressively. I know it does. You have to write down your observations more little things in their observations than you would necessarily with the child.” Using, “This teacher was also very clear about the process of one teacher sharing information about a student’s behavior prior to coming into the next classroom: she said, “Some of them I’ve been told, oh they don’t get a thing. Nothing’s clicking there, not picking up anything, so you just think then we’re starting fresh, fresh.” When a child is graduating into a classroom, “the first things they tell you are they a good listener do they help their friends are they a hitter, or a biter.” From what this teacher shared, a fresh start does not happen. Described roots; bias is created by an ethnic perception or belief or by an experience with a previous sibling. This sharing of information from one teacher to the next becomes much clearer when discussion on how documented assessment is affected by bias.

**Theme four: working to avoid bias**

One interesting pattern that emerged from this data was 18 out of 20 teachers work to avoid bias (APPENDIX J). Fifteen of the 17 teachers interviewed have identified times of bias being present and working to avoid bias. Sixty eightreferences from 19 of the possible 22 sources were coded as working to avoid bias.

Decisions independent of the opinions of others is important to several interviewees. Participant 1 likes to make independent decisions, but understands the challenges of bias. “It is difficult to avoid the biases…The graduated teacher who receives the students from a younger age group must use the documented observations as a guiding tool for curriculum planning.” Participant 1 continues, “Honestly, I don’t think it affects my lesson plan or my teaching.” Participant 1 prefers to make independent decisions. Hearing from other teachers, according to Participant 5, “Most teachers don't look at them (observational assessments from other teachers) until later-until they form their own opinion, and figure out their own strategy.” Avoiding bias can include not relying on the assessments finished by other teachers. “Well for the most part I didn't rely on it …would be more viable for me to look at and to trust, how they did academically not relying on someone else's opinion. Participant 8 states that she “tried to do my own when they came into my room”.Also reaching individual opinions, both Participant 10 and 14 agree with excluding the use of transferred observational assessment. Participant 10 states “I reach my own conclusions about the child development based on my testing, based on my interaction with the child, and based on observations so I would definitely give the child a clean slate”. Participant 14 also claims, “My lesson plan is straight across the board, same for everyone.” An attempt to reach independent decisions by four other participants, participant 15, 16, 19, and 20were also found, as stated by participant15, “I definitely try to reach my own conclusion…So ya know I would really like to make my own conclusions.”

Documenting bias is a possibility, with a need to provide preventative measures. Bias can be prevented by documenting only facts. According to participant 1,“The recording of it (observational assessment) is fact based…any info ya know, it’s written and its fact based. But it’s still to me…observational things with in…those reports…” Interview three believes teachers might exchange recorded conversations and claims to keep opinions separate from fact, stating, and “I would certainly start my own observations and documentation, honestly.”

Participant 5 agrees with the need to avoid bias, “You do need to make sure it does not affect the way that you assess the child or the way that you work with the child. You do need to find ways to work around it. I think a good teacher can do that.” Participant 5 believes bias can be there but can be prevented, and “…that most teachers try very hard to not only… show how, but not to feel it, and certainly if they feel it then to not show it.” Another way to avoid bias is to create a method of teaching the same for every child in the classroom with no individual attention. Participant 17 describes the program as “one size fits all.” So on the 20th day of school you will do this worksheetwhether you need it or not…and um it’svery academic and that’s our…work for everybody.” Keeping the same curriculum with no individual attention in the program will give the same work for everybody and can assist in Avoiding Bias.

Participant 13 believes bias to be nonexistent and states, “I've just been taught that way,” participant 13 continues, “So it just comes natural to me, to write an observation even though it's my own observation of a child.” Participant 3 agrees with keeping objectivity in everything observed and documented, describing a way to ensure objectivity in observational assessment. Having a backup plan to avoid bias can lead to bias prevention, “Have someone double check over what you've done and make sure what you're seeing is accurate,” with the inclusion of your documentation being checked over teachers can prevent bias. Participant 17 prefers to “Write it down as factual evidence…we want factual documentation of evidence of the child's progress you know where they started, where we’re at and areas that might need to be discovered”. Participant 14 states that without preventing bias we can hold “bias towards one student or a bunch of students you may make it harder on them, and expect more from them…That might hurt in the long run”.

Preventing bias was a topic participant 15 believes, “…that most teachers try very, very hard regardless of how they may feel about it.” When participant 16 was asked if there is information about any child given, does the previous teacher’s bias create any bias in the way participant 16 delivers the lesson plan, “It doesn’t. Not at all, no…I know what needs to be done in this…I know what the goals are and I need to teach to those goals.” and follows up by stating, “Now I have to remediate…if as I start teaching my goals not based on what someone else tells me from a previous grade…so ill do…based on my own observation and it’s not based on someone else’s observation.” Participant 20 also tries not to “…let it…because I don’t think that’s fair to the classroom. So what I do is I have the first couple of weeks of school,” using, “A standard lesson plan that is geared towards the developmental stage each child is supposed to be in, then from there based on my own assessments I will adjust what I need to in the lesson plan.”

### Theme five: oral transfer of bias

The unexpected theme found in the interview transcripts was the oral transfer of bias. Participant 10 believes teachers should create an awareness of their own bias and the bias in classroom and set it aside, “Exactly…a lot of times it’s verbal, and a lot of times for me it goes in one ear and out the other because I like to hear it, but I like to make my own decision”. Participant 10 continues, the oral information gained from previous teachers can contain behavioral information, a “lot of times its verbal and… I like hear it. I get a lot of behavioral…like what their behavior problems could be. What… works or what has worked for other teachers”. Participant 11 believes that information gained verbally does have an impact, “It did, and it absolutely did affect me. I had a whole rapp…” shared about one child in particular. Participant continues “Well, they just gave me a list of everything that he had done that was naughty…so I knew already that he was a little out of control” He has no parental help and “a language barrier”. Other information shared orally can include“what they know academically,” and “if they grasp anything academically”. Participant 11 also sharing that information shared orally can include statements like, “oh they don’t get a thing, nothings clicking there not picking up anything”.

Participant 12 believes that bias can originate from the classroom teacher, “I know that some teachers have them…I think that…when a child is given a label it’s very difficult for teachers to get past that”. Participant 12 prefers “that children are not labeled early on so that they don’t have a preconceived notion about them before they come to their class.” According to participant 13 bias can also originate from the children’s parents. “When we get them obviously being three year olds, were…getting…children straight from home, so our perceptions are going to be based on what the parents tell us.” Parents will describe their children and “get kind of bad feedback based on” what the “parents who are not really helping” say, or “based on the parent’s observation so we can know who needs help”.

Participant 17 believes that some children need more help than others, “I was going to have a child in my class they were sure was autistic. So I got in touch with the mother. I was going to…start working with the child a little over the summer,” to help the child adjust to the classroom. Participant 17 continues, “Then a month before school she…told me she found a school…a half a mile from their house…I was really kind of bracing myself of what it would be like having an autistic child.” Concern for the unknown suggests questions like, “So what’s going to happen if he’s disruptive? I guess in the preschool he was totally disruptive”. The oral transfer of bias can lead to the sharing of both positive and negative reactions. “They warn me if there something to be worried about but otherwise they say their cute you’re going to love them, stuff like that”.

Participant 2 states that, “Bias…comes in many different ways it can be spoken and unspoken in gestures and non-gestures and whatever you and I think no matter what the human side of it all brings some type of bias with it is”. Participant 19 believes that gossip and rumor is another form of oral bias, “usually it’s like rumor you know teachers are going, “oh ya know this kid, poor kid, poor Sally Mae, her parents don’tspeak English… they think they were affectingher development by making her sad because she can’tspeak English”. Teachers expressing opinion with gossip orally can also transfer bias.

According to participant 20 the oral transfer of information can lead to the transfer of many kinds of information. “I get all kinds of information of course there’s the verbal ones that teachers don’t want to write down because the bias, the prejudice would be seen”. Graduated teachers will, “come up to me and tell me to watch out for this Jonny”. He is“going to come up to you and pull your hair the first day of class.” Participant 20 continues, hopefully, the bias is not recorded.

Participant 3 talks about objectivity. “Listening to the bias when orally sharedcan have an effect. Yet I want to hear the information…I don't feel is totally objective…but I don't put it as an observation”. The non-bias verbal comments are recordedwith an asterisks and a note. “Not only do we pass information on with their portfolios but…we would share verbally with the teachers,” as well.

