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# Exploring Non-Contact Time in Early Childhood Education

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# EXPLORING NON-CONTACT TIME IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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# EXPLORING NON-CONTACT TIME IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Early childhood teachers have been the subject of many studies. Their qualifications, practices, and interactions with children have been widely researched as avenues for improving early childhood education. Yet little is known about the work supports early childhood teachers need to be successful. Non-contact time is one element of a supportive work environment that supports teachers' ability to address their professional expectations. However, information and guidance on non-contact time is lacking or absent from the literature. This study addresses this gap by exploring non-contact time from the perspectives of directors and teachers.

An embedded mixed methods design was used to investigate non-contact time in high-quality early childhood programs. This study had three aims. First, to identify the term or phrase directors and teachers use to refer to non-contact time. Second, to identify the amount of non-contact time teachers' have and describe how they use it. And third, to identify the factors that directors consider when allotting non-contact time to teachers. A total of 210 participants (104 directors and 106 teachers) completed an online survey.

Directors and teachers identified "planning time" as the most common way to refer to non-contact time in their programs. Results indicated that directors' expectations for and teachers' use of non-contact time included many activities outside of planning. The amounts of time teachers were allotted and received varied widely, although one thing was consistent, most directors and teachers acknowledged that teachers rarely have

enough non-contact time. Teachers reported addressing this lack of time with strategies that have the potential to impact job satisfaction and the quality of the classroom experience. Even though directors recognized that teachers needed more time, programmatic considerations were the most influential when making non-contact time decisions.

This research provides a description of non-contact time in early childhood education that can be used to inform policies and practices to support a profession that has been historically underpaid and underappreciated. Implications of these findings are discussed along with directions for future research.

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# CHAPTER 1:

# INTRODUCTION

Early childhood teachers have considerable impact on the quality of the preschool classroom and young children's development and learning (Burchinal et al., 2002; Burchinal et al., 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Mashburn et al., 2008). Teachers and their interactions with children in the classroom have been the subject of many studies (Pianta et al., 2005; Howes et al., 2008; Early et al., 2007; Cadima et al., 2016); yet, less is known about what happens behind the scenes, including how much time early childhood teachers are allotted away from children and how they use that time. The allotment of teachers' time away from children, referred to hereafter as *non-contact time*, is an important element of the work environment because it supports teachers completion of their professional responsibilities. This support is valuable for two main reasons outlined below.

Adequate allotment of non-contact time is important because reasonable treatment by administrators and social support are known factors associated with teachers' job satisfaction (Cheng & Chen, 2011; Cumming, 2017; Kusma et al., 2012). When teachers' professional obligations spill over into their personal time, they develop symptoms of burnout which could be detrimental to teacher job satisfaction and retention (Jovanovic, 2013). Recruitment and retention of teachers are significant factors in addressing the current and projected shortage of early childhood teachers across the United States (Gelfer & Nguyen, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016). Supportive working conditions are known predictors of retention (Podolsky et al., 2016) and factors associated with administrative

support also impact attrition, such as designated time for collaboration and planning (Sutcher et al., 2016).

The scope of this issue extends beyond job satisfaction and the potential to impact teachers' practices and subsequently children's experiences. When teachers do not feel supported in their work environment and/or are unsatisfied in their career this can impact the quality of experiences that they provide to children. Research findings suggest that teachers' well-being is associated with the well-being of children and classroom quality (Jennings, 2015). Further, teachers unsatisfied with their working environment respond to children in a negative manner more often and are less committed to the profession (Buettner et al., 2016). Teachers who are unable to complete professional responsibilities during the workday may feel overburdened and experience stress that could impact their job satisfaction and the quality of the classroom. This is important because evidence suggests aspects of classroom quality, such as positive climate, instructional quality, and strong teacher-child relationships lead to more positive outcomes for children (Fuhs et al., 2013; Weiland et al., 2013).

Early childhood teachers' non-contact time is a work support that is largely unexplored. The limited research on this time of day focuses mostly on lesson planning and, more specifically, on planning for children with special needs (Grisham-Brown & Pretti-Frontczak, 2003; King et al., 2016; Sandall et al., 2000). Still, even seasoned early childhood teachers who have mastered their professional responsibilities, such as planning, must meet obligations and expectations that require non-contact time. For example, research identifies several teacher responsibilities that necessitate non-contact time such as completing forms, planning, writing up observations, working with parents

and specialists, parent-interviews, and writing child reports (Faulkner et al., 2016; Kelly & Berthelsen, 1995). Although this is not an exhaustive list, it is unclear when teachers have the opportunity to complete these or other professional responsibilities requiring non-contact time within their workday.

Complicating the matter is a lack of guidance from the field on allotment and use of non-contact time. Leading early childhood professional organizations provide comprehensive lists of best-practices, responsibilities, and training requirements for teachers; yet they do not advise programs on how much time teachers need to manage both classroom and professional obligations. This lack of guidance has been pointed out and led to a call for further investigation of environmental work supports (Whitebook et al., 2018). The current context of a global pandemic has added public awareness to an established commitment of stakeholders in recent years to elevate early childhood education and prioritize the early childhood profession (Austin et al., 2011; Sarver et al., 2020; Whitebook et al., 2018), making this an ideal time to investigate ways to support the early childhood workforce and enhance the work environment.

**Purpose of the Study**

The descriptive and explorative nature of this study seeks to provide information regarding non-contact time and provide a baseline of information to inform the field. Currently, it is unknown how the field, including directors and administrators, are referring to and discussing issues of non-contact time. The lack of non-contact time policies and guidelines complicate the matter for directors who may understand classroom needs but are tasked with weighing multiple factors when allotting non-contact time. Further, early childhood teachers are a vital part of the equation for quality in the

early childhood classroom and important voices in understanding the work environment. However, their accounts related to issues of non-contact time are by and large absent. The field would benefit from the exploration of non-contact time from the perspective of directors and teachers including decision making factors for allotting non-contact time, how much non-contact time teachers receive, and how they use this time.

The overarching purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of the current state of non-contact time in early childhood education by addressing three research aims:

1. Establish terminology for how professionals in the field of early childhood are referring to non-contact time.
2. Describe the amount of non-contact time teachers are allotted, receive, and how they use their time.
3. Identify the factors that influence directors' allotment of non-contact time.

To address these questions, I utilized an embedded mixed-methods study design via an online survey. I will include comparisons of variables identified in the literature review as important to non-contact time allotment and usage. Specifically, this study will conduct planned contrasts to explore potential relationships between non-contact time and the variables of program type, years of teaching experience, and elements of classroom composition.

# CHAPTER 2:

# REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To appreciate the value of non-contact time, it is necessary to understand the many professional responsibilities of early childhood teachers. Based on a review of the literature, including both empirical research and organizational reports, the next sections provide: a literature driven definition of non-contact time, statement of theoretical framework, summary of the responsibilities of early childhood teachers, a description of non-contact time in education, and the effects of non-contact time.

## Defining Non-Contact Time

The field of early childhood lacks an agreed upon definition for the time of the day when early childhood teachers are free from their direct supervisory and teaching roles with children. The preschool and K-12 literature refers to this time of day in a variety of ways including planning time (Barney & Deutsch, 2012), office hours (Branscomb & McBride, 2005), non-child contact time (Whitebook et al., 2018), lighter hours (Beck, 2017), and non-contact periods (Ingvarson, 2005). The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment's (2018) referred to it as "non-child contact time." The center identifies tasks such as preparation and planning for instruction, assessing learning and the overall program, reflecting on their individual and team practices, consulting with parents and the community, participating in on- and off-site professional development and otherwise engaging in tasks that allow them to meet their professional obligations as examples (Whitebook et al., 2018). For this study, it was necessary to establish a term and definition of non-contact time in order to measure it. I selected the phrase non-contact time because the time of interest broadly encompasses more than planning and

office tasks. I further defined it as the time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children. The purpose of non-contact time is to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. It does not include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use. For ease of communicating throughout the rest of this literature review, I will refer to all work time not devoted to direct contact with children as "non-contact time." The proposed term and definition reflect the physical proximity of teachers to children and dichotomizes teachers' responsibilities as those they complete with children and those they complete away from children.

**Theoretical Framework**

As a framework for understanding the interconnectedness of non-contact time for teachers, children, and the environment, I applied the ecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner's theory was first introduced in the early 1970s and is centered on the individual and their immediate environment and relationships within that context are situated inside larger, and increasingly more distal systems that bi-directionally influence one another and ultimately the individual. Further, the element of time, referred to as the chronosystem, accounts for changes in the individual as they age but also situates the person within a larger historical context (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The application of this theory is suitable in this study because it encompasses the intricacies, relationships, and interactions of a teachers' workplace context. This is relevant because teachers are important factors for quality in the classroom and their relationships and interactions with children are part of providing high-quality early childhood experiences (Burchinal et al., 2002; Burchinal et al., 2008;

Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Mashburn et al., 2008). Human ecological theory recognizes the role of larger systems, referred to as exosystems, such as accrediting organizations, state licensing agencies, and societal policies on early childhood education that also influence the work environment and individual. This study was designed to understand the current state of the proximal environmental work support non-contact time in relation to teachers' responsibilities (often established by larger, distal systems). Thus, the human ecological theory provides an appropriate framework for considering potential influences that systems have on one another. A final aspect of this issue that is captured by this theory is that of the macrosystem. The macrosystem includes the attitudes and ideologies of our society's culture, which is significant for a profession that has been historically undervalued and underpaid.

**Responsibilities of Early Childhood Teachers**

Early childhood teachers are professionals who promote the learning and development of young children and support the diverse needs of children and families (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015). Teachers are integral to the quality of children's early childhood education (Dombro et al., 2011; Pianta, 2003; Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Consortium, 2008; Sarver et al., 2020) and research indicates that providing teachers effective workplace supports are beneficial for their classroom practices (Bierman et al., 2008; Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2021; King et al., 2016; Landry et al., 2006). For this reason, it is necessary to have a thorough understanding of the professional responsibilities undertaken by early childhood teachers.

### *Best Practices for Teachers in Early Childhood*

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is considered the leader in the field for determining standards and criteria for quality in early childhood programs; their voluntary accreditation program began in 1984 as a way to recognize high-quality early childhood programs. Programs that earn NAEYC accreditation demonstrate evidence of meeting 70% of the rigorous criteria outlined in ten standards and 100% of criteria with the special designation of 'required' (NAEYC, 2018). Such programs are highly regarded in the field and families looking for childcare are encouraged to use NAEYC accreditation as an indicator of quality (Fish, 2017). The standards and criteria are the culmination of years of research and input from experts on what constitutes quality in early childhood programs (NAEYC, 2018). The translation from research into practice has resulted in a meticulous inventory of tasks and responsibilities that together provide the standard of quality for early learning programs. Many of these tasks are addressed by teachers and would require non-contact time to complete. For example, according to the NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items, teachers employed at accredited programs are required to *provide evidence* of their abilities to: form relationships with children and families (p.41, p. 92), implement curriculum addressing the development of the whole child (p.107), provide quality educational environments and instruction (p.40), assess children's development and progress (p. 52), promote health and hygiene (p.62), communicate and share information with families (p.12), connect with the community (p.100), advocate for the program and field (p.101), and create safe and engaging indoor and outdoor environments for learning (p.106).

A review of accreditation standards identified several criteria that would require non-contact time. A select few of those tasks include creating lesson plans, collaborating with other professionals, and assessing and interpreting children's learning and development (NAEYC, 2018). Without non-contact time, teachers' planning would occur when they are in contact with children. It is currently unknown what effect this would have on the quality of children's experiences, but this approach would likely be discouraged based on best practices in the field which present planning as a multi-step process that requires intentionality and purpose (Epstein, 2014; Kostelnik et al., 2019). Furthermore, early in their careers, teachers are encouraged to write detailed lesson plans but over time and with experience, teachers can progress to writing only necessary elements (Kostelnik et al., 2019). Thus, it is possible that novice teachers may require more non-contact time than their veteran counterparts just for planning. The task of collaborating with colleagues and other early childhood service providers requires flexibility and confidentiality at times, which cannot be guaranteed in a classroom setting thus necessitating non-contact time for completion. Teachers also complete the important task of assessing and interpreting children's learning and development which is vital to identifying children who require early intervention. It is unclear if this important task can be conducted successfully in a setting in which a teacher is simultaneously working with children. In conclusion, several criteria established by the high standards of NAEYC accreditation support the argument that non-contact time is a necessary part of the work environment.

Beyond the standards set by NAEYC recommendations for accreditation, several practices promoted by research also support the need for non-contact time to focus on

activities such as reflecting with colleagues, preparing for lessons, and planning (Branscomb & McBride, 2005; Whitebook et al., 2018). Indeed, careful planning is essential for intentional teaching (Epstein, 2007). Furthermore, best practices such as formally documenting and sharing children's growth (Raikes & Edwards, 2009), engaging in the complete instructional process from planning to reflection and adjustment (Kostelnik et al., 2019), and thoughtfully interpreting classroom documentation and information (Gandini, 2012) would require non-contact time.

Not all teacher responsibilities and tasks require the same amount of time and the frequency with which teacher responsibilities occur also varies by task. Some of the previously mentioned teacher tasks and best practices happen regularly, such as creating lesson plans and writing observations. Other tasks occur only occasionally or very rarely, for instance, completing a formal functional behavioral assessment might occur once a year or less but requires a substantial investment of time and collaboration (Scott et al., 2004). Additionally, the overlapping demands of job-related tasks can be problematic. Without proper time support, teachers have difficulty managing their job-related responsibilities. In a study of early childhood teachers' experiences (Kelly & Berthelsen, 1995), one teacher who was responsible for conducting a speech screening noted in her journal that doing the screening was stressful because she was required to supervise an entire group of children while simultaneously concentrating on an individual child's speech, to which she conceded, "I can't do both successfully" (p.10). A teacher's ability to successfully manage her time to complete professional responsibilities could be an important aspect of teaching, yet, currently little is known about this topic.

Teacher responsibilities can, and often do, exceed the professional and educational tasks for which they are trained. Early childhood teachers are required to fulfill roles outside of their job description, extending the role of the teacher to include responsibilities normally delegated to an equipment manager, secretary, supply purchaser, custodian, or cook (Kelly & Berthelsen, 1995). For example, in a study by Kelly & Berthelsen (1995) preschool teachers journaling about their experiences recorded frequent interruptions to their work and completion of tasks for which they were not trained. One teacher participant described how her morning teaching was interrupted by a broken toilet which required her to take on custodial cleaning duties while simultaneously restricting children from the area. The teacher was responsible for contacting a plumber to come fix the problem and was put on hold, all while she was supervising children. Further, another teacher in the study reported being tasked with rearranging furniture to accommodate the space being used as a weekend voting location. These are clear examples of tasks outside of regular teaching duties that early childhood teachers fulfill. However, what is not clear is the impact such interruptions and tasks have on non-contact time and providing quality educational experiences to young children.

Early childhood teachers are required to be a sort of "jack of all trades" as they complete both their professional tasks and respond to duties outside of their job training and responsibilities. This creates a challenging situation for teachers attempting to provide the high-quality educational experiences that have become increasingly known to have positive impact on long-term child outcomes (Bakken et al., 2017). As a result, teachers are pulled in multiple directions as they try to meet the diverse needs of the classroom, children, and families (Manlove, 1994). Thus, the field would benefit from

examining how early childhood teachers manage the completion of their work responsibilities; more specifically how much non-contact time teachers are allotted and what they do with this time.

## Potential Impacts of a Lack of Non-Contact Time

Research provides insight into how the lack of non-contact time could negatively influence aspects of the classroom for both children and teachers. Next, the potential impacts on job satisfaction and children's classroom experiences are described.

### *Job Satisfaction*

Three critical elements of early childhood job satisfaction include supervisor support, the nature of the position, and relationships with co-workers (Daly Wagner & French, 2010). Job satisfaction within the ecological theory, is situated in an immediate microsystem, the workplace. Within this microsystem proximal processes operate to sustain the individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). For teachers, this can be interpreted to include common work environment processes and professional activities such as planning, collaboration, and problem solving often influenced by linkages and processes between larger contexts, referred to mesosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). Research shows that when teachers' essential needs related to such processes are met, they tend to stay in the education profession (Hirsch, 2019). Conversely, a difficult work environment coupled with high expectations has been known to contribute to stress in early childhood teachers (Goelman & Guo, 1998; Manlove, 1994) which likely has a negative impact on teachers' satisfaction with their job.

A teacher's satisfaction with their profession also depends on the degree to which the teacher has been allotted time to complete the assigned workload, has autonomy and

control, and feels challenged (Daly Wagner & French, 2010). In a study of fifty-four early childhood teachers who participated in a year-long professional development that included on-site support, all of the participants reported a lack of non-contact time for activities such as planning and preparing for teaching activities. The professional development and on-site support included release time to address professional responsibilities, which teachers reported as helpful. One teacher noted specifically how little time she had and that her own personal time on the weekends was valuable to her but often spent at a library planning. She further acknowledged that she appreciated the time provided by the professional development and on-site support for providing her work time to complete professional tasks. Teachers may lack the time that they need to adequately plan for lessons and use the skills they already have. It is unclear how hurrying thoughtful processes such as planning, implements the quality of classroom instruction.

The idea of teachers using their personal time to complete work-related tasks can be described using the term "intensification" which was coined in the 1980s to describe the erosion of work privileges, such as plan time, of educated workers (Larson, 1980). Intensification for a teacher can mean a reduction in the quality of services teachers provide to families and children (e.g. lesson plans, communication with families) (Larson, 1980). One study noted that a lack of non-contact time for teachers to collaborate coupled with teachers' investing their personal time to meet professional requirements was connected to symptoms of burnout and a loss of commitment to their practice (Jovanovic, 2013). In fact, teachers who were employed at schools that allowed for greater amounts of time for collaborating with peers were shown to be less likely to

leave the profession (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Teachers unsatisfied with their working conditions or experiencing stress are less able to provide quality educational environments for children (Buettner et al., 2016).

