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The Professional Development of Pre-K
Mentor Teachers: Insights from a
Face-to-Face and Online Community of
Practice

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation or written by Lori Allison Caudle entitled “The Professional Development of Pre-K Mentor Teachers: Insights from a Face-to-Face and Online Community of Practice.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Child and Family Studies.

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The Professional Development of Pre-K Mentor Teachers:
Insights from a Face-to-Face and Online Community of Practice

A Dissertation Presented for
the Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Lori Allison Caudle
August 2010

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DEDICATION

For my mother, Robbie LuAnne Rogers Pearce (1952-2007)

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood classroom mentor teachers are often left with little support and guidance as they assume the role of teacher educators. The purpose of this collective case study was to explore how a community of practice comprised of pre-K mentors and a university program coordinator supported the development of shared and individual understandings about how to effectively supervise preservice teachers. Utilizing key tenets of sociocultural theory, four pre-K mentor teachers from two public schools in the Southeast participated in an online and face-to-face community of practice facilitated by a university program coordinator. The pre-K preservice teachers (n=6) were secondary participants in this study. Across twelve weeks, the evolution of collective and individual knowledge was chronicled through interviews, online discussions, face-to-face exchanges, and classroom observations. Audio-tapes from meetings and interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data analyses involved iterative cycles of coding, moving from open coding to process and pattern coding. Through this process, data displays and conceptual memos were created and informed the analyses. Findings from this qualitative study illustrate how the mentors' processes of coming to know were developed within a complex web of relationships from which they re-envisioned their roles as pre-K teachers. As the mentors negotiated the meaning of mentoring, they engaged in recursive cycles of reshaping their identities through questioning, hypothesizing, and sharing lived experiences. New identities as educators of both children and adults emerged as they considered the role of mentoring as a tangible object to be closely studied, negotiated, and operationalized. The mentors left this study acknowledging that while mentoring was difficult, complex work, it was worthy work.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation study sought to explore how a community of practice (CoP) supported the professional development of classroom pre-kindergarten (pre-K) mentor teachers. Specifically, this study consisted of developing a community with pre-K mentors, both online and face-to-face, in an effort to (a) enhance their mentor knowledge and (b) positively influence the ways in which they educated their preservice teachers. It was anticipated that knowledge generated from this study would generate new insights into how providing collaborative opportunities for pre-K teacher mentors contributes to their professional development and practice as mentors. In this chapter, I begin by briefly discussing my prior experiences that led me to this study. This chapter continues with a discussion of the background and context that positions pre-K mentorship within the history of pre-K program development, and the overall need for high-quality pre-K teacher practice. Then, the chapter contains the problem statement, purpose of the study, and related research questions. The chapter concludes with a rationale and significance section and an introduction to chapter two.

Past Experiences

In the summer of 2003, I began my graduate internship year in an early childhood five-year teacher licensure program. For this academic school year, I worked under the supervision of two classroom mentor teachers, one in kindergarten and another in a multi-age 3rd and 4th grade classroom. While interning, I received little guidance from my mentors and completed my internship year experience feeling frustrated and unprepared. I became increasingly eager to learn more about the role of mentors in preservice teacher education and strived to investigate professional development opportunities provided to early childhood mentor teachers. As a result,

I enrolled in a doctoral program and began working toward a Ph.D. I took one year off my doctoral studies to teach second grade and learned what it was like to teach beyond the umbrella of a teacher preparation program. Teaching second grade reinforced my belief that support from effective mentors is imperative to the development of novice teachers. Once returning to graduate school the following year, I knew my research interests would likely include mentorship. This, along with my position as a program coordinator (discussed later in Chapter VI), is what led me to design this particular study. Due to my prior experiences, it was necessary for me to remain conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that I brought to this study. This was especially important for me because I did not have successful mentoring experiences as a preservice teacher.

Background and Context

In the U.S., preschool education has changed considerably over the past forty years, partly due to the increasing number of women entering the labor force and a greater emphasis on school readiness. In 1965, as part of the war on poverty, the federally funded preschool program, Head Start, first opened its doors to help prepare low-income children for schooling (Vinovskis, 2005). Also, in the sixties, other early education preschool programs were created, such as the Early Training Project in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, the High/Scope Perry Preschool in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers preschool program (Karloly & Bigelow, 2005).

Clearly, there has been a longstanding push to implement preschool programs that serve children labeled “at-risk”, although this interest seemed to fade somewhat in the eighties. More recently, since the nineties, there has been renewed interest in providing early care and education for these children, which has resulted in an explosion of new, state and locally-run, public pre-K

programs across the nation. While some states have expanded their programs to include all four year-old children who want to attend (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005), a majority of public pre-K programs solely target at-risk four year-olds. The term “at-risk” usually refers to children who are from low-income families, who receive special education services, who are dual language learners, and/or who exhibit other risk factors (Clifford, Bryant, & Early, 2005a). Historically, at-risk children have a higher likelihood of being in low-quality educational settings (Clifford, Bryant, & Early, 2005b; Clifford & Maxwell, 2002) and are more prone to needing extra assistance in their development of language, literacy, and social-emotional skills that are crucial for school success (Kinzie et al., 2006). Public pre-K populations are becoming increasingly diverse since immigrant families tend to have higher birth rates and lower incomes, thus increasing the number of children who qualify for enrollment in state pre-K classrooms (Clifford & Maxwell, 2002). Public pre-K programs operate in considerably different ways, both between and within states (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2005). This contributes to differences in teacher practice and the overall quality of care children receive in public pre-K classrooms.

High-quality educational experiences for children have been proven to positively impact their learning and development (Burchinal et al., 2000; Espinosa, 2002; Gormley et al., 2005; Melhuish, 2001). Peisner-Feinberg et al. (2001) and Curby et al. (2009) both found significant relationships between preschool quality and children’s academic outcomes and social skills. Research on pre-K quality typically labels quality as structural, such as features of the program infrastructure, or process-oriented, which pertain to aspects of the classroom the children directly experience (Clifford et al., 2005b; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007; Mashburn, et al., 2008). The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has identified ten structural standards

of quality used to evaluate each state's public pre-K programs (Barnett, Hustedt, Friedman, Boyd, & Ainsworth, 2007). These standards include: (1) comprehensive early learning standards, (2) bachelor's degrees for teachers, (3) specialized training in early childhood for teachers, (4) a credential for teacher assistants/aides, (5) 15 hours of teacher in-service, (6) maximum class size of 20 children, (7) adult-child ratio of 1:10 or less, (8) available screening and referral services, (9) meals, and (10) program monitoring (Barnett et al., 2007). Most states evaluate pre-K programs based on structural features of quality.

Process features of quality, such as teacher strategies and developmentally appropriate teacher-child interactions, have been shown to positively impact child outcomes more than structural features (Howes et al., 2008; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2007; Vu, Jeon, & Howes, 2008). In a large-scale study of pre-K quality, Mashburn et al. (2008) found (a) teachers' high-quality instructional teaching practices predicted children's academic and language skills, and (b) teachers' positive emotional interactions with children contributed to children's increased use of social skills. Examining children's academic growth and social skills over the pre-K year, Howes et al. (2008) found children who experienced high-quality teaching practices and closer teacher-child relationships exhibited higher academic gains.

Since the majority of pre-K programs target at-risk children, providing high-quality care is especially important, but is also a challenge. Not only are pre-K teachers working with young children who are at-risk and have varying needs, pre-K teachers are also required to wear many hats as they collaborate with teaching assistants (TAs), special educators, paraprofessionals, and families in order to meet the diverse needs of these preschool children. While the demands to teach pre-K are high, teachers are likely to receive inadequate support and access to resources

and training (Kinzie et al., 2006). Additionally, many pre-K classrooms are located within elementary schools, thus increasing the chances of pre-K teachers being supervised by principals and administrators who have little or no training in early childhood education and special education. This is a dilemma because there is a link between administrators' knowledge of early childhood education and high-quality pre-K programs (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2001). Often, pre-K teachers' supervisors are located off-site, which contributes to logistical and geographical challenges related to teacher support and ongoing, effective supervision.

Due to changes in state licensure programs and an increased demand for early childhood teachers, some universities have expanded their teacher preparation programs to include a pre-K licensure component, often providing a preservice teacher with a dual teaching license in regular and special education upon program completion. Many of these programs are built on a constructivist view of teaching and learning, which argues knowledge is socially constructed through interactions within particular contexts (Hausfather, 2001; Lowery, 2002; Rovengo, 1993).

As part of teaching licensure program standards, early childhood preservice teachers are required to spend time with mentoring teachers in student teaching or internship experiences. Many teacher preparation programs are placing more emphasis on field experiences (Ewart & Straw, 2005). Since the majority of in-service pre-K teachers are not adequately prepared to teach children who are at-risk (Clifford, Bryant, & Early, 2005b), early childhood teacher preparation programs must ensure preservice teachers have significant exposure teaching these young children by placing them under the guidance of effective mentors who teach pre-K. Mentors' abilities to successfully guide and educate preservice teachers are essential, yet

sometimes disregarded, in early childhood teacher preparation (Osunde, 1996). Further, the nature of the experiences preservice teachers have with mentors can vary drastically (Hayes, 2001). Field experience with mentors is a pivotal part of early childhood teacher preparation and has been shown to impact preservice teachers' motivation, job retention, and decision-making after they enter the field as in-service teachers (Everhart & Vaughn, 2005; Jenkins, Pateman, & Black, 2002; Osunde, 1996). In this dissertation, mentoring teachers are defined as practicing (in-service) teachers who guide and educate preservice teachers during student teaching experiences and collaborate with university colleagues to scaffold preservice teachers' development of competencies (Zeek, Foote, & Walker, 2001).

Problem Statement

Seeing that quality of care for pre-K children is a high priority (Clifford & Maxwell, 2002), novice teachers must enter their classrooms with strong knowledge of best practice. Research has shown preservice teachers' experiences with their mentors provide the foundations for their future classroom practice (Shen, 2002; Silva, 2000). Consequently, mentors' abilities to develop meaningful relationships with preservice teachers and implement appropriate and effective mentoring strategies are crucial for successful teacher education, especially in the preparation of future pre-K teachers. Yet, professional development opportunities for pre-K mentors are minimal, thus leaving many mentors feeling unprepared and uninformed about how to best educate and work with preservice teachers (Walkington, 2005a).

While research has shown consistent benefits for mentor teachers who participate in CoPs (Cherian, 2007; Mullen, 2000), little is known about how a learning community of pre-K teacher mentors can support and contribute to the professional development of mentors. Further, a large

portion of the literature on mentoring describes "...a technical/manual approach that reduces the mentor to a technician and mentoring to strategies and tips, rather than situating mentoring in complex contexts where issues collide and compete" (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006a, p. 8).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to develop a community of practice¹ with pre-K mentors, both online and face-to-face, in an effort to (a) enhance their mentor knowledge and (b) positively influence the ways in which they educated their mentees (preservice teachers). A community of practice is a context where learning and meaning-making occur as individuals engage in activities, interact with one another, share common goals, assume varying roles, and develop relationships over time (Wenger, 1998). Essentially, this initiative involved participants' development of new conceptual frameworks of knowledge grounded in their authentic experiences of mentoring pre-K preservice teachers. It was anticipated that investigating individual mentors' development through their participation in a professional community would provide new insights into how pre-K mentors in this context may work together to acquire knowledge of mentoring and use this new knowledge to inform their practices with mentees. Specifically, as mentors engaged in problem-posing and problem-solving strategies embedded in discourse and written reflections facilitated by me, it was expected that they would develop both shared and individual knowledge of mentor practice. To investigate these issues, the following research questions were explored:

¹ The term *community of practice* was used in this study instead of *professional learning community* because the majority of literature reviewed for this dissertation describes how professional learning communities often include school administrators.

1. In what ways did a community of practice comprised of pre-K mentor teachers evolve, both online and face-to-face, as they engaged in the co-construction and sharing of local knowledge related to improving mentor practice? Sub-question: What tools and processes for constructing new understandings were developed and/or accessed by the community?
2. How did participation in a community of practice impact and contribute to changes in each individual pre-K mentor's thinking, practice, and identity? Sub-question: How did mentors' use of problem-posing and problem-solving strategies evolve across time, as reflected in their discourse, text, practice, and focus of inquiry?

Rationale

Across the last twenty years, a number of researchers have noted that there is a need for greater recognition of the crucial role mentors play in teacher education (Parker, Fazio, Volante, & Cherubini, 2008). Yet, recognition is not enough. What is needed is additional empirical research on how to create conditions and contexts that address the complex nature of early childhood teaching as we ensure the success of mentors who educate preservice teachers. The rationale for this study stems from the notion that, in order to improve pre-K teacher practice, university teacher preparation programs should create professional development opportunities that support and contribute to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of pre-K mentors.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) suggest mentoring needs to progress in the following ways:

“...from being performed in pairs to being an integral part of professional cultures in schools. . . from hierarchical dispensations of wisdom to shared inquiries into practice. . . from being an isolated innovation to becoming an integrated part of broader improvement efforts to reculture

our schools and school systems” (p. 55). A step toward generating these types of changes is for university educators to create and establish learning communities with mentor teachers and also examine potential outcomes and benefits resulting from the members’ participation.

The following chapter includes a literature review that addresses (a) theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation and views of knowledge within these constructs, (b) developmental considerations in learning to teach, (c) the mentoring of novice teachers, and (d) the professional development of mentors. This review discusses both literature related to the purpose of this research study and provides evidence supporting the investigation of the current problem.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Sociocultural Theory

A theory of learning that has received increasing attention across disciplines is sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory is based on the notion that learning and knowledge are situated within the context in which they occur (Alfred, 2002). There are three main elements of sociocultural theory: culture, context, and community (Alfred, 2002). Particularly, learning is a social process that happens through interactions between individuals and systems that are embedded within culture and history (Wenger, 1998). Learning cannot be viewed as context-free and occurs through an individual's cultural lens (Alfred, 2002). Additionally, cultural tools mediate human action and shape learning; therefore mediation provides a process for how this shaping takes place (Wertsch, 1995). Sociocultural theory recognizes societal heritage, individual efforts, and social actions as inseparable, "as are the forest and the trees" (Rogoff, 1990, p. 25). Researchers who adopt this approach tend to focus on explicating the relationships between human learning and the cultural, historical, and institutional settings with which learning occurs (Wertsch, 1995).

Sociocultural theory stems from the early work of Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1978). According to Vygotsky, an individual's intellectual development cannot be understood without taking into account his/her environment and the interactions that occur within the environment (Rogoff, 1990). Focusing mainly on child development, Vygotsky argued that the natural and cultural planes work together to produce growth, and higher psychological processes cannot be developed without interaction with others (Leont'ev, 1981; Wertsch, 1991). Specifically, Vygotsky believed when children engage in cultural activities and use intellectual

tools under the guidance of more experienced children or adults, they can internalize the tools for thinking within their *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) (Rogoff, 2003, 1990). “The zone of proximal development is a dynamic region of sensitivity to learning the skills of culture, in which children develop through participation in problem solving with more experienced members of the culture” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 14). There are four stages of the ZPD. These include (1) where performance is assisted by more capable others, (2) where performance is assisted by the self, (3) where performance is developed, automatized, and “fossilized”, and (4) where de-automatization of performance leads to recursion back through the ZPD (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Forman, Minick, and Stone (1993) extended Vygotsky’s idea of ZPD by describing how collective, interrelated zones of development generated through social processes function as cultural mediators and contribute to learning. Essentially, it includes a place for both scaffolding and independence (Rogoff, 2003).

Vygotsky also felt an individual’s cultural history provides tools and practices for problem-solving and current social contexts situate cognition (Rogoff, 1984). Wertsch (1991) described Vygotsky’s writings through three interrelated themes:

- 1) a reliance on genetic, or developmental, analysis; 2) the claim that higher mental functioning in the individual derives from social life; and 3) the claim that human action, on both the social and individual planes, is mediated by tools and signs. (1991, p. 19)

Through this interpretation, Vygotsky’s theory emphasizes how cultural tools, and especially language, mediate human action; this is a key tenet of sociocultural theory (Alfred, 2002).

Vygotsky’s emphasis on the interrelatedness of individuals and society led him to seek a unit of

analysis that preserved the entirety of an event rather than breaking it down into smaller components (Rogoff, 1995).

Activity Theory

Vygotsky's argument that discourse and other tools mediate activities was expanded even further by his students, Leont'ev and Luria, and the collection of their ideas contributed to what is now known as activity theory (Tsui, Lopez-Real, & Edwards, 2009). Activity theory contends activities are goal-oriented and occur within collective, social systems comprised of interrelated components (Engestrom, 2000). Early aspects of this theory stress the importance of the individual, the object of the activity, and the psychological, or mediational tools (Tsui et al., 2009). Yrjo Engestrom added to this original view by arguing activity systems also include communities, rules, and the division of labor.

As a result, the components of the activity system discussed here include participant(s), rules, tools, communities, division of labor, and object(s) (Engestrom, 2000). Through engagement in joint activities, individuals produce artifacts and use cultural tools to represent and extend learning within and among each other (Wells, 1999). Tools influence the way individuals interact within an environment, which ultimately contributes to their learning (Tsui, et al., 2009).

Wertsch (1991) argued that an investigation of action must also include consideration of the use of mediational tools because these tools do not have a purpose without action. In his theory of mediated action, Wertsch made a case for why focusing on a single aspect of the overall activity in isolation is misleading, but often attempted when studying activities such as language and discourse. Researchers who focus on an activity as a unit of analysis, then, should

contend the relationship between an individual and his/her social and cultural environments cannot exist separately (Rogoff, 1995).

Sociocultural Planes of Development

Rogoff (1990; 1995) posited the study of learning and development through a sociocultural perspective can best be understood through the analysis of three interconnected planes: personal, interpersonal, and community. By engaging in cultural activities within a community, individuals can transform their thinking and responsibilities through an ongoing process known as *participatory appropriation*, or “...how individuals change through their involvement in one or another activity, in the process becoming prepared for subsequent involvement in related activities” (Rogoff, 1995). Fundamentally, Rogoff (1990) argued social exchanges act as a medium for activities to be transformed based on individuals’ understandings and levels of involvement. Individuals advance their thoughts and actions through social interaction and shared understanding, which prepares them to participate in similar activities in the future. She also noted when individuals use shared understanding in new situations, they are engaging in appropriation that reflects personal understanding of and involvement in particular activities. “People contribute to the processes involved in sociocultural activities at the same time that they inherit practices by others” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 52).

Based on sociocultural theory, interpersonal interactions involve collaboration and coordination; these exchanges can be considered what Rogoff (1990) called *guided participation*. She defines guided participation as a collaborative process where individuals (a) build bridges from present understanding and skills to reach new understandings, and (b) arrange and structure participation in activities, with notable shifts in individual responsibilities over time. This

participation requires engagement in shared endeavors, but individual actions can, and often do, vary greatly (Rogoff, 1995). Rogoff (1990) noted the main process of guided participation involves problem-posing and problem-solving through the use of cultural tools and interpersonal communication within activities.

The final plane of analysis, the community, can be defined as a group of people "...who have some common and continuing organization, values, understanding, history, and practices (Rogoff, 2003, p. 80). Rogoff recurrently viewed this plane through an apprenticeship metaphor, where individuals participate in a system of cultural activities and apprentices eventually gain more responsibilities (1995; 2003). In a community, activities occur within the constraints of culturally-defined traditions and practice (Rogoff, 1995). The community develops and evolves as individuals engage in shared activities. On the whole, Rogoff (1995) contended purposes/goals, cultural constraints, resources, values, and cultural tools are all important to consider within the plane of community since they are interrelated.

Situated Learning Theory

Essentially, sociocultural theory stresses both the importance of the activity and the social situation within a community. Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory reflects the principles of sociocultural theory that are the foundation of learning and claims learning and knowing are social, situated, shared, and distributed (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Through this perspective, different social settings provide appropriate contexts for learning and social relations change as individuals participate in activities and develop new understandings (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In particular, situated learning occurs through a process called *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). “A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). However, this term is not used to solely describe individual learning and identity formation, but also includes the transformation of Community of practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Overall, situated learning theory contends learning is a result of complex social interactions and stresses a need for the development of authentic activities within learning communities for genuine learning to occur (Utley, 2006).

While many facets of these theories were considered while developing this dissertation study, there were a few anchor points obtained from these theories that informed the data collection and analysis. Specifically, it was essential for the members of the community to have control of their own learning, providing their own ideas of what they wanted to learn and how. Also, there was a heavy focus on the importance of discourse on community members’ learning throughout the data collection process, which was viewed as situated in lived experiences across points in time.

Rogoff’s (1995) planes of development contributed to how mentor development was analyzed and described; the community and individual development were considered simultaneously, with one positioned in the foreground and the other in the background and vice versa. This positioning helped tell the story of how the community and individual members co-evolved across time in order to thoroughly answer the two research questions. Finally, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation was used during data

collection and analysis to help me, as a participant observer and facilitator of the community, understand how individual mentors were learning through varied participation.

Knowledge

What constitutes knowledge has been debated for centuries, especially in the fields of psychology, anthropology, and philosophy, and dates back to the theories of Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato. However, through a sociocultural lens, knowledge and learning are clearly outcomes of social interactions, situated in cultural contexts, mediated by tools, shared and distributed, and products of joint activities (Alfred, 2002; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1991). In essence, each culture has a shared system of meaning based on members' interpretations and understandings of surroundings, actions, and verbal expressions (Hammerstedt & Loughlin, n.d.). Individuals within cultures assign meanings to symbols and these symbols initiate action among individuals and social groups.

Educational Research on Knowledge

Historically, educational research has been based on cognitive, or individual theories of learning, inspired in particular by Piaget (Alfred, 2002; Tsui, et al., 2009). Through a cognitive approach, learning is viewed as universal with the effect of others or cultural artifacts that mediate interactions not considered influential (Tsui, et al., 2009). Researchers adopting a cognitive perspective typically focus on the individual as the unit of analysis whereas sociocultural researchers focus on interactive systems (Putnam & Borko, 2000).

While aspects of sociocultural theory have been part of the knowledge base for some time, Putnam and Borko (2000) argued these ideas about the nature of cognition and learning have been rediscovered within contemporary educational research. Researchers are revisiting the

idea that "...cognition is (a) situated in particular physical and social contexts; (b) social in nature; and (c) distributed across the individual, other persons, and tools" (Putnam & Borko, 2000, p. 4).

Views of Student Learning within Educational Settings

Not only has educational research been historically based on individual construction of knowledge, a majority of Western school learning environments, and instructional practices within them have focused on the importance of individual competence over social, distributed cognition (Putnam & Borko, 2000). In these settings, learning is decontextualized and typically viewed in isolation; interactions are constrained by the "grammar of schooling", or an externally enforced frame that determines what contributes to cooperation (Vanderstraeten & Biesta, 2006, p. 169). Thus, a major goal of schooling is to support students' flexible adaptation, or their ability to transfer learning to new situations (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). This is often taught by encouraging students to acquire knowledge in abstract ways (Lave, 1997).

Early in the twentieth century, learning within educational settings focused mainly on the acquisition of basic skills such as reading, writing, and calculating, but has now moved towards a focus on critical thinking, clear expression of thought, and complex problem-solving (Bransford et al., 2000). This shift has encouraged some researchers and practitioners to reexamine how to best support students' knowledge construction and view schools as professional learning communities, characterized by shared missions, values, and collective inquiry (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). According to Darling-Hammond (2006), the new demands on schools and teachers are requiring the reformation of teacher education. Wells (1999) recommended a need for educational settings to promote student learning through participation in joint activities, and that

there should be greater acknowledgement of the role discourse plays in different modes of knowing.

Teacher Knowledge

Within the field of education teacher knowledge, or cognition, is repeatedly discussed, and yet is challenging to articulate and assess (Kagan, 1990; Margerum-Leys & Marx, 2004). Kagan (1990) defined teacher cognition as any or all of the following: “Pre or inservice teachers’ self-reflections; beliefs and knowledge about teaching, students, and content; and awareness of problem-solving strategies endemic to classroom teaching” (p. 419). Generally, teacher knowledge is broken down into three broad components: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge (Margerum-Leys & Marx, 2004). Content knowledge is the basic knowledge of subject matter (Shulman, 1986). Pedagogical knowledge is general knowledge about teaching, such as how to organize a classroom or manage students during classroom activities (Baxter & Lederman, 1999).

