REFLECTIVE PROCESSES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING EARLY LEARNING
STUDENT TEACHER MENTORING EXPERIENCES IN STUDENT TEACHING
PRACTICUMS

A thesis presented by
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Abstract

This doctoral thesis explored mentoring in early learning teacher preparation programs. This study explored the reflective processes embedded in the work between student teachers and their mentors during early learning student teacher experiences at Washington State community and technical colleges. Schon’s (1987a) concepts of reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, and reciprocal-reflection-in-action framed the study. Thirteen early learning program alumni from seven community and technical colleges participated in the study. Inductive analysis was used to develop six categories, from which six conclusions were drawn. First, modeling and talking are key themes in how student teachers learn from their mentor during the student teaching experience. Second, reflective processes in student teaching include opportunities to reflect-on-action, collaborate, plan, and problem solve. Third, mentor support is fundamental to student teacher reflection, including development of trust. Fourth, reciprocal reflection-in-action is an element of the mentor role. Fifth, reflection-in-action is used in making adjustments to teaching while in the midst of action. Sixth, student teachers recognize personal growth as well as professional growth throughout the early learning program and in their student teaching experience. A variety of implications for future research arise from this study, including exploring the perspective of the mentor, or the varying relationships found in the student teaching triad. In addition, research on developmental networks, mentor selection, and student disposition are of interest. Finally, implications for future practice include developing mentor training, creating a mentor and student teacher network, and specifying steps of reflection in student teaching.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the ladies of ECE: Judy, Mary Kay, and Karen, who taught me everything I know. And to Wynette, who took a chance and hired a computer programmer to teach parenting, thus starting this early learning adventure.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The field of early learning in Washington State is deep in the process of transformation. In the last ten years, the state has made substantial progress towards developing a comprehensive system of early learning. It is a challenging task, as the field is complex, rooted in many belief systems with multiple stakeholders. Historically, the field has been fragmented by work with multiple agencies and the lack of a comprehensive early learning system (Professional Development Consortium, 2010, p.1). In 2005, instigated by then Governor Christine Gregoire, Washington’s legislature initiated a focus on education with the passage of a bill creating a steering committee to study education in the state. The work of this committee resulted in a comprehensive review of the structure and funding of education, including early learning, in Washington State. As a result, at the Governor’s request and with the approval of the legislature, the cabinet level Department of Early Learning (DEL) was created in 2006. In the years since, DEL has worked with public and private sectors to develop a “…comprehensive Early Learning Plan and has put the infrastructure in place for a successful, integrated, early learning system” (Washington State Department of Early Learning, 2011, p.1). As a result of the work that has been accomplished, Washington State was one of only nine states awarded a $60 million Race to the Top grant in 2011, intended to facilitate continued work in this area. In addition, recently elected Governor Jay Inslee, continues to offer support for early learning, designating $279.2 million dollars to early learning in his proposed budget for 2013-15 (Washington State Office of Financial Management, 2013).

Washington’s Early Learning Plan notes “the quality of early learning through the whole span of birth through third grade depends in large part on the education, training, and experience of the teachers” (Washington State Department of Early Learning, 2010, p. 40). Professional
development is a key component of the plan, with community and technical college programs playing a significant role. Therefore, this study of student teaching in early learning programs at Washington State community and technical colleges provides a valuable contribution to meeting the goals of the Early Learning Plan and improving early learning teacher preparation in Washington State.

This chapter begins with an examination of the problem of practice guiding this doctoral thesis, followed by the purpose of the study. Next, the research questions, theoretical framework, and an overview of the research plan will be presented, followed by a discussion of the significance of this study. Finally, study limitations and key terms will be presented.

Statement of Problem

The following section provides an overview of the problem of practice. This section begins with the general context and history, followed by a discussion of local context. Finally, the section concludes with the purpose statement for this study.

Problem of Practice.