Under-compensated teachers using their personal time to complete work tasks could quickly exhaust a teacher already dissatisfied with working conditions (Bullough et al., 2012; Liu and Ramsey, 2008). Addressing the need for non-contact time proactively has direct implications for directors who are interested in establishing and maintaining stability in their early childhood staff, and further supports the need to understand what aspects of an organization help to retain or push teachers to leave (Whitebook & Sakai, 2004). It seems that time is a recurring theme for teachers at all levels and teachers are asking for more time to complete their professional duties and meet the needs of the children in their care (Hirsch, 2019). Understanding early childhood teacher needs and examining non-contact time has the potential to lead to information to help inform policies and practices. Providing teachers sufficient non-contact time to meet professional and classroom responsibilities along with strategies for effective time management may have positive impacts on job satisfaction.

### *Classroom Experiences*

High-quality educational experiences in early childhood classrooms are known to yield positive results for children; yet it is not guaranteed in every program. Evidence indicates that many teachers do not provide high-quality instruction (Cabell et al., 2013; Early et al., 2007). In fact, interactions between children and their teachers tends to be of average quality and varies greatly among programs and educators (Pianta et al., 2005; Sosinsky et al., 2007). These interactions in the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological

theory refer to proximal processes at play in the teacher's primary work environment, the classroom. Instructional interactions define the quality of a program more than any other variable and subsequently impact children's development (Dombro et al., 2011; Pianta, 2003). The variation in quality of instruction and interactions in classrooms is noteworthy and may be influenced by the amount of non-contact time teachers have for planning and how they use their designated time. Without time to thoughtfully consider lesson details or attempting to multi-task while planning, the quality of instruction and interactions may suffer. Effective planning is a known contributor to high quality programs (Espinosa, 2010) and requires time to do thoughtfully and intentionally, especially for novices (Kostelnik et al., 2019). Currently, many early childhood teachers plan during their personal time or at the same time they are in the classroom caring for children (Whitebook et al., 2018). It is unclear how this approach to planning influences the quality of instruction in the classroom, but it is worth investigating how planning while simultaneously caring for children impacts instructional quality.

This reinforces a second avenue for improving instructional quality, providing effective support to teachers (Whitebook, 2019), which is a known way to improve classroom instructional quality (Landry et al., 2006; Powell et al., 2010; Whitebook et al.,2016). Effective work supports, such as wages, have shown positive impact on instructional practices (Whitebook et al., 1989; Whitebook & Sakai, 2003) so it is plausible that other work supports, such as the environmental work support of non-contact time, would also be influential to teachers' practices. Yet environmental work supports addressing non-contact time have not received the same amount of attention in early childhood as other types of teacher supports aimed at improving their knowledge

and skills. Professional development of teachers is often prioritized over improving working conditions, which reinforces the idea that early childhood teachers need to work on improving deficiencies in themselves first before their jobs will improve (Whitebook, 2019). Unfortunately, this promotes self-sacrifice of teachers' own well-being in an attempt to benefit children. Instead, we should promote the idea that just as children flourish in high-quality environments, teachers are also likely to benefit from high-quality, encouraging environments that support their teaching and promote their development (Austin et al., 2011).

### *Teachers' Perspectives*

Teachers often cite lack of time as a barrier to completing a variety of professional activities. Indeed, one of the main constraints to educational reforms is identified as the lack of time (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Fullan & Miles, 1991; Gandara, 1999). Examples include implementing technology in the classroom (Johnson et al., 2016; Keengwe & Ochwari, 2008), providing inclusive services for children with disabilities (Bose & Hinojosa, 2008; Brotherson et al., 2001), using the outdoors as a natural learning environment (Ernst, 2014), implementing curriculum (Burgess et al., 2010; Fraser-Thomas & Beaudoin, 2002), collaborating with interdisciplinary colleagues (Anderson, 2013), and providing science instruction (Bose & Hinojosa, 2016; Saçkes et al., 2011). It seems that time is a recurring challenge for most teachers that is difficult to address without knowing more.

In early childhood education the lack of time is evident in a qualitative study where researchers interviewed teachers about their experiences as early childhood educators. Five of the six teachers interviewed revealed they take work home at the end

of the day or spent time during their personal breaks and before or after work completing professional tasks such as documentation and preparation (Jena-Crottet, 2017). All six of the teachers felt that the non-contact time they were allotted, approximately 1-2 hours a week, was insufficient for completing their work tasks. Furthermore, they expressed a desire for more assistant teachers or aides to relieve them of their non-teaching duties in order to focus entirely on providing quality care and education. Teachers reportedly felt pressure from administration to complete professional activities such as documentation and reports without an adequate amount of non-contact time. Interruptions frequently occurred during non-contact time for a variety of reasons, ranging from other teachers coming in to ask questions to a colleague needing to print something (Jena-Crottet, 2017).

**Organizational Guidelines and Recommendations**

Guidelines on non-contact time in early childhood are limited and outdated. An attempt to regulate non-contact time was initiated two decades ago by home-based and center-based staff who initiated a process to identify "model work standards" (Center for the Child Care Workforce, 1998). Their efforts resulted in guidelines that specifically outlined levels of quality and corresponding amounts of non-contact time. The time was to be used for meetings, parent communication, observation, curriculum planning, collaborative efforts, preparation of materials, child assessment, and teacher reflection (Center for the Child Care Workforce, 1998). For high quality programming, the guidelines suggested that each week teachers should receive 5 hours of paid non-contact time. For emerging or "striving" quality, teachers should receive 2 hours of paid non-contact time each week. These guidelines attempted to spur community efforts to remedy

the challenge of high demands and low supports for early childhood workers (Whitebook, 1999) However, there is little evidence regarding how these guidelines have been enacted in the field or how programs have responded to the recommendations.

More recent efforts to ensure teachers' non-contact time have come from administrators of child development laboratory schools housed within universities. Laboratory schools are often considered quality early childhood educational settings and epicenters for research due to their commonly shared three-part missions to conduct research, teach young children, and provide outreach to the community (McBride & Baumgartner, 2003). A study by Branscomb & McBride (2005) on managing university laboratory schools noted that scheduled non-contact time for teachers is essential to the success of their early childhood programs. They argued that teachers in these settings need non-contact time to engage in reflective practice, talk with their colleagues, and conduct programmatic planning. When child development laboratories, places for teacher training and models of best practices, prioritize non-contact time it sends a powerful message to the field on the importance of this environmental work support for teachers. Researchers shared strategies for allocating office hours but these mostly required securing additional funding to hire support staff to cover the classroom while teachers had non-contact time (McBride & Baumgartner, 2003).

NAEYC, as previously mentioned, has been instrumental in identifying quality criteria for programs and teachers and this also specifically includes the provision of non-contact time. Two mentions of non-contact time appear in the NAEYC accreditation document (2018), first in the Assessment Section and then in the Staff Competencies, Preparation, and Support Section (p.59, p.86). The first specifies that programs

demonstrate evidence that both teachers and assistant teachers "are scheduled for collaborative planning time at least weekly, during which they do not supervise *awake* children" (p.59). This implies that teachers will have an opportunity for uninterrupted collaborative planning during children's nap time yet is problematic as frequency of napping decreases in children between the ages of 2 and 5 years (Iglowstein, 2003), making it unlikely that teachers would have a consistent opportunity to focus solely on planning while all the children in their classroom sleep. Additionally, this neglects provision of time for professional responsibilities outside of planning such as communicating with parents and tasks that require technology, such as a computer, that may not be readily available in the classroom. Finally, the standard does not necessitate that teachers actually get their collaborative planning time, but only that it be visibly scheduled, leading to questions about the discrepancy between the amount of non-contact time allotted for teachers and what they receive.

The second mention of non-contact time in the NAEYC accreditation document is for the purpose of taking a 15- minute break every four hours in which teachers are physically away from children (p.86). It is unclear if these breaks are intended for completing professional work requirements or personal time and it is unknown how teachers make use of them. The document notes that teachers should be allowed breaks and the ability to request relief as needed (p.79) but nothing ensures this practice or requires honoring such a request.

Calls for standards for work supports such as non-contact time exceed local and national organizational efforts as similar calls have also been made on a global scale; however, standards addressing early childhood work environments are absent or only

partially addressed in the United States. The International Labor Organization created the first outline of standards for addressing the work environment of early childhood educators in 2014. The standards addressed, among other things, non-contact time for professional development and reflective practices (International Labor Organization, 2014). Unfortunately, little evidence exists that show national organizations and state Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) have adopted these standards. By 2018, only 13 states had adopted an indicator for paid planning and/or preparation time into their QRIS (Build Initiative & Child Trends, 2017). The minimal organizational guidelines and recommendations provide little guidance for administrators and directors tasked with allotting teachers non-contact time.

## Influences on the Implementation of Non-Contact Time

### *Program Type*

The types of programs early childhood teachers are employed by can influence the expectations and requirements for their work (Saluja et al., 2002; Sarver et al., 2020). NAEYC accredited programs are distinguished from other programs based on their ability to meet standards for high-quality early care and education. Still, professional practices can vary based on funding and setting and thus has implications for the workforce, including aspects of program operations and work supports (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007; Saluja et al., 2020; Sarver et al., 2020). Non-profit centers have been shown to have higher wages and better child to staff ratios, professionalism, and positive caregiving (Sosinsky et al., 2007). Yet it is unknown how environmental work supports, including non-contact time, vary across program types. A positive work environment includes policies that support early childhood teachers' ability to provide

instruction effectively and sustain their relationships with co-workers, children, and families (Whitebook et al., 2018). Whereas the field of early childhood has well-established criteria for what constitutes high-quality environments for children through measures such as the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale - Revised (ITERS-R) (Harms et al., 2003) and the Early Childhood Rating Scale - Revised (ECRS – Revised (ECRS-R) (Harms et al., 2006), it has less defined and explicit standards for work environments and supports for teachers across program types. Thus, program type is a crucial aspect to measure and analyze to better understand its relationship with non-contact time.

### *Years of Experience*

The lack of guidelines and research on non-contact time likely pose challenges for directors who are responsible for personnel management and program operations (NAEYC, 2018). Directors often determine teachers' schedules and regularly manage multiple classrooms and age groups. Part of the directors' role is to ensure classrooms meet ratio requirements, have proper staffing, and manage the financial aspects of the program. Thus, the directors' role in determining work supports, including non-contact time, should not be overlooked. Classroom experience likely benefits directors in understanding the needs teachers have for non-contact time and other work environment supports, but research on the previous teaching experience of directors related to program management has mixed findings. A study of directors in New Jersey found that 36% had no teaching experience at any level (Ryan et al., 2011). However, in an older study in Illinois researchers found that most directors, nearly 90%, had experience as a classroom teacher (Rafanello & Bloom, 1997). Directors' qualifications and experiences vary

greatly by state (Whitebook et al., 2018) with some states requiring directors have experience working with young children. For example, in Nebraska, a minimum of 3,000 hours of experience working with young children in organized group settings is necessary for directors (Sarver et al., 2020; Nebraska Department of Education, 2019). However, currently it is unknown what factors influence directors' allotment of non-contact time. Measuring directors' years of previous teaching experience can help understand the association between directors' previous experiences and their allotment of non-contact time.

Teachers' years of classroom experience may also play a role in the allotment and use of non-contact time. This evolution from novice to more seasoned teacher may influence the amount of non-contact time teachers need. Teachers are initially instructed to make written lesson plans as a way to process and consider the many elements of a learning experience in detail from beginning to end (Cooper, 2013). This practice is useful for preparing a singular lesson and creating habits for thorough planning but also for increasing their personal confidence (Machado & Botnarescue, 2011). As teachers become more proficient in their planning, they may not find it necessary to write down every element of their plan (Kostelnik et al., 2019) which may reduce the length of time needed for planning and preparation. It is also possible that veteran teachers become more efficient at other tasks because of their experience. Conversely, newer early childhood teachers may be more prepared to use technology in the classroom due to an increased focus in recent years (Blackwell et al., 2013). Teachers' years of experience should be examined to understand its relationship with non-contact time.

### *Classroom Composition*

Early childhood classrooms are composed of young children with unique characteristics and needs which can affect classroom dynamics. For example, the age of the children in the classroom is a factor that influences the amount of assistance children may require throughout their day, with younger children requiring additional assistance. Further, the age of the child also impacts the ratio requirements and thus may affect the number of children enrolled in the classroom. Even among children of similar ages, unique characteristics and development are important to consider. Children who receive support through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) may require additional planning and preparation to ensure quality instruction and opportunities for participation (Grisham-Brown & Pretti-Frontczak, 2003). Further, individualized plans require close progress monitoring of goals including data collection to share with stakeholders (Grisham-Brown & Pretti-Frontczak, 2003). These additional tasks may require additional time for teachers to complete and consider. For these reasons, child characteristics play an important role in the composition of the classroom which should be examined alongside non-contact time for potential relationships.

Teachers comprise another aspect of classroom composition. The total number of teachers, lead and assistant, assigned to the classroom plays a role beyond that of maintaining ratio requirements. Assistant teachers are sometimes tasked with leading learning experiences and frequently engaging with children in quality interactions during play. Assistant teachers may benefit the lead teacher by helping with lesson preparation, gathering materials, and other tasks that could reduce the overall workload of the lead

teacher. Teachers without aid from an assistant may assume more responsibility for tasks that could be otherwise delegated. For these reasons, the total number of teachers in a classroom is a factor that may impact the allotment and use of non-contact time and therefore should be examined more closely.

**Summary**

In conclusion, with little guidance on non-contact time from professional organizations it is largely unknown how directors of early childhood programs determine the amount of non-contact time teachers are allotted and when teachers are completing their professional responsibilities that require non-contact time. Also, largely absent from the literature are early childhood teachers' accounts of the impact of non-contact time on their well-being, job performance, and instructional quality. As a starting point for understanding this subject, it would be beneficial to identify the amount of non-contact time directors allot to early childhood teachers and what responsibilities and tasks directors expect teachers to perform during this time. Similarly, few studies report on teachers' perspectives on non-contact time allotment and use, ignoring the individuals who arguably have the most valuable insight into how much non-contact time is being received and how it is being used. Establishing a foundation of information on non-contact time in early childhood would help inform professional guidelines, start a conversation aimed at supporting teachers, and develop a better understanding of this unexplored facet of teaching.

# CHAPTER 3:

# METHODS

In this chapter, I describe recruitment strategy and participants. I also include an explanation of the study design and the process used to develop and field test the survey tool. Last, I provide a description of the data collection and data analysis.

## Recruitment

I used a multi-step approach to recruitment including contact individual programs and by advertising the study with professional organizations. The NAEYC website offers a search feature that allows the public to search for NAEYC accredited programs (https://families.naeyc.org/find-quality-child-care). This search feature was accessed in the summer of 2020 and a spreadsheet of accredited programs along with contact information was downloaded for each state. State spreadsheets were then combined into a single database of all NAEYC accredited programs in the United States ($N$ = 6,622). The programs were sorted alphabetically by center name and numbered. A simple random selection was used to ensure that each program had an equal and independent chance of being selected (Fraenkel et al., 2016). Based on a power analysis, 82 participants were necessary to detect a medium effect size (.30) at 80% power (using an adjusted power table; Friedman, 1962; Cohen 1988) with enough sensitivity to identify correlations between groups. To address the planned contrasts outlined earlier with up to five groups, a minimum sample of 205 participants was needed. The average online survey response rate identified by a meta-analysis was 33% (Shih & Fan, 2009). To obtain 205 total participants while anticipating a 33% response rate, I began by identifying a simple random sample of 625 participants. I used a random number generator function to

generate 625 numbers between 1 and 6,622. The program corresponding to the random number was then identified as one of the 625 programs selected for recruitment. Contact information was obtained online or by calling the program and informing them about the study and asking for the program or director email address. The program or director was sent an email inviting them to participate (see Appendix B). Upon completion of the survey, participants had the option to refer other teachers and directors at NAEYC accredited programs by providing their colleagues email addresses. I contacted each referral using an identical email message inviting them to participate. After one week, all invited participants were sent a reminder to complete the survey if they had not already done so. After two weeks, the process of randomly selecting and inviting new participants repeated. This happened over five phases until the desired sample was obtained.

A secondary recruitment strategy was employed to reach directors and teachers associated with NAEYC. Contact information was obtained for NAEYC state affiliates throughout the country using the affiliate network (https://www.naeyc.org/get-involved/membership/affiliates/network). Each affiliate received an email invitation with a flyer to distribute to their members via social media, monthly newsletter, or listserv (see Appendix B). The flyer instructed interested individuals to contact the primary investigator about participation. This approach led to three inquiries from individuals who were sent the survey link.

**Participants**

Participants were 210 early childhood professionals, 104 directors ($M_{age}$ = 45.15 years, *SD* = 11.469, Range = 25-72) and 106 teachers ($M_{age}$ = 39.33 years, *SD* = 12.253,

Range = 20-64) employed at NAEYC accredited schools with scheduled non-contact time. Table 1 provides a complete summary of demographic information. Participants were primarily white, non-Hispanic females with some post-secondary education. Directors were more likely to be employed at public, non-profit programs but most teachers reported being employed at federally funded Head Start programs. Directors had significantly more teaching experience than teacher participants, $F(1, 208) = 8.69$, $p = .004$. Directors reported a mean of 18 years ($SD = 10.422$, Range = less than 1-41) of teaching experience, whereas teachers reported a mean of 13.83 years ($SD = 10.074$, Range = 1-41) of teaching experience.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

| Characteristic | Director | | Teacher | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Gender | | | | |
| Female | 103 | 99.0 | 101 | 95.3 |
| Male | 1 | 1.0 | 5 | 4.7 |
| Race | | | | |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 1 | 1.0 | 2 | 1.9 |
| Asian American/Pacific Islander | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3.8 |
| Black/African American | 11 | 10.6 | 9 | 8.5 |
| White/Non-Hispanic/Non-Latinx | 73 | 70.2 | 53 | 50.0 |
| White/Hispanic/Latinx | 17 | 16.3 | 35 | 33.0 |
| Other | 2 | 2.0 | 3 | 2.8 |
| Education | | | | |
| High School | 1 | 1 | 5 | 4.7 |
| Associates Degree | 7 | 6.7 | 22 | 20.8 |
| Bachelor's degree | 48 | 46.2 | 52 | 49.1 |
| Master's degree | 38 | 36.5 | 25 | 23.6 |
| Education Specialist | 6 | 5.8 | 1 | .9 |
| Doctoral Degree | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Other | 3 | 2.9 | 1 | .9 |
| Program Type | | | | |
| Head Start | 18 | 17.3 | 31 | 29.2 |
| Public School (not HS) | 4 | 3.8 | 12 | 11.3 |
| Public Non-Profit | 45 | 43.3 | 21 | 19.8 |
| Religious Affiliation | 5 | 4.8 | 11 | 10.4 |
| Military Affiliation | 0 | 0 | 7 | 6.6 |
| For-profit | 18 | 17.3 | 7 | 66 |
| Other | 14 | 13.5 | 17 | 16.0 |
| Early Childhood Teaching Experience | | | | |
| Less than 5 years | 6 | 5.8 | 14 | 13.2 |
| 5 or more years | 98 | 94.2 | 92 | 86.8 |

*Note: N* = 210 (Directors = 104, Teachers = 106).