Pedagogical content knowledge, which has received growing attention over the past decade, is a phrase originally used by Shulman (1986) and includes a teacher’s personal understandings of what it means to teach and learn particular content (Kagan, 1990). Shulman (1987) illustrated how pedagogical content knowledge “...represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (p. 8). Pedagogical content knowledge is the most complex of the three basic forms of teacher knowledge and quite complicated to measure because it cannot be directly observed and is difficult for teachers to explicate (Kagan, 1990). Shulman’s (1987) theory of teacher

knowledge argues there are interrelated categories of a teacher's knowledge base beyond the three general categories, which include: "curriculum knowledge, ... knowledge of learners and their characteristics, ... knowledge of educational contexts, ... and knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values and their philosophical and historical grounds" (p. 8).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) claimed it is beneficial to move beyond the traditional labeling of knowledge because too much categorization can lead to dismissal of valuable, alternative, unconventional views of learning. A number of scholars, instead, have focused on the range of contexts and conditions in which knowledge is constructed and situated. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001; 1993), for example, used Geertz's (1983) term *local knowledge* to illustrate how teachers can develop ways of knowing about their own teaching through activities such as collaboration and action research. Therefore, local knowledge is not a kind of knowledge, but is a position of knowing about teaching and what can be constructed as teachers engage in collaboration within their own communities.

Similarly, Max van Manen (1991) claimed effective teachers possess a pedagogical thoughtfulness and a tact that is beyond any intellectual knowing. "To be tactful is to be physically mindful of the person to whom one is oriented; to be tactful is to incarnate one's reflective thoughtfulness in concrete situations (van Manen, 1991, p. 206). Essentially, teacher tact, which is learned through experience and reflection on past experiences, is fundamental to effective teaching (van Manen, 1991).

Shulman (1987) claimed a teacher's broad array of knowledge is obtained through scholarship in content discipline, educational materials and structures, formal educational scholarship, and the wisdom of practice. Similarly, Bransford et al. (2000) argued practicing

teachers learn about teaching through their own teaching experiences, interactions with other teachers, formal inservice education, teacher enhancement projects, graduate programs, and life experiences. Lowery (2002) argued more research is needed in order to truly understand, “how teachers learn; what types of knowledge and levels of knowledge acquisition are necessary to become effective teachers; and what contexts are most conducive to learning how to teach” (p. 68).

Professional Development

Professional development opportunities are designed for teachers to acquire new knowledge and change practice, although obtaining new knowledge does not always lead to change in teaching practice (Caruso & Fawcett, 1999). Often, professional development for teachers (a) is predetermined and not based on teachers’ needs, (b) occurs in isolation, and (c) does not provide opportunities for teachers to implement new techniques in their classrooms followed by related feedback (Bransford et al., 2000). Yet, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) explained how new images of teachers’ professional development has shifted from what teachers do to what teachers know about teaching and their own teaching strategies and how they use this knowledge to inform classroom practices; essentially, there has been a shift from transmission-oriented to constructivist-based initiatives. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) built a case for professional development that highlights *knowledge-of-practice*, instead of just *knowledge-for* and *knowledge-in practice* (p. 48). “From this perspective, knowledge making is understood as a pedagogic act—constructed in the context of use, intimately connected to the knower, and although relevant to immediate situations, also inevitably a process of theorizing” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, p. 48).

Research on teacher professional development has highlighted a need for more collaborative approaches that include learning communities where teachers “try new ideas, reflect on outcomes, and co-construct knowledge about teaching and learning within the context of authentic activity” (Butler, Lausher, Jarvis-Selinger, & Beckingham, 2004, p. 436).

Lieberman and Mace (2008) remarked this shift towards collaboration is in response to new ideas of learning. They stated:

In plain terms—people learn from and with others in particular ways. They learn through practice (learning as doing), through meaning (learning and intentional), through community (learning as participating and being with others), and through identity (learning as changing who we are). (p. 227)

As such, developing learning communities is becoming an increasingly popular trend among professional development initiatives because it encourages collaborative reflection-on-action, develops knowledge-of-practice, and builds on the socio-historical, contextual experiences of participants (Butler, et al., 2004; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).

Lieberman and Mace (2008) described how networked communities in the United Kingdom have changed the nature of teacher development. The government sponsored a five-year project aimed at developing Community of practices through partnerships with teachers and local universities or colleges. This project led to the sharing and development of knowledge among hundreds of teachers and improved their understandings of teaching and learning, thus leading to improvements in their students’ learning. “The school networks helped to create *practitioner knowledge* (from teachers’ experiences), *public knowledge* (from research and

theory), and *new knowledge* (from what we created together)” (Lieberman & Mace, 2008, p. 229).

Learning to Teach

As current educational reforms are placing more emphasis on standards and teacher accountability, the development and preparation of preservice teachers has come to the forefront (Darling-Hammond, 2006). However, learning to teach is a complex endeavor that continues throughout a teacher’s lifetime, often mistakenly viewed as a process that occurs solely for those labeled as preservice teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 1983). As described previously in this chapter, acquiring necessary skills and knowledge bases for teaching is dependant on a variety of factors, and clearly it is impossible to obtain all of this when individuals are preservice teachers, nor would that even be desirable. Feiman-Nemser (1983) argued researchers and practitioners should view the preservice phase of teaching as laying the foundation for learning to teach, not the preparation *for* teaching. Rogers (1992) explained that adults continue to learn due to their (a) occupations, (b) social roles, and (c) interests. Therefore, preservice teachers are learning due to their future occupations while mentor teachers’ learning relates to their social roles as mentors and their interests in being leaders in the field.

Feiman-Nemser (2009) classified learning to teach around four themes: learning to *think*, *know*, *feel*, and *act* like a teacher (p. 698). Thinking involves moving past naïve beliefs; knowing consists of acquiring a deep and broad knowledge base *for* and *of* teaching; feeling includes developing emotions and personal identity by combining ideals and realities; acting constitutes building a repertoire of skills, routines, strategies, and decision-making skills (Feiman-Nemser, 2009). Reviewing literature on (a) adult and teacher learning and development, (b) the nature of

teacher preparation, and (c) the importance of learning in context provides necessary insights into how to best support mentors as they educate preservice teachers and prepare them for careers consumed with learning to teach.

Stages of Learning & Development

For many decades, cognitive-developmental theorists have explained adult and teacher development through various stage theories (Oja & Smulyan, 1989; Richardson & Placier, 1996; Romero, 1990). While each theory is different, they hold similar broad categories of preconventional, conventional, and post-conventional stages of development (Oja & Smulyan, 1989). Through these theories, the general argument is made that individuals change and develop more complex (1) patterns of cognitive thought, (2) interpersonal understandings, and (3) emotional constructs, as they progress through different stages or phases (Oja & Smulyan, 1989; Romero, 1990).

Loevinger (1976) studied personality and created stages of ego development that relate to the development of “impulse control and character development, cognitive style, conscious preoccupations and interpersonal style; each distinctive meaning has an associated character type” (Oja & Smulyan, 1989, p. 100). Tarule (1980) contended adults transform their views and beliefs about the world, and in turn their behaviors, through a series of four steps. These steps include (1) diffusion, (2) dissonance, (3) differentiation, and (4) coherence. According to Tarule, individuals respond differently to learning environments, depending on where they are in the process of transformation.

Sprinthall, Reiman, and Thies-Sprinthall (1996), and Oja and Smulyan (1989) stated how adult development stage theories are worth taking into account when thinking about teacher

development. One of the most well-known stage theories of teacher development is Francis Fuller's (1969) three-stage model, which classifies development into the phases of preteaching, survival, and teaching performance. Fuller's model argues a novice focuses on oneself, which she considers a weakness. This model was extended by Fuller and Brown (1975) to include a final stage focused on concerns for pupils. Berliner (et al. 1988; 1994) also designed a theory of teachers' thinking and argues teachers progress through five stages: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. Based on interviews with elementary preservice and inservice teachers, Black and Ammon (1992) constructed a theory of teachers' pedagogical thinking that proclaims teachers move from "...associationist and behaviorist conceptions (levels 1 and 2) to constructivist conceptions that are first quite global (level 3) but eventually become more differentiated and integrated (levels 4 and 5)" (p. 331).

Even more recent research reveals a trend towards categorizing teacher learning and development into stages. From a 17 year-long study, Arzi and White (2007) found secondary science teachers' content knowledge develops in three phases: academic details acquisition, curricular aggregation, and intra and inter-disciplinary linking and pattern construction. Mitchell (2008) evaluated teachers' professional growth over six years and found they develop a professional attitude by progressing through a series of stages, sometimes even simultaneously. These stages include (1) self-confidence in thinking, planning, and experimenting, (2) desire to acquire background content, (3) growth of the concept of curriculum building, and (4) relating their job to the world outside the school.

Some researchers have investigated the more narrowly defined learning and development of preservice and/or novice teachers. From a review of forty studies, Kagan (1992) found both

elementary and secondary preservice and first-year teachers are in a developmental stage where they are concerned with acquiring knowledge of students, using that knowledge to restructure personal views of self, and developing routines around classroom management. Kagan contended a focus on self is not a flaw of novice teachers, but is instead a necessary part of development. Through a yearlong case study, Meijer, Korthagen, and Vasalos (2009) concluded one secondary preservice teacher developed presence, or a sense of “being while teaching” through a series of six stages (p. 298). These stages consist of (1) chaos and a fixation on problems, (2) deepened awareness: confusion and fears, (3) reflection and the identity layer and confrontation with an existential tension, 4) discovering presence and deconstructing core beliefs, (5) deepening presence, and (6) towards autonomy in core reflection and maintaining presence.

Research is replete with the notion that the development of novice and experienced teachers, regardless of age taught, move through stages of development. This array of theories, based in empirical research, serves as a framework for chronicling the evolution of mentor teachers as they develop new understandings about self as teacher of both children and novice teachers.

Teacher Preparation

Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) described how society demands teachers to be morally righteous and “...representatives of the adult world—interpreting the diverse, and often conflicting, norms and values of our society” (p. 246). The task on teachers to be flawless, model citizens leads teachers to enter the field with misconceptions and unrealistic expectations (Feiman-Nemser, 1983). As a result, teacher preparation programs are compelled to provide

preservice teachers' with opportunities to acquire knowledge and develop dispositions that prepare them for the realities of teaching. However, teacher preparation programs have repeatedly been accused of being overly theoretical or out of touch with the realism of teaching in today's society (Anderson, 1997). In order to combat these allegations, many programs are restructuring curriculums and seeking numerous ways to help preservice teachers apply theory to practice through ongoing reflection, inquiry, and collaboration within authentic contexts (Barnett, 2008; Lowery, 2002; Utley, 2006).

Beliefs and Prior Experiences

A number of studies have shown a relationship between teachers' biographies (e.g., personalities, beliefs, past experiences) and classroom practices (Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991). More specifically, research on preservice teacher knowledge consistently shows prior knowledge and beliefs impact, and can even constrain, the adoption of new understandings (Hollingsworth, 1989; Rovegno, 1993). Tillema (1994) stated:

Beliefs serve as filters which screen new information, ultimately determining which elements are accepted and integrated in the professional's knowledge base. So normally, new knowledge will only be accepted in as far as it is congruent with the professional's pre-existing conceptions about teaching. (p. 602)

In 1975, Lortie maintained learning to teach actually begins long before a preservice teacher enters a teacher preparation program during what is known as the *apprenticeship of observation*. He claimed preservice teachers' socialization to the profession starts when they are students themselves and how they approach teaching is impacted by these early experiences. Yet,

even though preservice teachers spend many years observing teachers as they progress through schooling as students, they do not see the behind-the-scenes decision-making of teachers, which is critical to the profession (Borg, 2004).

Teacher preparation programs are continually implementing approaches, such as reflective practice, to encourage preservice teachers to identify and acknowledge their beliefs and prior experiences (Hanrahan & Tate, 2001; Long & Stuart, 2004). Through increased awareness, many teacher educators feel preservice teachers' epistemological beliefs, or beliefs about knowing and learning, change or transform, thus improving their teaching practice (Brownlee, 2004; Bowman, 1989). Particularly, preservice teachers are being provided with opportunities to understand and come to know the influence of prior experiences on their present learning so that their awareness contributes to an ability to judge what is relevant versus what is tangential.

Innovative Program Approaches

In addition to reflective practice, teacher preparation programs are utilizing other techniques aimed at scaffolding preservice teachers' knowledge acquisition. For example, across a two-year period, Sims and Walsh (2009) used lesson studies (which include constant collaboration within planning sessions, implementation of lessons, and debriefing sessions) with 57 elementary preservice teachers. Through observations of the cycles of the lesson studies (planning, implementing, and debriefing) the preservice teachers increased their understandings about the complexities of teaching and the process helped transition them out of Lortie's (1975) apprenticeship of observation phase.

Parks (2008) also implemented lesson studies with 27 elementary preservice teachers. Using transcripts from audio-taped class discussions and personal field notes, Parks developed content and participation structure codes. She found that the preservice teachers developed mathematical and equity-oriented processes of thinking about teaching through the process of engaging in lesson studies.

Schepens, Aelterman, and Keer (2007) investigated the impact of stimulated recall interviews with 10 secondary preservice teachers. In this study, participants were video-taped teaching on three separate occasions. During the interviews, they watched the videos (one at a time throughout the study) and were asked to stop the video when they remembered what they were thinking. Results revealed the topics of preservice teachers' thoughts changed over time and they also differed across participants. Interestingly, Meijer, Zanting, and Verloop (2002) illustrated how video stimulated recall interviews can be used with mentor teachers to help explicate their practical knowledge. In essence, it helps them think aloud and relive their experiences with students.

Contexts for Learning

Knox (1977) identified how learning and intellectual development are influenced by individual characteristics and contextual factors. These include: condition, adjustment, relevance, speed, status, change, and outlook. Recognizing the importance of context in which activities are embedded, some researchers and theorists have moved away from stage theories and have begun to focus more on how adult and teacher learning is individualized and situated in context, as suggested by some theorists, such as Knox and Vygotsky. In essence, as discussed previously in this chapter, views of knowledge and learning stem from a Piagetian, cognitive, stance but are

shifting towards a sociocultural approach that considers individual development within context (Alfred, 2002).

Bonk and Kim (1998) explored adult learning through a sociocultural lens and argued sociocultural theory is a way to integrate contemporary trends into adult education and learning within a variety of informal and formal settings. Some of these trends include a focus on collaboration and dialogue, self-directed learning opportunities, consideration of prior experiences and knowledge, and the function of cultural tools and artifacts within different contexts. “With adult thinking dependent on learning activities in the sociocultural milieu, it is imperative that we begin to understand the various contexts of adult learning (Bonk & Kim, 1998, p. 83).

Similarly, Alfred (2002) posited sociocultural theory is a way to democratize adult education by providing discourse communities that empower all participants. When discourse communities are designed and implemented effectively, they can provide contexts for members to challenge traditional, dominant cultural practices (Alfred, 2002). While it is essential to think about adult learning through a sociocultural viewpoint, this does not mean that stage theory is not important to consider. In conjunction, these two approaches provide in-depth views of learning that keep in mind both distinctive stages of development as well as individual and contextual factors.

Field Experiences

Daley (2002) identified four characteristics of context that influence adult learning within professional practice. These consist of “...allegiance to the profession, nature of professional work, variations in organizational culture, and level of independence and autonomy” (Daley,

2002, p. 80). Daley suggested the main challenge for adult educators is how to successfully promote rediscovery of new ideas within the context of practical, real-life situations. Due to the importance of learning through practice in context, classroom-based field experiences are an essential component of preservice teacher education. Preservice teachers frequently describe how experiences they have in classrooms are highly beneficial and valuable to their professional development as teachers (Barnett, 2008; Feiman-Nemser, 1983). Hancock and Gallard (2004) found elementary and secondary preservice teachers' beliefs can be both challenged and reinforced during field experiences.

Teacher preparation programs and school systems have begun embedding a series of strategies and activities into field experiences to increase preservice teachers' learning. Some of these include action research projects (Black & Ammon, 1992), paired field placements (Wynn & Kromrey, 2000), collaborative projects (Moran, 2002), co-planning and teaching through collaborative mentoring (Chalies, Bertone, Flavier, & Durand, 2008), and post-lesson interviews between preservice teachers and mentors (Chalies, Bertone, Flavier, & Durand, 2004).

The most significant part of the field experience for preservice teachers is the time they spend as student teachers or interns under the guidance of mentor teachers (Shen, 2002; Silva, 2000). While enrolled in teacher preparation programs, Osunde (1996) estimates preservice teachers spend roughly 33% of their program time with mentoring teachers. Therefore, experiences with mentors are crucial to preservice teachers' professional development and preparation as future teachers.

Pre-K Classroom Context

Preservice teacher learning within a pre-K classroom is likely to be different when compared to K-12 classrooms due to contextual differences. Some of these include variations in the physical placement of classrooms (Crawford, Clifford, Early, & Reszka, 2009), leadership support (Wilcox & Wigle 2001), student population (Gilliam & Zigler, 2000), teacher qualifications (Clifford, et al, 2005b), curriculum foci (Epstein, 2006), and overall concern for the quality of care children receive (Clifford & Maxwell, 2002).

For copious reasons, adequate teacher support and supervision in public pre-K contexts is an ongoing problem, primarily due to the structure and design of the pre-K programs. Many public pre-K classrooms operate under the umbrella of one school system, but exist in private childcare centers, non-profit centers, public schools, Head Start centers, and public preschools (Crawford, et al., 2009; Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). This separateness can lead to feelings of isolation among the teachers, which is a common problem in the teaching profession (McGinty, Justice, Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Puig & Recchia, 2008). Teachers in self-contained preschools or Head Start centers are likely to have more opportunities for collaboration than those in traditional K-5 public schools. This is important to consider when teacher preparation programs consider placements for pre-K preservice teachers, since most programs would prefer for novices to learn the value of collaboration within the field (Silva & Dana, 2001). Yet, some of the more isolated pre-K teachers may benefit greatly from collaborating with preservice teachers placed in their classrooms, particularly if they are working in the only pre-K classroom in the school (as was the case for one of the participants in this study).

In public schools, many principals are ill-prepared to guide pre-K teachers in dealing with students who are at-risk or receiving special services (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Wilcox & Wigle, 2001). Therefore, principals may rely solely on the pre-K supervisors to lead the pre-K teachers, and these supervisors are frequently located off-site and asked to supervise pre-K classrooms across a county or school district. In-service support for pre-K teachers is also minimal, with most training occurring while pre-K teachers are still preservice teachers enrolled in higher education programs (Clifford & Maxwell, 2002).

Student population can also provide mentors and mentees with added challenges. Most states do not have universal public pre-K programs and use eligibility requirements, such as whether children are receiving special services or labeled “at-risk”, to decide which preschool aged-children can attend (Gilliam & Zigler, 2000). Additionally, the preschool children entering these programs are becoming increasingly diverse since immigrant families tend to have higher birth rates and lower incomes (Clifford & Maxwell, 2002). Therefore, preservice teachers placed in public pre-K classrooms need successful mentors to guide them in meeting the diverse needs of these children.

Unfortunately, mentoring pre-K preservice teachers may be difficult for many pre-K teachers. Clifford et al. (2005b) argued that the majority of pre-K teachers are not adequately prepared to teach children who are at-risk. This may be partly due to the variation in teacher credentials, although more states are moving toward requiring teachers to hold bachelor’s degrees and/or teaching certifications (Crawford et al., 2009). However, there is some controversy about whether teachers’ educational levels are linked to classroom quality (Early et al., 2006). Further, research shows pre-K teachers are in need of training in language and literacy

development and ways to foster social-emotional competence among young children (Kinzie et al., 2006). As such, inadequately prepared and/or qualified teachers could lead to ineffective mentoring of novice pre-K preservice teachers.

The curriculum foci of pre-K classroom also differs in comparison to K-12 classrooms in that appropriate pre-K curricula focus on the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth of young children through play-based, developmentally appropriate activities (Epstein, 2006). Further, the pre-K curriculum should be designed to incorporate extra consideration to foster the development of dual language learners, considering the growing number of these children in pre-K classrooms (Espinosa, Castro, Crawford, & Gillanders, 2007). This has implications for pre-K mentors working with preservice teachers, as many classroom decisions behind the curriculum may be more nuanced and individualized.

The quality of care pre-K children receive is of particular concern, based on the young age of the children and the link between high quality early care and education and future child outcomes (Burchinal, et al., 2000). Such quality of care includes the specific strategies of the teachers, available materials, administrative support and training, types of teacher-child interactions, and access to resources and other sources of support (Vu, et al., 2008). However, since the majority of pre-K programs target at-risk children, or those who receive special services or have special concerns, quality of care is an even bigger issue, especially since at-risk children have a higher likelihood of being in low-quality educational settings (Clifford, et al., 2005b; Clifford & Maxwell, 2002).

When pre-K teachers become mentors, they are challenged to support the learning of a novice while still delivering high quality care and education to children in their classrooms. Yet,

mentoring in pre-K classrooms is likely to improve the quality of care young children receive both immediately and in the long-term, and therefore a critical component of pre-K programs for both children and teachers. For example, mentoring has proven to improve the teacher practices of both mentors and novice teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; McCormick & Brennan, 2001) and have a positive impact on students whose teachers were mentored (Jacobson, 2007).

Mentoring Novice Teachers

The mentor/mentee model of preservice teacher supervision is based on apprenticeship forms of learning. “Apprentices learn to think, argue, act, and interact in increasingly knowledgeable ways, with people who do something well, by doing it with them as legitimate, peripheral participants” (Lave, 1997, p. 19). Yet, how this model is implemented varies greatly due to the fact that mentors have individual views of mentorship and interpretations of their responsibilities (Hudson, 2007). Further, mentors are faced with the complexities of how preservice teachers obtain new knowledge and apply existing knowledge to guide their decision-making in the classroom, which is greatly influenced by their beliefs, prior experiences, development, and current situations (Rovegno, 1993; Tillema, 1994). “Mentoring is ultimately a teaching role—teachers teaching teachers to teach, and like classroom teaching, it is complex work” (Moir & Hanson, 2008, p. 62).

In her 1997 review of the mentoring literature, Hawkey found four general frameworks used in mentoring research which include (a) roles and responsibilities of participants, (b) stages in student teacher development, (c) stages in mentoring relationships, and (d) personal perspectives, values, and assumptions. Within the literature, Hawkey discovered a lack of theory-based research or research on the interactions between mentors and preservice teachers. Hawkey

suggested there is great variation in mentoring practices and further research, specifically qualitative research, is needed to explore how mentors support and challenge preservice teachers to enhance development and how mentoring interventions can positively impact preservice teachers' thinking and practice.

For this dissertation study, a current review of the literature on mentoring revealed similar categorizations as Hawkey (1997), but also an increase in studies about the professional development of mentors. Literature on mentoring is described next as (a) mentor roles and typologies (b) models/frameworks of mentoring, and (c) mentor strategies. Research on mentoring beginning teachers is also included because many of the behaviors, techniques, and models described are beneficial in understanding how to guide and support the development of novice teachers, whether they are preservice or beginning inservice teachers.

Mentor Roles and Typologies

Hall, Draper, Smith, and Bullough (2008) used open-ended surveys to investigate 264 mentor teachers' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. The researchers also conducted follow-up telephone interviews with 24 of the participants. They found that mentors view their primary role as assisting preservice teachers in becoming acquainted with the teaching profession and providing them with opportunities to teach in the classroom.

Silva (2000) investigated the role of two elementary mentors (Bridgett and Claudia) in a professional development school (PDS) and how they adjusted their teaching to guide undergraduate preservice teachers. Through mentor and intern journal entries, field notes, interviews, e-mails, meeting minutes, and observation sheets, unique roles emerged for each mentor. Bridgett was labeled as using *artistic mentoring* and her work focused on teaching

interns as teaching children, mentoring as decision-making, and creating spaces as pedagogical tools. Claudia was designated as using *inquiry-oriented mentoring*, centered around teaching interns as teaching children, voice and silence as pedagogical tools, and problem solver as problem poser.

Stanulis and Russell (2000) described how two elementary student teacher/mentor dyads interpreted their roles during a year-long field experience. Data collection consisted of classroom observations, small-group reflection sessions, whole group reflection sessions, and dialogue journals. The data analyses revealed the importance of preservice teachers feeling enough trust to be able to *jump in* and immerse themselves in teaching and risk-taking in order to develop professionally. Results also showed the value of conscious collaboration between mentors and mentees, and mentors' use of scaffolding to enhance preservice teacher learning. Finally, Stanulis and Russell suggested mentors benefit from mutual, shared mentoring situations, where they engage in collaboration with university and school-based educators and work as a team and learn from one another.

Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair (2005) conducted case studies of four elementary preservice and mentor teacher dyads to examine mentors' perceptions of their roles during the student teaching practicum. Through interviews and observations of interactions, results revealed seven mentor roles: planner, modeler, evaluator, friend, professional peer, counselor, and conferencer, with the planner and modeler roles being predominant. Sanders et al. also found that the mentors struggled with managing multiple roles and suggested they would benefit from support and professional development to increase their knowledge of roles and application of related behaviors.

Walkington (2005a) explored preschool mentoring teachers' perceptions of their roles and how participating in a mentoring relationship impacted their professional and personal self-concept. Through 105 open-ended surveys, Walkington found mentors sought to be mentors to grow professionally, improve classroom opportunities, and to gain personal satisfaction. Mentors reported challenges to mentoring, which included being overwhelmed and having a lack of confidence. Further, mentors revealed struggles when their beliefs varied from their mentees and when they had to be supportive, yet honest, with preservice teachers.