All five themes, Bias is Present, Working to Avoid Bias, Bias Influences Recorded Documentation, Bias Effects New Teaching Methods, and the Oral Transfer of Bias were formedby dissecting all 20 interviews using the Nvivo9 program to search for references belonging to each theme, giving the possibility for each interview to have areas that match more than one theme. Participants were teachers of children aged two through five who have had current or past experience with written observational assessment formats in early education classrooms. Participants were teachers in the Chicago Illinois area (Appendix H). Participants represent two genders, three different educational levels and four different ethnicity groups (Appendix I).

## Summary

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of 20 teachers in their experience of bias in assessment documentation of preschool children. The study used 23 mixed participants: three pilot study participants and 20 final study participants in Chicago area preschools. Data was collectedusing open-ended questions and analyzed and coded for emerging themes and patterns.   The study attempted to bring a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding testing at the preschool level. The findingsinclude a mixed response with themes and patterns found in identifying how bias affects documented observational assessment.

Chapter 4 began with a description of the language and subject matter expert (LSME) who checked the interview questions for language errors. After the LSME gave feedback the interview the questions remained the same and were given to three participants for the pilot study. The pilot participants were chosen from a population of early education professionals, are experienced with documenting observational assessments and hold seniority status in Early Childhood Education. The pilot study was designedto match the research questions with the interview questions. The interview questions were not changed after the results of the pilot study. No significant changes were suggested.

Leedy recommended the “sample size to be between five and twenty-five individuals who have direct experience with the phenomenon under study” (Pathak, 2007, p. 1). The population interviewed consisted of 20 early education teachers with past or current experience with documenting observational assessment in an early education classroom of children between the ages of two and five.

The three collected items, interview transcripts, the definition of bias described by Bem (1972), and literature were enteredinto the Nvivo9 program, then groupedas three different individual sources. An extensive search in each of the three sources was conductedto reveal text describing five different nodes. Working to avoid bias, bias is present, bias influences on recorded documentation and bias effects new teaching methods were identified as common themes. The fifth and unexpected common theme, Oral Transfer of Bias also emerged.

Theme three, bias influences recorded documentation answers the research question describing bias’ influence on the recorded documentation of observational assessment. Teachers describe bias as being documented into observational assessment by fiveout of 20, or 25 percent, of early education teachers. Theme four, bias effects new teaching methods answers the research question describing how bias effects the new teacher’s teaching methods. Four out of 20, or 20 percent, of teachers describe bias as affecting the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group.

## Conclusion

The theoretical framework for this study was based on the self perception theoryof bias (Bem, 1972). The literature provided a supportive foundation for the framework. The findings of the study determined that bias does have an influence on 25 percentof teachers documenting observational assessment, influencing 20 percentof teachers who create teaching methods based on the observational documentation they receive from the previous teacher.

This study was reinforced by triangulating all the data, face-to-face interviews, literature and theory (Hayes, 2010). The interviews combined with literature and theory gave the information needed to form a triangulation. “This process specifically addressed the purpose of the study which was to determine” (Hayes, 2010, p. 122) if bias influenced the documentation of observational assessment and teaching methods in early education classrooms for children aged two through five.

Chapter 5 will provide the study’s conclusions and “specific recommendations for educators to promote” (Hayes, 2010, p. 123) non-bias observational assessment documentation methods for early education programs. Chapter 5 will also include recommendations for further study on the topic of bias, emergent themes and implications toward leadership, inferences of study, and recommendations from the study.

# CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of 20 teachers in their experience of bias in assessment documentation of preschool children. The study used 23 mixed participants: three pilot study participants and 20 final study participants in Chicago area preschools. Data was collectedusing open ended questions and analyzed and coded for emerging themes and patterns.   The study attempted to bring a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding testing at the preschool level. The findings include a mixed response with themes and patterns found in identifying how bias affects documented observational assessment.

The Nvivo9softwareprogram identified themes and patterns of the interview data entered and analyzed. Evidence entered into Nvivo9 was collected, categorized, coded, analyzed, and described in chapter four. The primary goal of chapter five is to explain and present the study findings. In chapter five the literature review was tied to the emergent themes, their impact to leadership, and inferences drawn from the data.  This process allowed for the surfacing of themes that are common to the phenomenology. Triangulation of the data was done by entering the interview transcripts, literature, and theory into the Nvivo9 software program each as a source to explore all relevant data. In addition, recommendations for practice and policy will be explored as well as recommendations for further study. The study findings may help Early Education leaders create a new format to prevent bias from being documented onto assessment forms of Early Education students.

## Research questions

The two major research questions in this study focused on understanding bias and the effects of bias in the classroom specifically for observational assessment.

**1.** How do teachers feel the biases of other teachers influence the recorded documentation of children’s assessment when a teacher documents the observations of children in the classroom?

2. How do teachers feel the assessment from a previous teacher affects the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group?

## Emergent Themes

Five emergent themes appeared in the data. The first theme, bias is present,included 90 percent of interviewees who described bias as being present, having experience with observing bias in one or more classrooms. The second theme, working to avoid bias, found 90 percent of interviewees who describe the need to work toward avoiding bias. The third theme found 25 percent of teachers describe bias as influencing recorded documentation. The discovery of theme four, bias effects new teaching methods, found 20 percent of teachers teaching methods are affected by bias. An unexpected theme, theme five, the oral transfer of bias, found 55 percent of teachers transfer bias orally. The discovery of all five emergent themes presents new information from this original research.

### Theme one: bias influences on recorded documentation

As suspected, teachers do believe that bias can influence the recorded documentation of the subsequent teacher in the next calendar year. Teachers described bias as being documentedinto observational assessment by 25 percent of Early Education teachers. However, one of the things that were not so apparent was how that influence occurs. Some of the teachers did state that it *somehow* affected recorded documentation (I12) and that those affects might include pre-disposing a teacher to look for things in the child that are just not there.(I1). But these teachers did imply that whatever was forwarded would be something that was unintended. From field research this reflects how important it is to understand the process of documented observation and that the teacher is key to this process; especially key are the teachers’ perceptions. The teacher himself or herself is part of the instrumentation. Shinn indicated this in his 1987 study when he said that*,* “implicit in the bias involved in the referral process is the validity of the teacher as a test” (p. 37). In this case, the reliability and validity of the testing instrument is not the only thing that is important; of greater necessity is the reliability and validity of the teacher to be cognizant of his or her role in affecting the outcomes of documented assessment. Proper documentation of the children's developmental progress means reporting testing outcomes accurately (Morales, 2009, p. 31) with no bias, because teachers are responsible for all aspects of teaching the child, observing, planning, documenting and assessing, (Swee-Choo, 2000), how critical this is cannot be stressed enough.

The study also suggests bias cannot be completely out of the picture (Participant 20).

What is possible is for teachers to understand the parameters of the testing environment and account for it during the assessments (Allen, 2007). This may be able to counteract some of the detriments promoted through bias. This is critical for leaders of teachers to understand as well. When leaders can recognize bias and the possibility for bias being entered into observational documentation; leaders can design a recording method that isolates bias from observation (Appendix K). Once the bias is extracted from the recorded observations children can graduate into the next classroom without bias following them.

Teachers felt that bias of other teachers did affect documented assessment most of the interviewees stated that they worked hard to avoid bias. In other words, teachers spoke about trying to be aware of bias; these same teachers indicated their peers were apt to be biased, but were unaware of their own bias.

### Theme two: bias effects on the new teacher’s teaching methods

Bias is described by 20 percent of teachers as affecting the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group. Identifying the source and the effects of bias will lead to the prevention of bias affecting the children negatively. Teachers who shared that bias affected their coworkers through documented assessment, specifics about how they were actually affected were not clear from the research. According to Guo (2008) teachers need to work hard to avoid the effects of bias. The standards and testing results of documented observation are transferred with the children from one age group to the next, distributing the bias from one teacher to another.

Keeping bias out of the documentation of assessment is important, to prevent the next teacher from being affected by the opinion of others (Participant 3). When children are promoted into the next classroom the new teacher has access to the assessment information of the previous teacher. The assessment done by the previous teacher can hold information about how children are developing needed skills like reading (Participant 5). The “early stages of reading (Flax, Realpe-Bonilla, Roesler, Choudhury, Benasich, 2009),” supply information “about reading outcomes with oral language abilities playing an even stronger role in reading success as the children got older” (p. 63).