Early learning is generally considered to encompass programs that provide education and care for children from birth through age eight. The field of early learning has developed in a fragmented fashion, evolving from a grandparent or a neighbor taking care of children, or a parent opening a preschool, into the wide variety of child care facilities and preschools found today. The field has grown in spurts, often on a local basis, which has led to a plethora of philosophies and curriculums drawn from a variety of theories and varying widely in approach (Professional Development Consortium, 2010; Whitebook, et al., 2009). For example, programs might be half day or full day, include group instruction or not, be teacher directed or child centered. Curriculum also varies, encompassing purchased curriculum packages, project-based,
play-based, or academically-based curriculums. Some programs offer family support or parent education classes, others do not. Programs might be housed in a church, a home, a community building, a business, or a center. Funding sources also vary, including private tuition-based programs, not-for-profit, for-profit, and publicly funded programs – including local, state, and federal funding. Additionally, programs may be regulated at the local, state, or federal level, or may be completely unregulated. Requirements for working in the field are often minimal, with wages for early learning teachers typically hovering around the poverty level. In fact, a recent report indicates that approximately 61% of full-time and 77% of full and part-time early learning workers earned less than the federal poverty level for a family of four (United States Government Accountability Office, 2012), making it difficult for early learning workers to afford more education. Qualifications for working in the federally funded and regulated Head Start program are likely to be substantially different from the requirements of a church-based preschool or a family child care home. At the same time, there is national recognition of the value of early learning programs and a resulting interest in improving the field, by both policymakers and the public (Professional Development Consortium, 2010; Whitebook, et al., 2012). As a result, there is increased focus on teacher preparation and teacher quality in early learning programs.

In Washington State, early learning is in a period of change, beginning with the establishment of the Department of Early Learning (DEL) in 2006 and continuing to the present as DEL works to align standards, regulations, and programs. Early learning encompasses a wide variety of programs such as Head Start, all types of child care provisions and preschools, public and private K-3 classes, and the state funded Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), which is similar to federally funded Head Start.
Though teaching requirements vary, Washington State community and technical colleges offer early learning teacher preparation degrees and certificates in accordance with levels designated by DEL (Washington State Department of Early Learning, 2012). Students completing coursework in community and technical college early learning programs will receive either an Early Childhood Education Certificate, designed to provide a foundation of early childhood knowledge, or an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, qualifying them for lead teaching positions in the federal Head Start program and ECEAP, as well as director or lead teacher positions in child cares, family home cares, and preschools throughout the state.

Student teaching, also widely referred to as practicum, is a key experience in early learning teacher preparation programs at community and technical colleges in Washington, resulting in student teacher placement in a variety of early learning program settings while working with a mentor teacher. However, as noted in a report to the state legislature, “…the early learning work force is characterized by moderate to low levels of education…” (Professional Development Consortium, 2010, p. 4). Data provided in the 2011 Washington State Race to the Top application reports only 9.53% of the early learning workforce holds an associate degree or higher, while an additional 12.9% hold one of the early learning certificates available (Washington State Department of Early Learning, 2011). These statistics lead to concerns about the education levels of the mentor teachers working with early learning student teachers. Depending on the site selected, early learning student teachers may be working with mentor teachers with little more than a high school diploma or they may be working with mentor teachers holding four-year degrees. For example, Head Start and ECEAP currently require lead teachers to have an associate degree or higher (Brown, 2011; Washington Administrative Code, Chapter 170-100, Section 170-100-090, 2006). Beginning in 2013, Head Start will require half
of the lead teachers in the nation to hold a baccalaureate degree, either in early childhood education or in another subject with the addition of “…coursework equivalent to a major relating to early childhood education with experience teaching preschool-age children”. (Brown, 2011, para. 5). Child care center lead teachers must have a high school degree or the equivalent and must complete state training within six months (Minimum Licensing Requirements for Child Care Centers, 2006). The licensee of a family child care home must have a high school diploma and must complete 20 hours of state training (Washington Administrative Code, Chapter 170-296A, Section 170-296A-1975, 2012). Preschools in Washington State include educational programs that enroll children for less than four hours per day. There are no state regulations nor is there a regulatory department for these preschools, therefore, there are no requirements for teachers in these programs. These variations in teaching requirements differentiate the field of early learning from the field of K-12, where certification typically implies that mentor teachers will have, at a minimum, a baccalaureate degree in education and passage of a state certification exam.