Siebert, Clark, Kilbridge, and Peterson (2006) conducted a study with three high school mentor teachers to illustrate how they perceive their role when preservice teachers struggle or fail during internships. Through collaboration, Siebert revealed how mentors (a) question their ability to mentor when preservice teachers are not successful, (b) see similarities in how they teach preservice teachers and high school students, and (c) experience tensions between what they need to do to support preservice teachers and what responsibilities they have to their own students. Siebert described how mentors benefit from collaborations with university educators and need supportive contexts where mentors can discuss preservice teachers' progress with other professionals. Siebert concluded by stating how these mentor teachers, through engaging in mentoring, learned a lot about teaching, learning, teaching others to teach, and themselves.

Zanting, Verloop, and Vermunt (2001) conducted structured interviews to investigate 30 preservice teachers' beliefs about mentors' roles and compare their beliefs to mentors' perceptions and current views on mentoring. Results revealed six areas of foci: "...the affective aspects of learning, a mentor's teaching style, assessment of a student teacher's performance, reflection on a student teacher's lesson, the school context, and the self-regulating of learning"

(Zanting et al., 2001, p. 67). Within these areas of foci, five mentor roles emerged: coach, information source, evaluator of a student's [preservice teacher's] lesson, someone who stimulates a student teacher to think about his/her own teaching, and someone who introduces a student teacher to school life; the coaching role was dominant. There were 10 preservice teacher learning activities associated with these five roles. Zanting et al. (2001) also found student teachers' beliefs about mentoring were similar to the mentors. Interestingly, the preservice teachers did not expect the mentors to illuminate their practical knowledge behind their teaching practices. The researchers proposed explicating practical knowledge is an essential part of mentoring that mentors and preservice teachers often overlook.

Models/Frameworks of Mentoring

Walkington (2005b) utilized preservice teachers' beliefs and perceptions to suggest how mentoring relationships can contribute to their formations of individual teacher identities. He described how using a consultative mentoring model, which acknowledges individuality, is more appropriate than traditional supervisory models. Within the consultative model, both preservice teachers and mentors have time to engage in meaningful, even challenging discussions. Also, this model provides opportunities to reflect, which encourage the preservice teachers to build confidence and in the moment decision-making skills. Finally, this model includes a research aspect where mentors collect data on preservice teachers' interactions to use during debriefing sessions.

Hudson (2003) surveyed 59 preservice teachers to gain insights into their experiences of mentoring in relation to primary science teaching. Hudson conducted an exploratory factor analysis of survey data to assess the unidimensionality for five separate mentoring factors that

were derived from the literature. Results supported the theoretical base that there is a five-factor model of mentoring in primary science that includes: personal attributes, system requirements, feedback, modeling, and pedagogical knowledge. In particular, Hudson found preservice teachers in his study had small amounts of assistance in reflecting and received minimal information about system requirements from their mentors. Furthermore, the preservice teachers had little understanding of expectations for teaching science and most mentors did not demonstrate science teaching knowledge and skills. However, most mentors provided feedback, either oral or written, after preservice teachers taught science lessons. Hudson contended mentoring in primary science requires unique skills and knowledge and institutes of higher education should become involved in training and educating mentors.

Mentor Strategies

Zanting, Verloop, Vermunt, and Van Driel (1998) argued a need for mentors to explicate their practical knowledge. They contended when mentors bring their own practical knowledge to the surface, they assist preservice teachers in obtaining new information, understanding the nature of teaching, recognizing their mentor teachers' mentoring and developing of personal teaching theories, and integrating theory into practice. The researchers argued mentors can make their practical knowledge known to themselves and others by collaborating with other professionals and preservice teachers, reflecting on their own lessons, and co-teaching lessons with preservice teachers. The researchers mentioned some considerations for mentors, which included understanding the developmental stage of their preservice teachers and possessing a willingness and positive attitude about exploring their own thinking.

Feiman-Nemser (2001) used a case study approach to examine what strategies and techniques a successful mentor employed in his education of novice inservice teachers. Through interviews and observations over a two-year period, Feiman-Nemser found the mentor took advantage of salient topics to engage in meaningful conversations with mentees, worked to identify problems, probed mentees' thinking, acknowledged growth, and focused on students as a conversation piece. Further, this mentor was successful in linking theory to practice and utilized a cognitive apprenticeship approach to teacher education. Within this approach, mentors think aloud so mentees can both observe their actions and hear how they process tasks or problems. Feiman-Nemser summarized this mentor's work with beginning teachers as being a type of *educative mentoring*, where the focus is on practice-centered, inquiry-oriented professional development of novices within a collaborative culture (p. 28).

The Professional Development of Mentors

The role mentors play in the development of preservice teachers has increased dramatically since there has been a shift towards school-based teacher education (Koster, Korthagen, & Wubbels, 1998). "When student teachers are in their partner school, or field-based site, they work with a designated mentor who has substantial responsibility for planning, supporting, and assessing their professional development" (Furlong, 2000, p. 12). Since mentors are teacher educators, they need to possess rich knowledge of mentoring strategies in order to effectively guide preservice teachers' learning and development, yet many are left with insufficient support as they undertake this fundamental role (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006a; Walkington, 2005a). Often, teacher preparation programs falsely assume good teachers will automatically be good mentors, but this is not the case (Schneider, 2008). It is also sometimes a

challenge to find high-quality early childhood mentors, so program supervisors place preservice teachers in less than adequate field experiences (Walkington, 2005a). Finding mentors may be difficult because being an effective mentor is challenging; knowledge mentors are expected to share with mentees is rarely elicited professionally in the school context, thus it remains tacit and hidden from view (Edwards & Collinson, 1996; Zanting et al., 1998).

One way to combat these issues is to provide mentors with meaningful professional development opportunities through mentoring programs or other initiatives. Ideally, teacher preparation programs can provide ongoing guidance and support for mentors' professional development (Yendol-Hoppey, 2007). This is especially important for mentors in most public pre-K classrooms, due to the specific needs and challenges of working with young children from low-income families, who receive special education services, who are dual language learners, and/or who exhibit other risk factors (Clifford, et al., 2005a). These children are more likely to need extra assistance in their development of language, literacy, and social-emotional skills that are crucial for later school success (Kinzie et al., 2006). Essentially, some researchers argue the type of support and preparation mentors receive influences the quality of their mentoring and the impact they have on preservice teachers' practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Yet, continued research is needed on the impact of mentors' participation in professional development programs on their knowledge acquisition and mentor effectiveness (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009).

From a review of the literature, it is evident researchers are beginning to study the effectiveness of professional development initiatives for teachers and mentors that are based on collaboration and the acquisition and sharing of knowledge situated within communities (Mullen,

2000; Zeek et al., 2001). While many communities that have been formed with teachers do not focus directly on their professional development as mentors, with careful consideration the ideas behind CoPs can be utilized to form a community of mentors. Specifically, literature reviewed for this dissertation study reveals how: (a) collaborative opportunities, (b) CoPs, (c) professional learning communities, and (d) online forums may be used to increase teachers' and mentors' knowledge of best practices concerning a range of topics. Further, there are recommendations from the field about how to successfully design and implement collaborative initiatives in order to increase their effectiveness.

Collaborative Opportunities

Research in teacher education has shown that collaboration leads to changes in teacher knowledge and practice; teachers can learn to adjust their strategies to mirror collective views of teacher quality, develop more positive views of students, and create shared understandings of how to analyze student work (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Change is achievable because collaboration decreases teacher isolation and encourages teacher and school reform through joint action and problem-solving (Achinstein, 2002). Some researchers argue a collaborative model of development is in response to the unsuccessful workshop approach where outside professionals use a top-down method to train teachers (Baron, 2008; Fizer, 2004). Others believe it is because public schools are organized and function based on an ineffective factory model where teachers are given few opportunities to make decisions and/or work together to improve student learning (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992) explained:

As a profession, teaching is primarily defined by what teachers do when they are not with other teachers. . . . In fact, when teachers are out of their classrooms or talking to other

teachers, they are often perceived by administrators, parents, and sometimes even by teachers themselves as *not* working. (p. 301)

Schneider (2008) provided insightful ways to assist mentors in learning how to guide preservice teachers. Some techniques included providing mentors and preservice teachers with collaborative tasks that include shared planning, teaching, and reflecting. Schneider suggested mentors should engage in thoughtful interactions with preservice teachers so they can learn about the thinking behind preservice teachers' actions. Schneider also described how mentors should be guided in initiating constructive conversations. Overall, through a task structure, mentors can appropriately scaffold preservice teachers and also grow professionally themselves.

Mullen (2000) illustrated the need to use a collaborative mentoring model for professional development. She explained how walkways between schools and universities should be two-way paths to facilitate collaborative projects that encourage professional development of everyone involved. Mullen formed a one-year partnership support group of 17 members that consisted of administrators, teachers, professors, family school therapists, librarians, dissertation writers, and school directors. Through analyzing bi-weekly meeting transcriptions, Mullen described how school and university faculty engaged in synergistic sharing as they conducted joint research on mentoring in a variety of contexts. Mullen suggested collaborative co-mentoring practices should be a primary focus of both school and university professionals.

Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1993) described the importance of collaboration and contextual factors as they compared and contrasted two mentoring programs designed to support novice elementary and secondary inservice teachers. One program, in Los Angeles, required the mentors to mentor part-time and on their own while continuing their regular teaching loads. In an

Albuquerque program, mentors were full-time mentors and situated within a community of learners. In this program, mentor teachers focused solely on their role as mentors through research, weekly collaborative meetings, and participation in the university setting. Feiman-Nemser and Parker argued Albuquerque's model is a more suitable model for mentoring and provides mentors with necessary support through collaboration and shared inquiry.

Parker-Katz and Bay (2008) formed conversation groups with 17 urban mentors and university supervisors to explore the development of mentor knowledge and how this knowledge is used by mentors to make decisions about supervision. Over a six-month period, these researchers found mentors collectively constructed knowledge around three themes: "the importance of asking who teacher candidates can become as teachers, the importance of focusing on individual pupils' learning as a means to learning teaching, and the importance of collective responsibility in teaching" (p. 1266). The researchers concluded that a collaborative approach to mentoring encourages mentors to develop a vision of teaching and mentoring that is recursive, situated, and focused on individual knowledge of self and others.

To investigate mentors' perceptions of the benefits they receive from mentoring preservice teachers, Zeek et al. (2001) formed four informal conversation groups with 32 mentors in K-6 schools. After analyzing group transcripts, the researchers gained new insights into how mentors benefited from collaboration, how they approached the conversations, and how the researchers' agenda impacted the results; therefore, the data collection method for this study ended up being an important area of focus. In particular, the mentors (a) felt more empowered after talking with other mentors, university faculty, and school colleagues, (b) were eager to share their experiences and opinions, (c) responded to questions posed by telling stories, yet (d)

were not given opportunities to ask and answer their own questions. Zeek et al. added another stage to this initial study and asked 15 mentors to tell stories about pivotal moments in their experiences as mentors. After transcribing these stories, mentors read and discussed these stories within conversation groups. Through this process, mentors engaged in transactional inquiry as they collaborated and reflected on their own and others' stories of mentoring experiences, which facilitated their professional growth.

Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, and Bergen (2008) developed a collaborative training program in the Netherlands with 30 primary teachers who mentored preservice teachers (mentees). The program, called SMART, focused on increasing mentors' use of supervisory skills and consisted of training, peer consultation, and personal coaching sessions. Mentors participated in nine structured sessions over three months. During these sessions, mentors practiced supervisory skills, consulted with one another, and provided advice using a protocol. Some of the sessions included mentors sharing video clips of mentoring conversations between themselves and preservice teachers. After sharing, mentors would describe portions of their mentoring strategies that they would like to improve and the group would collaborate about these issues. SMART also included on-site coaching with trainers. Supervisory conversations between mentors and preservice teachers were recorded before and after the SMART program was implemented. Results revealed the breadth of supervisory skills remained relatively the same. However, mentors spent less time in advisor and instructor roles and more time in an encouraging role; this gave preservice teachers increased opportunities to actively contribute to the conversations and reflect on their practice.

Communities of Practice

Within the literature on mentoring, it is evident communities of practice are formed with mentors as a way to increase their professional development (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; Moir & Hanson, 2008). A *community of practice* (CoP) is a “group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in the area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). Within the field of education, a CoP is loosely defined as “a group of professionals and other stakeholders in pursuit of a shared learning enterprise, commonly focused on a particular topic” (Buysee, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003).

Communities of practice stem from early anthropological perspectives that describe how newcomers become enculturated into communities with specific traditions, roles, and practices (Butler et al., 2004). However, the phrase is most commonly associated with the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), who coined the term as they studied how meaning and understandings are negotiated among professional communities. CoPs are notorious for having an emergent, informal “curriculum” which dictates who participates and what type of learning will occur (Wenger, 1998). Essentially, Wenger (1998) explained how they are activity systems “where participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities” (p. 98).

Glazer and Hannafin (2006) highlighted the benefits of using a four-phase collaborative apprenticeship model, within a CoP, where a teacher-leader (mentor) collaborates with other teachers and guides them in the design and development of learning activities. The model is based on the idea of reciprocity and there is no set “entry point”. During the introduction phase,

the mentor models the implementation of a new method or resource and the other teachers reflect on this information. In the development phase, the entire team of teachers collaborates on the design, development, and implementation of learning activities using this new knowledge. During the proficient phase, the teachers autonomously develop learning activities and then the team collaborates on the results. Finally, in the mastery phase, the teachers, who have now transformed into central members of the team, are prepared to be mentors to other teachers. Glazer and Hannafin concluded by describing six factors that affect reciprocity within this collaborative model: affect, beliefs, environment, culture, cognition, and personality.

Through the New Teacher Center (NTC) at the University of California, Moir and Hanson (2008) described how they implemented communities of practice with mentor teachers called Mentor Forums. Moir and Hanson revealed the philosophy behind NTC as being based on “(1) one-to-one mentoring, (2) formative assessment, (3) mentor professional development, and (4) a community of practice” (2008, p. 62). Within each Mentor Forum, mentors (of novice teachers) came together three hours a week with program leaders to discuss practice-related issues and gain new knowledge through collaborative learning and inquiry. At each weekly meeting, there was an agenda that is comprised of “Connecting, Problem Pose/Problem Solve, a New Learning, Reflection, and Feedback for Future Forums” (Moir & Hanson, 2008, p. 65). A few mentors were asked to plan and facilitate parts of each meeting. Further, the Mentor Forums included the use of Formative Assessment System tools to guide mentor and novice conversations. Moir and Hanson concluded their chapter by discussing how the Mentor Forum was a valuable model for the professional development of mentors.

Professional Learning Communities

The principles behind CoPs have been extended in the field of education through the development of *professional learning communities*, or “collegial cultures where teachers develop the capacity to engage in honest talk. . . .They provide a forum for reflection and honest feedback, for challenge and disagreement, and for accepting responsibility without assigning blame” (Lieberman & Miller, 2008a, p. 18). Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) contended the professional learning community is the new paradigm for teachers’ professional development. Through this collaborative effort, teachers learn and develop which, in turn, positively impacts students (Lieberman & Mace, 2008; Lieberman & Miller, 2008a). DuFour and Eaker (1998) argued professional learning communities have six characteristics which include, (a) shared mission, vision, and values, (b) collective inquiry, (c) collaborative teams, (d) action orientation and experimentation, (e) continuous improvement, and (f) results orientation.

Achinstein and Athanases (2006b) stressed the need for inquiry within professional learning communities at the mentor level. Therefore, learning communities can be formed with mentors to improve their knowledge of mentorship, which ultimately leads to advances in preservice or novice teacher learning. As a result of mentor and novice teachers’ development, students can benefit tremendously from high-quality teaching practices (Mattern & Scott, 1999; Zeek et al., 2001).

Online Communities

Currently, advances in technology and the widespread use of the internet are allowing many communities of practice to be partially or completely based online (Thompson, Schmidt, & Davis, 2003). Online communities, known as vCoPs, are beneficial because they reduce

isolation, eliminate geographical constraints, and allow for both synchronous and asynchronous communication (Hibbert & Rich, 2006). Lieberman and Mace (2010) proclaimed the multimedia online age has provided opportunities for many professional learning communities to move online. While participating in these online communities, teachers have been shown to transform and change their practices, philosophies, and interactions with others (Borko, 2004). While the majority of online communities for teachers are not focused directly on their professional development as mentors, with careful consideration the ideas behind vCoPs can be utilized within a community of mentors.

Hibbert (2008) described how two online literacy courses evolved into a vCoP. Twenty Canadian teachers of various grades, two teacher educators, and the researcher herself, as a participant observer, participated in this course. Through analyzing the written vCoP conversations, field notes, and her own research journal, Hibbert found three conditions which supported the development of the community: “the discussion area, the language used (questions, cues, prompts), and the type and timing of the interaction with the teacher educators initially, and subsequently, the group as a whole” (2008, p. 141). However, these conditions were supported by the teacher educators’ online presence, which encouraged the formation of relationships and meaningful discussions.

My Teaching Partner (MTP) is an innovative, web-based support network, and an exceptional example of an online CoP, that was created for teachers of at-risk preschoolers (Kinzie et al., 2006). This network does not only provide resources and opportunities to collaborate with experts in the field, it also provides “teachers with a more intense, individualized form of support for high quality implementation—direct feedback on their

teaching and opportunities to reflect on their practice” (Kinzie et al., 2006, p. 198). The collaboration occurs through videoconferencing, online journaling, and systematic classroom observations. Over 200 teachers in Virginia have used MTP and researchers are exploring the linkages between the pre-K teachers’ participation and child outcomes, teaching quality, and teacher reflexivity (Kinzie et al., 2006). However, classroom observations used to examine these outcome measures are based on one measure, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (La Paro, Pianta, & Sthulman, 2004).

Barnett (2008) stated how a web-based professional development system, called the Inquiry Learning Forum, was created to support in-service and preservice science and math teachers’ use of inquiry-based practices. Through video vignettes of actual classrooms, student work examples, teachers’ reflections, and community discussions, teachers can share and co-construct knowledge. Barnett concluded that a vCoP is a vehicle to rejuvenate and reform teacher education.

Telementoring, also known as e-mentoring, programs have become increasingly popular since the nineties (O’Neill, Weiler, & Sha, 2005). These programs include novice and experienced professionals as well as program coordinators. O’Neill et al. described the creation of a web application called the *Telementoring Orchestrator*. Through this free program, coordinators develop a pool of mentors, locate mentors based on mentee needs, and balance mentor responsibilities to avoid burnout. This program is quite different from a face-to-face mentor/mentee relationship because names and e-mails are kept confidential through a router in order to avoid future contact once the relationship dissolves.

Through their experiences developing online learning environments, Hibbert and Rich (2006) illustrated how Shulman's (1987) model of pedagogic reasoning and action can be applied to vCoPs. Particularly, through collaboration, teachers cycle through a series of comprehension, transformation, instruction, evaluation, reflection, and new comprehension. This process is supported by a vCoP that includes a website with information specific to the community, resources for the individual and shared professional development of community members, and a discussion tool that inspires online face-to-face interactions. Hibbert and Rich maintained the public and virtual nature of vCoPs impel practitioners' reflections to evolve in highly complex ways, which lead to shifts in their overall knowledge and identity.

Recommendations from the Field

Developing communities for professional development can be slow and filled with conflict and misunderstandings (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). "It is difficult to ask hard questions; open classrooms up to constructive peer observation and feedback; and explore the nuances, assumptions, and unproductive habits of one's own practice with colleagues" (Baron, 2008, p. 56). Hord (2009) suggested learning communities need time and space for learning, effective leadership, and shared power. Lieberman and Miller (2008b) stated community leaders are faced with finding a balance between increasing teachers' knowledge while supporting processes of community relationship building. Wenger et al. (2002) argued CoPs can face problems when they become narcissistic, are viewed as marginal, become filled with conflict, or begin to resemble cliques. This can be avoided by engaging in joint problem-solving activities, supporting efforts of one another, finding ways for the community to add value

to an organization (such as a school), or including the community in making important decisions (Wenger, et al.).

Unique challenges exist when a community of practice is designed and implemented online (Scherff & Paulus, 2006). Sawchuk (2009) argued online professional development should be built on what is already known in the field about face-to-face initiatives. Building trust in an online community is difficult, yet is a faster process if members already know each other (Scherff & Paulus, 2006). Further, the goals of the online CoP are difficult to measure since they are essentially cultural phenomena (Drayton, Obuchowski, & Falk, 2009).

The following chapter is a discussion of the purposes and procedures of this dissertation study. Specifically, included in this chapter are (a) a brief overview of the study, (b) the sampling strategy and participants, (c) the setting, (d) the research design, (e) the data collection procedures, (f) the data analysis and representation, (g) fundamental considerations, and (h) a chapter summary. The design of the next chapter is based on noteworthy aspects of the literature review and a sociocultural framework.

CHAPTER III: PURPOSES AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this dissertation study was to explore how a community of practice supported the professional development of classroom pre-K mentor teachers. Specifically, I developed a community with pre-K mentors, both online and face-to-face, in an effort to gain new insights into how to best support mentors while also (a) enhancing their mentor knowledge and (b) positively influencing the ways in which they educated their preservice teachers. On the whole, the goal of this professional development initiative was to benefit mentor teachers involved in the study and also contribute to the field of early childhood teacher education. The following questions were the focus of this study:

1. In what ways did a community of practice comprised of pre-K mentor teachers evolve, both online and face-to-face, as they engaged in the co-construction and sharing of local knowledge related to improving mentor practice? Sub-question: What tools and processes for constructing new understandings were developed and/or accessed by the community?
2. How did participation in a community of practice impact and contribute to changes in each individual pre-K mentor's thinking, practice, and identity? Sub-question: How did mentors' use of problem-posing and problem-solving strategies evolve across time, as reflected in their discourse, text, practice, and focus of inquiry?

Research Design

Using a qualitative, collective case study approach, I investigated the research questions. Through online and face-to-face community interactions with mentors, classroom observations of mentors and mentees, and pre/post interviews with all participants, I was provided with rich

data that describe both how the CoP evolved and individual mentors changed through this professional development initiative. Further, I completed a personal reflective journal that confirmed mentor reports of their experiences online and in face-to-face exchanges and offers insight into my dual roles as a participant observer and program coordinator.

Qualitative Research

There are a host of reasons why this dissertation study was qualitative in nature. Levers (2005) defined qualitative research as “A reflective, interpretive, descriptive, and usually reflexive effort to *understand and describe* actual instances of human action and experiences from the perspectives of the participants’ living of a situation” (p. 438). I implemented this study by seeking to understand mentors’ experiences in a community of practice and how this contributed to collective and individual mentoring knowledge and practices. Due to its interpretive nature, a qualitative method is beneficial to practitioners (Walsh, Tobin, & Graue, 1993). Therefore, a goal of this study was to improve the learning experiences of the participating mentors and preservice teachers, which was extremely important to me, and one of the purposes of the study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) illustrated how qualitative researchers “allow the research design to emerge (flow, cascade, unfold) rather than construct it preordinately (a priori) because it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the many multiple realities to devise the design adequately” (p. 41). Since I did not know how the experiences of the mentors and the community would unfold, I relied on an inductive, emergent design that met the needs of the participants, yet was still intentional and purposeful. I included the voices of the participants (including myself) throughout the findings, which is a common feature of qualitative research.

Incorporating these voices empowers participants, provides more evidence of their lived experiences, and helps validate the research findings (Creswell, 2007). Further, since I was both a participant observer in the community and the program coordinator, my overall position in this research was multi-faceted. Through my own anecdotes, I captured how I flowed in and out of these two roles.

Collective Case Study Approach

For this dissertation, I chose a collective case study approach (Creswell, 2007; Schram, 2006). In a collective case study, “the researcher is focused on moving toward a better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a more general phenomenon or condition” (Schram, 2006, p. 107). In this particular study, the phenomenon was the professional development of pre-K mentor teachers. Creswell described how, in a case study, there is a bounded system, such as a particular context, as well as multiple forms of data collection over time. The primary bounded system in this study was the CoP. The multiple forms of data collection included interview and meeting transcriptions, online discussion posts, and classroom observations, which are described in more detail later in this chapter. The data collection occurred over twelve weeks and fostered a detailed, in-depth data collection process.