Teaching methods in Early Education involve setting the classroom environment with play equipment to meet the educational goals set for the classroom. Piaget concentrated on the physical environment and the assumption that children are active beings who interact, explore, and discover their environment. Children need to play (Kama, 1990) in a resource-rich environment. Assessing children in the early years is difficult but possible (Participant 2) in a format that involves observation and prevents children needing to read, and sit for long periods of time. Children young enough to meet the age requirement of preschool have not yet learned to read, write, and attaina long enough attention span to accomplish the task of filling in answering sheets (Roberts, 1999).

### Theme three: bias is present

Bias is Present in the classroom, and is described by 90 percent of the teachers as an obvious influence that needs to be recognized, and affects the behavior of classroom teachers. Teachers were aware of the bias around them, describing bias observed without describing their own bias. Ninety percent of teachers describing bias as being present shows the wide spread nature of bias. “Some of the commonly reported behaviors’ are unfair treatment, being biased and personal, and showing favoritism” (Swee-Choo, 2008, p. 68), with ninety percent of teachers confirming the presence of the bias theorized by Swee-Choo. How important it is to recognize this cannot be stated enough as teacher bias can create distortions in the job descriptions of teaching practices, slow the approaches to learning, and include insincere teaching (Swee-Choo, 2008). Bias being present can also affect the children. “It affects the whole program” (Participant 1). Information passed between teachers about the children in care can have negative results. When teachers are pre-warned about the children who misbehave (Participant 11), the graduated teacher treats the children differently. With the recognition of bias, leaders can take steps to avoid bias, helping each teacher create an environment where every child can be expected to learn without the influence of bias. Information passed between teachers about children in care can also have positive results.

Bias being present in the classroom can affect the documentation of assessments (Participant 5). Care needs to be taken when documenting the assessments of children because assessment lays the ground work (McKeon, 2005) for major decision making. Locating the source of the bias can be done to assist in deciding how to handle the bias that is present. Teachers are aware of the bias around them including the bias of their peers, the children’s parents, and then struggled to identify their own bias. The teachers were careful not to pass along negative information about other teachers but answered quickly when passing along negative information about a child’s behavior. Parent’s can be another source of bias (Participant 2) that affects the teacher’s methods. Parents express their own opinions to the teacher involving the teacher in decision making based on parent opinion (Participant 6). Teacher’s can also be a source of bias (Participant 8) when they document children’s assessment. Proper documentation of the children's developmental progress reporting child outcomes recordedaccurately (Morales, 2009, p. 31) can prevent bias from having an impact.

### Theme four: working to avoid bias

Recognizing and working to avoid bias is done by 90 percent of Early Education teachers. While teachers were aware of the bias, they also diligently stated they worked to avoid it (Participant 1). A teacher holding onto bias is not right (Guo, 2008). According to Guo (2008) teachers work very hard to overpower their bias while they teach. Working to avoid bias is a continual process that influences implementing curriculum and documenting observational assessment. The teachers in this study collectively worked hard to keep bias from affecting them, especially throughout the documented assessment because assessment affects decisions for educational improvements (McKeone, 2005)

Recognizing the influences and sources of bias can help to begin a process of avoiding bias. Many influences affect the assessment process of young children (Participant 11). A teacher’s personal background (Participant 8), and child development theory, are both influences that demonstrate a continual affect. Understanding child development, and how to use “a child assessment system that … assesses developmental progress…” (Allen, 2007, p. 456) will help to avoid documenting bias. Assessment tools have become common practice in American schools (Gredler, 1997) making teachers responsible for making sure that bias does not affect the recording of assessment. The teachers need to record assessments accurately (Participant 10). With the teacher as the test (Guo, 2008), bias can impact the accuracy of what is recorded. Information written in the assessment needs to be fact based (Participant 10) and bias free. Separating an actual observation from opinion when documenting for observational assessment (Appendix K) can serve to assist in avoiding bias.

### Theme five: oral transfer of bias

Although teachers did work hard to avoid bias being transmitted through documented assessment, some of these same teachers did not realize they transmitted bias orally. Fifty-five percent of teachers experience bias as being orally transferred either from parent to teacher or from teacher to teacher. The oral transfer of bias was an unexpected theme. Its emergence also raises other issues to safeguarding for bias, including how bias can affect the emotional development of children, and the continuation of bias transfer into older classrooms. This theme can be studied further giving leaders information to further understand the origination of bias and to locate ways to stop the oral transfer of bias.

The oral or verbal (Participant 10) transfer of bias is heard but is not always used when making decisions. A behavior completely decided by beliefs and attitudes (Melone, 1990 p. 89), is important to understand in case “the bias generalizes the perceptions of others” (Evangelista, et. al. 2008, p. 780). Teachers exercise significant influence on the children under their care (Foster, Algozzine, Ysseldyke, 1980), and should create an awareness of their own bias (Participant 1). Teachers do have an influence on the children’s behavior and academics as well as academic records. A lot of behavioral information is given verbally (Participant 10) like what their behavior problems could be, what works or what has worked for other teachers.

The oral transfer of information can lead to expectations of behavior from the children in care (Participant11). Verbal information is listened to but verbal information is not completely accurate (Participant 3). Concern must be taken to meet standards with assessment requirements (Barnett, Elliott, Wolsing, Bunger, Haski, McKissick, 2006), so documentation of that bias is not transferred orally. It is not clear from this study how the oral transfer affects the students, but it is important to see that the transmission of oral bias is present.

## Themes and their impact to leadership

The presence of bias in the classroom can influence all aspects of school, relationships of school personnel, children, parents and leaders. The research questions are answered directly from the interviews with 20 percent of teachers describing bias as affecting teaching methods and 25 percent of teachers describing bias as influencing the documentation of observational assessment. Other findings include 90 percent of teachers identified bias as being present and 90 percent of teachers work to avoid the effects of bias. An unexpected finding includes the oral transfer of bias. Fifty five percent of teachers experience the oral transfer of bias. Early Education leaders must accept the influence of bias and work to avoid the impact of bias.

The original nature of this study provided research into teacher’s perspective on bias. New research can be developed with this study to provide leaders and future researchers a basis to develop new methods to improve the classroom environment for teachers and children. This study provides educational leaders with a new model (Appendix K) that will assist in developing the needed new documentation methods. The suggested observational assessment procedure includes the separation of the actual observation, the interpretation, and teacher’s opinion. Educational leaders must educate teachers on proper practice of unbiased documentation to prevent bias from following children through each grade level beginning with early education classrooms. Increased knowledge about the documentation of children’s assessments will assist leaders in ensuring that, “…equitable, respectful, and confidential services are given” (Holcomb, 2009, p. 137) to students.

## Significance and implications for leadership

Educational leaders typically hire classroom teachers and decide what education and talents each teacher must possess. Educational leaders must also decide how to best train each teacher, and what topics to train the teachers on. Training teaching staff to avoid bias will influence the teachers not to show or document bias in the classroom or written assessments of children. “This research will facilitate the creation of professional development opportunities for teachers…that will enable… teachers to form effective, collaborative communities of practice and help to build successful educational programs for the students” (Whittinghill, 2010, p. 117). From this research leaders can infer the need and implement anti-bias training.

Every teacher has classroom responsibilities that include incorporating teaching methods, implementing lesson plans, assessing each child’s development, and communicating with other teachers. A leader must know the employee’s job and have a solid familiarity with employees' tasks (US Army, 1983). Included in the tasks are creating the lesson plans, incorporating teaching methods, and documentation of observational assessment. Leaders can train teachers how to document observational assessment by separating opinion from observation, keeping bias out of the observation (Appendix. K). When bias is kept out of the documented observation the possibility for any bias to transfer to another teacher is not possible, making it impossible for any prior documented bias to influence the graduated teacher’s teaching methods.

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## Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The knowledge gained by studying teacher bias is important for educational leaders to train teachers to ensure accuracy of documentation of children’s educational records. Leaders can develop an in-service training to reduce bias or to train teaching staff to reduce bias in the documentation of observational assessments. An in-service training about bias can be included into an already existing training, or modified (Tseng, 2008, p. 13) to include observational assessment or be created as separate training. With 25 percent of teachers influenced into documenting bias into observational assessments, a recommendation from the results of this study is to create a method for teachers to document observational assessments with a way to decipher between exact observation, what the children are learning from what was observed, and teacher opinion.