The varied educational levels of mentor teachers in early learning does not imply a lack of experience or skill to offer student teachers, however, it may imply a lack of pedagogical and theoretical knowledge. This becomes a concern when considering how early learning student teachers connect professional knowledge, or theory, with practice. As a scholar-practitioner, the researcher is interested in improving teacher preparation within the context of her practice, leading to a desire to explore interactions between mentors and student teachers. Further, there is a lack of research available pertaining to student teaching in early learning programs in general (Whitebook, et.al., 2009), and there is little research available on the reflective practices occurring in the dialogue between early learning mentor teachers and student teachers. Research
in this area is also of use to Washington State community and technical college early learning faculty across the state. A long-standing statewide group of early learning faculty members is engaged in collaborative work, including completion of projects such as common certificates, shared online classes, and common course numbering. The conclusions from this study will be shared with this statewide faculty group, potentially leading to change, not only in the researcher’s practice, but in the statewide context as well.

The following section articulates the problem statement for this study. It begins with a brief examination of teaching in early learning, followed by a discussion of student teaching. Next, the problem statement guiding this study is presented.

**Purpose Statement.**

Education is currently one of the top priorities in the United States, with early education often cited as a key factor in both educational equity and in advancing the national goal of improved academic standings and performance within the global platform. Research confirming the positive long term effects of early learning programs on later education (Burger, 2010) has focused national attention on the teacher quality in early learning programs (United States Government Accountability Office, 2012; Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006; Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009). The task of teaching is complex, involving classroom management, content knowledge, phases of child development, learning theories, curriculum development, instructional techniques, social and emotional support and development, educational theories, and more. It is also contextual, varying from school to school, classroom to classroom, and from child to child. Yet educational qualifications for teaching in early learning range along a continuum from minimal – a high school diploma – to baccalaureate degrees, which may or may not be in education (United States Government Accountability Office, 2012;
File & Gullo, 2002; Whitebook, et al., 2009), leading to concerns about the level of teacher preparation for work in the field. Further, teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education are diverse and little is known about how they differ or their efficacy (Bogard, Traylor & Takanishi, 2008; Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States, 2010; Professional Development Consortium, 2010; Whitebook, et al., 2012). Consequently, teacher preparation programs located in institutions of higher education are also a focus of national attention.

Although student teaching has been identified as a key strategy for improving the teaching practices of teacher candidates (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010), variations in contexts, philosophies, curriculums, and mentor teacher education and experience levels provide uneven early learning student teaching experiences (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010; Whitebook, et al., 2012). Additional research confirms the influence of mentor teachers in the training of student teachers (Anderson, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Research also indicates that reflective processes are an essential component of teacher preparation (Etscheidt, Curran, & Sawyer, 2012), while National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2008) includes reflection as a necessary practice in the preparation of teachers. Schon (1987a) suggests that the spoken and unspoken dialogues between mentors and student practitioners are a form of reflective process helping to connect professional knowledge and practice.

It is apparent that the student teaching experience will vary widely dependent upon site selection, variations in contexts, philosophies, curriculums, education, and experience levels of mentor teachers (Whitebook, et al., 2012). Despite the number of student teaching experiences offered in early learning teacher preparation programs, there is a lack of available research
pertaining to early learning teacher preparation (Whitebook, et al., 2009). Further, there is little existing research on the reflective processes occurring in the dialogue between mentor teacher and student teacher. The literature on mentoring is rich and deep, with many suggestions as to what a mentor does or should do and there is also literature available regarding mentor teachers, which includes roles and practices within the student teaching model.