Participants

To generate a group of potential participants, I utilized purposeful sampling. In this study, primary participants were pre-K classroom teachers who mentored preservice teachers enrolled in an undergraduate licensure program in a department at a large university in the Southeast. I was a coordinator for this licensure program. All pre-K mentors that worked with these preservice teachers in three local public schools were invited to participate (n=6) via individual

e-mails. Four mentors ultimately agreed to participate in the study (see table 1) as two declined due to other commitments. Three of the four mentors taught in a pre-K program at Lakeview Elementary² and one taught at Woodson Elementary, two elementary schools located in two different counties that were approximately thirty minutes apart. As the program coordinator, I worked closely with mentor teachers and had already formed relationships with three of the four participants, Holly, Melissa, and Whitney. Melissa was not only a pre-K teacher, but also a pre-K supervisor for the school system. Peggy, who taught at Woodson Elementary, was new to the licensure program.

In order to provide insight into the preservice teachers' experiences with their mentors, preservice teachers were secondary participants. Preservice teachers who were enrolled in a student teaching practicum course, which I taught, were invited to participate (n=6), and all agreed to participate. However, only data from four of the preservice teachers were included in this dissertation; these four participants were under the guidance of the four pre-K mentors who were primary participants in this study. The preservice teachers began full-time student teaching the first day school began after winter break. Since the preservice teachers were secondary participants, they were not the focus of the data collection or analysis for this study. Yet, mentees' voices were occasionally integrated within this dissertation to support findings about how the community of practice and individual mentors developed. In the findings chapters of this dissertation (chapters IV and V), there are few excerpts used from mentee interviews, as the focus of this study was to elucidate how the mentors developed shared and individual knowledge through participation in a community of practice.

² Pseudonyms are used for all locales and participants.

Table 1

Mentor Teacher Demographics

Mentor	Age	Level of Education	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Experience as Mentor	Descriptions of Self as Pre-K Teacher	Assigned Mentee
Holly	30	Master of Science in Early Childhood Education (preK-4 th grade licensure)	7	1	"I try to put the children first in my classroom. That is my goal, obviously, is to help them be a community learner-to work together. If they want to do something and it is appropriate, I want to try to help foster them into doing that."	Maria
Melissa	37	Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Development (preK-4 th grade licensure)	16	1	"Teaching is all-encompassing so I am the learner in the process. I'm learning what parents are telling me, what my assistant tells me. I'm loving the children and learning from what they're saying and I teach kind of from that."	Jackie
Peggy	56	Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education (preK-4 th grade licensure)	11	0	"I view myself as fairly energetic...I like to look at each student as an individual instead of clumping students together and I want each one of them to achieve to the best of their abilities so I think I'm looking at each teachable moment I can find."	April
Whitney	42	Master of Science in Instruction and Education (preK-4 th grade licensure)	18	1	"I teach through play. Of course I try to build academics in through the play and in our small groups...I just believe that kids learn best through hands-on activities and through play and through making choices."	Kristy

Context

This study took place at the mentors' schools, the university campus, and within a secured online discussion forum. Naturalistic classroom observations of mentors and mentees occurred in the mentors' pre-K classrooms located at the two school sites of Lakeview Elementary and Woodson Elementary. Monthly face-to-face mentor meetings took place in a pre-K classroom at one of the two schools, on a rotating basis. The mentors had the flexibility to choose where they wanted to use the online forum during the course of the study, but signed a pledge of confidentiality stating that information written on the forum would not be shared with (or viewed by) anyone other than the participating mentors or myself (see Appendix A). The one-on-one interviews with mentors were held at their schools. The preservice teachers were interviewed on campus, in my office.

Demographics of Schools

At the time of this study, Lakeview Elementary was a Title I city school, nestled in a small town of approximately 7,000 residents (Census Data, 2000). This preK-5th grade school had a population of about 600 students, with 69% being Caucasian, 27% Hispanic, and 4% African American. During the study, 83% of the students were economically disadvantaged (based on state school report card data). Lakeview had three pre-K classrooms for typically developing at-risk³ four year-olds and one pre-K classroom for children with special needs. The three teachers leading the regular pre-K classrooms participated in this study.

Located about thirty minutes away, in a neighboring county, Woodson Elementary was also a city school, situated in a town of around 27,000 residents (Census Data, 2000). At the time

³ The term *at-risk* refers to children who were from low-income families, received special education services, were dual language learners, and/or who exhibited other risk factors.

of the study, this preK-4th grade school had a population of about 500, with 74% being Caucasian, 12% African American, and 8% Hispanic. Thirty-five percent of these students were economically disadvantaged (based on state school report card data). Woodson had one pre-K classroom that was actually an extension of the year-round local city preschool, yet followed a regular school calendar. The teacher of this class, Peggy, was the fourth primary participant in this study, and the children enrolled in Peggy's class were four year-olds who were also considered at-risk.

Classroom Locations

The locations of the pre-K classrooms were similar across the two schools, set at the end of hallways and at far ends of the school buildings (see Figures 1 and 2)⁴. At Lakeview Elementary, the three pre-K classrooms were in a row. The fourth pre-K classroom (K-8), to the right of the other three rooms, was for children with special needs. At Woodson Elementary, the pre-K classroom was situated at the far left side of the school building with its own entrance.

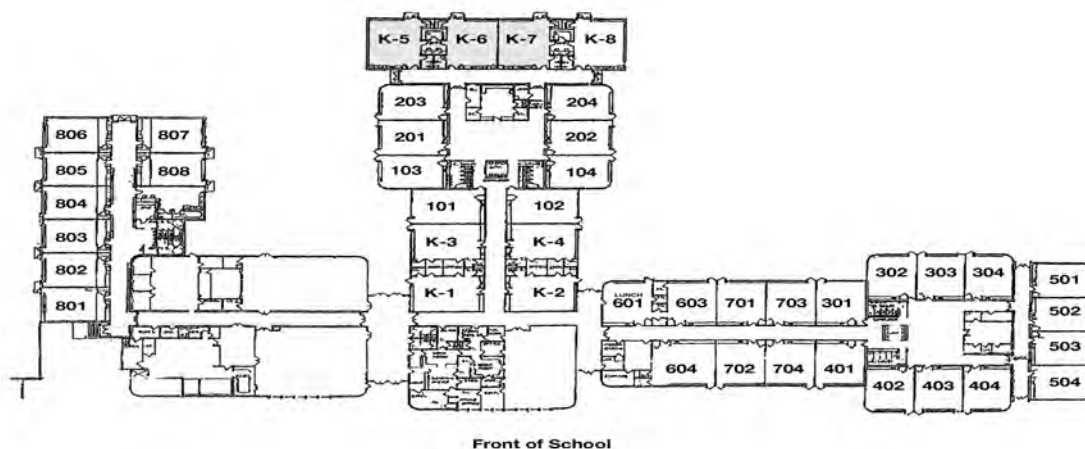


Figure 1. Layout of Lakeview Elementary with pre-K classrooms shaded.

⁴ In Figure 1, Holly's classroom was K-5, Melissa's classroom was K-6, and Whitney's classroom was K-7.

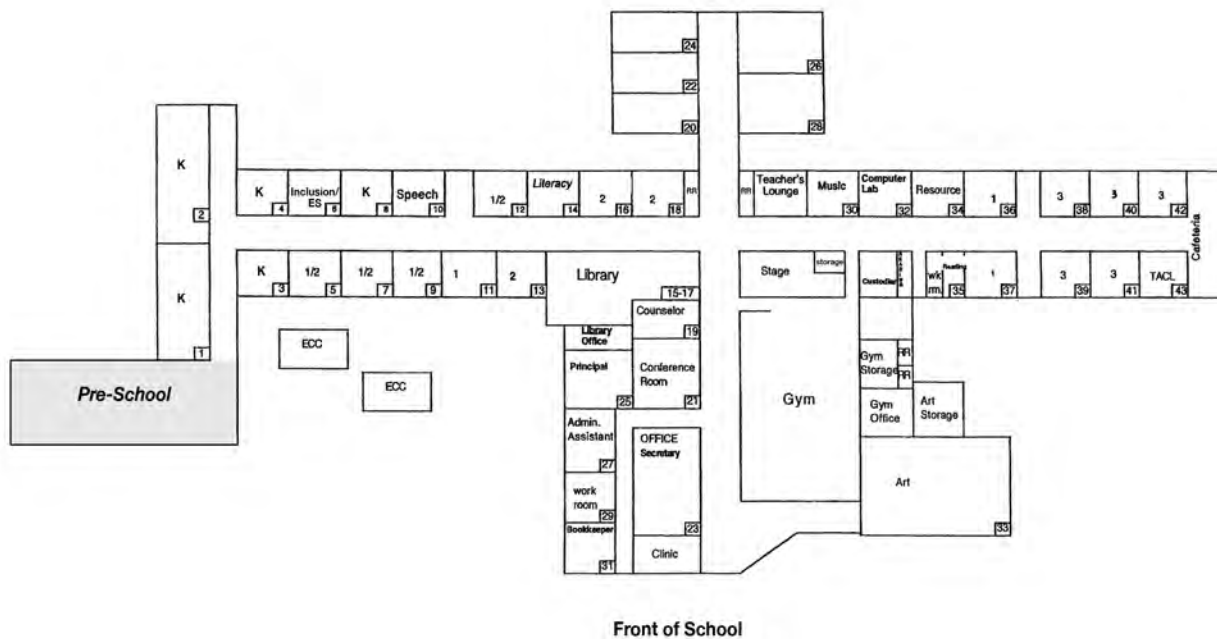


Figure 2. Layout of Woodson Elementary with pre-K classroom shaded.

Classroom Physical Environments

At the time of this study, the three pre-K classrooms at Lakeview were similar in layout. Each classroom had a large carpet area with a rocking chair and manipulatives (see Figure 3), a loft area (see Figure 4), multiple small tables, a block area (see Figure 5), a dramatic play area, an art area, and computer area. Due to the small, somewhat concealed spaces in the Lakeview classrooms, the preservice teachers were often not visible to the mentors during the day, depending on which area of the classroom they were teaching. For instance, if a preservice teacher was underneath the loft area with a group children and the mentor was working at a small table with another group of children, it was likely they were not visible to one another. The design of the Woodson pre-K classroom differed from the three at Lakeview. In this classroom, the children and teachers were visible to one another in all areas of the room (see Figure 6).



Figure 3. Large carpet area in a Lakeview classroom.



Figure 4. Loft space in a Lakeview classroom.



Figure 5. Block area in a Lakeview classroom.



Figure 6. Pre-K classroom at Woodson Elementary.

Peggy was aware that her classroom differed from the other three and basically described how she preferred to have more open, visible spaces. Peggy’s room did have some similar areas to the other three classrooms at Lakeview; they were just less enclosed.

Classroom Demographics

In order to be enrolled in a pre-K class, the children were required to meet eligibility requirements of being at least four-years-old and labeled “at-risk” for school readiness (see page 58 for definition of at-risk). If there was space for additional enrollment, other four-year-olds also qualified for placement in these classrooms (if they were viewed as socially in-need of preschool services), based on local city policies. Below is a breakdown of the classroom demographics, including the primary at-risk factors for each classroom:

All of the classrooms had a large percentage of children from low-income families and who were dual language learners. Also, over 20% of the children in two of the classrooms had children who were receiving special education services. The classrooms were diverse in terms of ethnicities, as displayed below:

Table 2

At-risk Factors within Each Classroom

Mentor’s Classroom	Total number of students	Number of students from low-income families	Number of dual language learners	Number of students receiving special education services
Whitney	19	15	6	4
Melissa	18	15	4	5
Holly	20	18	7	1
Peggy	18	9	6	1

Table 3

Percentages of Ethnicities within Each Classroom

Mentor's Classroom	Percentage of Hispanic Students	Percentage of African-American Students	Percentage of White Students	Percentage of Asian Students
Whitney	32%	5%	63%	0%
Melissa	22%	0%	78%	0%
Holly	35%	5%	60%	0%
Peggy	5%	16%	57%	22%

Data Collection Procedures

Once I received approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I individually contacted potential participants (preservice teachers and their mentors) via e-mail, describing the study and inviting them to participate. They were asked to respond to the initial e-mail if they were interested in participating or would like more information. Before sending the e-mails, I informed the preservice teachers and mentors (via informal, face-to-face conversations) that they would be receiving invitations to participate in a research study through their school or university e-mail accounts. Mentor teachers and preservice teachers that responded to the e-mail were given consent forms either in person or via e-mail.

Since this project required mentors to partake in a variety of activities beyond their normal school day, they were compensated for their participation. Specifically, each mentor received 50 dollars in monetary compensation and 50 dollars in classroom materials. Preservice teachers were notified that taking part in this study would not require any extra work in their school student teaching experiences; however, they would participate in pre/post interviews and grant me permission to use observations of them with their mentors in the classrooms as part of

the data set. The preservice teachers were also compensated with 25 dollars in classroom materials. Of course, abiding by the ethical rules of conducting research and IRB requirements, I informed the participants that participation was completely voluntary and they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time without penalties or consequences.

Study Timeline and Types of Data

Data collection for this study occurred across three points in time, from January 11th - April 6th, 2010, which was twelve weeks (see Table 4). I chose this time frame because this was when the preservice teachers enrolled in the licensure program fulfilled their student teaching requirements in pre-K classrooms. Across the three months, I conducted pre-interviews with mentors and preservice teachers. Also, I observed mentors and mentees in their classrooms for a total of between three and four observations for each dyad. The mentors and I participated in an online discussion forum and a series of three collaborative, face-to-face meetings that lasted around two hours, each. Between March and April, I conducted post interviews with the mentors and the preservice teachers. I kept a personal journal throughout the entire study.

Table 4

Data Collection Timeline and Types of Data

Time One (January 11 th -January 28 th)	Time Two (January 29 th -February 17 th)	Time Three (February 18 th -April 6 th)
• 4 mentor pre-interviews • 4 preservice teacher pre-interviews • 20 discussion posts • 3 classroom observations • 16 journal entries • 1 monthly meeting	• 16 discussion posts • 2 classroom observations • 5 journal entries • 1 monthly meeting	• 4 mentor post-interviews • 4 preservice teacher post-interviews • 22 discussion posts • 9 classroom observations • 10 journal entries • 1 monthly meeting

Pre/Post Interviews

One-on-one, individual semi-structured interviews were the first and last part of data collection and complemented the community of practice interactions and classroom observations. The mentor interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and the preservice teacher interviews were between 15 and 20 minutes. I took into account suggestions by Hatch (1998) to enter the interviews with specific questions in mind, but to also be responsive to questions that may emerge during the interview discussions.

Even after continuing to ask the mentees follow-up questions that related to their initial answers, the preservice teachers' interviews were quite brief in comparison to the mentors' interviews. It is unclear as to why they were so brief, but may be due to a combination of factors including: (a) the preservice teachers were secondary participants and were not asked as many questions, (b) they may have been somewhat hesitant discussing, in-depth, personal experiences with their mentors, especially in the beginning of the study, and (c) they were all in their early twenties and significantly younger than the mentors, with limited classroom experience.

The first week of data collection, I conducted pre-interviews with mentors. These interviews began with demographic questions (see Appendix B). Then, I asked mentors a series of questions to gain insight into their prior experiences, current beliefs, concerns, and overall understandings related to mentoring preservice teachers (see Appendix C). They were also asked about their school culture, collaborative experiences, and familiarity with technology. Preservice teachers were interviewed, within the first week and a half of data collection, to identify their expectations of the mentors, concerns they had about student teaching, and experiences they anticipated having with the mentors (see Appendix D).

After the preservice teachers concluded their pre-K student teaching experiences, I re-interviewed the mentors and preservice teachers. This was the final piece of data collection for this study. Mentors were asked to describe their experiences in the CoP, how they viewed themselves as mentors, what they now understood about mentoring, and if/how their interactions with the student teachers changed over the course of the study (see Appendix E). Preservice teachers were asked to explain their experiences with the mentors, whether their mentors met their expectations, and if/how their mentors helped alleviate some of their concerns and prepare them for teaching (Appendix F). Other questions were added on an-as needed basis.

Monthly Collaborative Meetings

After the initial interviews, I began holding monthly collaborative meetings that lasted approximately two hours each. The meetings were one of the two sources of community of practice data. Two meetings occurred at Lakeview Elementary (first in Melissa's classroom and then in Holly's classroom) and one at Woodson Elementary (Peggy's classroom). The mentors were provided with refreshments at the meetings which were held in the afternoons. During the meetings, the mentors and I sat around a table in a circle (see Figure 7).

Online Collaborative Forum

The face-to-face interactions were supported through a collaborative online forum designed at <http://www.huddle.net/>. The online community was essential since the mentors were only meeting face-to-face once per month and were teaching in two schools. Further, this forum provided mentors and myself with a space to write and reflect at any time of day. Huddle™ is an online platform where subscribers can create private, secured workspaces for collaboration, online projects, and document sharing.



Figure 7. Photograph of a monthly meeting.

Through Huddle™, I created a virtual workspace, called “A Place for Pre-K Mentors”, where mentors were invited to join via their e-mail addresses. Once the mentors joined, they were given opportunities to participate in collaborative discussions, view documents related to the student teaching course (such as the syllabus, assignments, and external links), and share/access other resources as the CoP evolved.

In order to produce rich, meaningful data among all of the mentors, gain insight into their individual thought processes, and encourage them to participate jointly in the CoP, mentors were asked to consistently contribute to the online discussions. I informed the mentors that it was necessary for them to participate in discussions for around 15 minutes at least once a week for the duration of the time they had the preservice teachers in their classrooms. This was also disclosed in the initial consent form. While the mentors were asked to participate each week, this did not always happen (see Chapter V for a breakdown of the number of discussion posts per mentor each week). I also asked the mentors questions to initiate discussions. Following my

posting of an initial question, remaining ones emerged from prior discussions (see Appendix G).

Further, I periodically posted other questions on an individual basis as the need arose.

Classroom Observations

Beginning in the middle of January, after the preservice teachers had been student teaching for two weeks, I started conducting naturalistic classroom observations of the interactions between the mentors and mentees (see Appendix H). The purpose of these observations was to provide data that could potentially support findings developed from the community of practice interactions; therefore they were not used to provide evidence of changes in on-the-floor practices. I observed both the behaviors of the mentors that were directed towards or related to the mentees, and the reactions and responses of the mentees. In particular, I noted the context of the situation, the types of mentor behaviors and descriptive field notes. On the back of the observation form, I wrote my observations of the mentee's reactions as well as other reflective notes on my interpretations of the situation once I left the classrooms.

Each observation occurred for between fifty minutes and one hour each in the morning, when the mentor and mentee were both present in the classroom and working with children.

Journal

An imperative part of my role as a participant observer involved engaging in reflexivity. Creswell (2007) argued a researcher demonstrates reflexivity if he or she "is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" (p. 243). Engaging in reflective journaling encouraged me to revisit my beliefs and experiences and assess how they impacted my participation in this study. Further, my journal entries were a source of

data, used to support findings based on the other forms of data. I completed journal entries, on average twice a week, resulting in 26 total entries.

Initially, my journal entries were characterized by recollections and my reactions to periodic interactions with participants. However, after the onset of data collection, I began writing different types of entries, in bullet form, that chronicled specific activities. These activities included e-mail exchanges, telephone calls, and informal conversations that represented building rapport, addressing concerns, and being a liaison between mentors and mentees.

Data Analysis and Representation

Analytic Process

Since the two research questions developed for this study focus on the development of shared and individual knowledge of mentoring among members of a community of practice, the data analysis for this dissertation focused primarily on community data. Further, the initial documents reviewed at the onset of the analysis included data primarily on the mentors. Therefore, for analytic purposes, the data were organized based on whether they were individually or community-based. The community of practice data included the face-to-face meeting transcriptions and the online discussion forum posts while the remaining data were individual. This does not mean, however, that they were viewed as separate because each participant was a member of the community. Organizing the data into these two categories informed my first phase of data analysis, which involved developing descriptive, open codes while reading chronologically through the community of practice data. These data included the discussion board posts that occurred before and after each monthly meeting as well as transcripts

from the three monthly meetings. I chose to examine these data first since they best informed my first research question (see page 8).

Essentially, I reviewed and coded six separate documents, three printouts of discussion board entries and three meeting transcriptions. I coded “chunks” of data, including words, phrases, and sentences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Occasionally, two or more codes were given to one chunk of data if there were multiple, descriptive meanings assigned to the text. While coding, I developed a data table and organized the codes into the following interrelated categories: (1) perceptions of preservice teachers, (2) mentor teacher strategies, (3) mentor teacher struggles, (4) mentor teacher goals, (5) mentor teacher philosophies, (6) community of practice interactions, and (7) other. These categories were created while coding, and some emerged later in the coding process than others. For instance, category five emerged while coding the third document (the compilation of the online postings in Time Two) and categories six and seven did not emerge until I began coding the fourth document (the transcripts from the face-to-face meeting in Time Two).

As I open coded, I engaged in memoing by inserting reflective comments into a column on the data table. These comments focused on interpretations of my role in the community of practice, emerging patterns, and data excerpts that seemed to contribute to patterns of participation. The process of reflective memoing and open coding led to new insights into how the community of practice was evolving across time. It became clear that categories one through five, and the seventh category, included codes that describe *what* mentors thought or did. Codes within the sixth category tended to focus on *how* the mentors shared and *processed* information within the community of practice, in particular through referring to themselves and themselves in

relation to others. However, this sixth category also included mentors' actions, but this was within the boundaries of the community of practice and not in their classrooms. For example, codes such as "questioning others" or "seeking advice" emerged from data on the community of practice.

How the mentors referred to themselves and themselves in relation to others became of particular interest since these codes were prominent in the sixth category. Data from these codes were likely to contribute considerably to answering both research questions, since they focused on mentor processes that potentially led to changes in knowledge. Yet, since I was becoming more familiar with the data while coding, there were data segments coded previously that could now be viewed differently and coded with these reflection codes. This was especially probable since the community of practice category did not emerge until I began coding the fourth document. Miles and Huberman (1994) contend segments of data that are assigned descriptive codes can also be viewed more interpretively as the researcher becomes more knowledgeable about a topic. Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) call this process "extension", where the researcher revisits previously coded data in a different way, with a newly developed construct in mind.

As a result, I re-read the community of practice data repeatedly and revisited all of the prior codes. I looked for evidence in coded and uncoded data of instances where mentors were referring to themselves or themselves in relation to others. Then, I created more in-depth codes under the following categories: (1) describing self (including struggles), (2) describing current/new knowledge, (3) reflecting on self as intern/novice teacher, (4) comparing self to preservice teacher, and (5) comparing self to another mentor. These categories stemmed from the

formerly developed process codes (see Appendix I). As a result of this iterative process, there were many instances when previously coded data segments were assigned new codes if it was apparent the mentors were reflecting in some way. This typically occurred when mentors were (a) aware of their personal philosophies or knowledge as they were sharing, or (b) described struggles that focused on themselves in addition to the preservice teachers. In these instances, several data segments that were previously coded under the categories of “mentor teacher struggles” or “mentor teacher philosophies” were recoded. Since both of my research questions were about change over time, the next step in the analysis process was to determine which of these codes were dominant and occurred across the duration of the study. The dominant and persistent codes were used to shape and inform the findings and occurred frequently among face-to-face community data (see Appendix I for dominant codes). As the findings were developed, data from the mentee interviews were analyzed and excerpts were used to support trends found in the mentor data.

Narrative Representation

Since this dissertation study focused on the evolution of the community of practice, the findings are depicted in narrative form. Narratives are frequently utilized to chronicle stories that are often guided by themes (Creswell, 2007). Within the narrative, the rhetoric is guided by the use of Time points (e.g. Time One, Time Two, and Time Three), which Lomask (1986) described as time-and-place shifts that move the reader to another point. In the following two chapters, I present two narratives comprised of four findings. I considered suggestions by Stake (1995) while creating these narratives that include: (a) triangulating observations and interpretations, (b) presenting sufficient raw data, (c) providing information on the role and

perspective of the researcher, (d) giving adequate attention to the various contexts, and (e) presenting a sense of a story. Throughout the following narrative in chapter IV, I frequently used excerpts from the face-to-face community data were used as examples, since the analytic process led to dominant codes derived from these data. Further, since my primary research question focused on the evolution of the community, it was necessary to provide sufficient evidence of this development, that was reflected deeper and more powerful entries within the face-to-face interactions.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I reveal some of the ways four pre-K mentors changed their views and their practices about what constitutes effective mentoring of student teachers⁵. These professional preschool teachers assumed the role of mentor with no prior formal training on how to guide young apprentice teachers. They soon discovered their challenges were not only procedural, logistical, and contextual, but also relational and complicated by turf issues, role conflicts, and differing philosophies of teaching and learning. Here, their journeys are evidenced on both the individual and collective levels. The individual and collective levels of development were positioned in both the background and foreground while writing this narrative, in order to emphasize one over the other periodically, as they complemented one another across this twelve-week study.