A documenting method was devised first as a two column method, now a three column documenting method, separates three different categories. The first column titled “Observation” is the area where “exact observation” is entered. The first draft of this method included the “Observation” column, and is intended for the recording of only observation with no interpretation of what is being learned. The second column titled, “Interpretation” included in the original was devised to highlight what children may or may not be learning or experiencing at the time of the observation. Under the “Interpretation” column, possible lessons learned by the children involved in each observation should be recorded. The third column was added after holding conversations with teachers who asked where they can record their professional and personal opinions. The “Opinion” column is where teachers document their professional and possibly their personal opinions about each child.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **OBSERVATION** | **INTERPRETATION** | **OPINION** |
| Kate cried when Josh took the flower out of her hand. Kate then babbled loudly pointing her finger at Josh. Josh stuck his tongue out at Kate. Kate then walked to the teacher and pulled on the teacher’s shirt while babbling. | After Kate’s flower was taken from her, she **attempted to communicate** with Josh. When communicating with Josh Kate didn’t get the flower back, Kate then walked to the teacher **to communicate** the problem to her teacher. | Kate was **unable to verbalize** with vocabulary and **showed her anger** by pointing and babbling loudly. |

Table 4: Documentation Model with Example

The model suggested presents a format to separate bias from the actual observation. This format acknowledges bias and allows the teacher to professionally avoid bias. Bias first needs to be recognized as an issue that should be corrected. Once bias is acknowledged leaders can then work to implement a method to help teachers avoid bias. Educational leaders can use this method to implement guidelines and trainings that outline the exact requirements for documentation without bias. The proposed idea in Table 4 is a tool that leaders can use to train teaching staff to avoid bias.

The unexpected theme, Oral Transfer of Bias, creates a new area for assessment and training. The oral transfer of bias can create isolation for teaching staff and children (Participant 12). To prevent the oral transfer of bias, leaders are recommended to create an environment of continual observation and assessment with the goal of alleviating or preventing any oral transfer of bias. Leaders are also recommended to include the oral transfer of bias into teacher’s annual in-service trainings; and evaluating possible employee oral transfer of bias.

## Recommendations for Further Research

Based on this study bias has now been recognized as being present and having influence, more exclusively teacher bias can persuade (Morris, 2011) the outcome of assessment. The discovery of the findings left several new unanswered questions that are recommended for further study to continue the improvements of Education assessments. The first recommendation is to increase the study area to further validity, or to create a comparative study of another large city searching for validity and commonalities. “It is recommended future research be conducted replicating this study with additional school districts in order to create a larger data set so findings may be further substantiated or refuted”. (Copeland, 2006, p. 73). Finding the exact nature of how bias affects documented assessment, and how it affects actual teaching methods can assist educational leaders in preventing any negative impact bias can have on the classroom. The new discovery of the oral transfer of bias can be studied further to find if the oral transfer of bias makes its way into documented assessment.

**Early Education and Elementary School**

This research can impact and benefit educational leaders, teachers, children, and future researchers. This study may uncover important fundamentals that could assist teachers with classroom administration and supply essential tools (Kleefisch, 2007). “Further research is needed” (Staples, p. 114) to find what influence teacher bias has on child development, assuming that emotional development is a part of the Early Education teaching methods. Future researchers can use the findings to discover different influences of bias and their impact on the children. Bias research is important to help educational leaders and teachers to prevent the creation of a classroom where children are impacted by bias. Leaders need to observe the teaching staff with the goal of finding patterns of bias. A pattern of bias can include the timing that bias is shown in the classroom or documented into an assessment of a child. When leaders have a full understanding of how bias impacts the classroom, leaders can develop bias training. Types of bias must be researchedand acknowledged; for example identifying racial bias can help leaders identify who needs to begin staff training on the influence racial bias can have in the classroom environment.

**High school and higher education**

The fourth recommendation for further research includes how bias influences the recording of assessment and report card grades for grade school children, high school children and college students. Watching how bias affects students of all ages and both genders can assist the leaders in the decision-makingprocess of what specifics to create regulations forand to train teaching staff. The next recommendation is The last recommendation for further study includes a study that will prove or disprove the new model (Appendix K) created with this study.

## Summary

The primary goal of chapter five was to further explore and present the study findings. In chapter five the emergent themes, their impact to leadership, and inferences drawn from the data were tied together to the literature review. Interview data was entered into and analyzed through Nvivo9softwareprogram to identify themes and patterns. Two research questions led this study on understanding bias and the effects of bias in the classroom specifically for observational assessment. **1.** How do teachers feel the bias of other teachers influence the recorded documentation of children’s assessment when a teacher documents the observations of children in the classroom? 2. How do teachers feel the assessment from a previous teacher affects the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group?

The five emergent themes appeared in the data including one unexpected theme. Ninety percent of interviewees described bias as being present. The second theme resulted in 90 percent of teachers work toward avoiding bias. Theme three found that 25 percent of teachers who describe bias as influencing recorded documentation. Theme four found 20 percent of teachers describe bias as effecting new teaching methods. An unexpected theme, theme five, the oral transfer of bias, found 55 percent of teachers transfer bias orally.

## Conclusions

Information gained from this study may help leaders prevent teacher bias from affecting graduated teacher perceptions upon the transfer of children’s assessments. The documenting placed into assessment formats are subject to the opinions and biases of teachers. The knowledge makes an original contribution to the field. Understanding and eliminating bias will help alleviate stress that will affect children in the early education classroom while creating a new model (Appendix K) to assist in observational assessment. With the reduction of bias in observational assessments, children being assessed will have an accurate account of occurrences. The goal is to decrease bias so that when standardized tools are used, the tools are viewedas sustaining data to provide confirmation about what is already known, rather than providing new information (Fraine, 2009). The intended outcome of the analysis was twofold. The conclusion identified bias as being documentedinto observational assessments by 25 percent of teachers, and described as effecting teaching methods by 20 percent of teachers. With further study of teacher bias patterns of timing and sources can be found.

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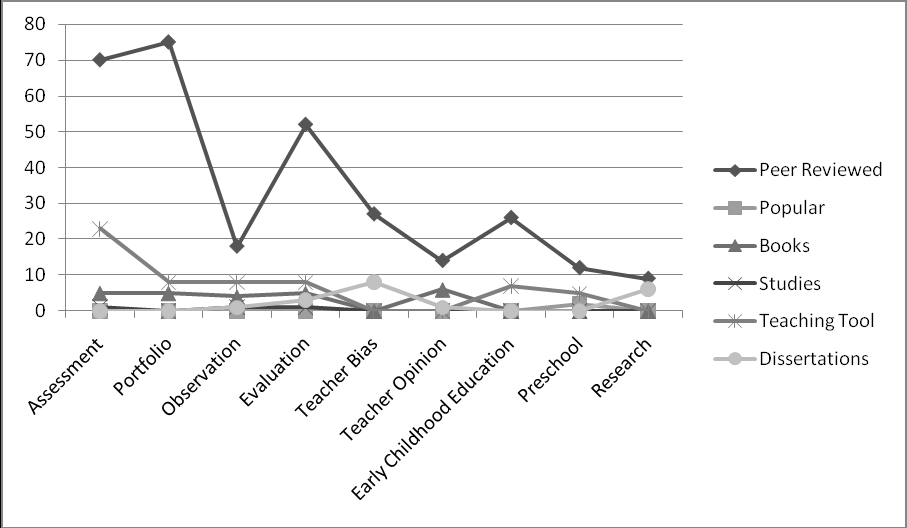
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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Literature Data Search

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Peer Reviewed | Popular | Books | Studies | Teaching Tool | Dissertations |
| Assessment | 70 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 23 | 0 |
| Portfolio | 75 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| Observation | 18 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 8 | 1 |
| Evaluation | 52 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 3 |
| Teacher Bias | 32 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Teacher Opinion | 14 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Early Childhood Education | 26 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| Preschool | 12 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Research | 9 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 |