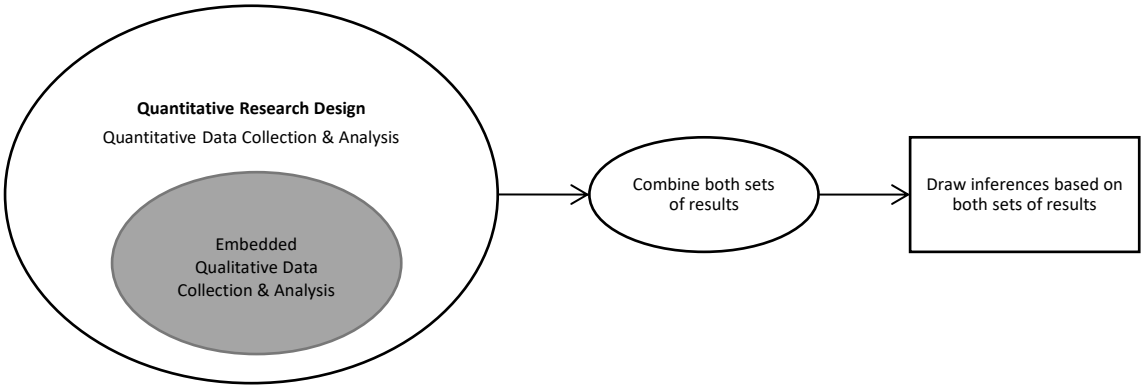
## Research Design

Mixed methods is an approach to research in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected, analyzed, and integrated in order to draw inferences within a single study (Tashakkori et al., 2021). Three crucial elements of mixed methods research are

timing, integration of data, and priority (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). Each of these decisions plays an important role in design, data collection, and analysis. This study used concurrent timing of data collection and combined integration of results with a quantitative priority. Multiple strands of data were collected using an embedded mixed methods design via an online survey (see Figure 1). Embedding, sometimes referred to as nesting, is an approach in which one methodology is located within another (Caracelli & Greene, 1997). In this study, qualitative, open-ended questions were embedded within a survey composed primarily of quantitative, closed-ended questions. This is also referred to as a mixed methods questionnaire (Tashakkori et al., 2021). The integration of two methods is often referred to as *the point of interface* (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). This study used a combined integration that occurred at the completion of data analysis and contributed to the joint interpretation of results (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). A priority was placed on quantitative elements because the quantitative data collection and analysis established baseline data to describe the current state of non-contact time and the qualitative data provides context. Qualitative data add value by giving voice to director and teacher perspectives related to non-contact time, a facet largely missing in the current literature but critical for understanding how non-contact time is being used in practice.

**Figure 1**

*Diagram of Proposed Research Activities in Embedded Mixed Methods*




## Measure

For this study, the primary instrument was a researcher-developed survey instrument. The Early Childhood Teacher Non-Contact Time Survey was created using a multi-step process including a critical systematic review, cognitive laboratory interviews, and field pre-tests.

### *Survey Development*

Development of a survey instrument is a multiple-step process (Fowler, 2014). Initial identification of survey objectives was intentionally aligned with the research aims and planned contrasts presented in the literature review to accomplish the aims of the study. Using the aims of the study as a foundation, I organized variables, question format, and type of resulting data (see Table 2) to create a tentative set of survey questions (see Appendix A for complete survey) and conducted a critical review of survey items. This was followed by cognitive laboratory interviews and pre-testing before survey distribution (Fowler, 2014). Each step is described in detail subsequently.

**Table 2**

*Research Objectives in Relation to Survey Development*

| Objective | Variable(s) | Question Type | Participant | | Data Type | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Director | Teacher | Quant | Qual |
| **Aim 1 – Definition** | | | | | | |
| Identify how different professionals in the field are referring to non-contact time | Role | Categorical | x | x | x | |
| | Term | Open-ended | x | x | | x |
| **Aim 2 – Amount and Use** | | | | | | |
| Amounts of Non-Contact Time | | | | | | |
| Identify amount of non-contact time teachers are allotted and receiving. | Time allotted | Numerical | x | | x | |
| | Time received | Numerical | | x | x | |
| Explore relationship between the amount of non-contact time scheduled and the amount of non-contact time received | Time schedule | Numerical | | x | x | |
| | Time received | Numerical | | x | x | |
| Explore relationship between amount of non-contact time allotted and program type as reported by directors | Program type | Categorical | x | | x | |
| | Time allotted | Numerical | x | | x | |
| Explore relationship between amount of non-contact time scheduled and program type as reported by teachers | Program type | Categorical | | x | x | |
| | Time scheduled | Numerical | | x | x | |
| Explore relationship between amount of non-contact time received and program type as reported by teachers | Program type | Categorical | | x | x | |
| | Time received | Numerical | | x | x | |
| Explore relationship between teachers' number of years taught and the amount of non-contact time teachers receive | Yrs teaching EC | Numerical | | x | x | |
| | Time received | Numerical | | x | x | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Explore relationship between number of children enrolled in a classroom and the amount of non-contact time teachers receive | Enrollment | Numerical | | x | x | |
| | Time received | Numerical | | x | x | |
| Explore relationship between the amount of non-contact time teachers received and the presence or absence of a child with an IFSP in the classroom | IFSP | Categorical | | x | x | |
| | Time received | Numerical | | x | x | |
| Use of Non-Contact Time | | | | | | |
| Identify how teachers use non-contact time | Time use | Open-ended | x | x | | x |
| | | Categorical | x | x | x | |
| Identify strategies teachers use to complete their work tasks in the event they lack sufficient non-contact time.* | Teacher strategies | Categorical | | x | x | |
| Identify directors' perceptions about how teachers complete their work tasks in the event they lack sufficient non-contact time.* | Director perceived teacher strategies | Categorical | x | | x | |
| Aim 3 – Influential Factors | | | | | | |
| Identify factors directors consider when allotting non-contact time | Factors | Likert Scale | x | | x | |
| | | Open-ended | x | | | x |
| Explore relationship between directors' number of years taught and the amount of non-contact time directors allot to teachers | Years teaching | Numerical | x | | x | |
| | EC | Numerical | x | | x | |
| | Time allotted | | | | | |
| Explore relationship between the number of teachers assigned to a preschool classroom and amount of non-contact allotted | Teachers per class | Numerical | x | | x | |
| | Time allotted | Numerical | x | | x | |
| Explore relationship between the number of teachers assigned to preschool classroom and amount of non-contact time received | Teachers per class | Numerical | | x | x | |
| | Time received | Numerical | | x | x | |

*Note.* *Phrasing adjusted slightly from proposal to dissertation.

### *Critical Systematic Review*

A draft survey with tentative questions was created to address each variable on the list. These questions were subjected to a critical systematic review using Fowler and Cosenza's (2008) standards for evaluation, including evaluating the questions for characteristics that research indicates can be problematic. The questions were revised to improve phrasing, reduce imprecise wording, and ensure consistent understanding. This process included reviewing the questions with three individuals with a background in early childhood education research; two of the individuals were doctoral students and one was a tenured university professor. This resulted in further refinement of wording and format including adjusting questions to solicit numerical data as much as possible. For example, when asking teachers to respond to how many minutes of non-contact time they receive per day, the initial question was presented as a categorical response in a multiple-choice format but was adjusted to a numerical response to gather more precise data. After revisions, the final questions were entered into the online survey management platform, Qualtrics (Qualtrics software, Version Sept 2020 of Qualtrics, Provo, UT).

### *Cognitive Laboratory Interviews*

Next, I conducted cognitive laboratory interviews to investigate how directors and teachers responded to the survey and ensured that the questions elicited consistent responses across participants. Cognitive interviews were conducted with directors and teachers from two NAEYC accredited programs - the Ruth Staples Child Development Laboratory at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln and the McPhaul Child Development Laboratory at the University of Georgia. According to guidelines, at least ten interviews are required to ensure the survey performs as intended (Fowler, 2014). Ten individual

interviews took place via online video meeting with three directors and seven teachers. Online meeting was an appropriate method because it allowed for conversation with the participant while using the screen share feature to view how the participant maneuvered the online survey.

The purpose of the meeting was to ask participants to respond to questions on the survey and provide details on their interpretation of the items. Participants were directed to "say in their own words what they think the question is asking" and "to explain how they chose a particular answer over others" (Fowler, 2014). Cognitive interviews with directors resulted in revising questions to be more inclusive of directors who oversee more than one program, adding more options for multiple choice questions, providing emphasis in survey instructions, including examples, and eliminating questions that split onto two screens. Teachers raised similar issues resulting in modifications including bolding certain words for emphasis, clarifying fixed-choice responses, removing repetitive phrasing, and emphasizing that the survey would remain anonymous and that directors would not be able to access responses submitted by teachers at their program. Table 3 provides a summary of feedback obtained through cognitive laboratory interviews.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Cognitive Laboratory Interview Feedback*

| Role | Feedback Resulting in Changes |
|---|---|
| Directors | Emphasize instructions using caps lock or italics.<br>Include phrases such as "on average" and "overall" in wording.<br>Adjust phrasing to be inclusive of directors who oversee more than one program or location.<br>Provide the option of "0 years of teaching experience" for directors who do not have classroom teaching experience.<br>Present the paragraph thanking participants after their full completion of the survey to ensure they fill out all necessary information to receive the gift card.<br>Consider adding a question asking about if teachers ever intentionally not take their non-contact time and why they make that choice. |
| Lead Classroom Teachers | Be sure it is possible for participants to have the ability to select more than one race.<br>Include assurances that directors will not see responses to emphasize confidentiality.<br>Consider adding fixed choice option of 'extending workday by coming in early and staying late' to the multiple-choice question asking teachers to describe what they do if they do not have enough non-contact time.<br>Avoid a page break between questions of the same topic.<br>Clarify on certain questions if the teacher is considered in ratio.<br>Emphasize important words by bolding or italicizing. |

Cognitive interviews were beneficial for pre-testing the survey with a group of professionals similar to the population identified to take the survey and to handle navigational aspects related to the survey setup as well.

### *Field Pretest*

Field pretesting occurred when the survey instrument was ready to be distributed. The purpose was to ensure the online survey management platform was set up properly and that data was indeed being collected by Qualtrics as intended. Two doctoral-level graduate students studying early childhood education completed the online survey from start to finish. The duration of the survey was noted as taking between 20-30 minutes and

all recorded data was examined for accurate gathering prior to distribution. The pretest confirmed accurate data collection and flow of survey and no additional changes were needed.

**Data Collection**

Data collection began in the Fall of 2020 (October 20, 2020 – December 11, 2020) after some programs across the country began re-opening from COVID-19-related closures and lasted approximately two months. The timing of the survey distribution was intentional so that professionals had time to adjust to the new academic year and health guidelines at early childhood programs before being solicited to participate. Approval for the research project was obtained by the university institutional review board (IRB). The survey had three sections: screening for eligibility, anonymous responses to non-contact time survey, and contact information for distribution of e-gift cards.

**Screening for Eligibility**

Screening questions were presented to individuals who clicked the survey link in the invitation email. This was to ensure that participants met three inclusion criteria requirements for the study. Inclusion criteria for the study were being the age of majority for the state the participant resided in, holding the position of either director or lead classroom teacher at a NAEYC accredited program, and having scheduled non-contact time (for teachers) or allotting non-contact time (for directors). The online survey ended for individuals who did not meet all three inclusion criteria.

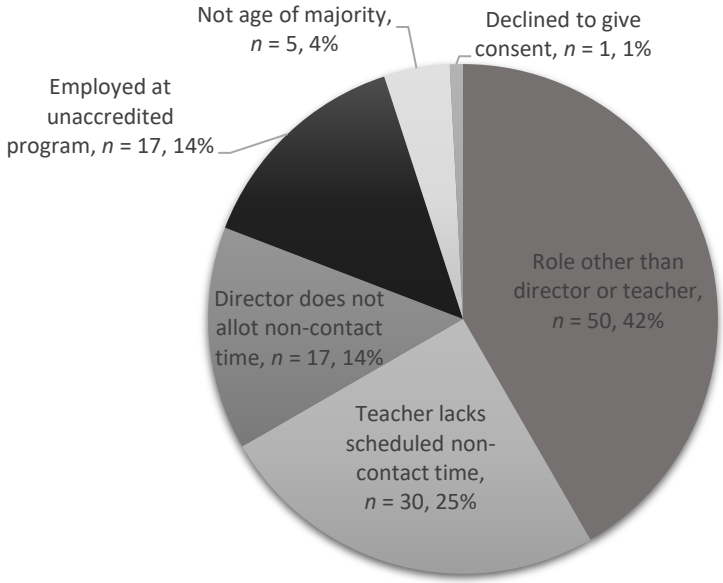
A summary of ineligible participants is provided in Figure 1. Notably, a quarter of ineligible individuals were teachers who were not scheduled non-contact time despite having met other inclusion criteria. Additionally, directors who were otherwise eligible to

participate but did not allot non-contact time for teachers in their program comprised 14% of ineligible participants. In summary, nearly 40% of individuals (*n* = 47) who were screened out of the survey were excluded because they lacked non-contact time experiences at their current NAEYC accredited program.

Individuals who did meet inclusion criteria continued the survey and were presented with an IRB approved consent form with the opportunity to agree to participate. Those that gave consent were forwarded on to the non-contact time survey and those that declined to provide consent were thanked for their time and the survey ended (see Figure 1).

**Figure 2**

*Ineligible Individuals*




*Note.* *N* = 120

**Non-Contact Time Survey**

Participants who met eligibility requirements and consented to participate were directed to the non-contact time survey which began with the gathering of demographic data such as age, race, gender, education, focus of degree, years of early childhood teaching experience, and program type (See Table 1 for demographics). Years of early childhood teaching experience data were organized into two categories, novices and experts. Novices were considered growing teachers with less than five years of experience and expert teachers were considered teachers who had five or more years of experience. This decision was based on previous literature that teachers' practices improve until approximately five years of teaching when it plateaus (Palmer et al. 2005; Rivkin et al., 2005). Program types were selected based on previous studies of program types that consider a setting's organizational affiliation as well as its profit status (Saluja et al., 2002). One of the options was "Other" and included a textbox for participants to write in a program type if the options did not describe their program. Responses in the "Other" category (e.g., inclusion preschool, parent co-operative nursery school, childcare center, school readiness program) were not able to be grouped into existing categories based on their lack of information regarding organizational affiliation and profit status. See Appendix A for the full version of the non-contact time survey.

All question settings in the survey management platform were set to 'force response' to eliminate missing data. Participants were able to toggle back and forth between pages of the survey as necessary to revise their responses. This feature was enabled because fixed choice options presented to teachers might serve as a reminder of activities they engaged in during non-contact time. The ability to return to previous pages

and add to or adjust their response would result in more complete data. Participants could exit the survey at any time by closing the browser window.

The questions presented to participants varied based on the role they identified during the eligibility screening section. Participants who responded that their role was director in the eligibility screening section were presented with questions about allotting non-contact time to teachers at their program. Participants who responded that their role was lead classroom teacher were presented with questions inquiring about their scheduled and received non-contact time experiences. The number of questions varied for participants because a response to one question could prompt a follow-up question. For example, participants who responded 'yes' to a question about if they have children in their classroom that have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) would be presented with an additional question asking how many students in their classroom have IFSPs. Directors were presented up to 24 questions and lead classroom teachers up to 33. All responses in the eligibility section and non-contact time survey section were anonymous. Instructions emphasized the anonymous nature of the survey to promote genuine disclosure about participants' non-contact time experiences.

The non-contact time survey consisted of a variety of question formats presented in varying frequency depending on role. The two most common formats of questions were multiple choice and open-ended. Directors answered 14 multiple choice and 7 open-ended questions and teachers answered 19 multiple choice and 10 open-ended questions. Other less-used question formats include matrix tables, where multiple pieces of information were collected in one question, and Likert style rating questions. Directors answered two questions in matrix table format and one Likert style rating question.

Teachers were asked three Likert style rating questions. Rank order questions are questions that ask the participant to place options in order of preference and was used only once for teachers.

**Contact Information Survey**

After completing the anonymous non-contact time survey, participants were re-directed to a separate contact information survey. The purpose of this survey was to collect personal information about the participant to disburse the e-gift card while maintaining the confidentiality of their non-contact time survey responses. This was done by disconnecting the two surveys such that responses about non-contact time were unable to be linked to personal information. The contact information survey collected participants first and last name and email addresses. This information was used to purchase $20 e-gift cards to be sent to the individual's email address. After completion of the contact information survey, participants were thanked for their time and contribution to the study.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was composed of four steps. First, data were exported from the Qualtrics survey management platform and prepared for analysis. Second, quantitative analysis was conducted on numerical and categorical data to address the planned contrasts, quantitative aspects of research aims, and demographic data. Third, the qualitative data were analyzed to address the qualitative aspects of the research aims. Fourth, the two types of data were integrated by combining the quantitative and qualitative sets of results at the interpretation and reporting level (Fetters et al., 2013). These analytic steps are outlined below for each of the three aims: Aim 1) Establish

terminology for how professionals in the field of early childhood are referring to non-contact time, Aim 2) Describe the amount of non-contact time teachers receive and how they use their time, and Aim 3) Identify the factors that influence directors' allotment of non-contact time.