The findings are portrayed through the voices of the mentors, drawn from individual and group statements that inform four findings (three revealed in this chapter and one in the following). In this chapter, I have woven together their dialogue (interviews and monthly meetings) and written reflections (online postings and my journal notes) to create a narrative of the development of these mentors across time, illuminated by the findings of (a) the mentors' struggle with sharing control and authority, (b) developing identities as mentors, and (c) the context of becoming a pre-K mentor. In the next chapter, I describe the fourth finding: how the online exchanges supported the face-to-face community. The evolution of the three findings in

⁵The terms student teacher, preservice teacher, and mentee are used interchangeably.

this chapter is discussed across three distinct Times⁶. Following is a trajectory of each finding, chronicled across the weeks and concluding with a chapter summary.

Finding One: The Mentors' Struggle with Sharing Control and Authority

They're kind've cooking in my kitchen. -Melissa

Throughout the first month of the study, the mentors expressed discontinuity between what they desired and what actually occurred in their mentoring experiences. In particular, they strived to be flexible, but also recognized sharing control and authority with their preservice teachers as a considerable challenge. From the beginning of the study, when asked to describe themselves as mentors, Peggy, Whitney, and Holly remarked that they were flexible or open, but also saw this as a challenge. For example, Peggy noted in her initial interview:

Flexible, I'm flexible. I have said that I am a little bit of a control freak and yes, I am, but not as much with the kids as I am with myself or somebody that I'm working with. But, I like to be flexible.

Also in her first interview, Whitney shared similar attempts to be flexible, but recognized this as a struggle when she explained:

I'm very flexible and um, willing to you know take new ideas from anyone that's in here... Sometimes it can be a little hard when you're letting someone else, you're like oh I might do that differently, but I feel like I'm pretty good about letting them [preservice teachers] try new things and you know.. . where I'm probably weak at is I hate to hurt people's feelings. [laughs]

⁶ Time One occurred from January 11th-January 28th, 2010; Time Two took place from January 29th-February 17th, 2010; Time Three began on February 19th, 2010 and ended on April 6th, 2010, after the final post-interview.

Holly mirrored Peggy and Whitney's remarks by exclaiming, "I want her [preservice teacher] to have the freedom to try things that maybe I wouldn't even do, as long as they are appropriate and great for the children, then I'm all for it."

Yet, Melissa, who became well-known among the community of practice for using analogies, did not initially describe herself as being flexible in her first interview. Instead, she disclosed how the experience of sharing her classroom with preservice teachers was like letting someone into her kitchen:

I've used this analogy before too, they're [preservice teachers] kind've, they're kind've cooking in my kitchen. I mean when you're in someone else's house and you're doing something there, and you say "Make whatever you want!", but still you have that like "Where's the spoon?" or "Are you sure you can make that? Are you sure I can make this?" So, there is a little bit of that feeling.

Melissa's analogy also hints at how her mentee, Jackie, felt during her first interview, "When it's not my classroom, I don't want to step on anybody's toes, you know what I mean?" Jackie shared this feeling that she should move into Melissa's classroom carefully, acknowledging that while she was welcome, the space was not her territory, yet.

As the communal exchanges began, both face-to-face and online, the mentors described scenarios of how they were either able or unable to share control with their preservice teachers. For instance, while Peggy deemed herself a *control freak*, in an early online post she commented about a situation where she was successful in sharing control with her preservice teacher, April. In this episode, Peggy changed her plans to suit April's idea:

Today, April got to see how flexibility in lesson plans works. It was snowing about 10 this morning...Though I had something planned for April to do, she expressed a desire in taking the interest of the flakes inside to small group time. I let her fly with it. Why not? April's early comments during her pre-interview further supported Peggy's efforts:

So far she seems to be just really like whatever, just do it and we'll go from there. She's really flexible, which really kind of helps a lot because like today, she was like, yeah, go draw snowflakes. That would be fun.

On the following day, Holly continued to expand upon Peggy's previous posting when she wrote on the discussion board about how her mentee, Maria, felt pleased about Holly giving her opportunities:

I was very pleased when she made a comment about being glad she was given many opportunities to be a teacher in our classroom...Also as I give her chances to plan activities she is able to thoughtfully come up with ideas that are appropriate for children and follow our pre-k standards.

By the first meeting, Holly explained how providing Maria with these teaching opportunities was sometimes difficult. In the following exchange, she shared how she did not intervene at a time when she felt she should:

Holly: Today, I was in there during that [circle time activity], but, I was just watching. I was trying to be very hands off. And I was watching that and I was just like "Oooooohhh!" That's when you're just like dying to be like, "Okay I've got to go over here because they [children] are like rolling on each other." You know?

Whitney: Someone's gonna get hurt.

Melissa: And that's a really hard thing to teach somebody.

Whitney: It is.

Following this conversation, others mirrored Holly's efforts to resist rescuing her student teacher and the children. For example, Peggy expressed her struggle with not stepping in while her student teacher was in charge:

The other day I was sitting at my desk and the kids were getting really rowdy and my fingernails were – and she was, April was doing large group, my fingernails were going into my palms [Group laughs] and I was biting my tongue until it almost bled, but all of a sudden I heard her go, if you can hear my voice touch your nose and I saw a couple of them touch their nose and then some more...and I looked at her and said thumb kiss to April, you know we'll thumb kiss and that means great job...I wanted her to know that I appreciated her being firm but using appropriate measures to get there.

For Peggy and April, April's recovery of a teaching moment resulted in a validation of April's efforts by Peggy. Yet Whitney, who typically avoided providing any type of feedback to preservice teachers that could be considered negative, expressed the difficulty she had when Kristy [her preservice teacher] did not complete each of the steps in a routine literacy activity:

I think it was yesterday or the day before, she forgot one thing that we usually do when we "cheer the letters". She just forgot to hold up the board and point to the letters ... and I was sitting there thinking, "Oh, do I need to say it or can I just wait and see?" ...I thought "Oh, she's not going to do it." And then you could tell and she picked it up and did it and I'm like, "She did it." She just forgot, you know, because we all do that.

After being questioned about her feelings regarding the outcome of this situation, Whitney expressed relief, “Oh, that was a big relief, yeah, because I don’t like to have to – I was like – “Shew, she did it.” [Group laughs]. The mentors continued to echo one another’s thoughts about what determined their decisions to step in or to stay out of an event that appeared to be falling apart. At this point in the study, most of them viewed their options as either “black or white”.

Later, when the mentors revisited their struggles with sharing control and authority, Whitney and Melissa wondered, out-loud, about why they were expecting their mentees to follow their exact protocols, and the tension they felt when expecting this replication:

Whitney: Stuff like that is so tedious. Part of me is thinking, you know, am I being finicky?

Melissa: I’m with you.

Whitney: Is that just the way I do it?

Melissa: Does it have to be done that way? I know.

Here, they began to posit whether it was always necessary for their student teachers to follow their lead “to the letter”. This interaction is one of the earliest times when the mentors acknowledged that their student teachers’ decisions to find their own footing could be trusted, even if their paths differed from the mentors’ typical ways.

This juxtaposition of mentees’ and mentors’ variations in practice began to influence later discussions about guiding the preservice teachers’ lesson planning. For example, during the February meeting concerns emerged when I informed the mentors of the preservice teachers’ frustrations related to their first solo week planning:

Melissa: I haven't really liked anything that these girls have planned, not yet. I am ready to see something great.

Lori: And that's what I talked to them about today and Jackie specifically said, "Well, if we did that they'd say no, these are the plans..." – they feel like they are being given plans [by you].

Whiney: Aww...

Melissa: No. It's way not true.

Lori: Because I know you all are very open.

Whitney: Well, maybe the first time we did come across that way.

Holly: The first solo week they felt that way?

Lori: That's what they said.

Melissa: We had inappropriate practice. We had inappropriate things out there. I'm like – I'm not going to let someone do something that's bad.

Lori: I think they had the mentality that they can't [make their own plans].

Holly: What was it [the focus of] their first solo week?

Melissa: I don't remember. I just remember that one week I looked at Jackie's plans and every single thing was writing and paper and pencil.

Holly: Yes, we had a lot of that going on.

Melissa: And I said "No".

Whitney: Yeah, no.

This discussion exemplifies the mentors' continued efforts to co-construct local knowledge about what constitutes "best practice", the criteria that caused them to step in to rescue a student

teacher from failure or error in judgment, and beliefs about whether their mentees always had to replicate their teaching practices to be effective.

As this second collaboration meeting drew to a close, the mentors remained centered on the issue of their student teachers' unhappiness with their guidance and began to question if they knew enough about what to expect from them, and how to know what kinds of support to offer their mentees. They began drawing parallels between teaching preschoolers and young adults, as they posed potential solutions to their dilemma:

Melissa: We need to streamline the mentor expectations a little bit, maybe creating some rubrics for circle time activities, rubrics for small group interactions, because then we're on an equal playing field.

Whitney: Um hum

Melissa: Now, how we give the feedback is all going to be different because our personalities are all different.

Lori: Well, do you want some of that? I have stuff to give you but I was waiting for you all to ask for it.

Melissa: I mean, what that [having rubrics and resources] has done for us with children in, in understanding our observations in children and bringing us together as a team would do the same for mentorship...

Holly: I think that'd be awesome.

Melissa: When can we get it? Like today? Can you bring it today? [laughs]

Holly: Because, I mean, after this discussion I feel like I've failed them, failed them in planning or failed them in some way in like getting them to some point.

Whitney: Yeah.

Holly: Like, why are they thinking that they can't do an activity that they want to do?

Melissa: Well, they're not really. I don't think they're really thinking that. That's just the first thing that came to their mind.

Holly: I don't think that's how we've approached things.

Melissa: But if we have something like that and if we could look at it as a team, we could go ahead and what I could say to Jackie is, "So sorry, see what I've been holding you accountable to? There is no way possible that you can be here."

Whitney: Right.

Melissa: I have set the bar too high. So, I need to – look where you really are – and I need to see where you are on this scale.

While the mentors continued to be unsure about when to step in or maintain on the margins of their preservice teachers' teaching practices, they began to identify more middle-ground. That is, three of the mentors began to describe child-centered conditions as one scenario that would cause them to move in, while in Melissa's case, she linked her decision-making process more broadly to her philosophy of teaching and learning. All of them began to voice shared needs for additional resources to aid them in preparing to be more effective supervisors.

Toward the close of the study, during the March meeting, the tension between playing out their roles as pre-K teachers and mentors came to the forefront, as illustrated in the following exchange:

Holly: We [Whitney and Holly] were talking about that yesterday. It's like we almost feel like we're not as great of preschool teachers right now because we're trying to be their [the mentees'] teachers.

Whitney: And it's hard, yeah.

Holly: It's like trying to be both, be a good preschool teacher and a good mentor.

Whitney: Yeah.

Holly: Not letting go of that role

Later in the meeting, the mentors voiced a concern for the children's academic preparedness, due to giving over some of their teaching time to their mentees. In the following conversation, I ask them to expand on their thoughts about what contributed to their feelings about their challenge to manage their teacher and mentor roles:

Lori: Do you think that where that was kind of a struggle for you all though [was] you really did have them [preservice teachers] do a whole lot, so you might have felt like, not that you were losing control of the class, but that it was just a different situation?

Whitney: Probably.

Holly: Maybe.

Lori: Maybe that's where part of it is, because you were trusting them with your children for a long time.

Holly: They are teaching them all those things that need to be taught and I'm looking at them and going, "I don't know if we've really gotten everything done that I usually would get done."

Whitney: Yeah, right.

Here, the mentors were quite concerned about whether their preschool students were being taught enough and began exploring the source of their uneasiness. This struggle was also described in my journal entry dated the evening of this meeting when I wrote, “Holly and Whitney discussed how they feel like they are not as good of pre-school teachers as they were before they had a preservice teacher. I will ask them to elaborate on this in their final interviews.” It is unclear whether the mentors experienced more difficulty with this aspect of mentoring because they taught young children who were at-risk, or if they would have experienced similar struggles if they taught older children who were not at-risk.

In addition to learning how to share control and take care of their pre-K students, the mentors began acknowledging what sharing control taught them about themselves. For instance, at the close of the final March meeting, the mentors remarked:

Whitney: It has been a learning experience, though, because while you’re watching them, you’re seeing things that maybe don’t work as well, or you say, “We need to change that”. . .you can see more.

Holly: Or you might see them do something and think, “Do I do that? Is that where she got that?”

Whitney: Exactly, or if you like the way you do something and then change things based on that.

Peggy: And I’m seeing [her] do things that I haven’t done and I’m going “Oh, I do like that.”

In her post-interview, Melissa shared her experiences learning about herself through the process:

Definitely I am learning a lot more about why I do things that I do. As I see the student teacher doing things that are mimics of me, if that's the way you say it, or I know I do, my characteristics, it's interesting to kind of evaluate myself.

Peggy added to Melissa's insights, "Not only did I feel like I was teaching, but I felt like she was also teaching me, and I think that mentors always need to be taught."

In summary, the mentors were confident and accomplished pre-K teachers who knew their children well and felt prepared and self-assured when teaching them. Yet, this sense of competence did not always transfer to their roles as mentors. Instead, they experienced an evolving conflict between when to take over and when to stay on the sidelines, what to expect of student teachers, and how to guide their fledgling attempts at effective mentor practice. They continued on both the individual and collective levels to move from a "black and white" orientation toward one that was more nuanced and situated. They began to identify and collectively address common challenges, revealing a shared understanding of how to grapple with the complex task and shifting position of acting as an effective pre-K mentor.

Finding Two: Developing Identities as Mentors

There's just too many variables to make it a cookie cutter type of thing. –Melissa

It is common in the field of early childhood education that effective teachers of young children are promoted to the position of mentors. Yet, there is rarely training on effective supervisory strategies or the developmental needs and learning styles of young adults. As a result, mentors are often left to draw upon their own experiences as student teachers to construct their developing identities. During their exchanges framed by the research design, the mentors in this study began sharing stories of their past experiences as well as their current efforts to

determine how to calibrate their supervision with the needs and abilities of their mentees. As a result of their collective efforts, diverse as they were, they began to construct a shared understanding of what it means to be an effective mentor.

Early on, the mentors felt compelled to compare themselves to one another and their preservice teachers as part of the process of defining their roles as mentors. While interacting within the community, some of the mentors began pointing out their differences. For instance, in the following excerpt from the January meeting, Melissa disagreed with a strategy Peggy used to determine if her mentee could “handle” a lesson. This is an important exchange for two reasons. First, it reveals the willingness of the mentors from the outset of this study to express their different perspectives. Second, it illustrates Peggy’s early experimentation to try and assess the abilities of her student teacher:

Peggy: I want to just kind of occasionally just “drop the ball” and see if she can take over, and she’s done really well...

Whitney: That’s awesome.

Peggy: Yeah, she really is ...

Holly: I felt that from the e-mails.

Melissa: Yes, that’s probably something that not every student could do.

Lori: Would have the ability to do.

Whitney: Right.

Peggy: She’s very mature.

Melissa: Um hum, so that makes a big difference and it sounds a little bit – I’m a little bit on the other side of that

Peggy: Um hum.

Melissa: As I don't feel that it's fair to spur on the student.

Peggy: Yeah.

In an effort to better ascertain what their mentees knew and needed to know, the mentors began discussing an approach for determining appropriate supervisory strategies. For example, Peggy and Whitney described how their student teachers' personalities resembled their own, while Holly and Melissa felt their personalities differed from their preservice teachers. In the first meeting, Holly commented:

I think we're a little different, but it works...She's not going somewhere with the children that they're not used to...personalities might be different but as far as the teaching style, you know it's fine. It works well together.

In this same meeting, Whitney also spoke of her mentee's personality. Whitney commented, "I think our personalities are maybe a little bit alike, you know, and so I think she's doing great". The topic of personality types continued as the mentors compared their personality types to the preservice teachers and one another:

Holly: But at least Maria's pretty tough. I mean, if I have to say, "Well, next time let's think about this. I probably wouldn't have done it like that".

Lori: Yeah, she [Maria] is the one *thinker*⁷ in the group.

Holly: Yeah, so that's where our personalities are different because definitely I'm a *feeler*.

⁷ The third letter in the Myers Briggs Type Indicator® personality test is either a "T" or an "F" to represent *thinker* or *feeler*. In their comparisons, the mentors frequently referred to themselves and others as being either *thinkers* or *feelers*, two opposing types.

Lori: Melissa, are you a *thinker*?

Melissa: I am a *thinker*.

Lori: I think that Maria might be able to—

Holly: She's a *thinker* and so she can definitely take that like, "You probably need to reconsider"...which is great because I would probably be more like "Aaahhhh!"

[laughs]...but I would have not wanted to have Melissa.

Whitney: Right, I wouldn't have either. [Group laughs]

Melissa: I know. I wouldn't have wanted to have me!

This exchange exemplifies the mentors' attempts to identify what kind of learners their mentees were and, concomitantly, what kind of supervision seemed to be a good fit. The mentors began to make this judgment not just focused on their mentees' styles and experiences but their own, as well.

This view of considering both their mentees' and their own experiences continued as the mentors reflected on their earlier experiences as novice teachers in order to, as Melissa put it, "get inside their [student teachers'] mind[s]". In her pre-interview, Holly commented, "You have your own time as an intern that you kind of look back on and you view your mentors and you think, "Okay, what did I like or what was scary...?" Similarly, Peggy mentioned:

It was hard for me and yet it was good for me to see that not every teacher is really good and I learned from that, too...what I want to learn differently and what, if I could become a mentor, what not to do.

In her initial interview, Melissa expressed a desire to be similar to her past mentors:

They were just very strong teachers there. A lot of team planning, a lot of innovative methods being used, and so it was very supportive and I hope I'm supportive in my own classroom as well, giving suggestions yet being supportive.

Whitney expanded on others' remarks when she shared how her experiences with her mentor had influenced her mentoring style. She explained, "I had a bad experience from my big mentor and I think that is why I feel so – I don't want her [preservice teacher] to take things the wrong way". Clearly, the mentors' thinking and practice were being influenced by their prior experiences as mentees, coupled with their beliefs about what they felt was developmentally appropriate pre-K teacher practice.

Melissa, who often used the process of reflecting on her prior experiences as a mentoring strategy, felt this strategy would help her expand her knowledge of how preservice teachers developed; however, she felt this type of reflection was difficult to accomplish. For instance, on the discussion board she shared how she needed to reflect on what it was like to be a young, novice teacher, but had forgotten what that was like. She wrote:

The biggest challenge I face is understanding where the student teacher is in her overall development. . . .I feel it is important for me to know more about where she is at, developmentally, so that I can meet her at her highest point of understanding and walk her to her next highest point of learning.

Melissa continued to revisit this topic in the January meeting and encouraged everyone to reflect on it:

Melissa: ...I think it's really important that we try to get to them if we can remember what it's like to be twenty-one and remember what it's like. I mean I can't hardly

remember it clearly, cause it's kind of like remembering before you had a child. You can't really do it. You can't do it. So, it's really hard to get inside their mind and individualize the instruction, like we do with the young kids...

Peggy: Um hum.

Melissa: But, a twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three year old who can be guarded, and who can protect themselves—

Whitney: Right.

Melissa:I can't really put the pieces together to figure out where I need to begin and where I need to end so I feel like I'm kind of making her jump through these big gaps of information.

One of the final conversations in the first meeting recapped why the mentors valued reflecting on their prior experiences:

Lori: What it sounds like you all are saying is that it [mentoring] is so individualized.

Whitney: Yeah.

Holly: And all these girls [preservice teachers] are coming in at very different places.

Lori: They are at very different places in their lives, very different temperaments, personalities, knowledge bases, all of that.

Melissa: Classrooms are different.

Holly: Yes.

Melissa: Teaching scenarios are different. There's just too many variables to make it a cookie cutter kind of thing.

Holly: And our past experiences with our mentors when we were in college are all different.

Lori: And that does seem to be impacting what you all are—

Holly: Because that's all we know.

As evidenced in earlier discussions, the mentors continued seeking ways to inform their understandings of preservice teachers and mentoring; one strategy they recognized as useful was to engage in self-reflection about prior experiences they had as student teachers. The mentors ended the first month of the study acknowledging (a) the vast differences across mentoring situations, (b) how their lack of knowledge about the development of young adult learners compromised their supervisory practice, and (c) that their ability to reflect on their prior experiences was critical because it informed their practice.

By the mid-point of the study, the participants continued to compare themselves (and their situations) to one another, yet these comparisons were more substantive than during the early weeks, and they moved into describing classroom vignettes to situate their reflections. For example, during the second monthly meeting, Peggy described how she enjoyed the car rides to and from the home visits because they gave her opportunities to bond with her mentee, April. The other mentors mentioned how those opportunities would be beneficial, except they conducted home visits at other times in the school year. The mentors also engaged in a related conversation about how they varied in the amount of time they were able to touch base or check in with their preservice teachers:

Melissa: Another thing that happens in my room is it's non-stop people in there.

Whitney: Yes.

Melissa: There's really, unlike these other two [mentors]...

Lori: There might not be as many opportunities where you would be by yourself with Jackie?

Melissa: There's not, and I don't really have the time to give to her...if she is as insecure as we are identifying that she possibly is, she needs more of me.

Lori: She's going to need you.

Whitney: Yes, and you [Holly] are talking to Maria in the mornings and I am too [talking to Kristy].

Holly: And I'm not here super early or anything but-

Lori: Is that when you touch base?

Holly: Yeah, I mean really.

Melissa: And that's a time that's very busy in my room.

Peggy: What time do you all usually start?

Melissa: Eight.

Peggy: See we start at eight thirty.

Holly: Oh, how nice.

Peggy: April's usually there twenty to fifteen till and then we have the whole time to talk.

Holly: That's fabulous.

Whitney: That's nice, yeah. We don't have that much time.

This conversation led Melissa to question whether she was dedicating enough time to Jackie.

According to my journal notes, Melissa phoned Jackie after the meeting and spoke with her for about an hour on the phone. This is one example of how the collective was beginning to

influence individual behavior. Through discussions within the community, Melissa became more aware of how her time constraints were limiting her ability to get to know her mentee both on a professional and personal level, something the group helped her see she needed to change.

During the second monthly collaboration meeting, the mentors began reflecting on their prior experiences as preservice teachers. In the following exchange, the mentors talked through their frustrations as they began comparing their preservice teachers' beliefs about appropriate professional practice to their past selves as interns, or novice teachers. In particular, the mentors were upset that one of the preservice teachers asked permission to leave a meeting with a principal to get a bottle of water at the family resource center, which was located outside the school, in an adjacent building:

Whitney: And I'm thinking, "Walk all the way out there and Mr. Ogle [principal] is coming?" I wanted to say, "Do you not realize?" Because I'm thinking, me as an intern, the principal's coming...we're in a meeting. There's no WAY I'm going to leave and walk away.

Lori: I know. I always think back to myself as an intern.

Whitney: Yeah.

Holly: Would you actually do that with your mentor teacher?

Melissa: And I was thinking are you going to be like *this* [making poor decisions] all day?

As the meeting progressed, they continued to focus on the differences between what they recalled about their conduct during their earliest teaching experiences as compared to the behaviors of their student teachers:

Melissa: We met with them [preservice teachers] and I kind of went over what they should anticipate as far as student teaching and I thought there would be a twinge of excitement there. I remember when I was student teaching and I was like, “This is what I’ve worked for, finally”.

Holly: Finally, yeah, it’s an exciting time. It should be.

Whitney: Um hum.

Later, the mentors shifted the conversation and began discussing their mentees’ incomplete and hurriedly prepared lesson plans:

Peggy: I said, “I don’t care if it’s your solo week or what. Sometime before you leave, I want you to make a game”.

Holly: I know. That’s a huge deal...we’ve told them that.

Melissa: We have.

Lori: They should, at least for one of their activities in their solo weeks.

Holly: I made a game for one of my teachers and I let her keep it and when we saw her at that lunch last year she was like we still play that game every year.

Whitney: Awww.

Holly: I’m just thinking why are they not into that?

There was also an instance in the meeting when some of the mentors briefly acknowledged the undeniable difficulties that comprise the student teaching experience:

Melissa: I – I – I think that’s a lot of it. I think they’re barely keeping their head above water, but they don’t realize that’s what’s happening.

Holly: True. ...that’s probably true.

Melissa: They're kind of like cramming all their stuff around.

Holly: It's a difficult time if you think back to that.

Whitney: Oh yeah.

By this point in the study, the mentors had moved away from an emphasis on the challenges of mentoring toward brainstorming about what and how they needed to learn. They began to co-construct shared understandings about how to "get inside the minds" of preservice teachers in order to discern how to guide them more effectively. Further, they acknowledged the ways their roles varied, shaped by their emerging identities as mentors. As the mentors recognized their differences and participated in the community in different ways, they were nevertheless influencing one another. In the final weeks of the study, the mentors' discussions about what they were learning from reflecting on teaching expanded to include their experiences as pre-teens and children, comparing their own childhoods to those of what they believed characterized their mentees':

Melissa: Back in the day when we were going to school...I think I babysat when I was eleven. People don't do that anymore.

Holly: Um hum.