## Appendix B

Assessment Input Chart

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Assessment | Administrator input | Teacher input | Parent input |
| Ages andStages Questionnaires (ASQ) Field tested developmental screening andmonitoring tool Age-specific questionnaires for children 6 months to 8 years with cut-off scores (Allen, 2007) |  | Secondary | Primary |
| Domains—gross motor, fine motor,communication, personal-social, and problem-solving, Multiple Domains, Not specifically tied to a curriculum (Allen, 2007) |  | Primary | Secondary |
| Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL) Norm-referenced standardized screening tool | Secondary | Primary |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Ages 3 to 5 years- 11 months; Domains—motor, concepts, and language, Learning Accomplishment Profile (LAP) Norm-referenced standardized assessment tool | Secondary | Primary |  |
| Ages 30 months to 5 years; Domains—fine motor, gross motor, cognition, and language, Early Screening Inventory—Preschool (ESI-P) Norm-referenced standardized screening tool(Allen, 2007) | Secondary | Primary |  |
| Ages 3 to 4 years- 6 months; Domains—visual motor adaptive, language/cognition, and gross motor, Early Screening Inventory—Kindergarten (ESI-K) Norm-referenced standardized screening tool (Allen, 2007) | Secondary | Primary |  |
| Ages 4 yrs.-6 months to 6 years; Domains—visual motor adaptive, language/cognition, and gross motor, Accomplishment Profile (E-LAP) Criterion-referenced screening tool | Secondary | Primary |  |
| Ages birth to 3 years; Domains— gross motor, fine motor, cognitive, language, self-help, andsocial emotional; Denver II Norm-referenced screening tool |  | Primary | Secondary |
| Ages birth to 6 years; Domains— personal-social, fine motor adaptive, language, and gross motor; Brigance Preschool Screen Norm-referenced screening tool | Secondary | Primary |  |
| Domains—50 measurable objectives for social, physical, cognitive, and expressive language development; Single Domain—Language/ Speech Fluharty. Speech Standardized norm-referenced; Ages 2–6 years; Subscales—identification, articulation, comprehension, and repetition | Secondary | Primary |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, 3rd ed. (PPVT-III) Standardized norm-referenced; Ages 2 years-6 months to adulthood | Secondary | Primary |  |
| Measures listening comprehension, and verbal skills; Single Domain—Literacy Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA) Standardized norm-referenced | Secondary | Primary |  |
| Ages 3 years to 9 years-11 months; Measures ability to attribute meaning to printed symbols, alphabet knowledge, and understanding of print; Single Domain—Social- Emotional Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Norm-referenced standardized screening tool | Secondary | Primary |  |
| Ages 2–5 years; Subscales— initiative, self-control, attachment | Secondary | Primary |  |
| Measures social and emotional competence; the Creative Curriculum Assessment Tool (CCPORT), is linked directly to the curriculum | Secondary | Primary |  |

(Lambert, 2000-2010; Schweinhart & Epstein, 1997)

## Appendix C: Pilot Study Consent

**UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX**

Informed Consent: Participants 18 years of age and older

Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Rebecca Reynolds and I am a student at the University of Phoenix working on a Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership. I am conducting a research study entitled A Phenomenological Case Study: Teacher Bias Effects on Early Education Assessments. The purpose of this study is the explore the perceptions of 20 teachers in their experience of bias in assessment documentation for preschool children.  The study will attempt to bring a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding testing at the preschool level. Theoutcome will give American early education leaders a base of knowledge for designing developmental assessments that may eliminate teacher bias.

Your participation will involve rating the six interview questions for compatibility to the main two research questions of the study. The interview questions that you will be rating are scheduled to be asked to early education professionals who will answer verbally while being audio recorded in 45 to 60 minute un-structured interviews. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself. The results of the research study may be published but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be disclosed to any outside party.

In this research, there are no foreseeable risks to you. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, a possible benefit of your participation is to give American early education leaders a base of knowledge for designing developmental assessments that may eliminate teacher bias. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (847) 346-7695 or email me at [rjrprayer@email.phoenix.edu](mailto:rjrprayer@email.phoenix.edu)

As a participant in this study, you should understand the following:

1. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without consequences.
2. Your identity will be kept confidential.
3. Rebecca Reynolds, the researcher, has thoroughly explained the parameters of the research study and all of your questions and concerns have been addressed.
4. The researcher will structure a coding process to assure that anonymity of your name is protected.
5. Data will be stored in a secure and locked area. The data will be held for a period of five years, and then destroyed.
6. The research results will be used for publication.

“By signing this form you acknowledge that you understand the nature of the study, the potential risks to you as a participant, and the means by which your identity will be kept confidential. Your signature on this form also indicates that you are 18 years old or older and that you give your permission to voluntarily serve as a participant in the study described.”Signature of the interviewee \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the researcher \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Directions and**  **Interview Questions** | **Research Question Number One** | **Research Question Number Two** |
| Rate each interview question on a scale of 1 to 3.  1 = Interview question does not address the research question listed above.  2 = Interview question somewhat addresses the research question listed above.  3 = Interview question fully addresses the research question listed above. | How do teachers feel bias influences the recorded documentation of children’s assessment? | How do teachers feel the assessment from a previous teacher affects the new teacher’s teaching methods when a child’s assessment follows the child into the next age group? |
| What are your current perceptions of observational assessments? |  |  |
| What are your perceptions of teacher bias? |  |  |
| Do you think bias influences the recording of observational assessment? |  |  |
| When a child graduates into your classroom, do you reach your own conclusions about the child’s development, or do you teach based on the observational assessments of the children’s previous teacher? |  |  |
| Describe the type of information you receive from other classroom teachers of children graduating into your classroom? |  |  |
| What have you observed while watching other teachers who record their observations? |  |  |
| How does the observational assessment done by other teachers of your students recently graduated into your room effect the implementation of your lesson plan? |  |  |

## Appendix D

**UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX**

Informed Consent: Participants 18 years of age and older

Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Rebecca Reynolds and I am a student at the University of Phoenix working on a Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership. I am conducting a research study entitled A Phenomenological Case Study: Teacher Bias Effects On Early Education Assessments. The purpose of this study is the explore the perceptions of 20 teachers in their experience of bias in assessment documentation for preschool children.  The study will attempt to bring a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding testing at the preschool level. Theoutcome will give American early education leaders a base of knowledge for designing developmental assessments that may eliminate teacher bias.

Your participation will involve holding a recorded conversation while answering questions for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself. The results of the research study may be published but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be disclosed to any outside party.

In this research, there are no foreseeable risks to you. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, a possible benefit of your participation is to give American early education leaders a base of knowledge for designing developmental assessments that may eliminate teacher bias. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (847) 346-7695 or email me at [rjrprayer@email.phoenix.edu](mailto:rjrprayer@email.phoenix.edu)

As a participant in this study, you should understand the following:

1. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without consequences.
2. Your identity will be kept confidential.
3. Rebecca J. Reynolds, the researcher, has thoroughly explained the parameters of the research study and all of your questions and concerns have been addresses.
4. If the interviews are recorded, you must grant permission to the researcher, Rebecca J. Reynolds to digitally record the interview. You understand that the information from the recorded interviews may be transcribed. The researcher will structure a coding process to assure that the anonymity of your name is protected.
5. Data will be stored in a secure and locked area. The data will be held for a period of five years, and then destroyed.
6. The results will be used for publication.

“By signing this form you acknowledge that you understand the nature of the study, the potential risks to you as a participant, and the means by which your identity will be kept confidential. Your signature on this form also indicates that you are 18 years old or older and that you give your permission to voluntarily serve as a participant in the study described.”