### *Data Preparation*

I exported the survey data from Qualtrics into an Excel document to prepare the quantitative data and qualitative data for analysis. The fixed choice options for closed-ended questions were checked to affirm the numerical value assigned to each option was accurate. The quantitative and qualitative data were then separated into two different Excel spreadsheets. Each of these quantitative and qualitative documents was imported into an applicable data analysis program, SPSS (IBM SPSS 7, 2020) and MAXQDA Plus (VERBI Software, 2019) respectively.

Quantitative data were further prepared in SPSS by specifying key aspects of each variable to make the output clear. Type of variable was set to "numerical" where appropriate and value labels were assigned to categories that corresponded to the multiple-choice response options. Missing values were present only for questions that did not appear to the participant based on their role at their center. For example, directors did not answer questions specific to teachers and thus would appear as missing data. To ensure this did not interfere with analysis related to role, the select cases feature was used when working with each subgroup of the sample.

Qualitative data preparation included determining the unit of analysis. Each written response to an open-ended question of the survey by a participant was a description of their thoughts and experiences with the phenomenon of non-contact time

and therefore considered a separate unit of analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Length of the unit of the analysis in the data varied by participant's response to the posed question. Sometimes units were short phrases, a list of activities, or single sentence responses depending on the question presented. For example, a participant's response to the question asking them to list their non-contact time activities would be one unit of analysis (e.g., "Lesson planning, assessments, maintaining child portfolios, parent communication, and prep for parent-teacher conferences"). Other units of analysis were short paragraph explanations provided by participants that gave a response and explanation for their response.

### *Quantitative Analysis*

Aims 2 and 3 required quantitative analyses and included multiple steps depending on the aim. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic information of participants (see Table 1). Next, the planned contrasts mentioned in the literature review were analyzed beginning by identifying the variables needed for analysis. The appropriate inferential statistical analysis was selected based on variable and implemented for each planned contrast. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate patterns of differences between types of programs and participant roles. Pearson's correlation analysis ($r$) was used to identify relationships between amounts of non-contact time allotted and received. Output was interpreted and written in text format and will be shared in the Results section (Chapter 4). To address Aim 2, I again used descriptive statistics to analyze the fixed-choice options to understand the activities that teachers most identified as working on during their non-contact time. These quantitative results were connected to qualitative results during integration. Fixed-choice questions

identifying factors that directors considered when allotting non-contact time addressing Aim 3 were analyzed using descriptive statistics. I was specifically interested in the proportion of directors who selected each fixed-choice response to better understand the factors that influence director's non-contact time allotment.

### *Qualitative Analysis*

Content and thematic analysis was used to analyze the open-ended survey questions. I served as first coder and an undergraduate student with experience in survey research served as the second coder of the qualitative data. Both coders familiarized themselves with the data for each of the three research aims by reading the survey responses actively and critically for meaning while making notes and highlighting items of interest (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Content analysis was used for Aim 1 as a means of systematizing and quantifying data (Fraenkel et al., 2019). For Aims 2 and 3, coders' notes and memos served as a basis for initial generation of codes to identify a label relevant for addressing the research aim and conducted at the semantic level for meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This approach to coding was inductive (Saldaña & Omasta, 2021) because it began with an open-ended exploration of an issue to "learn as you go" (p.7). After discussing the initial codes, we created a code book outlining each code, its definition, and an example from the data. After codes were determined to be concise, coders double coded approximately 20% of the codes simultaneously to assess application to data, then coders independently coded all of the remaining data separately. After independent coding, coders reconvened and compared codes for all items. We achieved Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestion of a minimum 80% intercoder

agreement with our range of agreement being 81-97%, with a mean agreement calculated at 91.8%.

The purpose for the qualitative analysis to address Aim 1 was to identify the phrase or term that professionals in the field used most frequently to describe or discuss their non-contact time. Using an inductive approach, 13 codes were established, and each survey response was grouped into the corresponding, appropriate code. These codes are presented in the results section and quantified for comparison between directors and teachers.

Analysis of survey responses addressing Aim 2 about teachers' use of non-contact time resulted in 20 codes. Survey responses that address Aim 3 inquiring about factors directors consider resulted in four main codes with 23 sub-codes. Together both coders discussed the codes and merged them into themes that captured the significance of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Ultimately, themes were considered in relation to the entire data set to maintain the context and check for quality of theme. We finalized and defined the themes to describe the uniqueness and essence of each while ensuring to directly address the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

### *Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data*

Meaningful integration or bringing together of quantitative and qualitative data is an important aspect of mixed methods research and provides a better understanding of the topic (Plano Clark & Ivanokva, 2016; Tashakkori et al., 2021). In the design phase of this study, the integration of the qualitative and quantitative data was deliberately planned to occur during the interpretation and reporting level (Fetters et al., 2013). The quantitative data from this study was interpreted in the context of the qualitative results through

narrative descriptions, comparisons of data across participant role, and joint displays presented in Chapter 5.

# CHAPTER 4:

# RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the results of data analysis and integration in four main sections. One common rationale for using mixed methods in research is to gain a deeper understanding of the topic than can be gained with one approach alone. In this study, I was able to use mixed methods as a way to simultaneously address the exploratory and explanatory aspects of non-contact time. This study was able to generate information related to the amounts of non-contact allotted and received among early childhood teachers at NAEYC accredited programs. These results are situated within the qualitative data which supply the context of teachers' and directors' non-contact time experiences. The first three sections address each research aim and its corresponding objectives and planned contrasts. Each section includes a statement of the aim, analytical strategy used, pertinent variables and data, and a description and integration of the qualitative and quantitative results.

## Aim 1

The purpose of Aim 1 was to establish terminology for how directors and teachers refer to non-contact time. I collected qualitative data from all directors ($n$ = 104) and teachers ($n$ = 106) using an open comment question. Participants were provided the non-contact time definition established for this research (i.e., The time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children. The purpose of non-contact time is to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. Non-contact time does not include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use.) and asked to provide the

term or phrase used at their program to describe this time of day. It is important to note that the use of the term non-contact time in the survey may have influenced participant responses. Some directors ($n$ = 18) and teachers ($n$ = 10) provided more than one term or phrase (e.g., “teacher preparation time or non-instruction time”, “planning time and/or release time”, or “planning time or meeting time depending on what’s happening”). In these cases, each term or phrase was coded separately allowing multiple responses per participant. A number of participants ($n$ = 23) responded to the question with the amount of non-contact time they received or listed their non-contact time activities. These responses were deemed not applicable to the question and removed from the analysis. Overall, 217 terms or phrases were identified for coding. Qualitative content analysis was used because it systematically investigates responses by topic to examine aspects such as frequency and type (Saldana & Omasta, 2021). Initial codes were grouped into categories and assigned labels. As shown in Table 4, nine categories were created and describe the responses provided by directors and teachers. Percentages indicate the proportion of directors or teachers that provided a term or phrase in that category, as a result the sum of percentages exceeds 100 because participants could provide more than one term or phrase.

**Table 4**

*Summary of Terms and Phrases Referring to Non-Contact Time*

| Category | Definition | Participant Responses | Director | | Teacher | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Planning | A reference to planning is included in the response. | "Planning time"<br>"Teacher plan time"<br>"Curriculum planning time" | 64 | 61.5 | 53 | 50.0 |
| Preparation | Preparation or a variation of is part of the response. | "Prepping time"<br>"Teacher prep time"<br>"Preparation time" | 15 | 14.4 | 10 | 9.4 |
| Time of Day & Location | Response includes a reference to the time or place non-contact time occurs. | "Nap time"<br>"Release time"<br>"Office hours"<br>"Out of class time" | 10 | 9.6 | 9 | 8.5 |
| Work Time | Response contains a general reference to work. | "Teacher work time"<br>"Work time"<br>"Independent work time" | 8 | 7.7 | 10 | 9.4 |
| Meetings | Response includes meetings or collaborations. | "Team meetings"<br>"Teacher meetings"<br>"Weekly meetings" | 7 | 6.7 | 6 | 5.7 |
| Absence of term/time | Participant indicates a lack of term or a lack of time. | "We don't have a term"<br>"We don't get plan time"<br>"We have contact with children all day" | 0 | 0.0 | 8 | 7.6 |
| Other | Response lacks context to fully understand meaning or is uniquely labeled. | "Reconstruction"<br>"DTM"<br>"Non-instruction time" | 4 | 3.8 | 3 | 2.8 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Break | Response refers to a break, rest, or relaxation. | "Break time" "Time for relaxing" | 2 | 1.9 | 4 | 3.8 |
| Computer | Response indicates access to a computer. | "Computer schedule" "Computer time" | 1 | 1.0 | 3 | 2.8 |

*Note.* Percentage reflects proportion of directors or teachers that provided a term or phrase in that category.

The top two categories for both directors and teachers were Planning and Preparation. The most frequent term or phrase used to describe non-contact time included "planning." Responses in the Planning category mentioned planning as the central focus (e.g., "planning time", "lesson planning", and "plan time"). The Planning category contained the most responses for both directors and teachers. Preparation was the category that received the second most responses and included terms and phrases that identified preparation as a way to label non-contact time (e.g., "prep time", "preparation time", and "classroom preparation"). The category with the third most frequent number of responses for directors was labeled Time of Day and Location because it encompassed responses that referred to when and where non-contact time occurred. Specifically, responses that included locations in the building (e.g., "office time", "off-floor", and "out of class time") were grouped with responses that referred to times of the day (e.g., "nap time", "end of day", and "before and after school") signifying that for some directors non-contact time occurred at a specific time or place. Teachers also had a high number of responses in this category, but the category with the third most frequent number of responses for teachers was labeled Work Time. Work Time was the category for responses that were labeled with nebulous references to work such as "Teacher

Independent work time" and "Work time/work day". Directors had similar but fewer responses that were organized into the Work Time category.

A small but notable difference between directors and teachers was that all directors reported a term or phrase for non-contact time, whereas not all teachers did, as illustrated in the frequency of responses of the category labeled Absence of Term/Time. Eight teachers indicated that they either had no term to talk about non-contact time or that they did not receive non-contact time at their program (e.g., "we don't get plan time", "we have contact with children all day", and "there isn't a term"). Thus, there was one small discrepancy between directors and teachers.

In sum, the most frequent term or phrase directors and teachers reported using to refer to non-contact time was planning time. The term was widely reported among both directors and teachers illustrating the mainstream acceptance and use of this term among professionals in different roles. The use of the term planning also potentially indicates how this time of day is being used among professionals in the field. Results suggest that planning was a primary activity that was expected to occur during teachers' non-contact time. A greater exploration of how teachers used their non-contact time is addressed in Aim 2.

**Aim 2**

The overall purpose of Aim 2 was to identify amounts of non-contact time and to describe how teachers use this time. Aim 2 had several objectives (see Table 2) and thus required quantitative and qualitative data collected from both directors and teachers. Following mixed methods procedures, results of qualitative and quantitative data from directors and teachers were integrated or combined (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). This

integration includes comparison of responses by role and provides context for the interpretation of results in Chapter 5. Results of Aim 2 data analysis are presented in the following sections addressing amounts of non-contact time and use of non-contact time.

### *Amount of Non-Contact Time*

Quantitative data on non-contact amounts were collected from both directors and teachers. To distinguish between the allotment of non-contact time and received non-contact time, the terms "intended*"* and "actual" are used. Intended amounts of non-contact time refer to the amounts of time allocated, allotted, or scheduled. Directors and teachers both reported intended amounts of non-contact time. Actual amounts of non-contact time refer to the amounts that the teacher had or received. Teachers were the only participants to report on actual non-contact time because although directors can report on the intended amount of non-contact time allotted to a teacher, for practical reasons (i.e. directors oversee multiple classrooms and staff) it is unlikely that directors would have a complete understanding of the actual amount of non-contact time teachers receive. I asked three questions to participants to gather data on specific quantities of non-contact time. First, directors were asked to report the intended amount of non-contact time they allotted to teachers. Second, teachers were asked to report the intended amount of non-contact time they were allotted by their directors. Third, teachers were asked to report the actual amount of non-contact time they received. Directors and teachers in this study are not paired and thus there is no known connection between individual participants. All participants were asked to respond in minutes and results are reported below by program type, years of teaching experience, and classroom composition.

I used descriptive statistics to summarize director and teacher's responses related to the intended amounts of non-contact time and actual amount of non-contact time received (See Table 5). Directors intended an average of about 2.5 hr of non-contact time each week (*M* = 148.71 min, *SD* = 128.96, *Range* = 30-720). Notably, the range of responses was immense.

Teachers reported being scheduled for a higher amount of intended non-contact time as compared to directors' reports at over 4 hr per week (*M* = 246.68 min, *SD* = 171.51, *Range* = 0-900). Directors and teachers reported amounts of intended non-contact time were significantly different, $F(1,209) = 21.83$, $p < .001$.

The mean amount of intended non-contact time teachers reported being allotted was 37 min more than the actual amount teachers reported receiving (*M* = 209.5 min, *SD* = 153.3, Range = 0-900). I used a within group analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare the mean differences and results show that there was a statistically significant difference between the intended amount of time teachers reported being allotted and what the actual amount they received, $F(1,105) = 22.85$, $p < .001$.

**Table 5**

*Minutes of Non-Contact Time per Week*

| | *M* | *SD* | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| Intended Time | | | |
| Directors | 148.71 | 128.96 | 30-720 |
| Teachers | 246.6 | 171.50 | 0-900 |
| Actual Time | | | |
| Teachers | 209.54 | 153.27 | 0-900 |

**Program Type.** I collected program type data using a multiple-choice format question in which participants were able to select just one choice. The range of intended non-contact time directors reported allotting to teachers varied greatly within each of the program types. A one-way ANOVA found no significant difference between program types and the mean amount of intended non-contact time directors reported allotting, $F(5, 98) = 1.094$, $p = .369$.

Similar analyses were conducted to explore the amount of intended non-contact time teachers reported being allotted and program type. A significant difference was found between programs in the amount of intended non-contact time teachers reported being allotted by program type, $F(6,99) = 3.628$, $p = .003$ (See Table 6). Pairwise comparisons using LSD (with a minimum mean difference of 140.15) revealed that teachers at public school programs reported being allotted significantly more intended non-contact time than teachers at all other program types, except for Head Start programs where there was no statistical difference in the intended amounts of non-contact time allotted to teachers at public schools and Head Start.

Finally, analyses of the amount of actual non-contact time that teachers report they received and program type revealed that the mean amount of actual non-contact time teachers received was significantly different between program types, $F$ (6,99) = 2.886, $p = .012$. Pairwise comparisons using LSD (with a minimum mean difference of 127.62) revealed that teachers at Head Start, public school programs, and programs affiliated with the military reported receiving significantly more non-contact time than teachers at for-profit programs. Teachers at public school programs reported receiving more non-contact time than teachers at independent, non-profit programs and other programs (See Table 6).

**Table 6**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way ANOVA of Non-Contact Time and Program Type*

| | Head Start | | Public School | | Independent, Non-Profit | | Religious Affiliation | | Military Affiliation | | For Profit | | Other | | *F(6,99)* | $\eta^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | | |
| Director Allotted | 162.8 | 142.7 | 253.8 | 135.6 | 153.0 | 130.4 | 138.0 | 34.2 | - | - | 100.8 | 62.5 | 152.7 | 175.9 | 1.09 | .053 |
| Teacher Schedule | 287.8 | 178.9 | 395.7 | 235.8 | 189.9 | 141.0 | 234.0 | 106.5 | 200.0 | 196.1 | 103.4 | 22.6 | 223.1 | 115.9 | 3.63** | .180 |
| Teacher Received | 254.8 | 161.7 | 306.8 | 212.6 | 152.6 | 96.4 | 195.9 | 144.3 | 229.1 | 213.7 | 89.0 | 38.1 | 179.2 | 93.7 | 2.89* | .149 |

*Note.* *p < .05 **p < .01

**Years of Early Childhood Teaching Experience.** I analyzed the categorical data of teachers' status as a novice or expert teacher for potential patterns in the amount of actual non-contact time teachers received. A significant difference was found between the actual amount of non-contact time expert teachers reported receiving and the actual amount novice teachers reported receiving, $F(1,105) = 4.323$, $p = .040$. Novice teachers reported only receiving a mean of 131.4 min of actual non-contact time ($SD = 100.8$) each week whereas expert teachers reported receiving a mean of 221.4 min of actual non-contact time ($SD = 156.8$) each week (See Table 7). No significant differences were found between novice and expert teachers and intended amounts of non-contact time.

**Table 7**

*Mean, Standard Deviation, and One-Way ANOVA of Non-Contact Time and Status*

| | Novice | | Expert | | *F(6,99)* | $\eta^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | | |
| Director Intended | 190.0 | 138.0 | 146.2 | 128.7 | .650 | .006 |
| Teacher Intended | 169.6 | 115.1 | 258.4 | 176.0 | 3.327 | .031 |
| Teacher Actual | 131.4 | 100.8 | 221.4 | 156.8 | 4.323* | .040 |

*Note.* *p < .05

**Classroom Composition.** I investigated two different aspects of classroom composition and how they related to the amount of non-contact time teachers received: the number of children enrolled in a classroom and the presence of children with an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) in the classroom.

First, to examine how enrollment may influence how much actual non-contact time teachers received, I asked directors and teachers how many children were enrolled in

their classrooms. Directors reported the number of children enrolled in infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms separately. The mean of these variables was calculated to create a new variable representing the average number of children assigned to a classroom. Directors reported enrolling mean of 14.69 children (*SD* = 4.6) per classroom. Results show there was not a significant relationship between the number of children directors enrolled in a classroom and how much non-contact time directors intended for teachers, $r(102) = .564$, $p = -.061$ Teachers reported the number of children in their classroom resulting in a mean of 14.54 children (*SD* = 5.36) per classroom. Results show there was not a significant relationship between the number of children that teachers reported being enrolled in their classroom and how much intended non-contact time they were allotted, $r(104) = .179$, $p = .071$. Further, there was not a significant relationship between the number of children teachers reported being enrolled in their classroom and the actual non-contact time teachers reported receiving, $r(104) = .133$, $p = .181$.