Melissa: I mean people don't go take care of a sixteen-month-old when they're eleven years-old next door. It doesn't happen. So, these girls [preservice teachers], although they may work in a daycare or they may have nieces and nephews, they're in no way to the point of where I was when I did my student teaching because our society is different.

Lori: And they don't know how to play themselves, like you said, growing up when they were children.

Peggy: Because they didn't, you know, when I got home from school I changed out of my school clothes into my play clothes and I was out the door. But, now these kids are graduating from college, you know, they were in soccer at five and t-ball and dance and football and it's going from one activity to another.

Melissa: And all that plays a big part into teaching. [3/10/10]

Here, the mentors expressed concerns that their beliefs about the preservice teachers' childhood experiences may have put their mentees at a disadvantage in their teaching careers. This view is one filtered by assumptions made regarding their mentees' lack of knowledge about the importance of children's play. As play is the site of children's learning, the mentors were left to consider how to make up for what they believed were limited childhood experiences.

As the project came to a close, the mentors acknowledged that while they had similar childhoods and early teaching experiences they were, indeed, different as reflected in their references to their philosophies of teaching. Unlike earlier discussions that focused on how to correct their mentees' errors, for example, the last group conversation that follows exemplifies a wiser, more contemplative perspective on what it means to be a mentor:

Melissa: It goes back to how I teach preschoolers too is that V⁸ which is at the very beginning it's like oh, da da da, this is how we do it in here. This is good practice in the classroom. And then as we move up the V, she's getting more power to know what she, how she wants to implement good practice. But, that's me. I mean that's just who I am

⁸Melissa represented her philosophy by describing it as a "V". At the beginning of her time working with her mentee, she engaged in a lot of direct teaching, and was, in essence, at the bottom of the "V" working closely with her. As time progressed and her preservice teacher became more knowledgeable and capable (according to her standards) she moved up the "V" and provided her mentee with more independence.

which is very completely different rather than maybe things you [Holly] have said before, like when you're working with children ... you want to build a relationship first and then come in and redirect and that's just an upside down V. (Holly: Yeah.)

Melissa: It's basically just an upside down view. Yeah, it's just different.

Lori: But, all of them [preservice teachers] have grown so it's interesting to see how it's just different.

Melissa: Exactly. It just works. The mentoring relationship is just different for everybody because the gauge is different and the strategies are different and the experiences are different.

Peggy: And the personalities are different.

Melissa: Personalities are completely different.

Lori: And how much you want to give over to them.

Whitney: Right.



Figure 8. Two mentors compare their viewpoints in the final meeting.

In this discussion, the mentors seemed to agree that the role of a mentor is complex, influenced and informed by a myriad of factors. As such, while there was a fair amount of agreement about what it means to mentor, there was also recognition of variability across the community. As the final meeting progressed, Holly compared herself to Melissa:

Holly: Yeah, I definitely enjoy doing it [mentoring], whether I'm good at it, I don't know [laughs].

Lori: You have grown a ton. You guys really have grown.

Peggy: It was a good first mentoring experience for me.

Holly: I mean I know I'm not like Melissa, so I'm like okay...I don't know, you know?

Lori: But you have your own style.

Here, Holly did not seem completely confident describing how she differed from Melissa; however, she demonstrated a bit more certainty in her final interview:

Lori: Well last night it sounded like you were able to describe a lot of things that you noticed with Maria.

Holly: Yeah.

Lori: And you kind of have a unique way of letting her know, so it sounded like you are able to communicate with her.

Holly: Right, I try to. I mean compared to other people I feel like I don't do as much of that [feedback] but—

Lori: You have your own style.

Holly: And that's the thing. Comparatively, I don't feel like I do that as much but I feel like it's what she needs...

The mentors' comparisons contributed to emerging understandings of the unique differences that existed within each mentoring experience. Melissa summarized this belief when she proclaimed:

That's what teaching is – it's all about what makes us different in the fact, different times, different upbringings ourselves. All of these different things impact so many different things of teaching. I don't think we really stop to think about it or at least I haven't ever personally until these ten weeks, really realized all the things that I represent that are coming out that make me who I am...

Finding Three: The Context of Becoming a Pre-K Mentor

There's more to it than people think. -Whitney

Challenges unique to the pre-K context continually complicated the mentors' ability to provide timely and relevant feedback to their mentees. At the beginning of the semester, I gave the preservice teachers an assignment to provide their mentors with information about how they best liked to receive feedback (verbal, written, or both) and when (in the moment, a bit later, or both). This provided some challenges for the mentors. For instance, in her pre-interview, Holly shared how difficult it was to provide Maria with feedback as she had requested:

Maria, she wants direct feedback – like immediately, if she's done something that she wants to know about. It's a little difficult in pre-K to do that so...if I've got a group and she's got a group, you know. I can't pull her. We would lose the whole class. So, even though I'm working on getting better at that to make sure there's time where I quickly get to her for feedback that sometimes is hard for me to do.

In the January meeting, the mentors continued sharing challenges related to the preservice teachers' need for feedback and their inability to respond in a timely way. They

depicted how the context was an issue when trying to provide immediate feedback to their mentees during the school day:

Peggy: In the afternoons we usually sit down and the three of us [mentor, teaching assistant, and preservice teacher], we'll talk about how the day went. And several times during the day I'll say "Well how do you think that went? How do you think this went? What would you do different?"

Holly: Right, and see that's the thing, Maria wanted hers [feedback] more immediate and I told her sometimes I can do that and sometimes we have to move on with the kids—

Whitney: Yeah.

Holly: So I can't pull you aside, you know?

Melissa: Lots of time I make time. I make time because I can be so direct and to the point. [Group: Um hum] Like one sentence here, you know, here's what to consider. Sometimes, though, when there's not enough time ... I'll say, "Remind me on the playground I want to address dah dah dah dah dah".

Holly: That's a good idea because that's my thing. I'm like, ah—and I might even forget what I want to say.

Whitney: Yeah.

Here, Melissa provided the community with a potential solution by suggesting they provide short snippets of feedback coupled with more thorough discussions at later times.

The discussion of the classroom constraints continued and Whitney shared her struggles with providing verbal and written feedback to her preservice teacher, Kristy:

Lori: So Whitney, do you find it hard to give feedback to her [Kristy] in the classroom too?

Whitney: Just like what Holly was saying, yes.

Lori: Because it looks like what I've seen in the pre-K is that a lot of times you are either working individually with a child or you're with a small group of children.

Whitney: I try to do it right after, like if we are lining up...but it's especially hard with my class too because you can't turn your [head]...she [Kristy] wanted written [feedback] so I have been writing stuff, because I was asking Melissa, I'm like, "How am I going to write that down?" and Melissa said, "Just write what you see her do." So that's what I did...I just tried to write, but I'm not a fast writer. It takes me forever. I'd be writing and she'd be moving on to something else and I'd be like, "I've got to catch up!"

In this conversation, Whitney acknowledged the challenge of how to navigate between meeting the needs of her young students while at the same time providing feedback to her mentee. While she attempted to implement a strategy used by Melissa, she determined that it just did not work for her.

Whitney's efforts to search for new ways of giving more immediate feedback were propelled by her challenges to give in the moment feedback to her student teacher, which I observed in the classroom. For example, I noted that, "The preservice teacher and mentoring teacher were in separate areas of the room working with children. There was not really an opportunity for them to communicate since they were engaged with children in separate activities". Similarly, immediately following one of my observations of Peggy's classroom, I wrote, "Mentoring teacher lead all activities. Not really any communication between the

mentoring teacher and preservice teacher. Context not conducive to a lot of communication since mentoring teacher and preservice teacher were each leading small groups”.

In these two, one-hour observations, there was only one instance of communication between the mentors and their student teachers. On the other hand, my first observation of Melissa’s classroom was quite different. In this observation, Melissa interacted seventeen times with her preservice teacher, Jackie; within these interactions she taught directly, extended Jackie’s thinking, encouraged her, and explicated her practical knowledge.

Through classroom observations and the mentors’ reports, it is evident that the pre-K context was not always favorable to providing mentees with feedback in the moment, as some of them preferred. The struggle to meet this need of their preservice teachers contributed to unsettled feelings among some of the mentors. To combat this issue, Melissa suggested they also consider the scope of the mentoring experience, including the impact on their teaching assistants:

So, I think that’s why we need to look at the ten weeks in it’s entirety because you’ve got to know that, you know, two and a half of it is going to be trying to figure out how she [mentee] is going to fit into this whole thing and we haven’t even begun to discuss how it affects my classroom assistant, who also has to establish a relationship with her and figure out where she’s at and figure out about herself and how the role is and all that stuff.

Here, Melissa shared her thoughts about how to confront the time constraints, but also alluded to another important factor in the mentoring experience, the role and position of the teacher assistant (TA) in the classroom.

It turned out that Melissa was not the only one to identify the significance of her TA. For example, in her pre-interview, Jackie [Melissa's preservice teacher] compared Melissa's approach to building a relationship with that of her TA, Tracy:

I've talked as friends, I think, with Ms. Tracy like everyday. We talk at lunch and she is so nice. She really, you can feel like – Melissa isn't really asking me about myself ... but Tracy is always like, "What do you like to do?" and I can totally relate to her.

Other mentors, besides Melissa, also identified the important role of the TA. For instance, on the discussion board, Peggy noted how her TA was guiding April's learning:

At times, I feel like we [mentor and TA] are giving her too much information at one time, but she seems to be taking it all in. Today, I noticed that Carol, my TA, was showing April a sample of a child's portfolio in which we collect work throughout the year to demonstrate beginning, middle, and ending ability.

Additionally, in the first meeting, Peggy continued to comment on Carol's role when she said, "I think Carol has had almost a better opportunity to get to know April than I have simply because, while I was teaching, they might have been setting out materials or talking or things like that". On a similar note, in her pre-interview, Whitney described how mentoring has shown her the important contributions of the TAs. She described, "I've learned how much work the assistants do and, not that I didn't know that, ...but when you're removed from it and, wow, ...I mean, and how much it's like a team." Here, Whitney revealed how she developed a renewed appreciation for the TAs. By taking a step back from the trenches of the daily classroom routine, Whitney was able to use a collective lens for reflecting on her own teaching team.

During Time Two, the pre-K context continued to be an important discussion topic, but the mentors were now beginning to think more critically about how to manage particular classroom experiences and what to say to the mentees during/after these instances. For example, on the discussion board, Melissa posed a question to the group about supporting student teachers' understandings of play. She asked, "So, girls the million dollar question is how do we (as mentors) instill the values, definition and practice of true play in student teachers who may or may not really know how to play themselves?" In response to this question, Whitney described her challenges with mentoring during daily playtime:

I'm not sure how we can teach the student teachers the importance of play with the teacher as the facilitator of that play...I am trying to be an example for Kristy at work time by being engaged with children as they carry out their plans...Being engaged myself and still trying to observe what Kristy is doing is what I find most difficult. I want to observe her more carefully, but I still think I need to be playing with the children in order to set the example.

Holly also wrote about this struggle:

This is the million dollar question. I think some days I do a better job being a good example than others...I don't know. I think we have to be examples everyday and watch them [preservice teachers] and help our [pre-K] students.

Here, the mentors seemed to move away from focusing on the challenges of providing timely feedback toward exploring how to handle mentoring across particular situations. They voiced uncertainties about how to model "best practices" with the children as a way to provide feedback to their mentees, yet believed that it was a useful approach.

By the mid-February collaboration meeting, the mentors began comparing the two pre-K contexts of Woodson Elementary and Lakeview Elementary. There was only one mentor teacher (Peggy) at Woodson while there were three at Lakeview. Specifically, Peggy shared how her program isolation impacted her mentoring role because she and her preservice teacher spent so much time together:

Peggy: We [Peggy and her mentee] are comfortable enough with each other that I can say, “You know, let’s redo this. Let’s, you know—April, go do this.”

Lori: What contributed to you getting to that point with April? Was it spending time in the car driving back and forth from the home visits?

Group: Yeah, probably.

Peggy: I think so. It gave us time.

Holly: Yeah, that would put you alone.

Peggy: It does. And she gets there early every morning. She beats me there most of the time, which kind of ticks me off. That’s okay [laughs]...but I think being in the car and we’ve done—a couple of Wednesdays we’ve done lunch together.

Holly: That’s good.

Whitney: That’s nice.

Peggy: We don’t see any other teachers.

Holly: Right.

Peggy: Because we’re so isolated in our room (see page 59 for floor plan).

April mirrored Peggy’s sentiments in her final interview when she noted, “We had a lot of car time because of the home visits and that helped SO much. We got so close because we were

always in the car and moving around.” As a result of their geographic isolation from other classrooms, Peggy and April had more time than the other dyads to get to know each other and to develop a trusting relationship. Consequently, Peggy seemed comfortable handing over responsibilities to April.

Melissa drew a contrast to Peggy’s situation when she noted that it was difficult to compare the two contexts, due to different relational aspects:

Melissa: I just wanted to make one point about the relationship that we’re able to build here [at Lakeview]. I think that it’s very different, here, when we have three [preservice teachers]. (see page 60 for floor plan)

Whitney: I think so too. I was just thinking about that.

Not only did the mentors’ classrooms differ in proximity to other classrooms but also in program schedules. The variation in program schedules impacted whether or not the mentors and mentees had time to discuss the day. There was precious little time at Lakeview before, during or after the program day to sit and critically reflect with the student teachers. In the following two exchanges, we see once again that while Peggy’s classroom at Woodson was isolated, she and April’s schedule allowed for more frequent and sustained exchanges:

Peggy: What time do you all usually start?

Melissa: Eight to one-thirty.

Peggy: See, we start at eight-thirty.

Holly: Oh, how nice.

Peggy: So...April’s usually there twenty to fifteen till and then we have–

Holly: You have that whole time to talk.... That’s fabulous.

Whitney: That's nice, yeah. We don't have that much time.

Lori: To check in with each other—

Holly: Yeah, we don't have that much time ...,

Soon, the discussion moved to the afternoon program schedule where the mentors discovered that, once again, Peggy had an hour of planning time but because of bus duty at Lakeview the rest of the mentors lost that opportunity:

Melissa: We've had bus duty.

Holly: That's been a problem.

Lori: I think that's when you [Peggy] use the time in the afternoon with April.

Peggy: About two thirty to three thirty.

Lori: And yours [children], yours do lay down for a nap. Are you able to talk at all?

Peggy: Yes, we do talk sometimes during that.

Holly: See, we don't get that, either.

Whitney: No.

During the final monthly collaboration meeting, the mentors continued to discuss the role of the TAs that began during Time One of the study. In the following excerpt, they acknowledged the invaluable contribution of their TAs to the supervision of their mentees. The mentors described how the act of mentoring in their classrooms was actually embedded in a system of relationships, one that included themselves and their mentees, their mentees and their TAs, and the numerous interplays among them. Consequently, the mentors' knowledge about what was needed to provide effective mentoring now included an awareness of their TAs as their supervisory partners:

Melissa: But, I think that the person who has the hugest role in making Jackie successful is not me. It's Tracy [TA].

Holly: Tracy. Yeah, she probably has.

Melissa: It's the assistants that are in the classroom...and although I've been able to do some of the directive teaching, they have been the ones that have made the lesson successful.

Peggy: Which reminds me, when the first couple days that April was here, she was sitting at my desk because I wanted her to sit there so she could see the kids...but I'm hearing Carol in the background saying, this is why she's doing this. This is why she's doing that.

Holly: See, that's great.

Later in the meeting, the mentors revisited the topic again:

Melissa: The assistants do a big job in making, I think, the student teacher successful.

Peggy: Yes!

Whitney: Oh yeah.

Melissa: Because the fact of the matter is, a good assistant makes me successful.

Peggy: Yes, yes.

In this exchange, it is evidenced that the mentors had grown to understand the complex, multi-faceted nature of mentoring. Specifically, they realized that mentoring is not simply about finding the time to provide feedback to preservice teachers but, rather, it is more broadly a relational experience where mentors' and mentees' decisions and experiences cannot be viewed in isolation, but instead are influenced by time, context, and others.

By the closing weeks of the study, the mentors recognized the challenges associated with the pre-K context and had formulated some ideas about what they still had left to learn coupled with an appreciation of the effort required. For example, in the following exchange with me during her final interview, Holly noted that learning to mentor in a pre-K classroom takes time and practice to balance the roles of preschool teacher and mentor:

Holly: We [Whitney and Holly] have only done this for two years now so finding that balance of “Okay, how do we still maintain that we are still teaching all of the four year olds and being mentors?”—Because it’s a lot of work.

Lori: It’s a lot of work.

Holly: It’s a lot of work so I think that’s kind of what we’ve been feeling about that.

Lori: And make them [mentoring and teaching] where they’re not really separate but integrated roles.

Holly: Exactly, exactly.

Lori: Because if you tack on mentoring, if you tack it on then it’s just a whole other job, but if you can figure out a way to maybe integrate it?

Holly: Integrate it, right. And that’s where it just comes down to being inexperienced as a mentor. I mean we did it last year but still, two years doing it—it’s not like you’re an expert mentor. You’re not [laughs].

Whitney felt similarly as she acknowledged the conflict-ridden demands of mentoring in the pre-K context and recognized where she still has room to grow:

I felt like maybe I wasn’t keeping up with my kids in my classroom, you know? I mean we’re just making it. We’re doing okay and making it but I wasn’t doing what I usually

would like in the afternoons and things. I probably would have been doing more maybe to get ready for different units and stuff...I loved having Kristy. It was great...but I would be with her and we'd be doing whatever we needed to do...So I kind've felt like I just didn't have as much time to just focus on my kids and just my classroom...And maybe it's just because I'm not good at balancing both things.

By the close of the study, the mentors felt that being a mentor in a pre-K program, while demanding, was rewarding work. For instance, in her final interview Melissa expressed how being a successful mentor is difficult, yet significantly contributes to the evolution of what it means to be a good mentor:

Mentoring is teaching and it's difficult. It is difficult to be a good mentor and really not just push it off as to something that's not, uh, a serious job because it is very serious because the girls that come in think they have a huge repertoire of knowledge and they really need to see that there's so much to learn...and I think every time I teach a different class I'm a different person. I'm a different teacher. I've taken something else away from it and so I think the same with mentorship. I take something away from it that is a feather in my cap, so to speak. That I have that much more knowledge base about mentoring...I think it just strengthens me.

After being asked about how participating in the community of practice influenced her thinking about mentoring, Whitney shared similar thoughts about the demands of becoming an effective mentor:

I think it made me realize, you know, that it's tough. There's more to it than people think. There's more to it and it can be difficult at times and, you know, it's time consuming.

You really have to put effort into it...there's a lot to it and it's a lot to think about if you want to do a good job at it. You really have to put time into it.

Holly described her ongoing challenges even as she acknowledged the importance of her efforts:

I really still struggle with making sure that I can tell the girls [mentees] what they need to work on, just finding that balance of how to approach telling them and first of all seeing it and being like, "Oh, she needs to work on this,"...but I really do love being a mentor...I do love having that sense of importance in someone else's education, you know, I really do love that. So, I'm glad for the opportunity...I've been really happy about [mentoring] the past couple of years.

Additionally, Peggy expressed a sense of worth in her mentoring role when she recalled:

As this was my first time mentoring, it was a fabulous experience. I felt encouraged that I could teach a new teacher and be an example for them – the best practices. Um, so I thoroughly enjoyed it. I would do it again in a heartbeat.

Through interacting within the community of practice, the mentors grew to appreciate the intricate, interconnectedness of the mentoring experience. They completed this professional development initiative with an emerging knowledge base; they now acknowledged that effective mentoring is relational, influenced by a range of conditions, situated in place and time. This was evidenced not only in the community and individual data, but also through classroom observations. The mentors left the community of practice with a growing belief that the job of a mentor is difficult, yet fulfilling, worthy work.

Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter, the community of practice evolved in unique and striking ways, influencing the mentors' understandings of what it means to become a pre-K mentor. Early in the study, they utilized a reactive stance, consumed with difficulties. They focused on the preservice teachers' limitations and the temporal and contextual challenges associated with fulfilling their roles. They used a range of strategies to determine their mentees' needs and abilities, from "dropping the ball" to recalling lessons learned from their own student teaching experiences.

As the community developed, their discourse and written dialogues became increasingly thoughtful and intentional. They adopted a more critical, reflective stance from which they questioned their decisions, reflected on their prior experiences, and acknowledged their similarities and differences. They also came to understand that their mentoring roles benefited from supervisory partnerships with their TAs.

By the final days of the study, the mentors perceived the role of a mentor as nuanced, dynamic, and complex. They recognized many of the factors that influenced and informed the mentoring experience, positioning mentoring within a system of relationships comprised of mentors, mentees, and others that is situated in place and time. The mentors became increasingly aware that their work together contributed to both a shared view of mentoring, but also allowed for differentiation. Overall, they moved away from an early reactive stance, consumed with challenges toward a position characterized by problem-posing and problem-solving. They concluded their participation by proclaiming that while learning to be a responsive and knowledgeable mentor is hard work, it is worthy work.

CHAPTER V: ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARD

Given that the evolution of the community of practice was partially dependent on participation in online communication, it is important for me to discuss this learning context in some detail. Specifically, it is beneficial to reveal (a) how the discussion board communication supported the more powerful and dominant, face-to-face dialogue, (b) how the member roles and topics of conversation were similar and different across the two contexts of the online discussion board and the face-to-face meetings, (c) how the mentors felt about using technology, and (d) limitations that emerged while using the discussion board. My role in the online community is illustrated in the following chapter of this dissertation.

Role of Discussion Board in Community and Individual Development

Within this dissertation, the online interactions among community members supported the face-to-face exchanges, thus were not the primary focus within the data analysis. As apparent throughout the narrative of the prior chapter (chapter IV), the excerpts that best contributed to answering the research questions came from face-to-face community dialogue, even though the online data remained highly valuable. As a result, it appears that the face-to-face exchanges were more powerful, on the whole, than the written communication. However, as evidenced in this chapter, the mentors also benefited from using the online discussion board.

Comparing Online and Face-to-Face Interactions

One of the purposes of the online discussion board was to provide the mentors with opportunities to communicate between the monthly meetings. My initial goal was for the face-to-face and online discussions to overlap and build upon one another as the community evolved across time. Then again, while participating in the community I found that it was also valuable

for the mentors to interact differently across the two settings, as this notably contributed to their learning.

Member Roles

There were some apparent similarities in how the mentors interacted online and in-person. The mentors' level of participation in the discussions across contexts was comparable, with Melissa being the most active participant both online and face-to-face. The other three mentors were similar in the amount of posts they uploaded to the discussion board and their level of dialogue in the face-to-face meetings; however, due to reasons that are unclear, Peggy was inactive on the discussion board the last three weeks. Yet, it is likely Peggy was "turned off" by Melissa's over-participation on the discussion board, which is described in the following sections of this chapter. Below, in Table 5, is a breakdown of the number of discussion board posts for each community member per week as well as the average length of posts:

Table 5

Number of Discussion Posts per Week for Community Members

Week	Holly	Melissa	Whitney	Peggy	Lori
One	1	3	0	3	4
Two	0	1	1	0	2
Three	1	2	0	1	1
Four	1	5	1	2	1
Five	1	2	1	1	0
Six	1	4	1	1	2
Seven	1	3	1	0	0
Eight	0	1	0	0	1
Nine	1	2	1	0	3
Total posts	7	23	6	8	14
Average number of words per post	191	404	288	287	229

For the most part, the mentors adopted similar roles across the two settings. Both online and face-to-face, Whitney and Holly frequently put themselves together in statements, referring to joint feelings as if they were partners in the process of learning to mentor. Moreover, Holly and Whitney would often wait to take the lead from others. For example, in her final interview, Whitney mentioned how, on the discussion board, she would usually hold back until others responded to inquiries before she would respond:

Lori: there were some tough questions [on the discussion board]

Whitney: There were, and I said, “I’ll wait. I’ll wait and see.”...but towards the end it was like well, nobody else was saying- so I was like oh my gosh, nobody’s saying anything. So, sometimes I would do that and wait and see what Holly would say.

As evidenced in this conversation, Whitney’s participation in the online community was partially dependent on how others replied to the difficult questions, which were mostly posted by Melissa.

As she did in the meetings, Melissa typically posed challenging questions to the community on the online board and reflected deeply on what she was learning and what she still wanted to know. Melissa’s strong presence in the online community was undeniable and in her post-interview, Melissa perceived her role in the community as being such. She explained, “I was hoping that people would come on board [online] and let me kind of lead and people could challenge my thoughts...”. Early in the study, Melissa emerged as a dominant, and at times domineering, participant in this study based on the intensity and frequency of her exchanges, including her written discussion posts. Yet, while Melissa did exemplify a strong leadership role, the other three mentors contributed significantly to the online posts. Further, the nature of what the mentors contributed to the online discussions changed over time. Initially, all of the mentors

engaged in storytelling, basically reporting instances of what occurred in their daily experiences with mentees. Over time, Melissa engaged in more philosophical writing.