Mohrman and Lawler (2012) suggest that “research is used when it connects to practice and fits the context practitioners experience” (p. 49) and further suggest that there is a need to shift approaches to research to reflect the reality faced by practitioners. The reality in early learning teacher preparation programs is that there is a wide variation in mentor education, selection and training. Given this variation, the perspective of the student teacher, in regard to the experience of being mentored, is of value. Further, the researcher considered the idea of intent versus interpretation. A worldview of social constructivism suggests that how mentoring is interpreted by the mentee is of concern, regardless of the intentions of the mentor, adding support to the exploring the perspective of student teachers. In addition, as a scholar-practitioner currently working with early learning student teachers, the researcher recognizes the value of reflection in the teacher preparation process. The primary lens through which teacher preparation has been examined has often been from a performance perspective – focused on evaluation and skill, rather than from a learning perspective. Exploring student teaching through a learning perspective focuses on the reflective processes and practices of student teachers during their practicum. This shift in assumption from performance to learning and from outcome to process is a shift in research approach which connects research to practice, providing practitioners with research that applies to their practice (Alvesson & Sandburg, 2011; Mohrman & Lawler, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore early learning student
teacher perceptions of the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience in early learning programs at Washington State community and technical colleges.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore early learning student teacher perceptions of the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience in early learning programs at Washington State community and technical colleges. The following research questions were designed to support this objective.

1. How do early learning student teachers describe the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience?

2. How do early learning student teachers describe the role of their mentor in the reflective processes associated with their student teaching experiences?

3. How do early learning student teachers describe their reflective processes concerning their own learning associated with the student teaching experience, their mentor experience, and their overall teacher preparation experiences?

These research questions were designed to elicit early learning student teacher perspectives of being mentored and the reflective processes that occurred during that experience. The first question is designed to gain insight regarding how student teachers understand and identify the reflective processes that occurred as they worked with their mentors. The second question shifts perspective from the actual reflective processes to the mentor’s part in those processes. Finally, the third question again looks at the reflective processes, however, in this
case the question is designed to examine how student teachers perceive the reflective processes in regard to their own learning rather than examining how and when they occurred.

The following section presents the theoretical framework used as a lens for this study. This section begins with a brief discussion of the worldview guiding this study. Next, the selected theoretical framework is presented.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research study was guided by a social constructivist perspective of learning, in which it is believed that individuals make meaning from their own experiences as they strive to understand their world (Creswell, 2007). The social constructivist worldview sees individuals as constructing meaning through their interactions with others. Research guided by this worldview seeks to understand how the participant interprets and makes meanings from their experiences. Questions are open-ended and broad, allowing participants to talk about their experiences. In addition, understanding the context in which participants work and live is recognized shaping their meaning making, which requires the researcher to understand those influences. Finally, social constructivist researchers recognize the influence of their own experiences on their interpretation of participant meaning, requiring them to articulate their own position in regards to the research (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, in this study, emphasis was on the interactive processes of learning, experiences, reflections, and social interactions as experienced by participants and viewed through the lens of social constructivism.

The theoretical framework guiding the study was Schon’s (1987a) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* as applied to the mentoring experiences of early learning student teachers during their student teaching practicum. Three reflective processes were considered: reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, and reciprocal reflection-in-action. Schon’s (1987a) concepts of
reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, as well as the idea of the reciprocal nature of mentor and student reflection, capture the essence of reflective processes in early learning student teaching. The concept of reflection-in-action captures the nature of reflection while in the moment, such as when in the midst of a lesson or an interaction with a child. Reflection-on-action may be seen when engaged with the mentor teacher in more explicit methods of teaching, such as discussion and critique. Moreover, both concepts are related to modeled behaviors – the moments when an early learning student teacher is observing the mentor teacher in action – as the student reflects while the teacher is at work, as well as after the fact. Finally, the reciprocal nature of the reflection appears to be a constantly occurring event as the mentor teacher and early learning student teacher interact and react to each other. For the purposes of this study regarding student teaching, the role of the coach in Schon’s reflective practicum was considered as part of the broader spectrum of mentoring.