Signature of the Interview Participant \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the researcher\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## 

## Appendix E

Interview Questions

1. What are your current perceptions of observational assessments?

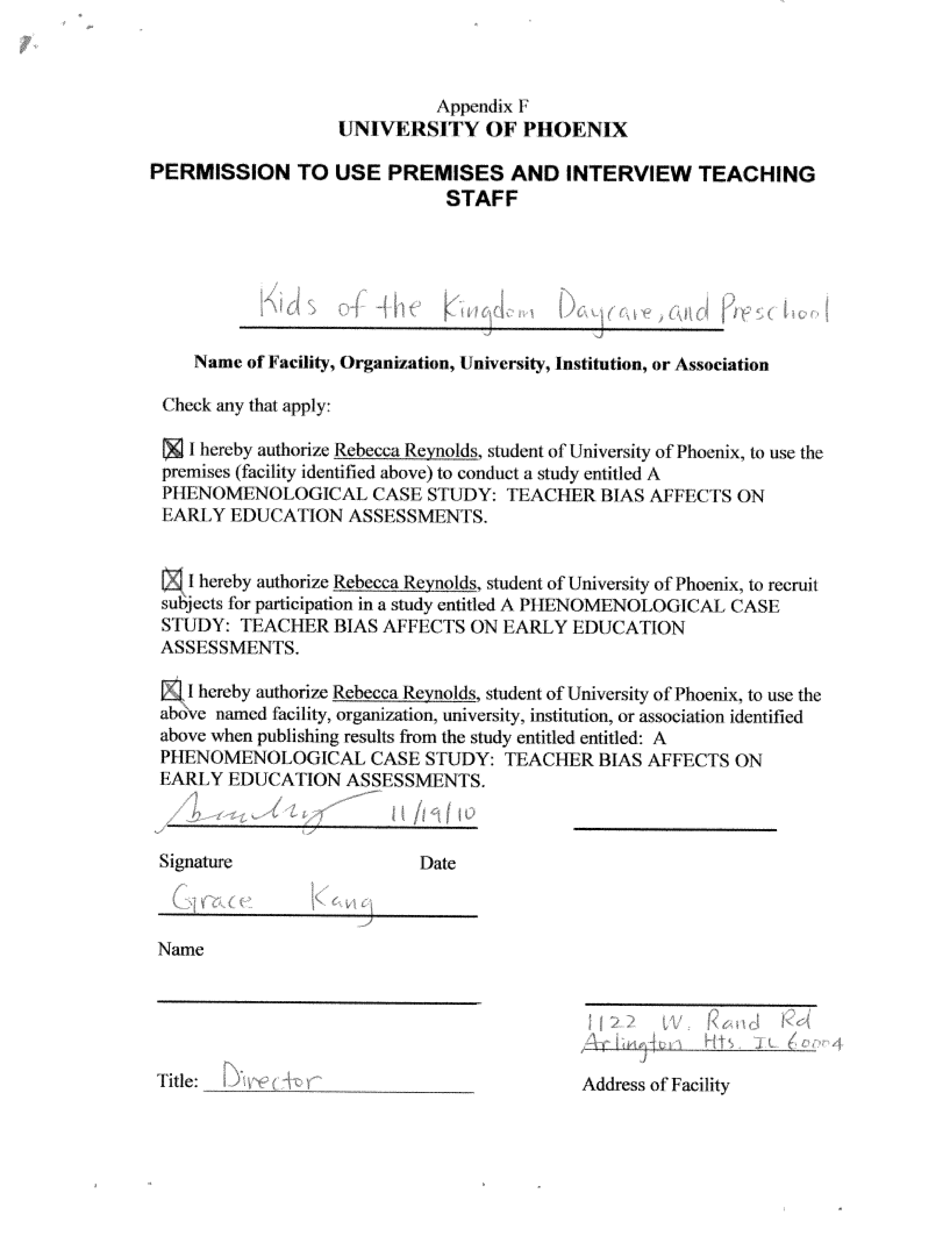
2. What are your perceptions of teacher bias?

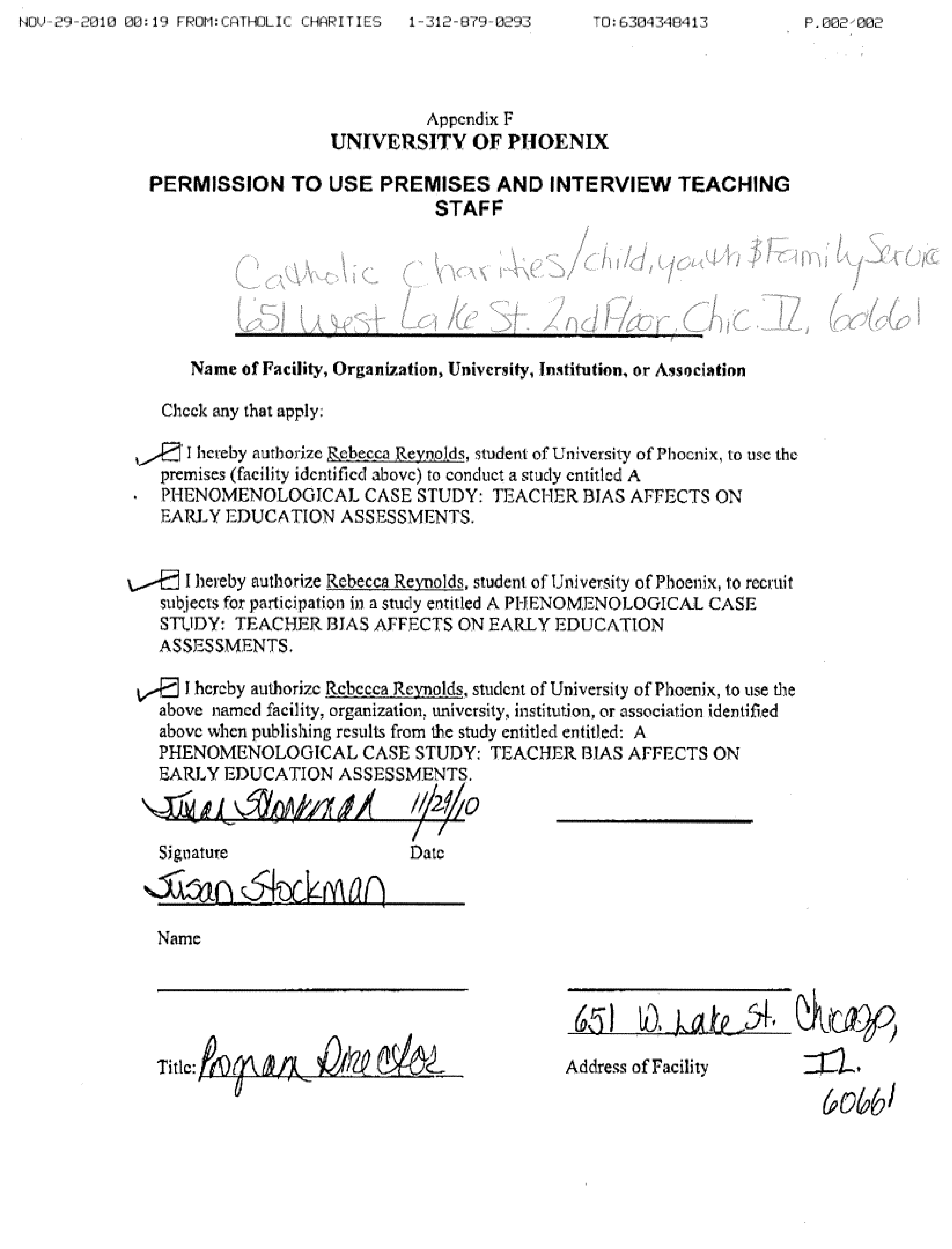
3. What is your opinion regarding bias’ influence affecting the recording of observational assessment?

4. When a child graduates into your classroom, do you reach your own conclusions about the child’s development, or do you teach based on the observational assessments of the children’s previous teacher?

5. What type of information do you receive from other classroom teachers of children graduating into your classroom?

6. How does the observational assessment done by other teachers of your students recently graduated into your room effect the implementation of your lesson plan?