While the other mentors did not usually engage in this type of critical reflective practice, they did begin to write in more thoughtful ways. For instance, in a late-February posting, Whitney moved beyond storytelling as she reflected on where she thought Kristy was in her development and why she felt that way:

I also believe that Kristy is somewhere between partial transfer and conscious maintenance. She seems to use what she has learned in theory or from experience in the classroom to enhance her teaching performance. She knows that transition times can be difficult and confusing for some of the students in our classroom. She also knows that young children do better with less transitions. She demonstrated using this knowledge today when she brought the children back from the playground and had to quickly transition them to special activity time in Melissa's room...

Since Peggy was from a different pre-K program than the other three mentors, her role online and face-to-face mainly consisted of sharing differences. For instance, in a face-to-face meeting Peggy commented how "there's a lot of different things going on" in her classroom because her classroom was partially funded through a large, private national school readiness association. Additionally, Peggy grew comfortable enough with the community to share a difficult personal experience about her son potentially being sent to Afghanistan, which brought her to tears. Her sense of trust had developed across time and was evident both online and face-to-face, as she often shared intimate scenarios about herself and her classroom.

While there were obvious similarities in the member roles and discussion topics across the two contexts, there were also some differences. Particularly, there were variations in how two mentors, Melissa and Peggy, positioned themselves in the community across the two settings. Online, Peggy sought advice from the community on more than one occasion, yet rarely did this in the face-to-face meetings. For instance, in late January she inquired about how much time she should spend in her classroom during her mentee's solo weeks. Peggy wrote, "This week is Amy's first solo week. As I haven't had a student teacher before, please give me some suggestions about the amount of time I should be out of the room." This kind of request never occurred in the face-to-face meetings, except for when one of her inquiries was revisited during an in-person exchange. Perhaps Peggy felt more comfortable asking for input from others online, or she was provided with few opportunities to do this in the meetings. We did often speak on top of one another during the meetings, a common occurrence when gathering together to discuss such an intense topic as mentoring.

Melissa also differed somewhat in the content of her blog postings compared to her face-to-face exchanges, as she referred to outside resources she found at least three times in her written posts; this was not done in passing, but was extensive and thoughtful. For instance, this early discussion board entry is a good example of Melissa's online contributions:

Friday, I stumbled upon a book that triggered such thought and perspective, it was not enough for me to read only once. I had to own it to begin to process the information. The name of the book is *Choice Words: How Our Language Affects Children's Learning*, and I have not been able to put it down....As I read it, immediately I began to think of unlimited situations in which these strategies could be generalized, one of which is

mentorship. Please stick with me as I have yet to get to the “food for thought”. Scroll to the next post to continue.

Each time Melissa referenced literature, she described what it said and how she and the other mentors could use it to inform their practice. Occasionally, she referred to these resources in the face-to-face meetings, but only when extending prior discussions from online postings. While there was only one attempt from two other mentors, Holly and Whitney, to use one of the resources, Melissa appeared to benefit from this process. She posted resources throughout the duration of the study, referring to a resource as being “food for thought”.

Topics of Conversation

Within the community, the topics of conversation frequently extended across the two settings. The mentors would begin writing on the discussion board about a situation and then refer again to it in the face-to-face meetings, occasionally with my prompting. For instance, in an exchange during the second meeting, I brought up the subject of some of Melissa’s recent online posts. On the discussion board, Melissa had asked the mentors to apply resources to their mentoring situations and also reflect on what they believed as teachers:

Lori: And then on the blog, goodness gracious, so much to look at [laughs].

Melissa: And this last one [question about teacher beliefs] I came up with –

Lori: It hurt my brain. I’m just kidding.

Holly: I just looked at it today.

Whitney: I tried to read it and my kids kept coming up to me –

Melissa: I decided that I had to try to think about it more before I said anything [in response].

Lori: Okay, so let's think about this...

Often, these types of discussions occurred at the beginning of the monthly meetings since everyone had been communicating online over the prior weeks. On a similar note, the mentors and I would converse in-person about different topics and follow up with additional online exchanges subsequent to the monthly meetings. For instance, following the second monthly meeting, in an online post, I requested more information from the mentors related to a conversation we had about their desire for resources to inform their practice:

Hi Ladies- I am working on providing you all with some information you requested last night about typical development of student teachers. In order to look in-depth at the literature in the field, I need a little bit more information from you all. So, can you answer the following questions?

As evidenced here, my role in the project constituted making connections between the two contexts, something I discuss in more detail in Chapter VI of this dissertation.

A unique aspect of the discussion board was that the mentors could get on it at any time, day or night. This led some participants to post a discussion thread when they were experiencing strong emotions or had something fresh on their minds to say. Frequently, they would write reflections on experiences from that very day. For example, in early February Peggy experienced an upsetting experience with a parent that led her to seek immediate advice from others. She wrote in a late-night post, "I am still (at 10pm) incredibly angry...thank you for letting me vent. What would you do in this situation? Are we just the child's teacher, are we social workers, are we supposed to teach the parents basic parenting skills, and a thousand other "are we" questions?" In the monthly meetings, however, the mentors were more reflective about the past

several weeks, spending less time chatting about things that may have just occurred that day, which was something they did often on the discussion board.

As evidenced so far in this chapter, the positions of the mentors and topics of conversations across contexts varied depending on the situation. The mentors were able to utilize the discussion board differently than the face-to-face conversations. These examples support the notion that the combination of the two contexts, with varying temporal attributes and modes of conversation, was beneficial to the evolution of the community.

Mentors' Impressions of Using Online Communication

Having the mentors participate in an online discussion board was a new experience for all of them. At the beginning of the study only one mentor, Peggy, disclosed being comfortable online, and this was mainly because she had prior experience using a popular social networking website. As expected, the other mentors expressed uncertainties about using the online discussion board.

During the initial interviews, when questioned about their experiences with technology, some of the mentors described their knowledge of technology as sparse. For instance, Holly commented, "Oh, I'm very low on the technology totem pole" [laughs]. Melissa revealed how she was venturing into a new experience. She explained, "I guess I'm getting ready to do some online discussions and I haven't done that yet. This will be a novelty to me". Whitney's prior technology experience primarily consisted of sending e-mails and setting up computer games for the preschoolers. In response to a question about her experience with technology, she mentioned, "Not much, you know, as far as like computers in my room, I get them ready for the kids to play on them and e-mail, you know I do the e-mail, but that's it."

This lack of technology experience was also evident in early discussion posts. For example, Melissa wrote:

Oh, all of this technology is so new to me! This discussion board will really pull me out of my comfort zone!!! I am really not a great writer and feel as though I can speak more clearly than I can write, so please bear with me as I post ideas, thoughts and feelings about this huge job of being a mentor.

Similarly, Holly described, “I am not used to typing my thoughts to anyone, so it may be strange at first, but I am excited to have this opportunity.”

The mentors’ hesitations about the technology use required for their participation was unquestionable, yet their uneasiness decreased as time progressed. By the end of the project, the mentors felt more comfortable online, yet two of the mentors, Whitney and Holly, still preferred to converse in-person instead of via the discussion board. For example, Holly commented, “I’d probably prefer to sit down and talk to people versus reading and re-reading some of their thoughts” [laughs]. Further, both of these mentors described how they did not use computers on a regular basis, so it was sometimes a challenge to find time to get online.

Melissa, who became known for lengthy posts, really enjoyed the discussion board and noticed by the end of the project how she varied from the others in how she used the board; Melissa often used the board as a reflective tool and a way to challenge others to think at deeper levels about their philosophies. In the final meeting, Melissa commented on how she used the discussion board differently from the other three mentors:

I really used Huddle in a different form than you all did. Quite frankly, you all got on there and talked a lot about what you saw your student teachers doing. Mine kind of

started that way and then I veered completely to the right and was really thinking in a different form and so that's how I have revisioned what I think teaching is.

The other three mentors did mention becoming bogged down sometimes with trying to read, comprehend, and respond to Melissa's posts. In her final interview, Holly commented:

It was good to read what people were saying and thinking. Some of the questions I felt like was like, "Oh, I don't think I can answer these" [laughs]. I don't know these things. This is WAY deeper than I am so I don't know [laughs]...I didn't really use it as a reflection for myself, but I just used it to almost start thinking about what was happening with me and Maria.

Holly's acknowledgement of how she chose to use the board also emerged in one of my journal entries. For example, an excerpt reads, "Holly did see value in the online blog and said she used it more as a way to just check in and think about where she was as a mentor and how her student was doing over the 10 weeks". On a similar note, in her final interview, Whitney mentioned the difficulty she had reading some of Melissa's longer posts:

Melissa, she knows this. I thought, Melissa, I don't have time to read that because it would be so long and it was just hard to get to. That was a weakness for me...sometimes the questions, I really just wouldn't know. I would be like, "I don't really know".

Peggy mentioned a comparable struggle in her exit interview:

I did get a little bogged down in some of the very lengthy ones [discussion posts]... because by the time I got to it, it was late in the evening (L: Um hum) and I didn't necessarily feel like reading every bit of it so I would skim more. I felt like, I feel like

maybe if we could have used it more, not outline form but like...maybe a little bit more simple. Maybe not as much, maybe not as much article type.

Clearly, the mentors felt differently about how to best use the discussion board. Based on the post-interview data, it was evident some of the mentors were “turned off” by Melissa’s over-exuberance in the discussion board, thus impacting the number of overall posts. Melissa ended up feeling frustrated that she did not get a deeper level of response from her discussion posts and expressed these feelings in her final interview:

That kind of got frustrating to me. I was hoping someone would begin to make those jumps as I began to make jumps in the writing and take it to another level, but it just never really happened. And, I don’t know if it is a developmental thing with teachers or is it – did they feel like it was just one more thing they had to do, you know? I probably took it above and beyond, the writing aspect of it, because I enjoyed thinking about my own thoughts and reading it.

While there were some mixed feelings about how to utilize the online board as a tool for learning, the mentors still felt using the Huddle discussion site was a valuable experience. For example, in her final interview, Peggy stated, “I felt like there was a lot of learning going on. I learned a lot...I think it was a good forum to have and I think it is beneficial to know what’s going on.” Likewise, at the end of the study, Holly commented:

It was very exciting for me to try. It was good to read what people were saying and thinking...I wouldn’t have thought so much about those things [that others wrote] had I not had to write in there and so I think that it was good in that sense.

As evidenced in their words, the mentors were out of their comfort zones while interacting online. It was a new experience for them that they saw as challenging, but valuable. It was important that each mentor used the online board in ways that suited her individual needs, and, based on their comments, this appeared to be the case.

Discussion Board Limitations

As with most technology, there were limitations associated with using the discussion board that were discovered during this study. First, there was a limit to the number of characters allowed for each discussion post. For example, if a post exceeded the character limit an error occurred and the words were not posted. This caused Melissa some frustration, since she frequently wrote more than the allotted number of characters. For instance, she expressed her frustration in a discussion board entry when she exclaimed, “I went over the limit again...so this is the second time I am writing this – UGGGHHH!”. To solve this problem, some of the mentors (and myself) separated our own posts into two smaller posts.

Second, the discussion board software did not alert the community members if a person responded to herself. For instance, there were a few occasions where Melissa started a new post, waited a few days, and then added more comments as she thought longer about the issue. The other mentors were not notified, via e-mail, about her new posts and did not see them unless they went and looked for them.

Finally, the discussion board threads were presented in chronological order. Therefore, when someone responded to a discussion post, it was placed at the bottom of a string of threads. This was somewhat of a problem for me because, when I wanted to respond to each mentor’s comments, my responses would show up at the bottom of the page instead of directly beneath

each mentor's posts. So, to guide the mentors, I would sometimes put my responses to each of them in different colored font so they could more easily see my comments.

Summary

The online discussion board was imperative to the development of the community of practice. Without it, the mentors would have communicated less frequently and I would have had less access to their thoughts and ideas. Some mentors were able to use the board as a tool for learning that differed from how they interacted face-to-face. Further, their thinking about mentorship was extended because their topics of conversation overlapped across the two contexts of the online discussion board and the face-to-face meetings; this supports the likelihood that they contemplated issues longer than they would have, had they only engaged in face-to-face dialogue once a month. While there were some challenges and technical limitations, the mentors benefited from their online experience and it notably contributed to their learning and my role as facilitator and caretaker of the community.

CHAPTER VI: MY ROLES

Since I was a member of the community of practice and played an integral part in the collective and individual changes that occurred, it is essential to explain my two professional roles. During this study, I was a program coordinator and participant observer, often finding myself moving in and out of these roles on a daily, or even hourly, basis. This chapter illustrates (a) the influence of my past experiences as a teacher on my roles in this study, (b) how my job as a coordinator enabled me to more successfully implement this professional development initiative and (c) how my research position as a participant observer involved being a facilitator, community caretaker, and mediator.

Past Experiences as an Early Childhood Teacher

As discussed in chapter I of this dissertation, my past experiences as an intern motivated me to develop and implement this dissertation study. Essentially, I was given very minimal guidance from my mentor during my internship year. However, I also had one year of experience as a second-grade teacher. During this initial year of teaching, I was given little support from the school system or other teachers, often feeling isolated, confused, and overwhelmed as a young teacher. I frequently referred back to my first year of teaching during the community of practice exchanges and informal conversations I had with the mentors while collecting data for this study. This year of teaching experience enabled me to relate to the mentors in their positions as teachers. While I have never taught pre-K, the mentors and I were able to share stories about teaching, which likely contributed to more meaningful interactions and richer data.

Program Coordinator

During this study, I was a program coordinator for a small birth-kindergarten licensure program, a job I had for two years prior to the start of this study. In my position, I supervised field practicum experiences and taught an early childhood methods course and seminar to senior-level preservice teachers. Since these preservice teachers participated in a variety of field placements over two semesters, I had already formed relationships with mentor teachers and school systems across four local counties.

After observing preservice teachers in a range of early childhood classrooms and regularly collaborating with mentors, I quickly realized that I could make more of an impact on the preservice teachers' education by working with mentors. Borko and Mayfield (1995) supported this notion as they described how the role of a university supervisor should shift from focusing on preservice teachers in the field to coaching, supporting, and guiding mentors. Of course, my interest in this work also stemmed from my prior experiences as an intern, which was previously mentioned in Chapter I of this dissertation.

Due to my role as coordinator, coupled with my prior experiences as a mentee and early childhood teacher, I entered this study with subjectivities that are important to note. Peshkin (1988) argued if researchers acknowledge, upfront, their own subjectivities, they can "be able to write unshackled from orientations that they did not realize were intervening in their research process" (p. 17). Based on my prior experiences, I held strong feelings from the beginning of this study that mentors should continually partner with mentees instead of allowing them to adopt primary teaching roles with no guidance or feedback. Further, based on my experiences as a

program coordinator, I entered this initiative feeling concerned about the lack of support mentors are given from the school systems and university preparation programs.

My position as a coordinator gave me more immediate access to the schools and mentors than I would have had as a researcher just entering the field. For example, before recruitment and data collection began for this study, I already knew all of the mentors except for one, and was acquainted with the school administrators and familiar with the schools. I had built a level of rapport, but still needed to continue developing positive, trusting relationships with the mentors; this informed my second role as a participant observer. Aware of my personal biases before and during the study allowed me to continually engage in reflexivity throughout the research process. While there were no specific data collected on how the mentors perceived me in my position as a coordinator, it is possible that they felt I had a growing expertise in the field of early childhood education, thus positively impacting their perceptions of me and encouraging them to value the research experience.

Participant Observer

My research stance in this study was one of a participant observer. As a participant observer, I was able to continue building relationships with the participants. Because I was an influential member in the community, it was imperative for the mentors to trust me. As Bernard noted, “Presence builds trust. Trust lowers reactivity” (2006, p. 354). Therefore, I continued building trust by spending additional time in the classrooms, and engaging in informal conversations with mentors. For example, I spent more time with Peggy at the beginning of the study since she was a new mentor in the licensure program, and referenced this in an early journal entry:

I spent around 2 hours at Woodson [Elementary] today, talking with Peggy and touring her classroom and getting to know her students. Peggy was very welcoming and energetic. She wanted to share some of the things she does in her classroom with me, such as assessments, special activities, classroom books that they make, recipe activities, and so much more. She also spent quite a while with me chatting before the interview about herself and what it is like teaching pre-K at Woodson.

After this early, in-depth exchange, I felt like Peggy was beginning to trust me. It was imperative for her and the other mentors to view me more as a close colleague than a researcher, and spending time with the mentors was one way for them to develop this perspective. For example, after purposefully spending additional time with Whitney following her initial interview I also wrote:

I finished an interview with Whitney and talked with her for a while afterwards. She really has a lot to say and is really insightful and has had a TON of experience in different preschool settings. I hope she feels comfortable about speaking out in Thursday's meeting.

Facilitator

Being a constructivist teacher educator, I strived to create conditions conducive for learning amongst the participants. Some of the procedural, task-related decisions I made were imperative to the development and sustainability of the community. When describing a two-year school-based collaboration, this role was acknowledged by Oja and Smulyan (1989) when they noted, "Task functions lead towards goal achievement, include initiating group action, predicting outcomes for various actions...keeping members' attention on the goals, clarifying

issues...making expert information available, and fending off interference from the environment” (pp. 143-144). Initially, I provided for group action and learning by designing the study to be collaborative, focused on the mentors’ everyday experiences. Further, I established expectations for the mentors to participate in the online discussion board and face-to-face meetings.

Just as the mentors struggled with knowing when to step into situations with their preservice teachers and when to stay out, I frequently grappled with similar decisions. Throughout the study, I constantly assessed and re-assessed how to position myself in the community exchanges so the mentors were able to have ownership of their learning while regularly interacting in meaningful ways. I was especially challenged with when to become involved, or not, during their online postings. For example, in the beginning the mentors typically wrote to me instead of one another, and their topics of conversation were scattered. I reflected on this in my journal:

I have found the mentors all discuss different things [online] and I am struggling with whether or not I should step in and show relationships between what they are saying or just comment back separately...I feel like I have to reply because they are talking about separate things.

Ultimately, my decision was to continue responding to mentors individually, but also to make connections between what everyone was saying. Sometimes, I linked what the mentors had previously written by using follow-up questions to the group (see Appendix G for list of discussion questions). For instance, when two or three of the mentors began writing about their struggles to not overwhelm the student teachers, I posted a new discussion thread:

Last week, many of you described how you want to teach the student teachers as much as you can and one or two of you mentioned that you do not want to overwhelm them with information. It must be hard to find a balance between providing information to student teachers without overwhelming them. How do you all find that balance? Do you read into their cues, have a system in place, or just go by intuition?

It turned out that, as a result of this tactic, the mentors began writing to one another, especially after the first face-to-face meeting. Some of the situations where I needed to act were more obvious than others. For instance, when the number of blog postings decreased at one point, it was clear that I needed to encourage the mentors to continue posting and did so via e-mail:

Dear mentors- If you haven't checked out the Huddle site this week, it would be great if you could join in on the fun! You can just visit www.huddle.net and login. The discussion tab is where the most recent discussion is posted and it is about how to balance providing student teachers with information without overloading them. You can also start your own discussion if you would like about anything you want.

Another reason that I struggled with whether to step in during the blog exchanges was because I did not want to appear as if some of the conversations were solely between Melissa, the most active member online, and me. Melissa and I conversed about this issue in her post-interview:

Melissa: Your feedback was the biggest piece of meat I could get [from the online discussions]. It's kind of like you're hungry and people are just giving you water.

Lori: And I wanted to just go on and on, but I didn't want it to become just you and I.

Melissa: I understand. And that would have-

Lori: Maybe turned people off.

Melissa: Exactly.

This exchange exhibits how I was hesitant about becoming too responsive to Melissa's posts because I felt concerned that the other mentors would become less involved in the online discussions. Typically, I also waited two or three days before replying to her writings to provide opportunities for the other mentors to respond first.

As the community evolved, I provided mentors resources if I felt they were at a point where their learning was inhibited due to a lack of information, and when they made requests. For instance, when the mentors sought more information about how to best guide preservice teachers at the mid-point of the study, I revisited the literature and gave them a resource about how to mentor while considering the developmental levels of preservice teachers. To support the development of shared understandings, I summarized and extended prior discussions during face-to-face conversations (see Figure 9). For example, this is how I began the second monthly meeting:

Okay, what I'm going to do today is just kind of go through what we talked about before to kind of keep our brains in check and then we can talk about whatever we want, whether or not you want to revisit some of the stuff that we've talked about on the blog or from the last meeting. So, if we think back to our last meeting, we talked a lot about how it's hard to give feedback in the moment when you're working with the children and the context makes it difficult to...



Figure 9. Leading a discussion with the mentors.

Sometimes, I also tried to clarify what the mentors were saying, such as, “It sounds like what you all are saying is that it [mentoring] is so individualized.” I was careful to phrase these types of statements so that I was “checking in” with the mentors at the same time I was interpreting what I thought they were thinking.

These attempts to extend the mentors’ thinking was sometimes coupled with follow-up questions, such as, “And so, I’m wondering as far as explicating the practical knowledge, to talk out loud, how can we do that in a pre-K classroom the way it is designed?”. These questions were likely valuable to the mentors because they directly related to their own daily struggles.

Online, my efforts to summarize and extend mentors’ thinking were a bit different. I wanted the mentors to reflect on their thoughts, but I also provided some sense of validation for what they were saying so they would be encouraged to continue writing and sharing on the board. For example, in the following exchange I supported Holly by acknowledging that her struggles were legitimate:

You bring up so many great points about being a mentor! I think it can be such a challenge when you have a student teacher who is coming in with confidence, experience, and knowledge. Trying to find areas of strength may not be visible right away, which can be a worry for mentors and supervisors.

Here, I attempted to reiterate Holly's thoughts while also validating her feelings. This orientation also represents my other responsibilities, as a caretaker for this community of practice.

Community Caretaker

As was evidenced in much of the dialogue in the prior findings chapters, becoming a mentor is not just a cognitive endeavor, but an affective one as well. Oja and Smulyan (1989) referred to this role as one of maintenance when they wrote, "Maintenance functions include keeping interpersonal relations pleasant, arbitrating disputes, providing encouragement, giving minorities a chance to be heard, stimulating self direction, and increasing interdependence among group members" (p. 144). Essentially, in this role I monitored and supported the social cohesion of the community by continually gauging what the members were feeling and making purposeful decisions to act based on my perceptions of their individual needs.

In the monthly meetings, I was aware of which mentors were being more vocal than others, and made an effort to involve each mentor in the discussions. Frequently, this entailed asking the mentors direct questions in the meetings; therefore, establishing trust among the mentors was key so they did not feel "attacked" or put on the spot. Also, if a mentor began to say something but was interrupted, I tried to provide her with an opportunity to express her thoughts later when the discussion allowed by saying things like, "What did you want to add, Peggy?".

Monitoring the social cohesion of the group primarily entailed providing words of encouragement. When mentors began to reveal insecurities, I tried to reassure them in ways that would promote their continued participation in the community and future professional development activities. Participating in this professional development initiative meant the mentors were disclosing some of their vulnerabilities and reflecting on their decisions as they developed new understandings. At different points in the study, all of the mentors were in need of some level of encouragement. For example, in the following post, I expressed appreciation and encouragement to Whitney and Holly:

I appreciate your posts and do think that you have great points here! I think you have touched on an important issue---when you take on a role as a mentor, you are stretching yourself even more thin in a way, committing to yet one more thing in life. As you described, it is hard to figure out what to say "no" to but I am so glad that you both adopted mentor roles these past 10 weeks and hope you are interested in continuing as mentors in the future. You have brought so much to the table as far as your own knowledge, experiences, and unique approaches to mentoring. Congratulations on successfully guiding another group of preservice teachers through the pre-K teaching experience---this is quite an accomplishment!

These types of exchanges were common among these two mentors and myself. Whitney and Holly were, at times, somewhat unsure of their abilities, primarily regarding how they could be successful in their dual roles as pre-K teachers and mentors.

On a few occasions, I also noticed that Peggy needed extra words of support. Peggy was the only mentor who was from another school and who had never mentored before. I did not

want her to feel isolated due to these factors so I not only spent time building rapport with Peggy, as discussed previously, but I reassured her that she was doing a great job mentoring a preservice teacher for the first time.

Melissa, who was quite confident in her abilities as a mentor, began second-guessing some of her decisions in the final days of the study. I wrote about this in my journal:

Melissa voiced some concern that she may not have done a good job with her preservice teacher. I reassured her and she later e-mailed me thanking me for my words of encouragement. I discussed with her how I had to make a special column on the observation sheets since she encouraged and motivated Jackie so much. Melissa became teary-eyed when I described this.

Oftentimes, I encouraged the mentors through individual exchanges, but these interactions also informed the development of the community because the mentors were able to return to the group with more confidence and a sense of reassurance.