The social constructivist worldview guides this study, leading to an examination of the reflective processes that occur during interactions between mentors and early learning student teachers. Schon’s (1987a) theory was selected as lens as it offers multiple ways of looking at reflection in a dynamic classroom environment. Early learning student teachers are engaged in mentor and child interactions in a busy, real-life classroom which provides many opportunities for varied reflective processes. Schon’s (1987a) concept of reflective processes provides a framework for understanding how reflection occurs during those interactions. The next section provides a brief overview of the research plan for this study.

**Overview of Research Plan**

This study was a qualitative, interpretive study of early learning student teaching alumni. The participants represented seven different community and technical colleges in Washington
State, and had completed their student teaching practicum within the last three years. Thirteen participants were interviewed, by phone, using open-ended questions. Interviews were transcribed and coded using an eclectic method of In Vivo and descriptive coding. Data analysis followed, using an inductive process, which resulted in six categories. Two participants provided written documents for examination, which were then read and coded to confirm categories. A dissertation journal was kept during the entire process and was used to make notes, track progress, and write analytic memos. At this point general trends in the data were considered through review of the categories and dissertation journal. Finally, six conclusions were drawn.

**Significance of Study**

Early learning, and teacher preparation in early learning, are of national and local concern. This study is significant at the local level, as it informs both the researcher’s practice and the practice of other early learning programs in Washington State by providing empirical evidence of the reflective processes found in the work between mentor and student teachers. In addition, gaining the student teacher perspective in regard to these processes led to several conclusions that, if implemented, may improve practice. Further, this study could influence policy in programs in regard to mentor training and mentor selection. Finally, this study is a step towards the goals of Washington’s Early Learning Plan, which states “the quality of early learning through the whole span of birth through third grade depends in large part on the education, training, and experience of the teachers” (Washington State Department of Early Learning, 2010, p. 40).

On a broader level, this study also addresses a gap in the literature on early learning student teaching, on reflective processes in early learning student teaching, and on mentoring in
early learning student teaching. Student teaching in early learning is not the same as student teaching in the K-12 system. Differences include the varying contexts and philosophies of early learning, variations in regulations and teaching requirements, variations in the education of the teachers in the field, the nurturing and care component of early learning, and finally, the developmental levels of children from birth through age eight.

**Assumptions/Delimiters/Limitations**

This study was guided by the following assumptions:

1. Learning is a social process, involving interactions with others.
2. Learning is a constructivist process, based on experience.
3. Reflection is an integral part of learning and is essential in both the social process and the constructivist process of learning.
4. Learning and reflection cannot be separated.

For this research study, the delimiters were:

2. Alumni who had completed their student teaching within the past three years.
3. Focused only on the student teacher perspective.
4. Data was self-reporting via interview and written documents. No field observations were conducted.

Limitations of this research study are as follows:

1. This study explored the perceptions of participants who were program alumni rather than currently enrolled students.
2. This study focused on student teacher perspectives, providing a one-sided view of an experience that involves at least two, if not more, people.

3. This study interviewed 13 former student teachers from seven community and technical colleges, limiting the scope of the study to a small group out of multiple programs.

4. This study was based only on interviews and a minimum amount of written documents.

5. This study did not collect detailed demographics concerning race, ethnicity, or religion.

6. This was a qualitative study, subject to interpretation by participants and the researcher, and therefore may be open to other interpretations.

Key terms and Definitions

The following definitions are included to clarify the terminology used in this study:

*Early Learning:* generally considered to encompass programs that provide education and care for children from birth through age eight (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011).