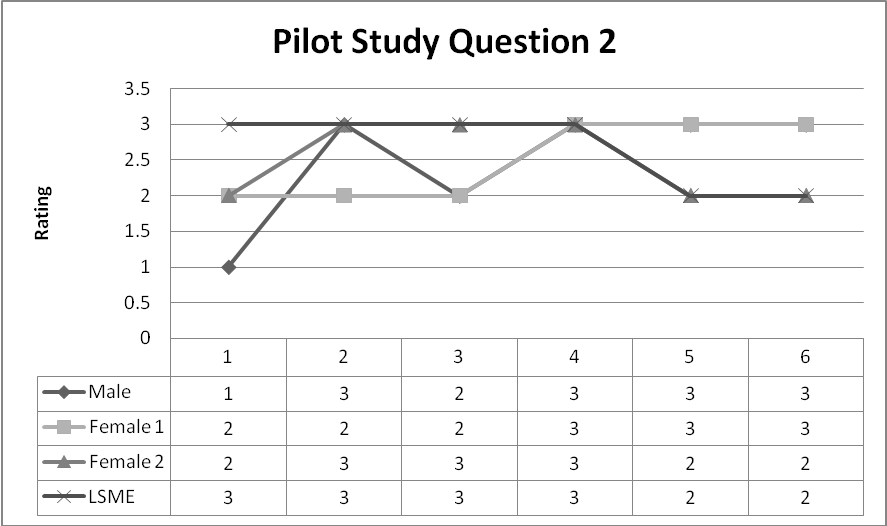




## Appendix G: Triangulated locations of interviews



# Appendix H: Pilot Study Research Question Number two

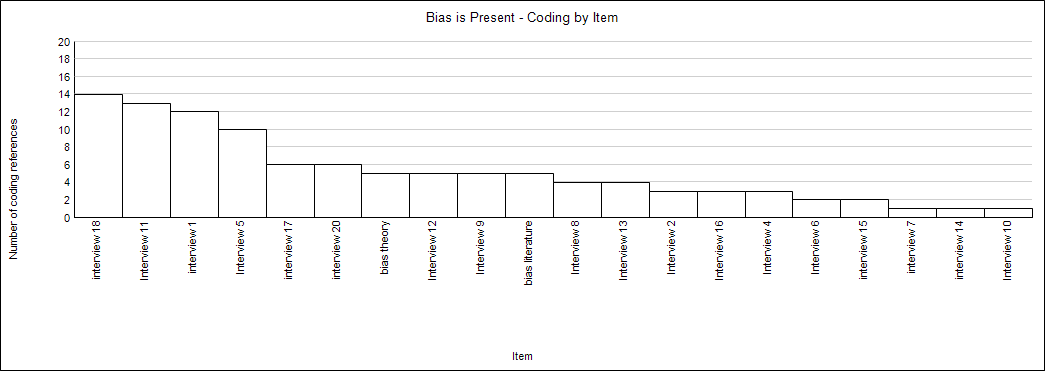


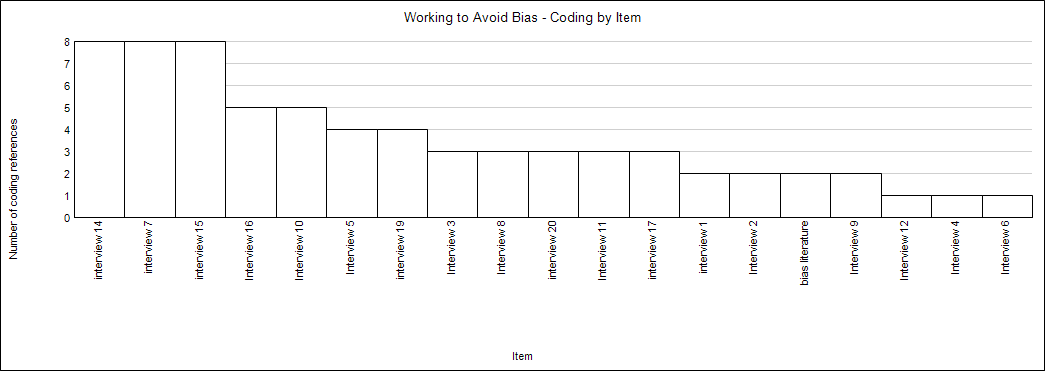
* Pilot Study Research Question Number Two

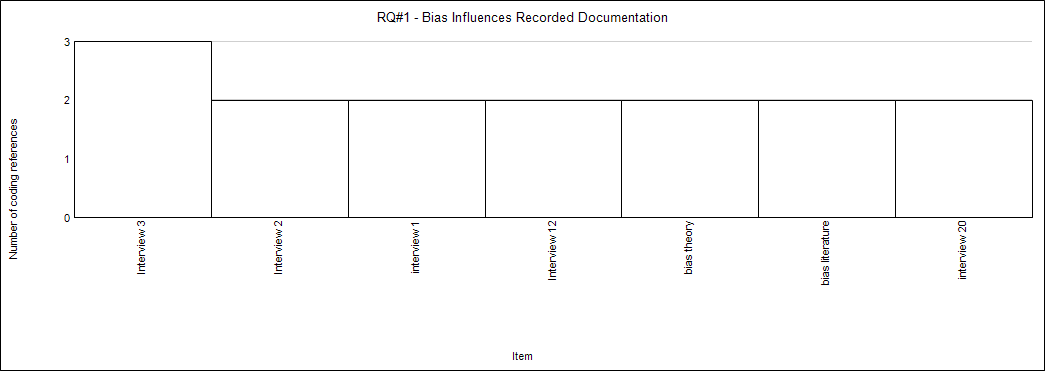
## Appendix I: Participant Representation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Ethnicity | Gender | Educational Level |
| Black | 2 Female | 1 Associate Degree,  1 Bachelors Degree |
| White | 11 Female, 1 Male | 3 Associates Degree,  6 Bachelors Degree  3 Masters Degree |
| Chinese | 2 Female | 2 Associates Degree |
| Hispanic | 4 Female | 3 Associates Degree  1 Masters Degree |

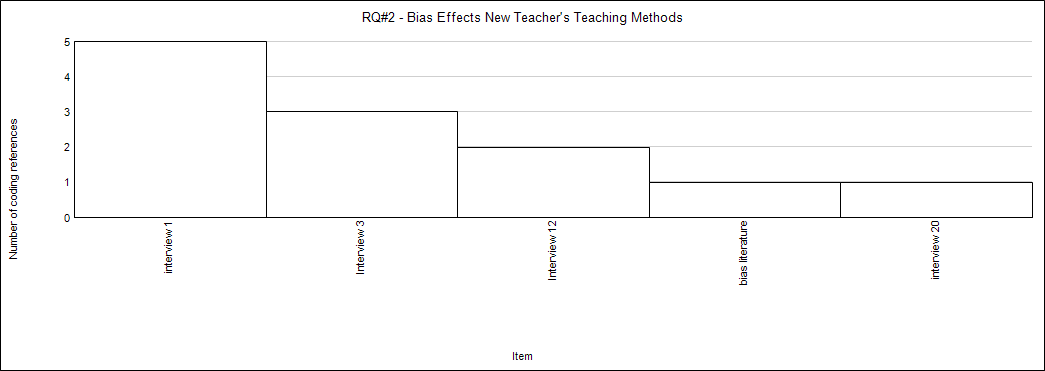
## APPENDIX J: Graph results



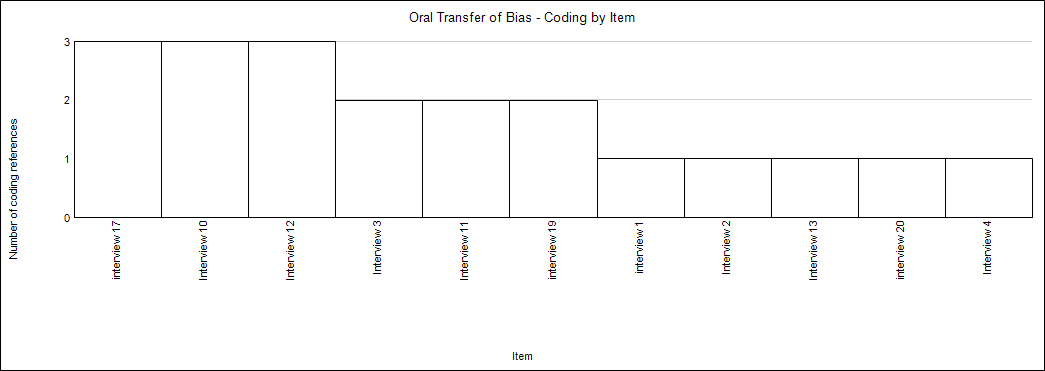
* 18 out of 20 (90%) explained bias as being present in the classroom
* Interview 18 (I18) referenced bias as being present 14 times
* Interview 10 (I10) referenced bias being present one time
* 18 out of 20 (90%) explained themselves as actively working to avoid bias
* Interviews 14, seven and 15 referred to avoiding bias eight times.
* Interviews 12, four and six referred to avoiding bias one time



* Five out of 20 (25%) describes bias as influencing the recorded documentation of observational assessment