Second, I collected data from teachers on the presence or absence of children with an IFSP in their classroom. Thirty percent of teachers ($n = 32$) reported having at least one child with an IFSP in their classroom. These teachers received a mean of 239.5 min (*SD* = 140.9) of actual non-contact time per week, whereas teachers without a child with an IFSP received a mean of 196.6 min (*SD* = 157.5) of actual non-contact time each week. This difference was not statistically significant, $F(1,104) = 1.771$, $p = 1.86$, indicating teachers with a classroom serving a child with an IFSP received a similar amount of non-contact time as their colleagues without a child with an IFSP in their classroom.

In conclusion, teachers reported receiving significantly less actual non-contact time than they were intended. Teachers employed at public school programs reported receiving the most actual non-contact time at over 5 hr per week, or about an hour a day. Conversely, teachers employed at for-profit programs, such as national chains, received the lowest mean amount of actual non-contact time at 1.5 hr per week illustrating the wide variance in how non-contact time is scheduled and received as reported by teachers at NAEYC accredited programs. However, quantity is not the only aspect of non-contact time, Aim 2 also sought to understand how teachers use their non-contact time.

### *Teachers Use of Non-Contact Time*

Aim 2 addresses use of non-contact time to identify activities teachers engaged in during their non-contact time and what teachers do in the event that they lack sufficient non-contact time. Qualitative data was collected from directors asking them to list their expectations for non-contact time use and from teachers asking them to list the activities they complete during non-contact time use. A follow-up fixed choice question was presented to both directors and teachers with literature-driven activities as options to similarly investigate directors' expectations and teachers' use of non-contact time. Directors and teachers were asked to select all options that applied, this resulted in numerical data that has been converted to percentages to show the proportion of participants who selected each option. The qualitative data was list-like in nature with a single response including several codable activities. Chapter 3 described the thematic analysis of this qualitative data gathered through open-ended question. Codes were assigned to each of the listed activities provided in the 106 teacher responses, resulting in a total of 582 coded segments with a mean of 4 activities provided per teacher response

(*SD* = 2.355, *Range* = 1-12). Most teachers (83.1%) listed fewer than six activities. All 104 directors provided responses, resulting in a total of 637 coded segments with a mean of 4 activities per response as well (*SD* = 1.785, *Range* = 1-8). Most directors (64.4%) listed between 3-5 activities. These segments were coded using 21 codes that emerged from the data and were later reduced and combined with other codes. The result was eight main themes and definitions that describe the ways that teachers used and directors expected teachers to use non-contact time. The quantitative fixed choice options were organized into the qualitative themes using the definitions as a guide. (see Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Use of Non-Contact Time Fixed-Choice Results Organized by Theme*

| Qualitative | | Quantitative |
|---|---|---|
| Themes | Definitions | Fixed-Choice Options |
| Teaching and Curriculum | Activities related to and including planning and preparing the environment and curriculum for a range of learners through a variety of instructional approaches. | • Plan and prepare lesson plans and activities<br>• Gather materials for activities and classroom areas |
| Child Progress | Activities related to informal and formal documentation and assessment of children's learning and development. | • Child Assessment |
| Family Relationships | Tasks that establish and maintain relationships with a child's family. | • Communicate with families<br>• Work related social media |
| Program Management | Activities that maintain required paperwork for licensing, accreditation, food programs, child files, and other program policies. | |
| Shared Communication | Activities related to in-person or online communication with any job-related individual. | • Check work email |
| Healthy Environment | Tasks related to maintaining a clean and safe physical environment for adults and children. | • General cleaning tasks such as dishes, laundry, or sanitizing |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Staff Support and Preparation | Any activities that support staff in their work including supervision, collaboration, and professional development. | • Meet with other teachers and early childhood professionals |
| Well-Being | Activities that support personal care and well-being. | • Take a break<br>• Get a coffee or drink<br>• Set up personal appointments<br>• Check personal email<br>• Personal social media<br>• Meditate<br>• Take a walk or exercise |

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative data can highlight similarities and confirm findings but also detect differences in the data. Table 9 juxtaposes the results of the quantitative results from the fixed-choice question and qualitative results from the open-ended question. Findings are described below.

**Table 9**

*Integrated Matrix of Use of Non-Contact Time Results*

| Quantitative Results | | | | Qualitative Results | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Directors | | Teachers | | Theme | Sample/Exemplar Participant Responses | Directors | | Teachers | |
| *n* | % | *n* | % | | | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| 103 | 99 | 102 | 96 | Teaching and Curriculum | "Planning activities for individual goals to implement with children"<br>"Creating social stories and picture schedules"<br>"Plan for future lesson plans, activities, and circle times"<br>"Search for relevant, age-appropriate literature" | 101 | 97 | 85 | 80 |
| 94 | 90 | 85 | 80 | Child Progress | "Child checkpoints and assessments"<br>"Assess data of student performance for small group instruction"<br>"Analyzing assessment documentation" | 67 | 64 | 52 | 49 |
| 84 | 81 | 79 | 74 | Family Relationships | "Weekly emails to parents with description of next weeks agenda"<br>"Setting up visits and calling parents for new children"<br>"Write weekly emails and send families electronic | 58 | 56 | 49 | 46 |
| | | | | Program Management | "End of month reporting (injury, classroom, building checks)"<br>"Making monthly meal count forms"<br>"Program/district/grant/licensing paperwork or tasks"<br>"Purchasing items we may need for the classroom" | 34 | 33 | 37 | 35 |

| Quantitative Results | | | | Qualitative Results | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Directors | | Teachers | | Theme | Sample/Exemplar Participant Responses | Directors | | Teachers | |
| *n* | % | *n* | % | | | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| 73 | 70 | 82 | 77 | Shared Communication | "Check and respond to emails"<br>"Communication with specialists"<br>"Make phone calls"<br>"Zoom" | 24 | 23 | 32 | 30 |
| 48 | 46 | 62 | 59 | Healthy Environment | "Cleaning/sanitizing classroom materials"<br>"Laundry"<br>"Putting away dishes"<br>"Vacuum" | 20 | 19 | 29 | 27 |
| 72 | 69 | 65 | 61 | Staff Support and Preparation | "Talk as a team, problem solve classroom issues"<br>"Group decision making"<br>"Completing required trainings or reading center policies (new or updated)"<br>"Professional development (1% of annual hours)"<br>"Monthly trainings as applicable" | 29 | 28 | 26 | 25 |
| 44 | 42 | 82 | 77 | Well-Being | "Use the restroom"<br>"Catch my breath"<br>"Eating lunch"<br>"I don't stray from work very often. There have been times when I have checked my pay stubs during my non-contact times" | 1 | 1 | 8 | 7 |

*Note*. Percentage reflects proportion of participants that listed at least one activity in that theme.

Most qualitative and quantitative responses by teachers and directors were identified as belonging to the theme related to Teaching and Curriculum. Teachers largely reported using their non-contact time for planning lessons, preparing their classroom environment, gathering materials for activities, and addressing the unique needs of individual students. For example, sample responses related to planning that are representative of the data include “lesson planning”, “writing weekly lesson plans”, “modifying/adapting activities and materials for children with special needs”, and “curriculum planning for whole group and individuals”. Directors and teachers frequently mentioned writing or creating lessons, preparing a variety of lesson formats, and searching for age-appropriate materials and literature. They also identified researching learning activities to pursue project-based curriculum. Further, they reported using non-contact time for selecting materials and designing the environment in responses such as “gather supplies”, “collect materials”, “toy rotation”, “switching out materials”, and “hanging artwork”. Such responses suggest a priority of working on lesson plans, preparing for activities, and organizing the learning environment during non-contact time. The content of responses related to planning and the frequency at which it occurred compared with other activities, reinforces the findings from Aim 1 in which directors and teachers referred to this time of day most frequently as “planning time.”

The theme showing the second highest frequency for both qualitative and quantitative data for directors and teachers was labeled Child Progress because it captured responses related to observing, documenting, and assessing children’s learning and development. Directors and teachers reported non-contact time should be used for completing observation-based assessments such as the Child Observation Record (COR)

(HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2013) and screeners such as the Ages & Stages Questionnaires-3 (ASQ-3) (Squires & Bricker, 2009). Some responses reflected the mandatory nature of assessment, for example, “required assessments for funders.” Documentation of progress was not limited to individual children, however. Directors and teachers also reported “individual and classroom portfolios”, “creation of classroom documentation”, “documentation of curriculum”, and “Reggio-Emilia inspired documentation”. These forms of documentation share the learning occurring in the classroom. The frequency at which teachers mentioned they complete these activities varied with some responses indicating these tasks occurred daily (e.g., “daily documentation for each child on their daily sheets”, “entering daily documentation”) and others monthly (e.g., “completed my November documentation board”, “monthly picture documentation”). Assessment and documentation in early childhood often includes tasks related to photography as a way of showing evidence of learning. Qualitative responses included references to this aspect as shown by these sample responses, “uploading/downloading pictures”, “photo editing”, and “creating each child’s portfolio with photos and narrative”. Observing, assessing, and documenting children’s learning is an ongoing task that can partially be done in the presence of children (taking the photographs) but it also requires non-contact time for technological aspects such as uploading images and entering narrative data into computer systems as illustrated by responses in this category.

The theme with the third highest frequency identified by directors’ quantitative data and directors’ and teachers’ qualitative data included tasks focused on supporting relationships with families. Responses presented a variety of activities related to

establishing and maintaining communication and relationships with families. In-person activities that were mentioned included conducting parent conferences, home visits, and meetings. Other activities that supported communication occurred with the help of technology via email, zoom, phone, and classroom app. These types of communication occurred daily in some cases. For example, four responses included, “On my daily 30 minutes I’m usually making parent contacts”, “I’m communicating with parents through an app, this is done daily”, “creating daily communication reports for parents”, and “daily posts to parents.” Additionally, directors and teachers identified creating weekly or monthly newsletters as an activity during non-contact time as well (e.g., “write a monthly newsletter article for families”, “uploaded pictures for our monthly newsletter”, and “creating newsletters”). Directors and teachers mentioned communication as ongoing and as-needed (e.g., “contact parents as needed”, “respond to family emails or email families directly for ongoing communications”). These results suggest that a portion of non-contact time is dedicated to planned communication with families on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, and also available for families on an as-needed basis

It is worth noting that the category with the least frequent qualitative responses, Well-Being, was more frequently selected when the question was presented in a fixed-choice format versus open-ended. Quantitative data reveal that directors expect and teachers engage in Well-Being activities during non-contact time, however, the qualitative data differed in terms of frequency. Qualitative responses related to well-being were rare and included, “taking care of personal medical needs (Type I Diabetic)”, “take a walk for my mental health”, “I try to eat a meal”, and “catch my breath”. Only three responses in the qualitative data included non-work-related personal tasks. These

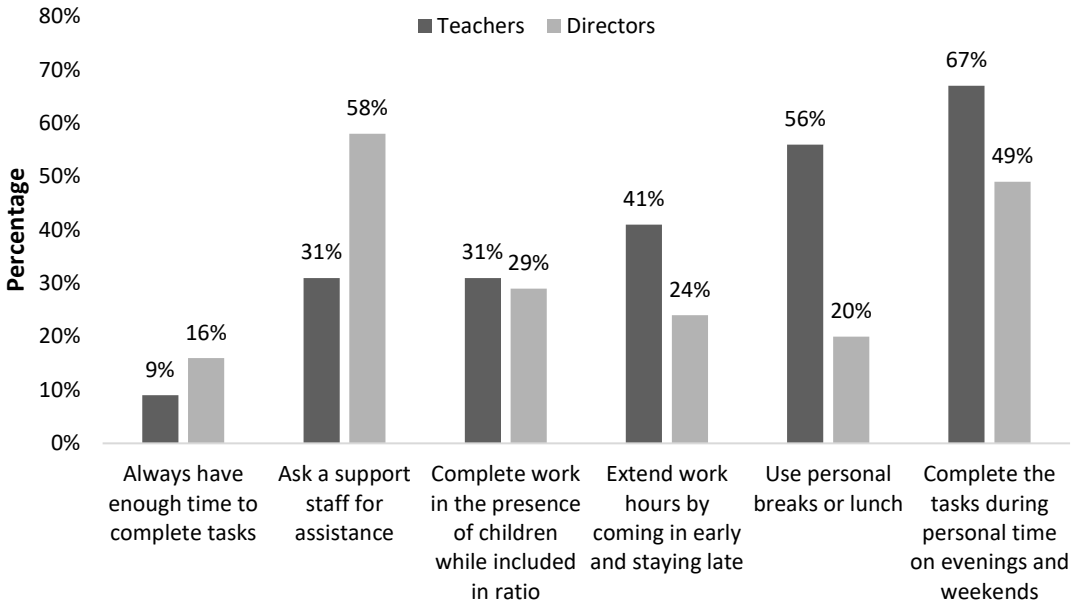
responses were: “I don’t stray away from work very often. There have been times when I have checked my pay stubs during my non-contact times”, “make doctor appointments”, and “sometimes it is my only time that I can make personal calls and will try to squeeze those in if I can”.

In summary, directors expected and teachers used non-contact time for planning lessons and preparing materials for the classroom environment and learning. It is not hard to imagine that if teachers lacked sufficient non-contact time, it could be detrimental to the learning environment and quality of instruction. To fully understand how teachers complete their work tasks, I asked teachers what they do if they are not able to complete their work-related tasks during their non-contact time.

**Strategies for Coping with a Sufficient Lack of Non-Contact Time.** I asked teachers the multiple-choice format question, “What do you do in the event that you are unable to complete your work tasks during your non-contact time?” Teachers were directed to select all answers that applied to them. Similarly, directors were asked to share their perceptions of what teachers might do if they did not complete their work tasks during non-contact time, again with the option of selecting all applicable responses. Figure 2 shows the proportions of teachers’ and directors’ responses for each possible multiple-choice response.

**Figure 3**

*Alternative Strategies for Completing Work Tasks*




Results indicated that more than 90% of teachers reported experiencing a lack of non-contact time to complete their tasks. More than two-thirds of teachers reported that they completed work tasks during personal time on the evenings and weekends. Over 40% of teachers extended their work hours by coming in early and staying late while more than half of teachers responded that they coped with insufficient non-contact time by using their personal breaks and lunch to complete their work. Similarly, more than 80% of directors acknowledged that teachers did not always have enough time to complete their work tasks. However, a distinction exists in how directors perceived teachers were dealing with a lack of non-contact time. Directors largely reported that they thought teachers would seek assistance with unfinished work from support staff, whereas teachers reported using personal time over support staff. Still, almost half of directors conceded that teachers completed tasks during their personal time at home and on

weekends. This is problematic because directors are responsible for program management and allotting non-contact time to teachers. These findings suggest that directors recognized that teachers rarely had enough time to complete their tasks and that teachers were managing their work responsibilities by sacrificing their personal time. This finding supports the examination of factors that influence directors' allotment of non-contact time. It is important to understand why directors are allotting amounts of non-contact time that even they tend to perceive as inadequate for teachers to complete their tasks.

## Aim 3

The purpose of Aim 3 was to identify the factors that directors considered when allotting non-contact time. Qualitative data and quantitative data were collected to address this aim using open-ended, numerical response, and Likert scale questions. I collected information on directors' years of EC teaching experience, non-contact time allotment, number of teachers assigned per class, and teachers reported scheduled non-contact time. Results of the qualitative and quantitative data analysis and integration are presented below in two sections.

### *Factors Directors Consider*

To identify the factors that directors consider when allotting non-contact time to teachers in their program, I gathered both qualitative and quantitative data. First, I asked an open-ended question asking directors to list the factors they considered when determining how much non-contact time to allot to their teaching staff. The second question was a follow-up question that asked directors to rate the importance of five

factors on their non-contact time decisions using a Likert scale (0 = *Not Important at All* to 5 = *Extremely Important*).

Directors' responses to the open-ended question contained lists of factors they considered when allotting non-contact time. Each factor received its own code (see Chapter 3 for further detail of qualitative analysis) for a total of 250 coded responses from 104 directors. Initially, 25 codes emerged based on readings of the responses, these codes were categorized into three main themes, Child, Teacher, and Program that describe the source of the factor. Table 10 displays the definition of each theme, example responses, and the number of directors who listed at least one factor categorized into that theme. Total percentages on Table 10 exceed 100 because it reflects the number of directors who identified at least one factor related to that theme. For example, of the 104 directors surveyed 26 directors (25%) mentioned a factor related to children as influential when allotting non-contact time. Child-related factors included specific needs of children in the classroom, number of children in the classroom, and considerations of child age. Nearly twice as many directors mentioned teacher related factors were considered when allotting non-contact time. Teacher related factors included a teachers' workload and expectations, burn-out, years of experience, director perceived likelihood of burnout, and teacher request or preference. A small number of directors ($n$ = 5) identified that they individualized non-contact times per teacher (e.g., "It is based on individual need. All staff do not work at the same pace. More time is allotted as necessary).

**Table 10**

*Factors Directors Consider When Allotting Non-Contact Time*

| Theme | Definition | Example Responses | Director | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *n* | % |
| Child | Factors related to individual children or the classroom. | "Developmental needs of children (if they have to create a more intense load of differentiation)"<br>"Continuity of care for the children"<br>"It depends on if a child needs the teacher."<br>"Depends on how many kids are in each classroom" | 26 | 25 |
| Teacher | Factors related to teacher responsibilities, expectations, preferences, or experiences. | "I consider if the teacher is meeting the workload requirements."<br>"Our goal is to ensure they have adequate time to complete necessary tasks"<br>"They know to ask us if they need additional time"<br>"Teacher burn out rate"<br>"It is based on individual need. All staff do not work at the same pace. More time is allotted as necessary."<br>"Is the planning time being used effectively by the teachers?"<br>"Tenure and experience of teacher" | 51 | 49 |
| Program | Administrative factors related to directors, program management, and meeting mandatory requirements. | "All staff need equal time."<br>"It depends on staffing for the day."<br>"Depends on the availability of a staff member to cover them."<br>"Depends on what our daily schedule looks like."<br>"We also consider the overall expense budget"<br>"We go based on ratios"<br>"State and NAEYC requirements for planning time"<br>"Contracts and labor hours"<br>"Our decisions are driven by our core values."<br>"State PD requirements " | 84 | 81 |

*Note.* Directors listed multiple factors related to more than one theme.

