

SISSON, JAMIE HUFF, PH.D., May 2011

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF PUBLIC
PRESCHOOL TEACHERS (232 pp.)

Co-Directors of Dissertation: Martha J. Lash, Ph.D.
Jennifer H. James, Ph.D.

Using narrative inquiry, the researcher examined how five public preschool teachers' understand and negotiate their professional identities within the context of a major metropolitan school district. Based on the premise that identities are socially constructed, individually understood, and negotiated within social spaces, the researcher examined participants' lived stories through the three dimensions of space: *backward/forwards*, *inward/outward*, and *situated in place* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These three dimensions provided insight into how participants have come to understand their professional identities throughout their life experiences and how they choose to author their identities in response to multiple constructs of what is professional.

Findings from this narrative inquiry suggest that participants draw from their personal histories to understand the significance of relationships and knowledge to their professional work. Findings also suggest that how participants understood relationships and knowledge were often competing with the constructs promoted by the district through dominant discourses. As a response, participants enacted their own understandings of their professional identities by asserting acts of agency within their classrooms and within social spaces.