* Four out of 20 (20%) describes bias as effecting the new teacher’s teaching methods



* Eleven out of 20 (55%) explained bias as being orally transferred
* Interviews 17, 10 and 12 referenced bias as being transferred orally three times
* Interviews 1, 2, 13, 4, and 20 referenced bias as being transferred orally one time

## APPENDIX K: Documentation Model with Example

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **OBSERVATION** | **INTERPRETATION** | **OPINION** |
| Kate cried when Josh took the flower out of her hand. Kate then babbled loudly pointing her finger at Josh. Josh stuck his tongue out at Kate. Kate then walked to the teacher and pulled on the teacher’s shirt while babbling. | After Kate’s flower was taken from her, she **attempted to communicate** with Josh. When communicating with Josh Kate didn’t get the flower back, Kate then walked to the teacher **to communicate** the problem to her teacher. | Kate was **unable to verbalize** with vocabulary and **showed her anger** by pointing and babbling loudly. |

* Under the heading “Observation” the actual observation with no opinion or interpretation is documented. Very precise words are used to describe the observation.
* Under the heading “Interpretation” the child’s learning is described.
* Under the heading “Opinion” the teacher’s opinion of what is learned or what needs to be learned by the child is described. This is the heading where the teacher has freedom to document opinion.

**APPENDIX L: Interview Detail Matrix**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Interview number** | **Degree earned** | **Observational Assessment learned** | **Years of experience** | **Extra info teacher wants to share** |
| 1 | Bachelor’s Degree in Information Technology | Head Start | 8 | Participant 1 was a stay at home mom who spent 20 years raising her children. When participant 1 became a grandmother she left her job to watch her grandchildren, later to become a preschool teacher and bring her grandchildren to work with her. |
| 2 | Associate’s Degree in Fashion Design | Community College | 5 | Participant 2 is now a part time preschool teacher and a college student studying Early Childhood Education at a community college |
| 3 | Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education | Head Start | 7 | was an early childhood teacher in an Eastern country |
| 4 | Masters Degree in business | Head Start | 10 |  |
| 5 | Bachelor’s Degree in Business Administration | College | 7 | Promoted to Preschool Director |
| 6 | Associate’s Degree in photography | workshop | 5 | Earned the required 6 credits to teach, now works in manufacturing |
| 7 | Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education | college | 10 | now owns and directs an Early Childhood Center |
| 8 | Associate’s Degree in general studies | Head Start | 5 | earning enough credits to be teacher qualified by the state of Illinois, is working towards a Bachelor’s Degree |
| 9 | Associate’s Degree in Business Administration | Seminar | 4 | now works as an administrative assistant for an early childhood center. |
| 10 | Associate’s Degree in Hotel Management, Associate’s Degree in Early Childhood Education | Seminar | 12 |  |
| 11 | Associate’s Degree in management | Seminar | 15 |  |
| 12 | Bachelor’s Degree in International Business | Head Start | 13 |  |
| 13 | Associates Degree in Early Childhood Education | Head Start | 9 | Co teaches Preschool |
| 14 | Associates Degree in Early Childhood Education | Head Start | 7 | Currently student studying Elementary Education |
| 15 | Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education | Head Start | 8 |  |
| 16 | Bachelor’s Degree in Math | Head Start | 8.5 | Earned the state required 6 early childhood credits |
| 17 | Associates Degree in General Education | seminar | 8 | Earned the state requires 6 early childhood credits |
| 18 | Bachelor’s Degree in Science | Seminar | 7 | Earned the state requires 6 early childhood credits |
| 19 | Bachelor’s Degree in Human Services | Seminar | 7 | Earned the state requires 6 early childhood credits |
| 20 | Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education | Head Start | 5 | Own child in same classroom |

**APPENDIX M: Participant Details**

Participant 1 is a current preschool teacher, and has been a preschool teacher for eight years. Prior to teaching preschool participant 1 was a stay-at-home mom who spent 20 years raising her children and finishing a Bachelor’s Degree in Information Technology. When participant1 became a grandmother she left her job to watch her grandchildren. She then became a preschool teacher bringing her grandchildren to work with her. Participant 1 has since earned her Bachelor’s Degree in Early Childhood Education. Participant 1 learned about observational assessment from Head Start.

Participant 2 was a preschool teacher for five years who began as an assistant teacher after graduating from high school. Participant 2 is now a part time preschool teacher and a college student studying Early Childhood Education at a community college, after earning an Associate’s Degree in Fashion Design. Participant 2 learned about observational assessment from the community college.

Participant 3 was an early childhood teacher in an eastern country for seven years where she earned her Master’s Degree in Early Childhood Education. Participant 3 began teaching preschool in America two years ago. Participant 3 learned about observational assessment from Head Start.

Participant 4 earned a Master’s of Business Administration and has been an Early Childhood teacher for four years completing an Early Childhood Education Associate’s Degree. Participant 4 has been teaching preschool for 10 years. Participant 4 learned observational assessment from Head Start.

Participant 5 is currently a Preschool Director who taught preschool for seven years before being promoted. Participant 5 earned an Associate’s Degree in Early Childhood Education as well as a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Administration. Participant 5 learned observational assessment in a required in-service training.

Participant 6 earned a Photography Associate’s Degree, participant 6 then attended college to earn enough Early Childhood credits to teach in a classroom. Participant 6 taught preschool for five years and now works in manufacturing. Participant 6 learned observational assessment through a workshop and began using the process immediately.

Participant 7 earned a Master’s Degree in Early Childhood Education, and

worked as a classroom teacher for 10 years using observational assessment. Participant 7 now owns and directs an Early Childhood Center. Participant 7 learned about observational assessment in college while earning the Master’s Degree.

Participant 8 earned an Associate’s Degree in general studies while earning enough credits to be teacher qualified by the state of Illinois. Participant 8 has taught in an Early Childhood classroom for five years, and is working towards a Bachelor’s Degree. Participant 8 learned about observational assessment from Head Start a previous employer.

Participant 9 earned a Business Administration Associate’s while earning the required six Early Childhood credit hours to teach preschool. Participant 9 taught preschool for four years and learned observational assessment from a seminar. Participant 9 now works as an administrative assistant for an early childhood center.

Participant 10 earned an Associate’s Degree in Hotel Management and an Associate’s Degree in Early Childhood Education. I10 has been teaching preschool for the past 12 years. Participant 10 learned observational assessment by attending a seminar.

Participant 11 earned a Management Associate’s Degree and the required minimum six college credit hours to work as a preschool classroom teacher. Participant 11 has 15 years of experience teaching preschool. Participant 11 learned observational assessment by attending a seminar.

Participant 12 earned a Bachelor’s Degree in International Business, going back to school to earn the required six Early Childhood credits to qualify for teaching preschool. Participant 12 has been teaching early childhood for 13 years. Participant 12 learned about observational assessment from Head Start.

Participant 13 earned an Associate’s Degree in Early Childhood Education.

Participant 13 has been teaching preschool for nine years. Participant 13 currently team teaches in an early childhood classroom.

Participant 14 earned an Associate’s Degree in Early Childhood Education.

Participant 14 was trained in observational assessment through Head Start and has seven

years of experience. Participant 14 is currently studying Elementary Education.

Participant 15 earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education and were trained in observational assessment through Head Start. Participant 15 has taught preschool for eight years.

Participant 16 has an earned Bachelor’s Degree in Math and earned the required 6 credit hours in Early Childhood Education. Participant16 has taught preschool for eight and a half years, and received training on observational assessment from Head Start.

Participant 17 has an earned Associate’s Degree in General Education and has earned the state required minimum of 6 Early Childhood credit hours. Participant 17 has taught preschool for eight years and received training on observational assessment.

Participant 18 has an earned Bachelor’s Degree in Science with the required 6 credit hours in Early Childhood Education. Participant 18 was trained in observational assessment while taking a seminar. Participant 18 has seven years experience teaching preschool.

Participant 19 has an earned Bachelor’s Degree in Human Services with the required 6 credit hours in Early Childhood Education. Participant 19 learned about observational assessment while attending a workshop. Participant 19 has worked as a preschool teacher for seven years.

Participant 20 has earned a Master’s Degree in Early Childhood Education. Participant 20 learned observational assessment while attending Head Start’s training. Participant 20 has been teaching in the same classroom for the last five years.