Most factors identified in the qualitative data were program-related and included issues of licensing, staffing, and scheduling. Directors cited requirements related to ratios and classroom coverage along with budget considerations as influential in their allotment of non-contact time. Two especially poignant responses are shared below because they are representative of responses frequently found in the data set. One director responded:

> "We have evaluated how much time we can offer staff based on the overall tasks staff need to accomplish and the number of additional staff we can afford to provide as subs. At one time we determined we could not provide more than 90 mins a week of prep time to any classroom because we rely on other rooms to be able to cover the number of teachers out of the room if a team of staff is leaving their room to plan."

In this response there was evidence that directors considered teacher workload and expectations. Further, this director provided an explanation that there are financial factors related to how many staff the director could afford and that staffing was an issue because teachers cover each other's classrooms during non-contact time, constraining the use of non-contact time. A second director described how she manages non-contact time and staffing shortages in this example, "We have a set formula. Kindergarten teachers get 60 minutes, all other teachers get 30 minutes. If we are short staffed, infant and toddler teachers are the first to give up planning time to cover breaks." In this case, a precedent is used for determining non-contact time, although it lacked a rationale for the stated formula. Staffing is mentioned as a factor and the director described a contingency plan for when the program lacks adequate staffing. Planning time is sacrificed for infant and toddler teachers so that they can cover the breaks of colleagues. This is notable because

state licensing and accreditation bodies often require that teachers get a break, but they rarely mandate that teachers receive non-contact time. Thus, programs dedicated to licensing and accreditation may be prioritizing breaks over non-contact time in an effort to comply with requirements.

The adherence to requirements that directors alluded to in their open-ended responses is further supported by quantitative findings from the Likert scale responses directors provided when they rated the importance of five factors on their non-contact time allotment (see Table 11).

**Table 11**

*Directors' Ratings of Factors Important to Non-Contact Time Allotment*

| Factor | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher to child ratio requirements | 4.46 | 1.15 |
| Schedules of support staff | 3.98 | 1.15 |
| Budget and finance | 3.07 | 1.58 |
| Teacher request | 3.60 | 1.21 |
| Guidelines from a professional organization or licensing agency | 3.61 | 1.21 |

*Note.* Indicators for rating scale 0 = *Not at all important* 5 = *Extremely Important*

Directors rated teacher-to-child ratio requirements as extremely important and support staff schedules as very important. This may be because ratios are closely related to staff schedules. Open-ended qualitative responses showed that directors talked about meeting ratio in terms of having enough staff to cover the classroom. Budget, although rated the lowest, was still moderately important and mentioned in the qualitative data in conjunction with coverage and staff schedule. Taken together, these results indicate that

ratio, staff schedule, and budget are intertwined and important for determining teacher's non-contact time. Additionally, directors reported in their fixed choice responses considering guidelines from professional organizations and state licensing agency as very important. Few organizations and states provide specifics on non-contact time amounts; however, this result reveals that direction from an outside source is a key factor in guiding directors' decisions.

To summarize, qualitative and quantitative results suggest that directors mainly considered program related factors such as ratio, staff schedules, budget, and licensing and accreditation requirements when allotting teachers non-contact time. These factors are often entangled as one regularly influences another. For example, maintaining proper ratio as outlined by licensing agencies requires enough staff to be scheduled to cover each other's non-contact time, which in turn requires the financial means to pay an adequate number of staff. A change in any one of these factors would likely create a domino effect that impacts the others. Directors also reported prioritizing mandatory requirements and looked for guidance from professional organizations in determining teachers' non-contact time, highlighting the need for clear policies on non-contact time from the field.

***Years of Early Childhood Teaching Experience.*** As previously mentioned in the literature review, director characteristics and classroom composition could play a role in influencing how much intended non-contact time directors allotted to teachers. To investigate these potential influences, I conducted correlational analyses examining the relationship of each of these variables with the amount of intended non-contact time director's reported allotting to teachers. Directors' teaching experience in early childhood was collected in the demographic portion of the survey and found to be a mean of 18

years (*SD* = 10.4). Results indicate that there was not a significant relationship between directors' years of early childhood teaching experience and their allotment of non-contact time to teachers, $r(102) = .023$, $p = .820$ in this study. In short, directors who spent more time in the classroom as an early childhood teacher allotted similar amounts of non-contact time as directors who had less experience as a classroom teacher.

***Classroom Composition.*** The composition of the classroom related to the number of teachers assigned to a classroom was investigated as well. Directors often manage the make-up of classrooms in terms of both children and teachers. I asked directors to provide the number of teachers they assigned to each classroom. Directors reported the number of teachers they assigned to infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms separately. The mean of these variables was calculated to create a new variable representing the average number of teachers assigned to a classroom. Findings reveal that directors assigned an average of 3.24 teachers (*SD* = 1.23) to a classroom. Correlational analysis showed that in this study there was not a significant relationship between the number of teachers that directors assigned to the classroom and the amount of non-contact time directors intended for teachers, $r(102) = 0.066$, $p = .503$.

To examine the relationship between the number of teachers assigned to a classroom and the actual amount of non-contact time received from the teacher's perspective, I asked teachers to provide the number of teachers assigned to their classroom, including themselves. The mean number of teachers assigned to a classroom as reported by teachers was 2.66 (*SD* = 1.33). Correlational analysis showed that there was not a significant relationship between the number of teachers in the classroom, as

reported by the teacher, and the amount of actual non-contact time teachers reported receiving, $r(104) = .080$, $p = .414$.

# CHAPTER 5:

# DISCUSSION

The current study examines three aspects of non-contact time from the perspectives of directors and teachers: terminology, amounts and usage, and factors that influence its allotment. Overall, there are four main results. First, directors and teachers in this study most commonly referred to this time as “planning time”. Further, non-contact time is used to cover a range of activities, such as instructional planning and preparation. Second, there are discrepancies in the amounts of non-contact time teachers reported being allotted that were significant across program types indicating that teachers at certain types of programs received less non-contact time than others. Third, novice teachers reported receiving less actual non-contact time than expert teachers despite having no differences in their intended amounts of non-contact time. Fourth, although amounts of non-contact time varied, it was acknowledged by both directors and teachers that teachers rarely had enough non-contact time to meet their professional expectations. To deal with this teachers reported using strategies that have the potential to compromise the quality of classroom instruction and accelerate burnout. These results are further discussed in the following four sections. The first three sections discuss each of the three research aims: establishing terminology, amounts of non-contact time, and factors influencing allotment of non-contact time. In each section I discuss the implications of this research and provide recommendations for policy and practice. The fourth section presents insights from integration and the value added from using a mixed methods approach. Last, I address study limitations and recommendations for future directions for research.

**Establishing Terminology**

The field of early childhood would benefit from a common term or phrase to serve as a foundation for determining teacher and director expectations. A common understanding about what non-contact time is coupled with a unified way to refer to it is beneficial because it can lead to more productive discussions and improved policies. This study provided participants a literature-driven definition of non-contact time and asked them to provide the term they use in their setting. The purpose was to identify the term or phrase early childhood directors and teachers use to refer to non-contact time. Results revealed both directors and teachers most often used the phrase "planning time" to refer to non-contact time. This finding indicates that the "collaborative planning time" phrase used by NAEYC (2018) aligns well with what directors and teachers reported using in practice. The benefit of a shared phrase between directors and teachers is a common language for discussing a work support that aids directors in program management and teachers in meeting their professional obligations. Currently, organizations and researchers in the field have referred to this time of day in a variety of ways (Beck, 2017; Branscomb & McBride, 2005; Ingvarson, 2005; King et al., 2016; Whitebook, 2018); however, the policies in place to support teachers should be clear and concise because of the implications they have for educational practice. One advantage to establishing "planning time" as the primary way to refer to this time of day is a unified way of connecting with colleagues across programs and other professionals and researchers in the field about this valuable work support. Additionally, "planning time" is a concrete way to discuss this time of day with non-teacher stakeholders, such as families and parents, whose children benefit from teachers having a designated time to thoughtfully

consider learning activities and prepare classroom materials. The phrase “planning time” is widely used in neighboring fields of education and is considered a key practice by the National Education Association (NEA) for addressing teacher workload issues (NEA, 2020).

Although this is the most common phrase used by directors and teachers in this study, there may be limitations to using planning time to describe this work support. The adoption of a broader phrase such as “non-contact time” may better describe teachers professional time away from children and encompass the many expectations and use of this time. Disadvantages may exist to establishing “planning time” as the commonly held way to refer to non-contact time within the field. The phrase “planning time” does not indicate the presence or absence of children nor does it allude to the many other tasks that teachers are responsible for completing during this time. As was presented in the results section, teachers engaged in an average of four activities during non-contact time and directors expected that teachers do more than just plan during this time. Thus, a broader phrase has the potential to better describe the variety of activities teachers report working on and be more inclusive of directors’ expectations. Referring to non-contact time as “planning time” could be misconstrued and narrow the intended application and use of non-contact time in practice as it only implies one purpose.

Over time, consistent use of an established term by the field could improve implementation. Research shows that policies addressing only structural elements may be less effective, thus moving forward it will be important to create not only policies at the national level, but strong cultures of professionalism and respect for teachers’ time within programs as well (Connors, 2016). This is crucial because important differences exist

between the literature-driven definition selected for this study and the definition emerging from the resulting data. The definition of non-contact time established for this study inherently describes this as time away from children. However, in the data teachers revealed that they at times complete their professional work tasks in the presence of children. The working definition of non-contact time used in this study has discreet nuances with the definition of non-contact time that appears to be occurring in practice. Indeed, some teachers reported they had fifteen hours of non-contact time each week, which may indicate that children's nap time is a primary resource for completing professional activities. Yet it is unknown if teachers are physically away from children during this time or if they are completing work in the presence of sleeping children. A clear definition of non-contact time that addresses and defines non-contact time should be established as a profession to address boundary issues related to the presence or absence of children. Further, it is important to emphasize the value of the pedagogical tasks and professional activities meant to occur during non-contact time. Tasks such as laundry and dishes, although vital to the day-to-day operations of a program, may be best reserved for other times of the day. Thus, professional work tasks should be thoughtfully considered and outlined. This research can contribute a foundation for discussion in the field about the intended purpose and parameters of non-contact time.

**Amounts of Non-Contact Time**

Results of this study revealed a general lack of consistency in the amounts of intended non-contact time allotted in NAEYC accredited programs. The average amount of intended non-contact time directors reported allotting to teachers varied greatly with some directors allotting as little as half an hour (30 min) per week and others as much as

12 hr (720 min) per week. This variation was even greater in teachers' responses with some teachers being allotted as much as 15 hr (900 min) per week while others reported none. This finding builds on previous research that shows inconsistencies in the amount of non-contact time early childhood teachers are allotted (Whitebook, 2018). The discrepancies in non-contact time as a work environment support have been addressed in K-12 systems of education, whose teachers are often represented by unions that advocate collectively on their behalf and who can rely on paid non-contact time (Whitebook, 2014). Yet efforts to create national standards with specific amounts of non-contact time (5 hrs each week being considered high quality level) are decades old and not widely implemented (Center for Child Care Workforce, 1998). This underscores the need for systemic change to address non-contact time to create a consistent professional environment that includes adequate amounts of non-contact time for all early childhood teachers.

Teachers deserve a supportive working environment that includes sufficient non-contact time, regardless of where they are employed. However, findings in this study showed differing amounts of intended and actual non-contact time based on the type of program where teachers were employed. Teachers who were employed at public school programs reported being allotted more intended non-contact time than teachers at all other program types. Teachers at public school programs reported actually receiving the most non-contact time at approximately 5 hr each week, or about 1 hr a day. This finding suggests that early childhood teachers employed in public school settings may benefit from a "trickle-down effect" (Wo et al., 2019) in which the non-contact time afforded to elementary teachers is extended to early childhood teachers housed in the same school.

K-12 education has addressed the issue of non-contact time for teachers through formal policies regarding work environments. Although non-contact hours vary by school, unions, and professional organizations, K-12 teachers have advocated for this support because it encourages teachers' well-being physically, economically, and emotionally through paid professional development time and paid planning time (Whitebook et al., 2018). Early childhood teachers are less likely to belong to a professional union or organization than their elementary and middle school counterparts (Hirsch & Macpherson, 2020), and such organizations are less representative of the interests of early childhood teaching staff in regards to their work environments. Early childhood teachers in this study who did not work at programs associated with a public school received fewer amounts of non-contact time.

Teachers employed at for-profit programs received the least amount of actual non-contact time. The type of curriculum adopted by a program may help to understand the allotment of non-contact time for teachers. For example, some preschool programs have established their own scripted curriculums which may reduce the amount of non-contact time teachers need for planning. Additionally, previous research has shown non-profit centers have lower staff-to-child ratios and turnover, and implement more positive caregiving, whereas for-profit chain status was associated with lower quality caregiving (Sosinsky et al., 2007). In this study, for-profit centers received the least amount of non-contact time as a work support which warrants more research to better understand the associations across programs and practices. King and colleagues (2016) found that teachers' work time supports, including non-contact time, did not significantly predict children's emotional expression and classroom behaviors but called for further

investigations into the relationship between non-contact time and variables such as teacher burnout or efficacy. Lack of a supportive work environment combined with high expectations creates a stressful environment (Goelman & Guo, 1998; Manlove, 1994) and early childhood teachers regularly experience insufficient work supports that contribute to stress and turnover (Whitebook et al., 2018). Turnover is already prevalent in early childhood with a study estimating as much as 32% of early childhood teachers in one state left the field in 12 months (Bassok et al., 2021). The high rate of turnover found in the field is already known to be detrimental to children's literacy, socioemotional, and language development (Markowitz, 2019) making it important for future research to address key factors in the relationship between work supports and teachers job satisfaction and the quality of classroom experiences.

Significant differences were found in the amounts of actual non-contact time teachers reported receiving and the teachers' status as a novice or expert teacher. This was particularly interesting because no differences were found between teacher status as a novice or expert and the amount of intended non-contact time teachers reported. This suggests that novice and expert teachers are intended to receive similar amounts of non-contact time but that the expert teachers actually received more non-contact time. Further research should be conducted to investigate more specifically how the role of tenure impacts staff coverage and shifting responsibilities of teachers; however, there are two possible explanations for this finding. First, the qualitative data in this study suggest that at times teachers report sacrificing their non-contact time to help cover each other's classrooms for breaks. It could be that novice teachers, due to a lack of tenure, are required to sacrifice their non-contact time before expert teachers, leading to unequal

access to non-contact time. A second explanation could be that novice teachers are still developing their time management skills whereas seasoned professionals are able to prioritize their work in a way that ensures them non-contact time. Current research supports the need for early career teachers to receive mentoring. Indeed, recent graduates often express a desire for support during their first year of teaching (Rodd, 2006). Early career early childhood teachers reported wanting the opportunity to connect with an experienced teacher in their first years (Brindley, Fleege, & Graves, 2000). Additional support in a variety of areas, including time management, may keep teachers from becoming overwhelmed (Noble & Macfarlane, 2005) and leaving the field.

Even with scheduled non-contact time, teachers face barriers to getting their actual non-contact time. In this study, teachers reported receiving significantly less actual non-contact time (37 minutes) than they were intended. In their open-responses teachers described several barriers, types of interruptions, or other tasks that prevented them from receiving their full planning time. These findings align with current research that found similar barriers to receiving non-contact time are commonplace in education (Collinson & Cook, 2001; Jena-Crottet, 2017; Kelley & Berthelsen, 1995). For example, teachers in other school settings, also reported that their time is at risk and they experience frequent interruptions by teachers, students, administration, and parents (Collinson & Cook, 2001). Overall, these findings imply that teachers are likely to experience interruptions that reduce their non-contact time. Efforts should be made within programs to respect non-contact time, reduce interruptions, and ensure teachers have access to reliable and consistent non-contact time.

**Non-Contact Time Use**

Findings from this study revealed that directors and teachers were similar in their reports about the intended use of non-contact time. The most common uses of non-contact time were tasks related to teaching and curriculum and the documentation and assessment of children's learning. This finding was the same for directors and teachers and confirmed by both the qualitative and quantitative data. Each of these activities are important professional obligations included in NAEYC accreditation standards (NAEYC, 2018) and contribute to a high-quality program. The alignment of findings with accreditation standards is notable and suggests that directors expected and teachers were using their non-contact time for professional purposes.

Program Management was identified as a theme that emerged from the qualitative data and encompasses activities such as completing, filing, and maintaining licensing and accreditation paperwork as well as required forms related to the program's meal plan. However, there were no fixed choice options presented from the quantitative data that could be mapped onto this theme. Program management tasks are often designated for the program director (NAEYC, 2018). This finding suggests that teachers play a role in program management including the completion of necessary forms for licensing, accreditation, and other organizational reports.

A small number of qualitative responses indicate that directors and teachers viewed non-contact time as an avenue to address tasks related to personal well-being such as eating meals, using the restroom, or taking care of medical needs. This is similar to other research in the field that shows teachers lack time to address their personal needs (Kelley & Berthelsen, 1995). The higher rate of occurrence of these responses in the

quantitative data suggest that teachers may have been more willing to select a fixed-choice option related to their well-being than to write it in an open-response question. It should be noted that teachers are required to have personal breaks throughout the day. However, this finding may indicate that personal breaks may not be enough time to address well-being and as a result such tasks spilled over into non-contact time.