Mediator

In addition to being a facilitator and community caretaker, I adopted another role in this study as a mediator between the preservice teachers and the mentors. Based on my position as a program coordinator coupled with my role as participant observer, it was essential for me to be sure there was positive communication occurring between the preservice teachers and mentors. If a preservice teacher or mentor consistently felt frustrated or upset, this would have likely hindered her learning and professional growth. Oftentimes, this mediation was beyond the scope of my data collection, yet impacted the research study in many ways.

For instance, Melissa and Jackie struggled with communicating effectively with one another. Jackie and I would have informal conversations about how she felt unsure of herself as a teacher, based on Melissa's vast amount of feedback. On the other hand, Melissa would converse with me, frequently via telephone, about how she felt Jackie was showing little effort, thus leading Melissa to provide more and more feedback. Through ongoing communication, I was able to help Melissa realize that Jackie was feeling incompetent as a teacher, which led her to withdraw and be uneasy in the classroom. Also, I was able to converse enough with Jackie to help her realize that the amount of feedback provided to her was not a personal attack, but just Melissa's style of mentoring. Hints of this issue emerged early on, as evidenced in Jackie's pre-interview comments when she described what expectations she had of a mentor:

... and giving us feedback obviously on what we could do to improve ourselves but not TOO much feedback because that can get really overwhelming and make you feel bad about what you are doing because sometimes I am getting all this feedback and I feel like, "Man, I can't do anything right".

Here, it is clear Jackie was feeling very insecure about her abilities as a teacher, which began impacting her actions in the classroom. As Melissa became more aware of Jackie's feelings, she was able to meet her needs more effectively. This appeared throughout the data in chapter IV as Melissa grew to recognize the relational aspects of mentoring.

In conclusion, my roles in this study clearly influenced the development of the collective and the individuals. My position as a program coordinator gave me access to the schools and mentors in unique ways. My role as a participant observer included being a facilitator and caretaker who kept intact the communal fabric and supported the active engagement of the

participants. Essentially, I mentored these mentors and often mirrored behaviors they used with their mentees, such as providing feedback and support, asking questions, building relationships, scaffolding learning, and meeting individual needs. In my view, these relational aspects of my roles were imperative to the mentors' learning in this study.

CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this dissertation study was to explore how a community of practice supported the professional development of classroom pre-kindergarten (pre-K) mentor teachers. Through developing a community of practice (both online and face-to-face) comprised of pre-K mentors and myself, it was anticipated the mentors would (a) enhance their mentor knowledge and (b) improve the ways in which they educated their preservice teachers. The following research questions were explored in this study:

3. In what ways did a community of practice comprised of pre-K mentor teachers evolve, both online and face-to-face, as they engaged in the co-construction and sharing of local knowledge related to improving mentor practice? Sub-question: What tools and processes for constructing new understandings were developed and/or accessed by the community?
4. How did participation in a community of practice impact and contribute to changes in each individual pre-K mentor's thinking, practice, and identity? Sub-question: How did mentors' use of problem-posing and problem-solving strategies evolve across time, as reflected in their discourse, text, practice, and focus of inquiry?

The findings described in previous chapters serve to illustrate both changes on the collective and individual levels as the mentors strived to understand how to best guide the learning of student teachers. These efforts, exchanges, and emergence of new understandings developed within a complex web of relationships from which the participants re-envisioned their roles as pre-K teachers. Through these processes of transformation, the mentors' identities expanded to include not only being teachers of young children, but also mentors of young adults.

While it was expected that the mentor teachers would engage in this work, it was unexpected that their contributions to the collective would be so rich and diverse. Consequently, they each contributed to an emerging and collective understanding of what it means to be a mentor in their programs.

A major challenge in formulating this discussion was how to discuss this journey in ways that foregrounded certain aspects of the community in relation to the individual and vice versa. It is important to consider the structure of the community, the processes for coming to know, and the new knowledge generated by the participants separately, yet without losing sight of their inter-related nature. After first acknowledging the limitations of the study, this chapter follows with the discussion and ends with implications for research and practice.

Limitations

There were clear limitations to this study. The community of practice was small in size, only being comprised of four mentor teachers and myself. Three of these teachers were from the same pre-K program, leaving only one mentor, Peggy, to provide a varying perspective in terms of programmatic and school system differences. The twelve week time-span was also a notable limitation. Not only was the short duration of the study a limitation, but the research design primarily focused on the effectiveness and processes of the community of practice. While there was evidence of early changes in on-the-floor mentor practice with mentees based on their perceptions, it was beyond the scope of this study to obtain sustained, compelling documentation of these changes through systematic classroom observations. Even though the classroom observations I conducted revealed detailed information about the pre-K context, classroom routines, teacher/student roles, and daily activities, I was unable to use these observations in

ways other than to reinforce findings from other data sources; this was due to the fact that they were conducted at various times and did not reveal systematic, substantial evidence of mentor/mentee interactions across the classrooms. There were, however, obvious transformations in the participants' thinking about what constitutes effective mentoring and evidence of their evolving identities as mentors, expressed through their narratives and confirmed by my observations of the community and their classroom practice. However, the mentors in this study dealt with specific contextual challenges and it is unclear whether the findings of this study are unique to pre-K mentors or would likely occur among mentors in K-12 classrooms as well.

Discussion

The Impact of the Research Design on the Community

Communities of practice function not only because they are social and relational, but also because of frameworks that orchestrate and structure experiences of the participants. The design of this study served two purposes: it guided the research and organized activities among members of the community. This study established particular expectations that included online writings and face-to-face conversations, assuring more than one way for participants to represent thoughts, share experiences, and ensure participation. There were rules of engagement and a set of expectations that led to the mentors' accountability for their own participation in the form of attending monthly meetings, responding to one another's postings, being receptive to my periodic classroom observations, and expressing their feelings, challenges, and strategies with others. As Holly remarked at the end of the study, "It keeps you more aware of what you're doing. It's like an accountability almost. I know I have to TRY to be the best mentor I can be...It keeps you on your toes and helps you grow as you're learning from the other mentors"

As previously discussed, I had dual roles in this study. My roles seemed to have influenced how the mentors expressed their loyalty to me and the study. As I moved back and forth between my responsibilities as a coordinator and researcher, I engaged in more sustained interactions among the mentors, working in the field on a continual basis. Due to my roles, the mentors knew me in multiple ways, as an experienced classroom teacher, a coordinator of a program for which they had a strong commitment, and as a researcher who was dedicated to their professional development as mentors. It is unclear, however, as to the root of their loyalty and ongoing efforts. Most likely, their steadfastness was due to a range of factors, varying for each participant and based on both an allegiance to the field of early childhood education as well as the emerging school-university partnership. It was also clear, based on the data, that the mentors were very dedicated to the quality of care the preschoolers received while in their classrooms. Nevertheless, my dual roles contributed in positive ways to the evolution of the community and the individual changes that occurred throughout this dissertation. The relational aspects of my roles were essential to the mentors' learning as I mentored them through their roles as teacher educators. As I formed relationships with the mentors, I grew to know about them as not only pre-K teachers and mentors, but also as mothers, women, and friends. This led us to form special relationships that increased the effectiveness of the community of practice. The relational part of a community cannot be discounted, as it often keeps the members acting and community evolving.

This research design was about more than the methodology and procedures; it also structured the community. It was not only helpful to me as a researcher, but it was beneficial to the participants. On the whole, the design of this study was an effective, situated model that

holds potential for future professional development initiatives among pre-K mentors and even mentors of higher grades.

The Process of Coming to Know

In plain terms—people learn from and with others in particular ways. They learn through practice (learning as doing), through meaning (learning as intentional), through community (learning as participating and being with others), and through identity (learning as changing who we are). Professional learning so constructed is rooted in the human need to feel a sense of belonging and of making a contribution to a community where experience and knowledge function as part of community property. (Lieberman & Mace, 2008, p. 227)

The field is replete with literature that emphasizes prescribed approaches to mentoring. These studies often fail to acknowledge how individuals socially construct knowledge that is shared and informed by critically examining and reflecting on their own practice. As evidenced in this dissertation, the mentors were given no handbook or series of steps to guide their learning. Instead, they sought new understandings through a variety of processes initiated by members of the community. It is a guiding principle of this study that “Learning [to be a mentor] cannot be designed, created and controlled” (Henderson, 2006, p. 2), but instead develops within the interplay of the “layering events of participation and reification by which our experiences and its social interpretation inform each other” (Wenger, 1998, p. 151). As a result, the foci of the communal exchanges emerged from shared and individual needs, helping to assure that mentors in a variety of schools and classrooms would likely benefit from a similar process.

The mentors in this study engaged in a continual string of reflective exchanges about their everyday mentoring lives, moving back and forth between their classroom experiences, shared narratives of these experiences, and individual reflections. Consequently, they co-constructed their mentor identities, in relation, and quickly learned that there was no “one-size-fits-all” mentor persona. As Melissa noted, “There’s just too many variables to make it a cookie cutter kind of thing”. As they negotiated the meaning of mentoring, they engaged in recursive cycles of shaping their identities through questioning, hypothesizing, and sharing lived experiences. Their identities emerged through negotiating meaning within a complex interweaving of participation and treatment of the role of mentoring as a tangible object to be closely studied, negotiated, and operationalized.

Through these processes, the mentors evidenced what Feiman-Nemser (2009) classified as four areas of learning to teach. They moved past naïve beliefs, acquired a deep and broad knowledge base *for* and *of* teaching, developed emotions and personal identities by combining ideas and realities, and built a repertoire of skills, routines, and strategies. As they learned to be mentors, they were also learning how to participate in a community of practice.

For the four mentors, participating in a community of practice contributed to changes in their thinking not only about their current mentoring situations, but also about guiding novice teachers as a professional calling. As they grappled with how to handle everyday struggles, they continually repositioned themselves and their ways of thinking through what Festinger (1957) refers to as *cognitive dissonance*. Cognitive dissonance occurs when an inconsistency between beliefs and/or actions leads to psychological tension, thus motivating individuals to change their thoughts and behaviors to seek a state of equilibrium (Festinger, 1957). In this project, as the

mentors engaged in social discourse about daily practices, unsettled thoughts often emerged, leading them to both transform some of their prior beliefs and actions and rationalize others. This occurred as they “reified in a social discourse of the self and of social categories... a lived experience of participation” (Wenger, 1998, p. 151). For example, the mentors began this study with preconceived notions of what it meant to be mentors that were more “black-and-white”, but left feeling overwhelmed and perhaps humbled by the actual complexities that were involved in being classroom-based teacher educators. Further, as all four mentors engaged in discourse, they rationalized their differences, particularly related to how they built relationships with student teachers and shared control and authority.

There were qualitative differences in the mentors’ participation that impacted their learning within the community. In essence, this study portrays a multi-vocal account of how four teachers came to understand how to be mentors. Their learning was defined through social discourse, appropriated by each of them through varying ways of participation in a community. The organization of the communal roles and their positions was partially influenced by pre-existing patterns of interaction (Oja & Smulyan, 1989). Clearly, Melissa played a dominant role. However, this does not mean that the positions of the other mentors were illegitimate. In her position as a pre-K supervisor, Melissa was comfortable leading Holly and Whitney and they were content with taking her lead while also voicing their own opinions, making mentoring and teaching decisions that were most relevant to their needs. Naturally, Peggy, who was the only mentor from another school and new to mentoring, approached her role in the community with some caution; nevertheless, she often shared a countering perspective to Melissa’s and contributed in particular ways, such as through revealing her affective approach to mentoring.

Peggy's position was similar to Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of *legitimate peripheral participation*, as she stayed more on the margins of the community, engaging in lower-risk tasks, yet actively shaping the focus and emerging insights of the community.

While the mentors assumed varying roles and positions, they all held a strong presence in the community, thus contributing to the construction of shared knowledge and processes of learning about the work and identity of a pre-K mentor. The meaning allotted to what constitutes "best mentoring practice" was mutually negotiated, gradually enacting a distributed network of expertise. While the mentors were all participants in the same community, what they knew at the end of the study was both similar and different.

Consequently, as each participant moves into future mentoring experiences, they are prepared to engage in similar ways of knowing and being. This is what Rogoff (1995) referred to as *participatory appropriation*, or when individuals advance their thoughts and actions through social interaction and shared understanding, which prepares them to participate in future activities of a similar kind. Knowledge of this process is critical, as it helps ensure that the work of becoming an effective mentor will carry forth into the mentors' future activities, both shared and individual.

The Situated Nature of Mentor Learning

The learning that occurred within this study was situated, developing from complex social interactions and authentic activities positioned in space and time, both present and historical. Situated learning naturally includes learning groups with variable compositions that provide opportunities for the negotiation of new knowledge. Social processes derived from diverse community positions and roles contribute to collective, interrelated zones of development

(Forman, Minick, & Stone, 1993), which are mediated by discourse, writings, tools (e.g., computers), use of metaphors, and rituals/routines. The learning that occurs within groups, such as the community in this study, includes peripheral/centrist, novice/expert, and researcher/participant. This does not mean that learning is one-way, with novices only learning from experts or participants from researchers. Rather, each member makes important contributions to collective understandings.

The participants in this study learned from one another as they assumed varying positions. For instance, even though Peggy was usually positioned on the periphery of the community, she was confident in her abilities to meet the affective needs of her mentee. On the other hand, Melissa was centrist within the community and clearly poised in her abilities to link theory to practice, yet struggled with the affective realm of mentoring. In this place and time, all participants benefitted from the range of perspectives, skills, and sensitivities of the community members, sharing the responsibility of informing one another and co-constructing new knowledge about the practice of mentoring.

Within this study, *local knowledge*, or a position of knowing about mentoring and what can be constructed as mentors engage in collaboration within communities, emerged from a confluence of current and past experiences. While situated learning is embedded within particular social and physical environments, it is also socio-historical and future-oriented; it is not simply informed by and related to the “here-and-now”. As the mentors negotiated what it means to be a successful mentor, they drew from everyday teaching experiences as well as prior memories as novice preservice teachers and even young children. The experiences and beliefs

the mentors brought into the community about the roles of mentors transformed across the twelve week study.

Many of the conversations that occurred within the community were based on the mentors' day-to-day experiences in pre-K classrooms. The pre-K context, being quite different in comparison to K-12 settings, provided the mentors in this study both with unique challenges and benefits. While it is not for certain, pre-K mentors in general may have more autonomy than mentors in higher grades, thus giving them necessary flexibility to make classroom decisions based on the needs of their preschool children and mentees. In this study, it appeared as if there was a high level of autonomy among the mentors, based on the conversations, written reflections, and classroom observations. On the other hand, these mentors were working with young children, labeled "at-risk", who had a variety of learning needs. This led to increased responsibilities and challenges. Further, pre-K mentors such as the ones in this study are increasingly being asked to mentor preservice teachers, yet little is known about how to effectively meet the needs of mentees (and mentors) in pre-K classrooms.

While much was learned about the mentors' through this study, their experience in this study is only a small window into their lives as teachers and mentors. Mentor learning exists along a continuum, with professional development initiatives only placed in particular space and time. Therefore, learning is not only about the occurrences in the physical space of a professional learning community, but also what occurs in social practices when individuals are physically removed from such community exchanges (Greeno, 1997).

The act of coming to know what it means to be a mentor is "intimately connected to the knower, and although relevant to immediate situations, also inevitably a process of theorizing"

(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001, p. 48). Learning how to engage in the act of theorizing, informed by lived experiences, is the antithesis of outcomes generated from top-down, skills-focused professional development initiatives. Rather, it is an owned, dynamic, situated stance that holds the promise for ensuring that mentors recognize their own possibilities as they continue to pursue this difficult, worthy work. As such, mentors will carry forth both what they have learned and how they have come to know into future experiences. As Melissa wrote on the blog at the end of the study:

I am a different person than before this journey began. It has surely been an insightful experience for me, and although I have mentored many young teachers in the past, this time has been the most rewarding. Perhaps it is because many challenges have been overcome, or maybe it is because of the fact that we took the time to reflect in writing. Whatever the reason, this time, I recognize that mentoring has changed me.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

This study has contributed to an understanding of how pre-K mentors in one community of practice helped define the roles and responsibilities of effective mentors. Future research is needed to continue to explore how a community of practice approach, comprised of both online and face-to-face exchanges, contributes to mentors' processes of coming to know about how to be teacher educators. Additionally, investigations focused on changes in "on-the-floor" mentoring practices, informed by collectives, will help illuminate the connections between knowledge developed by mentor communities and their individual interpretations in their own classrooms. To this end, research is needed on the particular challenges faced by pre-K mentors, as these may be influenced by program contexts that differ from those of K-12 mentors. Also,

future studies should explore the impact of pre-K mentors' professional development on child outcomes and quality of care, since this was beyond the scope of this particular study.

The orientation to studying mentoring included in this study has implications for both higher education teacher licensure programs and school systems. Since mentor teachers are teacher educators and supervise extensive practicum experiences, there is a need for university supervisors to support mentors by facilitating communities of practice. Furthermore, mentor teachers should be provided extended blocks of time throughout the school year to participate in either face-to-face or online communities of practice, yet a combination of both is ideal. Through these processes, they will not only improve their abilities to educate current mentees, but develop a shared repertoire of skills and knowledge they can carry forth into their future endeavors, thus influencing the learning of increasing numbers of preservice teachers and children for years to come.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Mentor Pledge of Confidentiality

As a participant in this research study, I will be participating in confidential discussions, both through an online discussion board and in person during monthly meetings with other mentors. In order to ensure proper protection of all participants, I agree not to share any information about specific preservice teachers or classroom mentors with individuals who are not participants in this study other than the primary researcher, Lori Caudle, and her faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Jane Moran. This includes allowing others to view the online discussion board, or aspects from these online discussions, in any way. I also agree not to share my online discussion board password with anyone. A breach of this agreement is a serious ethical violation and I pledge to abide by this confidential agreement.

Signature of Participant Mentor

Date

Appendix B: Mentor Demographic Questions

1. How old are you?
2. Where did you go to college and what degree did you obtain?
3. What type of teaching license do you hold?
4. How many years have you been teaching pre-K?
5. How long have you been a mentor?
6. Have you taught any other grade levels than pre-K and if so, where and for how long?

Appendix C: Mentor Pre-Interview Questions

1. Let's start off by you briefly describing your school and its culture.
2. How do you view yourself as a teacher of young children?
3. How do you view yourself as a mentor of future teachers?
4. Tell me about your experiences with your mentors as a preservice teacher.
5. What do you think are important qualities for "good" mentors to possess?
6. What uncertainties do you have as you begin mentoring in January?
7. If you have mentored student teachers/practicum students in the past, what have you learned from these experiences?
8. Have you had any opportunities to collaborate with other teachers and colleagues? If so, can you explain some of these?
9. What experiences have you had using technology? Have you ever used an online discussion board?

Appendix D: Preservice Teacher Pre-Interview Questions

Pre-Interview Questions

1. What expectations do you have of your pre-K mentor teacher when you student teach next semester?
2. What worries do you have about student teaching? Do you think your mentor can help alleviate some of these worries? If so, how?
3. What types of experiences do you anticipate having with your mentor?
4. What do you think mentors should know about teaching and learning in order to be effective?

Appendix E: Mentor Post-Interview Questions

1. How do you currently view yourself as a mentor?
2. What do you think are important qualities for you as a mentor to possess?
3. Describe your experiences in the collaborative monthly face-to-face meetings. Do you feel like these experiences changed at all over the course of the past 5 months and if so, how? Also, did your role in these meetings change? If so, in what ways?
4. What was it like participating in the online discussion board? What did you like/dislike?
5. Has participating in this community of practice impacted your knowledge about mentoring? If so, how?
6. Did your mentoring practice change over the past few months? If so, how?

Appendix F: Preservice Teacher Post-Interview Questions

1. How do the actual experiences you had with your mentor compare to your expectations?
2. Did your mentor help alleviate some of your worries? If so, in what ways?
3. What types of experiences did you have with your mentor?
4. What do you think your mentor knows about teaching and learning?
5. Describe some examples of ways your mentor guided your learning during student teaching?
6. How do you think your experiences with your mentor have prepared you to teach young children?

Appendix G: Online Discussion Board Questions

1. What has your experience been like so far with your student teacher? What questions or worries do you have, if any? What is unclear to you about this whole mentoring role?
2. It must be hard to find a balance between providing information to student teachers without overwhelming them. How do you all find that balance? Do you read into their cues, have a system in place, or just go by intuition?
3. How would you list the student teachers on a continuum of teacher development, based on what you know about them from our communications and your own personal knowledge? (ex: Student 1-----student 2-----student 3-----student 4). Also, when you do this, can you give a rationale for why you would put a student in a particular position?
4. For this week, can you each think back to where you placed the student teacher developmentally and also think about yourself and your own beliefs about teaching and learning? Then, it would be excellent if you could each use that information to make a simple action plan to implement over the next two weeks of how you will help your student through her final push in this 10-week journey (based on where she is and what you believe about what is important for teachers to know and do).

Appendix H: Classroom Observation Form

Mentor/ & Mentee: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Classroom Context: _____

Mentor Behaviors (adapted from Helman, 2006, p. 72)

Mentor Behaviors	Tallied Number of Times Observed	Comments and/or examples
Extends preservice teachers' thinking (e.g. uses clarifying questions, probes, paraphrases, makes connections, projects, or pauses to elicit suggestions from preservice teacher)		
Teaches directly (e.g. defines, suggests, illustrates from own experiences, tells, shows how, explains why, or elaborates on to provide new information to preservice teacher)		
Promotes Accountability (e.g. questions or problem-solves with preservice teacher to identify applicable teaching strategies)		
Explicates Practical Knowledge (e.g. describes actions out-loud, reflects on what she is doing and why, answers preservice teachers' questions about why she did something)		

Field Notes (general description of what happened):

Appendix I: Reflection “Process” Codes

*Bolded codes were dominant.

- 1) Describing Self: Mentors shared situations of personal struggles or reflected about self

Philosophies

Self as Learner

Thinker/Feeler

Balancing Roles

Need to Reflect

Questioning Self

Lack of Confidence

Lack of Knowledge

Lack of Time

Personal Goals

Role as Mentor

Feeling Overwhelmed

“Control Freak”

Providing Support

Doubts

Need to Grow/Learn More

Uses Analogies

Uses Resources

Too Many Commitments

At Specific Dev. Level

Survival Mode

- 2) Describing Current/New Knowledge: Mentors acknowledged new knowledge gained

Growth in Knowledge of Preschool Context

Beliefs Transferred into Mentoring Role

Value of Reflection

Mentoring Individualized

Important of Teaching Rationale

Redefining Belief System

Growth in Awareness of Demands

Growth in Knowledge of Learning

Growth in Knowledge of Feedback

Changes in Definition of Teaching

Mentoring about MTs, not PTs

Changing Role of Mentor

Varied Knowledge across Domains

- 3) Comparing Self to Preservice Teacher: Mentors compared themselves to their mentees

Similar/Different Personalities

Thinker/Feeler
Different Behaviors during Internships
Different Personal/Past Experiences

Similar Issues
 Similar/Different Levels of Initiative
 Different Comfort Levels
 Different Levels of Social-Emotional Development
 Different Teaching Approaches
 Seeing Self in PT

4) Comparing Self to another Mentor or Mentor/Mentee Situation: Mentors compared themselves to one another or to other dyad situations

Different Discussion Board Use
Different Mentoring Styles
Similar/Different Contexts
Similar Struggles
Similar/Different Philosophies
Thinker/Feeler
 Different Past Mentoring Experiences
 Different Levels of Demands
 Different Decision-Making
 Different MT/PT Dynamics

VITA

Lori Allison Caudle completed her Bachelor's degree from the Child and Family Studies Department at the University of Tennessee in 2003 and received her Master's degree the following year in conjunction with her certification to teach Pre-K-4th grade. During her graduate internship, she developed a desire to continue her academic work and entered the Ph.D. program in the Child and Family Studies Department at the University of Tennessee. To gain some more early childhood teaching experience, Lori took one year off her doctoral work and taught 2nd grade at a local primary school. She returned to graduate school with even more passion to contribute to the field of early childhood education through research and practice.

In 2007, Lori was given the opportunity to coordinate a new PreK-K teacher licensure program in the Child and Family Studies Department. This undergraduate program provides students with an opportunity to receive an Early Development and Learning (PreK-K) teaching license to teach children with and without disabilities. As the PreK-K Coordinator, Lori supervised Child and Family Studies undergraduate students, also known as preservice teachers, in their practicum and student teaching placements, taught related courses, and worked closely with classroom mentoring teachers and other professionals in the field that contribute to the education of the PreK-K students.

In the spring of 2009, Lori completed her Ph.D. courses and a short time later began her dissertation work. Her other research interests include the impact beliefs have on teacher practice, how inquiry supports the professional development of teachers, and the role technology plays in teachers' acquisition of knowledge. Lori has accepted a birth-kindergarten faculty position at Western Carolina University that began August 1, 2010.