Directors and teachers reported that teachers rarely have enough non-contact time to complete their professional tasks. This is not surprising given that environmental work supports are briefly addressed in the NAEYC accreditation standards (2018) compared to the expectations and responsibilities outlined for teachers. In the current study, only 9% of teachers and 16% of directors reported that teachers always have enough time to complete their tasks. This means a staggering 91% of teachers experienced a lack of non-contact time and nearly 85% of directors recognized this lack of time. This finding is consistent with previous research in which King and colleagues (2016) asked 98 early childhood teachers to respond to the survey question, “Do you get paid planning time?” Only 23% of teachers ($n$ = 23) in the study reported always having enough time and 30% percent ($n$ = 29) reported “Never” having paid planning time. Similarly, Tout and colleagues (2010) examined state QRIS and found that many emphasized purposeful planning that included observations and written notes, but unfortunately lacked any indication of when planning should occur. Critically, it is unclear how the quality of classroom instruction is impacted when over 90% of teachers feel they do not have sufficient time to complete professional activities that are primarily focused on teaching and curriculum. One way teachers reported addressing this shortage was by completing their work-related tasks in the presence of children while included in ratio requirements.

Quality interactions are at the heart of early childhood education (Hamre, 2014) and it is unclear how this strategy of simultaneously working on professional tasks, like planning, while in the presence of children impacts the quality of instruction and classroom experiences. Further, teachers reported coping with insufficient time in ways that encroached on their well-being and personal life. For example, 41% of teachers reported extending their workday beyond their scheduled hours by coming in early and staying late, a distressing amount for a profession that is already underpaid (Whitebook et al., 2018). Additionally, 56% of teachers reported using personal breaks and their own lunch time to address their work expectations and 67% admitted to bringing their work home to complete during the evenings and weekends. These strategies for managing workloads are likely unsustainable, research shows that when teacher's work infringes on their personal time, they experience symptoms of burnout (Jovanovic, 2013), which is problematic for a field already experiencing high turnover and teacher shortages (Whitebook et al., 2018).

Just as the field advocates for supportive and nurturing environments for young children, teachers should be provided with a supportive work environment, which are known predictors of retention (Podolsky et al., 2016). An important element of a supportive work environment is paid non-contact time (Build Initiative & Child Trends, 2017; Whitebook et al., 2018). Teachers who feel supported in their profession are more committed to their work and respond more positively to children (Buettner et al., 2016). Subsequently, child outcomes could be improved through positive climate, instructional quality, and teacher-child relationships (Fuhs et al., 2013; Weiland et al., 2013).

**Allotment Influenced by Programmatic Factors**

Directors identified programmatic factors as the most common consideration when allotting non-contact time. Results of thematic analysis indicated that the majority of directors surveyed (81%) considered programmatic factors such as staff schedules and ratio when allotting non-contact time to early childhood educators. Directors cited insufficient staffing in their responses when asked to share factors for allotting non-contact time. These findings are aligned with other research indicating insufficient staffing is a known problem for the field. For example, directors interviewed for a study on early childhood teacher turnover reported that additional staff improved the working environment (Cassidy et al., 2011). The lack of staffing impacts the ability of teachers to have time away from children and even provide one-on-one attention (Whitebook et al., 2016). The quantitative responses directors provided rating the importance of factors on their non-contact time allotment decisions aligned with their qualitative responses. Staffing is closely connected to teacher-to-child ratio requirements which was rated "extremely important" by directors when allotting non-contact time. Ratio requirements are mandated and clearly outlined by early childhood licensing and accreditation bodies. The emphasis on these requirements, although justified and necessary, may prioritize them for directors who rated guidance from professional organizations and agencies as "very important." Qualitative data support this finding as shown in the response presented earlier from a director who noted, "If we are short staffed, infant and toddler teachers are the first to give up planning time to cover breaks."

Directors may be allotting non-contact time differently because of its elective nature. In contrast to teacher breaks that have specified requirements for frequency and

duration, non-contact time is generally recommended but with little or no guidance on amounts (NAEYC, 2018). Directors indicated that direction from an outside source is a key factor in their decision making, illustrating they are willing to follow guidance from early childhood professional organizations. However, few organizations and agencies require (or even suggest) minimum amounts of non-contact time, reducing its importance and potentially influencing how directors prioritize issues of non-contact time. Currently, few standards exist addressing early childhood work supports at the national or state levels (Build Initiative & Child Trends, 2017; Whitebook et al., 2018). One potential avenue for emphasizing the importance of non-contact time include encouraging more states to add it as a QRIS standard with specific guidance on duration and frequency. Further, it may be possible to attach a provision of non-contact time as a requirement for public funding (Whitebook et al., 2018). Addressing non-contact time through clearly articulated policies is a first step in creating change for the early childhood workforce.

**Insights from Integration**

A mixed methods approach was suitable for this study because a single approach would be insufficient to answer the research aims. Quantitative data described the current state of non-contact time in terms of amounts, uses, and differences in allotment and actual time received. Due to the exploratory nature of this study and the lack of research on non-contact time in early childhood education, it was not possible to predetermine the possible facets of non-contact time to ask about them in a closed-ended or categorical way. Embedding open-ended, qualitative questions about non-contact time within the larger quantitative survey was essential to fully understand the topic because closed-ended questions alone would limit the findings. Integrating both approaches was

necessary to achieving a more valid and complete conclusion than can be achieved by using just one of the methods alone (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). Additionally, several topics of interest in this study are unaddressed in the current literature and a mixed methods approach provided a "breadth and depth of understanding" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 123) that one method alone would not achieve. The quantitative approach provided a foundation for understanding the current amounts of non-contact time in use throughout NAEYC accredited programs, whereas the strength of the qualitative approach garnered additional factors and insights that are not present in the current literature. An example of this is how the fixed-options related to the use of non-contact time did not include program management factors. Without the qualitative data, that aspect of teachers' job responsibilities would not have been revealed. This is a leading rationale for implementing a mixed methods approach because the strengths of each approach can compensate for the weaknesses of the other (Johnson & Onwegbuzie, 2004; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016).

Mixed methods research is known to exist as a continuum of qualitative and quantitative integration (Tashakkori et al., 2021). Mixed methods studies can take place along any point on the continuum with varying degrees of integration. In this study, the research aims drove the emphasis on quantitative data with the qualitative data providing context to the quantitative findings. Integration of the data revealed a complex situation in which directors based their allotment of non-contact time on programmatic factors that are closely linked with one another and relied on the scant guidance of professional organizations and licensing requirements. Further, directors acknowledged that the time they allot to teachers is rarely enough for teachers to meet their job demands. The

variance in the numerical data paired with the proportion of categorical responses confirm this qualitative finding. As a result, teachers' professional work infringed on their personal lives. The implications of these findings are multi-faceted and may have an impact on the teacher personally but also likely influences the children, classroom, and program.

**Limitations**

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The pandemic began six months prior to data collection. Early childhood programs normally comply with high expectations and requirements for hygiene; however, the distribution of the survey was timed to ensure that programs had time to adjust to new, stringent pandemic-required protocols. The survey contained reminders and directions that specifically asked participants to respond about their non-contact time during normal circumstances (pre-COVID-19), still it is unknown how the ongoing pandemic impacted the results. Thus, it should be noted that it could have potentially biased directors' and teachers' responses.

This study was intended to explore and describe the current state of non-contact time at high-quality programs. NAEYC accreditation is widely considered the gold standard in early childhood and thus NAEYC accreditation was used as inclusion criteria to ensure all participants were employed at high-quality programs. However, NAEYC accredited programs make up less than 10% of early care programs nationwide (NAEYC, 2018), limiting the generalizability of results. Future research should investigate non-contact time enactment at non-NAEYC accredited programs.

Relatedly, I used a simple random sample of NAEYC accredited programs for the purpose of giving each program an equal and independent chance of being selected. The

resulting participants may not represent subgroups of teachers and programs including teacher education, program type, and curriculum type, in the same proportions as what exists in the workforce. This decreases the likelihood of representativeness and generalizability. Future researchers could use stratified random sampling to ensure that specific subgroups are present in the sample and no differences are detected between subgroups and the workforce.

Some limitations exist based on the use of a self-report measure. This study sought the perspectives of directors and teachers using a self-report survey measure asking participants to recall their experiences with non-contact time. This is important because as previously mentioned, teachers' perspectives are missing from the literature. Challenges to using self-report measures include social desirability and consistent interpretation of questions (Demetriou et al., 2015). Although multiple efforts were taken to address participants responding in a socially desirable way, including reminders throughout the survey that responses would remain confidential and anonymous, reassurance that that survey responses would not be shared with directors, and extensive systematic critical review including cognitive laboratory interviews and piloting (Fowler, 2014) of the survey before dissemination, this may still have been an issue. Future research should continue to investigate non-contact time using other research designs that can avoid these types of biases in self-report. For example, teacher journaling and teacher logs are methods researchers have used as one way for teachers to record their experiences in real time (Bayat, 2010; Camburn & Barnes, 2004). This may provide more detailed data based on current events rather than asking teachers to recall previous experiences. Journals and logs can be analyzed for type of activity frequency and

duration. Additionally, video recorded or in-person, nonparticipant observations would provide information on non-contact time without relying on self-reporting measures and again provide data on both the frequency and duration of activities.

Last, this research used a publicly available database provided by NAEYC to search for accredited programs nationwide which was beneficial for up-to date information. It also resulted in important lessons on how to reach early childhood directors and teachers employed at NAEYC accredited programs. Recruiting by distributing flyers via social media and advertising with state affiliates opened the survey up to individuals interested in only receiving the monetary compensation. To remedy this, I worked closely with IRB and Qualtrics customer service to identify inauthentic participants and removed them from the sample. Future researchers should consider avoiding such issues by recruiting and advertising on NAEYC moderated discussion boards. The NAEYC Open Discussion Forum is available to all NAEYC members and provides an opportunity to reach directors and teachers and engage in conversations online. This is a valuable resource to researchers who need access to NAEYC members.

**Implications and Suggestions for Future Research**

Implications of this work include informing the field on the current state of non-contact time in order to urge constructive change and mutual understandings at multiple levels. Directors will benefit from knowing the average amount of non-contact time being allotted at high-quality programs as a way to evaluate and adjust their own practices. Local, state, and national organizations may use this study as a launching point for setting much needed requirements on non-contact time amounts. This study also has the

potential to spur conversation and discussion on environmental work supports in early childhood which are often secondary to other issues such as salary and benefits.

The field may need more than one word to define this time of day. Participants in this study commonly referred to non-contact time as “planning time”. However, data also showed that teachers participated in a range of activities outside of planning. It may be necessary for the field to delineate planning time from time meant for other professional practices. Future research should consider exploring the duration of professional activities to understand if teachers’ planning time warrants its own specific time and phrase separate from other non-contact time activities.

Future research should investigate the relationship between non-contact time and teachers’ job satisfaction and the quality of children’s classroom experiences. The relationship between these variables is important to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of non-contact time as an environmental work support. Specifically, teachers’ job satisfaction and retention could be measured, two critical issues for the field (Totenhagen et al., 2016). The quality of the classroom experience can be measured using research-based observational tools, such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta, 2008). The CLASS assesses emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support and is widely used in research and evaluation. Understanding how non-contact time support for teachers impacts the classroom experience is important for child outcomes. Teachers’ ability to plan for lessons may impact the quality of the classroom experience. NAEYC (2018) identifies collaborative team planning as an important task, however, this study revealed teachers provide coverage for each other and often take their work home and it is unclear how

collaborative planning is impacted by such practices. Future research should investigate the influence of planning and non-contact time on classroom quality and subsequent outcomes for children.

Additionally, considering the programmatic factors that influenced directors' allotment of non-contact time (e.g., curriculum type, staff-ratio, classroom coverage, and budget), the financial investment necessary to provide paid, non-contact time to teachers is crucial. Currently, several states are investing in early childhood education through attempts to strengthen the early childhood workforce by addressing work environments and benefits aimed at improving retention (Build Initiative & Child Trends, 2017; Sarver et al., 2020). It will be necessary to identify how much non-contact time is a sufficient amount. Cost-effective solutions that provide adequate amounts of non-contact time to teachers will be critical for moving forward.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this exploratory mixed methods study was to describe the current state of non-contact time in early childhood education. Specifically, to establish terminology for the field, identify amounts of non-contact time and how it is used, and to describe factors that directors consider when allotting non-contact time to teachers. This study highlights the need for systemic policy changes related to environmental work supports that can support and sustain the early childhood workforce.

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## Appendix A

## Early Childhood Teacher Non-Contact Time Survey

Start of Block: Eligibility

Thank you for your interest in participating in the research study entitled Exploring Non-Contact Time in Early Childhood. The following questions will help determine if you are eligible to participate.

The age of legal adulthood varies by state. Are you considered a legal adult in the state you live in?
(19 years or older in Nebraska and Alabama, 21 or older in Mississippi, and 18 or older in all other states)19 years or older in Nebraska and Alabama, 21 or older in Mississippi, and 18 or older in all other states)

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Which of the following best describes the program you are employed by?

- ○ Not currently NAEYC Accredited
- ○ Currently NAEYC Accredited

What is your role at the program you are employed by?

- ○ Director
- ○ Lead Classroom Teacher
- ○ Other

*Display This Question:*

*If What is your role at the program you are employed by? = Lead Classroom Teacher*

Do you have scheduled time away from children designated for completing your work-related tasks?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

*Display This Question:*

*If What is your role at the program you are employed by? = Director*

Do you schedule time for your teachers to be physically away from children for the purpose of completing work-related tasks (creating lesson plans, gathering materials, responding to emails, etc.)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

End of Block: Eligibility

Start of Block: Informed Consent

You are eligible to participate in the study on early childhood teacher non-contact time. Please read the below consent form.

**IRB #:** 20200620420EX
**Project ID:** 20420
**Project Title:** ***Exploring Non-Contact Time in Early Childhood Education***

My name is Erin Hamel. I am conducting a study on teachers' non-contact time in early childhood education. This research focuses on the environmental work support of non-contact time, which is defined as the time during teachers scheduled work day when they are not with children. If you are a legal adult in the state you live in (19 years or older in Nebraska and Alabama, 21 or older in Mississippi, and 18 or older in all other states) and employed as a director or teacher at an NAEYC accredited program, you may be eligible to participate in this research.
**What is the reason for doing this research study?** This is a research project that focuses on exploring non-contact time in early childhood. Work supports like non-contact time are important to the recruitment and retention of teachers in early childhood.
**What will be done during this research study?** Participation in this study will require approximately 30 minutes of your time. You will be asked to complete an online survey

asking about your experiences with non-contact time. Participation will take place at your convenience. All responses given during survey completion will remain anonymous.
**What are the possible risks of being in this research study?** There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.
**What are the possible benefits to you?** The benefit to participating is the opportunity to contribute to the field of early childhood education by sharing information about your experiences with non-contact time that will help provide a better understanding of non-contact time as an environmental work support. The results of this study will be used to better understand non-contact time which could influence early childhood programs and policies.
**How will information about you be protected?** Your responses to this survey are anonymous. All survey responses will be stored in a secure, password protected survey management system, Qualtrics, and on secure, password protected web-based storage.
**Will you be compensated for being in this research study?** You will receive a $20 gift card for participating in this study. Payment will be provided upon completion of the survey. In order to document your receipt of the payment, you must provide your name and address to the research team. Your contact information used to disburse the gift card will be kept separate from your anonymous survey response. Payment records will be stored for up to 7 years and may be stored with Financial Personnel at the University.
**What are your rights as a research subject?** You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. For study related questions, please contact the investigators: *Erin Hamel* by phone (402)310-4409 or email erin.hamel@huskers.unl.edu or *Dr. Rachel Schachter* by phone (402)472-7682 or email rschachter2@unl.edu. For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) by email irb@unl.edu or by phone (402)472-6965.
**What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?** You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw') at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your employment or your relationship with the investigator or with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

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***Documentation of Informed Consent*** You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By clicking on the 'I Agree' button below, your consent to participate is implied. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

- ○ I AGREE
- ○ I DO NOT AGREE

End of Block: Informed Consent

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Start of Block: Demographics

In this section, you will be presented with questions that ask you to describe yourself and your place of employment. As a reminder, your responses are anonymous.

What was your age on your last birthday?

▼ 17 ... 80

What gender do you identify as?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Other _____

What is your race/ethnicity? Mark all that apply.

- ☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ White/Non-Hispanic/Non-Latinx
- ☐ White/Hispanic/Latinx
- ☐ Other (please specify)

_____

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- ○ Some high school but no diploma
- ○ High school diploma or equivalent
- ○ CDA or Associates Degree
- ○ Bachelor's Degree
- ○ Master's Degree
- ○ Education Specialist or professional diploma based on at least one year of coursework beyond a masters degree
- ○ Doctoral degree
- ○ Other (please specify) _____

What field(s) is(are) your degree(s) in? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Child development
- ☐ Early childhood education
- ☐ Elementary education
- ☐ English as a second language
- ☐ Special education
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

What is the total number of years you have taught in early childhood settings?

▼ I have not taught in early childhood settings ... 60

Do you have prior professional experience working with children of other ages outside of early childhood?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

*Display This Question:*

*If Do you have prior professional experience working with children of other ages outside of early ch... = Yes*

What other grade(s) of children do you have prior professional experience working with? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Kindergarten
- ☐ First grade
- ☐ Second grade
- ☐ Third grade
- ☐ Fourth grade
- ☐ Fifth grade
- ☐ Sixth grade
- ☐ Middle School
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

Which of the following best describes the program you work at?

- ○ Head Start
- ○ Public school (excluding Head Start)
- ○ Independent, nonprofit, or other public agency (operated by a university or hospital)
- ○ Affiliated with a church or synagogue
- ○ Affiliated with military
- ○ For-profit (such as a national chain)
- ○ Other (please specify) _____

During normal circumstances (prior to COVID-19), please indicate your program's length of day.

- ○ Half day (5 or less hours)
- ○ School-length day (5.1-8 hours)
- ○ Full day (more than 8 hours)

*Display This Question:*

*If During normal circumstances (prior to COVID-19), please indicate your program's length of day. = School-length day (5.1-8 hours)*

*Or During normal circumstances (prior to COVID-19), please indicate your program's length of day. = Full day (more than 8 hours)*

Does the program you work at have full-day or half-day options?

- ○ Full-day
- ○ Half-day
- ○ Both full-day and half-day options
- ○ Other. Please specify

_____

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Director Demo

What is the total number of years you have been director of an early childhood program?

▼ Less than a year ... 50

During normal circumstances (prior to COVID-19), on average how many children do you enroll in each type of classroom in your program?

| | |
|---|---|
| Infant Classroom | ▼ NA ... 31+ |
| Toddler Classroom | ▼ NA ... 31+ |
| Preschool Classroom | ▼ NA ... 31+ |

During normal circumstances (prior to COVID-19), how many teachers (lead, assistant, aides, etc.) are assigned to the average classroom in your program?

| | |
|---|---|
| Infant Classroom | ▼ NA ... 6+ |
| Toddler Classroom | ▼ NA ... 6+ |
| Preschool Classroom | ▼ NA ... 6+ |

An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is a document outlining early intervention services for eligible children. Do you have children in your program with an IFSP?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

*Display This Question:*

*If An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is a document outlining early intervention services... = Yes*

How many children in your program have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)?

▼ 1 ... 20+

End of Block: Director Demo

Start of Block: Director Survey

Now you will be asked about non-contact time. Non-contact time is the time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children. The purpose of non-contact time is usually to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. Non-contact time does not include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use.

Using the above definition, what term or phrase does your program use to refer to *non-contact time*?

While completing the following questions, remember that non-contact time is defined as the time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children. The purpose of non-contact time is to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. Non-contact time does not include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use.

Approximately how much non-contact time is a lead teacher in your program scheduled for each week?

- ○ 1-30 minutes
- ○ 31-60 minutes
- ○ 61-90 minutes
- ○ 91-120 minutes
- ○ 121-150 minutes
- ○ 151-180 minutes
- ○ 180+ minutes (Please specify)

_____

*

Specifically, how much non-contact time is a lead teacher in your program scheduled for each week? (Please report in minutes)
Example: 1 hour = 60 minutes, 1.5 hours = 90 minutes, 2 hours = 120 minutes,

_____

Do all teachers in your program receive the same amount of *non-contact time*?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

*Display This Question:*

*If Do all teachers in your program receive the same amount of non-contact time? = No*

*

Please explain why teachers in your program receive differing amounts of non-contact time.

During *non-contact time* in your program, are teachers excluded from ratio requirements and completely free of supervision requirements?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I don't know.

In your program, do teachers spend time on their work-related tasks in the presence of children (even children they are not responsible for supervising)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

*Display This Question:*

*If In your program, do teachers spend time on their work-related tasks in the presence of children (... = Yes*

When teachers complete their work-related tasks in the presence of children, are the children...

- ○ Awake
- ○ Asleep
- ○ Both, some children are awake and others are asleep

As you complete the following questions, remember non-contact time is defined as the time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children. The purpose of non-contact time is to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. Non-contact time does not include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use.

*

Think of the many tasks teachers are responsible for completing. List the work-related tasks that you expect teachers to work on during their *non-contact time.*

Here are some examples of things that teachers might do during their non-contact time. What, if any, of the following do you expect your teachers to do during their

scheduled non-contact time? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Plan and prepare lessons and activities
- ☐ Take a personal break
- ☐ Communicate with families
- ☐ Get a coffee or drink
- ☐ Meet with other teachers and early childhood professionals
- ☐ Gather materials for activities and classroom areas
- ☐ Child assessments
- ☐ Set up personal appointments
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____
- ☐ Check work email
- ☐ Check personal email
- ☐ Use the restroom
- ☐ Work-related social media
- ☐ Personal social media
- ☐ Meditate
- ☐ Take a walk or exercise
- ☐ General cleaning tasks such as dishes, laundry, sanitizing, etc.

---

The following question asks about how you determine the amount of non-contact time to allot teachers in your program. As a reminder, non-contact time is defined as the time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children. The purpose of non-contact time is to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. Non-contact time <u>does not</u> include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use.

---

Directors are responsible for many aspects of program management. List the factor(s) you consider when determining how much *non-contact time* to allot to your teaching staff.

Thank you for sharing factors you consider when allotting the amount of non-contact time in your program. Below are other potential factors that could influence the amount of non-contact time teachers receive. Please rate the importance of the following factors on your decision of how much non-contact time to allot teachers in your program.

| | Not at all important | Slightly important | Moderately important | Very important | Extremely important |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 5 |
| Teacher to child ratio requirements | | | | | |
| Schedules of support staff | | | | | |
| Budget and finance | | | | | |
| Teacher request | | | | | |
| Guidelines from a professional organization or licensing agency (please specify which org/agency) | | | | | |

Do teachers in your program receive their non-contact time as scheduled?

- ○ Always
- ○ Usually
- ○ About half the time
- ○ Seldom
- ○ Never
- ○ I don't know

*Display This Question:*

*If Do teachers in your program receive their non-contact time as scheduled? = Usually*

*Or Do teachers in your program receive their non-contact time as scheduled? = About half the time*

*Or Do teachers in your program receive their non-contact time as scheduled? = Seldom*

*Or Do teachers in your program receive their non-contact time as scheduled? = Never*

*

What interferes with teachers' ability to receive their non-contact time as scheduled?

In the event that a teacher does not receive a scheduled non-contact time, does the program re-schedule it for another time?

- ○ Always
- ○ Most of the time
- ○ About half the time
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Never

What do teachers in your program do in the event that they are unable to complete their work-related tasks during their scheduled *non-contact time*? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Teachers in my program always have enough non-contact time to complete their work-related tasks
- ☐ Use personal breaks or lunch at work
- ☐ Ask a support staff for assistance
- ☐ Complete tasks in the presence of children while included in ratio
- ☐ Complete the tasks on personal time (evening & weekends)
- ☐ Extend their work hours by coming in early or staying late
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Other (please specify)

_____

How much time do you think the average teacher in your program spends completing work-related tasks during their personal time (evenings and weekends)?

- ○ Never
- ○ 1-30 minutes
- ○ 31-60 minutes
- ○ 61-90 minutes
- ○ 91-120 minutes
- ○ 121-150 minutes
- ○ 151-180 minutes
- ○ 181+ minutes

Do teachers in your program ever **choose** not to take their non-contact time?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I don't know

*Display This Question:*

*If Do teachers in your program ever choose not to take their non-contact time? = Yes*

*

Why do you think teachers selectively opt out of taking non-contact time?

End of Block: Director Survey

Start of Block: Teacher Demo

What type of classroom are you the lead teacher for?

- ○ Infant classroom
- ○ Toddler classroom
- ○ Preschool classrom
- ○ Mixed age classroom
- ○ Other (Please Specify)

_____

Some teachers **plan** all the lessons for their classrooms, others do not. About what percentage of lesson **planning** are you responsible for in your classroom?

- ○ 0-25%
- ○ 26-50%
- ○ 51-75%
- ○ 76-99%
- ○ 100%

Some teachers **teach** all of the lessons in their classroom, others ask teacher aids or assistants to help. How much of the instruction do you **teach** in your classroom?

- ○ 0-25%
- ○ 26-50%
- ○ 51-75%
- ○ 76-99%
- ○ 100%

During normal circumstances (prior to COVID-19), about how many teachers and assistants (including yourself) are assigned to your classroom?

▼ 1 ... 10+

During normal circumstances (prior to COVID-19), how many children are enrolled in your classroom?

▼ 1 ... 30+

An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is a document outlining early intervention services for eligible children. Do you have children with an IFSP in your classroom?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

*Display This Question:*

*If An Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is a document outlining early intervention services... = Yes*

How many children in your classroom have an IFSP?

▼ 1 ... 20+

End of Block: Teacher Demo

Start of Block: Teacher Survey

Now you will be asked about *non-contact time*. *Non-contact time* is the time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children. The purpose of *non-contact time* is usually to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. *Non-contact time* does not include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use.

Using the above definition, what term or phrase do teachers in your program use to refer to *non-contact time*?

The following questions will ask you about amounts of non-contact time. As a reminder, *non-contact time is defined as the time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away*

*from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children.* The purpose of non-contact time is usually to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. Non-contact time does not include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use.

We are interested in learning about how much non-contact time you are scheduled for each day**.** Move the slider to indicate how many minutes, on average, of non-contact time you are **scheduled to receive** each day during the week.

Scheduled Non-Contact Time in Minutes

| | 0 | 30 | 60 | 90 | 120 | 150 | 180 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Monday | | | | | | | |
| Tuesday | | | | | | | |
| Wednesday | | | | | | | |
| Thursday | | | | | | | |
| Friday | | | | | | | |

*Display This Question:*

*If What is your role at the program you are employed by? = Lead Classroom Teacher*

As you know, early childhood teachers may start out with a schedule but often have to be flexible throughout their day. Now we'd like you to consider how much non-contact time you **actually receive** each day. Not what you are scheduled for, but what you **actually receive**. Move the slider to indicate how many minutes of non-contact time you actually get each day during the week.

Non-Contact Time Received in Minutes

| 0 | 30 | 60 | 90 | 120 | 150 | 180 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| Monday |  |
| Tuesday |  |
| Wednesday |  |
| Thursday |  |
| Friday |  |

Is your current amount of **scheduled** non-contact time adequate for completing your work-related tasks?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

*Display This Question:*

*If Is your current amount of scheduled non-contact time adequate for completing your work-related ta... = No*

Please explain why not.

Are all teachers in your program scheduled to receive the same amount of non-contact time?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I don't know

*Display This Question:*

*If Are all teachers in your program scheduled to receive the same amount of non-contact time? = No*

Please explain why teachers in your program are scheduled to receive differing amounts of non-contact time.

As you answer the following questions, please remember that *non-contact time is defined as the time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children*. The purpose of non-contact time is usually to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. Non-contact time does not include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use.

Do you ever complete your work-related tasks in the presence of children (even if you are not included in ratio requirements)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

*Display This Question:*

*If Do you ever complete your work-related tasks in the presence of children (even if you are not inc... = Yes*

When you complete work-related tasks in the presence of children, are the children...

- ○ Awake
- ○ Asleep
- ○ Both, some are awake and others are asleep

*

Teachers are very busy and do many things each day, including non-work related tasks. Try to think back to your **designated non-contact times** and list all the things you worked on during those times. There are no right or wrong answers and all of your responses are anonymous.

As you complete the following questions, remember *non-contact time is defined as the time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children*. The purpose of non-contact time is usually to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. Non-contact time does not include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use.

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Now that you've listed some of your own non-contact time activities. Here are examples of activities other teachers might do during their non-contact time. What, if any, of the following activities do you do during your scheduled non-contact time? (**select all that apply**) As a reminder, your director will not see your responses and there are no right or wrong answers. All of your responses are anonymous.

- ☐ Plan and prepare lessons and activities
- ☐ Take a break
- ☐ Communicate with families
- ☐ Get a coffee or drink
- ☐ Meet with other teachers and early childhood professionals
- ☐ Gather materials for activities and classroom areas
- ☐ Child assessments
- ☐ Set up personal appointments
- ☐ Check work email
- ☐ Check personal email
- ☐ Use the restroom
- ☐ Work related social media
- ☐ Personal social media
- ☐ Meditate
- ☐ Take a walk or exercise
- ☐ General cleaning tasks such as dishes, laundry, or sanitizing
- ☐ Participate in professional development
- ☐ Other (please specify)

_____

What do you do in the event that you are unable to complete your work tasks during your non-contact time? (select all that apply)

- [ ] I always have enough non-contact time to complete my tasks
- [ ] Use my personal breaks or lunch at work
- [ ] Ask a support staff for assistance
- [ ] Complete my work in the presence of children while I'm included in ratio
- [ ] Complete the tasks during my personal time (evenings & weekends)
- [ ] Extend work hours by coming in early or staying late
- [ ] Other (please specify)

_____

About how much time do you spend each week completing work-related tasks during your personal time (personal breaks, evenings & weekends)?

- ○ Never
- ○ 1-30 minutes
- ○ 31-60 minutes
- ○ 61-90 minutes
- ○ 91-120 minutes
- ○ 121-150 minutes
- ○ 151-180 minutes
- ○ 181+ minutes

When and where do you work on most of your work-related tasks (excluding caring for children) and why?

As you answer the following questions remember that *non-contact time is the time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children.* The purpose of non-contact time is usually to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. Non-contact time does not include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use.

Do you consistently get your non-contact time as scheduled?

- ○ Always
- ○ Most of the time
- ○ About half the time
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Never

*Display This Question:*

*If Do you consistently get your non-contact time as scheduled? = Most of the time*

*Or Do you consistently get your non-contact time as scheduled? = About half the time*

*Or Do you consistently get your non-contact time as scheduled? = Sometimes*

*Or Do you consistently get your non-contact time as scheduled? = Never*

What keeps you from getting your non-contact time as scheduled? Please describe.

The schedule of an early childhood teacher can be unpredictable and issues can arise unexpectedly. How often would you say you **experience interruptions** to your non-contact time?

- ○ Always
- ○ Most of the time
- ○ About half the time
- ○ Sometimes
- ○ Never

*Display This Question:*

*If The schedule of an early childhood teacher can be unpredictable and issues can arise uexpectedly... = Always*

*Or The schedule of an early childhood teacher can be unpredictable and issues can arise unexpectedly... = Most of the time*

*Or The schedule of an early childhood teacher can be unpredictable and issues can arise unexpectedly... = About half the time*

*Or The schedule of an early childhood teacher can be unpredictable and issues can arise unexpectedly... = Sometimes*

*

What types of interruptions do you experience? Please provide examples.

Because work tasks vary by teachers, an assortment of supplies and materials may be needed during non-contact time. You may not need all of the things listed below, we are

just interested in your accessibility to these items. What, if any, of the following do you have available to you during your non-contact time? (Please select all that apply).

- ☐ Designated adult physical space away from children
- ☐ Adult sized furnishings (tables, desk, chair, etc.)
- ☐ Technology (reliable computer, tablet, printer, etc.)
- ☐ Office supplies (paper cutter, paper, etc.)
- ☐ Professional resources (books, organizational guidelines, etc.)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

_____

The following questions ask about your preferences for non-contact time. Remember, *non-contact time is the time when a teacher is scheduled to be physically away from children and free from his/her responsibilities to care for, supervise, and teach children.* The purpose of non-contact time is usually to provide a teacher time to complete work-related tasks. Non-contact time does not include breaks, lunch, or other times of the day designated for personal use.

On average, how much non-contact time do you need each day to complete your work-related tasks?
Move the slider to indicate your preferred amount of non-contact time in minutes each day.

Preferred Non-Contact Time in Minutes

| | 0 30 60 90 120 150 180 |
|---|---|
| Monday |  |
| Tuesday |  |
| Wednesday |  |
| Thursday |  |
| Friday |  |

Please consider your ideal time and place for completing your work-related tasks. Rank the following in order of preference by ***clicking***, ***dragging***, and ***dropping*** the options with 1 being most preferred and 5 being least preferred.

_____ Designated non-contact time at work
_____ At home in the evenings
_____ Personal break time at work
_____ At home on weekends
_____ Other (please specify)

List and describe the work tasks you spend the most time on.

Do you ever selectively **choose** to not take your non-contact time?

- Yes
- No

*Display This Question:*

*If Do you ever selectively choose to not take your non-contact time? = Yes*

For what reasons do you selectively opt out of taking your non-contact time?

Are your personal break times ever interrupted due to staffing reasons?

- Always
- Usually
- About half the time
- Seldom
- Never

*Display This Question:*

*If Are your personal break times ever interrupted due to staffing reasons? = Always*

*Or Are your personal break times ever interrupted due to staffing reasons? = Usually*

*Or Are your personal break times ever interrupted due to staffing reasons? = About half the time*

*Or Are your personal break times ever interrupted due to staffing reasons? = Seldom*

What types of interruptions do you experience during your personal break times?

End of Block: Teacher Survey

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Start of Block: Refer participants

We are interested in hearing from directors and lead teachers of NAEYC accredited programs. You may provide email addresses of colleagues who you think would also be interested in completing this survey.
Please separate the email addresses with a semicolon.
Example: teacher@program.com; director@program.com; name@program.com

End of Block: Refer participants

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# Appendix B

## Recruitment Email

Subject: Study of Non-Contact Time in Early Childhood Education

Dear [Director name],

I am writing to inform you of a study being conducted on early childhood teachers' non-contact time. The purpose of the survey is to learn about the environmental work support of non-contact time, the time of a teachers work day when they are away from children.

We are inviting directors and teachers of NAEYC accredited programs who are interested in sharing their experiences in an online survey. All responses given during survey completion will be kept confidential. Participants must be the age of majority for their state (19 in Nebraska & Alabama, 21 in Mississippi, and 18 in all other states).

The benefit of participating is the opportunity to contribute to the field of early childhood education by sharing information about your experiences with non-contact time that will help provide a better understanding of this environmental work support. The results of the study may appear in the publication of reports, presentations, or research articles.

The survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete and you will receive compensation of a $20 gift card. To access the survey, click on the URL link below or you may copy and paste this address into your web browser.

URL link: http://www.qualtricsurveyid

If you have questions about participation, please contact the investigators, Erin Hamel or Dr. Rachel Schachter by email or phone.
Erin Hamel: erin.hamel@huskers.unl.edu (402)310-4409
Dr. Rachel Schachter: rschachter2@unl.edu (402)472-7682

If you would like to speak to someone else regarding the study or to express concerns, please access the Research Compliance Services Office at irb@unl.edu or call at 402-472-6965.

Sincerely,

Erin Hamel
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
University of Nebraska
erin.hamel@huskers.unl.edu

# Appendix C

**Recruitment Flyer for State Affiliates**

**Volunteers Needed for Research Study**

## Exploring Non-Contact Time in Early Childhood Education

We are conducting research to find out how early childhood directors and teachers schedule and use their time away from children.

*Participants will receive a $20 gift card.*


### WHAT WOULD I HAVE TO DO

You will be asked to complete an online survey. The survey should take about 30 minutes to complete. There are no risks involved in this research.

### IS THIS STUDY RIGHT FOR ME

Are you age of majority for your state? (19 in Nebraska & Alabama, 21 in Mississippi, & 18 in all other states)

Are you a director or lead teacher working in a NAEYC accredited program?

Are you comfortable answering questions about your work day in English?

University of Nebraska Lincoln

**To participate please email erin.hamel@huskers.unl.edu**

**IRB Number: 20200620420EX**