*Learning:* There are many perspectives to consider when defining what it means to learn. In line with the constructivist worldview of this study, learning is considered to be the construction of knowledge from one’s own experiences (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

*Mentor:* There is ambiguity as to the terminology concerning the concepts of coaching and mentoring. This study is framed by the Schon’s (1987a) concepts of coaching and reflection. Distinguishing differences between the terms *coach* and *mentor* are hard to
define (Passmore, 2007) resulting in the interchangeable usage of the terms (Stowers & Barker, 2010). Though definitions vary, coaching is often identified with skill development and mentoring with career development (Passmore, 2007; Stowers & Barker, 2010). For the purposes of this study, a mentor encompasses both roles, promoting both skill development and career development.

Student Teacher: a student engaged in preservice field practice (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2008).

Practicum: a situation where students may work in a real-world context under the guidance of an experienced practitioner (Feiman-Nemser, 2012).

Reflection: There are many theories and definitions of reflection to be found. For the purposes of this study, reflection is defined as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1910, Chapter 1, Section 1, Subsection IV, para. 3).

Reflective Processes: both the individual reflections of the student teacher and the combined reflections that occur between student teacher and mentor (Schon, 1987a).

Reflection-in-action: reflection that occurs during an event or activity and is the result of unexpected occurrences (Schon, 1987a).

Reflection-on-action: reflection that occurs after the fact, reflecting on what already occurred (Schon, 1987a).

Reciprocal-reflection-in-action: reflection that occurs as the mentor teacher responds to the student teacher’s reflection-in-action through demonstration or discussion, eliciting a further reflection-in-action from the student teacher (Schon, 1987a).
Summary

Chapter One defined the scope and purpose of this study. An introduction, problem statement, and position statement were presented, followed by the research questions and theoretical framework guiding this study. An overview of the research plan, the significance of the study and the assumptions, delimiters, and limitations of the study were also presented. Lastly, a list of key terms and definitions was provided. Next, Chapter Two reviews the key concepts found in the literature concerning mentoring, reflection, and student teaching.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of the following chapter is to describe key literature that informed this study. This chapter begins with an introduction and an overview of the field of teacher preparation, followed by brief reviews of research regarding mentoring, mentoring in student teaching, studies concerning reflection, and reflection in student teaching. The final two sections examine gaps in the literature and provide a summary of key points.

Introduction

This review of the literature began with an examination of three strands of literature: mentoring, student teaching, and reflection. The first strand to investigate was student teaching, with a goal of understanding how the role of the mentor in student teaching evolved and is perceived today. This involved a historical review of student teaching and a review of the literature on mentoring in student teaching. The next strand to examine was the literature on mentoring. This involved an examination of the evolution of mentoring, the major concepts of mentoring, and the varied types of mentoring, which resulted in a narrowing of focus to the particular mentoring that occurs in student teaching. The third strand to be reviewed was the literature on mentoring. This review began with an examination of John Dewey’s (1910) How We Think, then moved into theories of transformational learning, experiential learning, and Schon’s (1987a) theory of the reflective practicum. It was at this point that the three strands coalesced and Schon’s theory was accepted as the framework for the study. After reviewing these strands of literature, the focus was narrowed to mentoring in student teaching and reflection in student teaching. The sequence followed are outlined in Figure 1.
Overview

As early as the 16th century, becoming a teacher involved an apprentice learning to teach through practice and the observation of a master teacher (Hughes, 1982). The evolution of the formal system of teacher preparation in the United States began with the formation of normal schools in the early 1800’s. The first state-supported normal school included a model school where student teachers could observe and practice. During the first half of the twentieth century many normal schools became colleges and, with that change, an eventual shift away from student teaching in a model school occurred, replaced by student teaching under the guidance of a
mentor teacher in the public schools (Hughes, 1982). There is little literature outlining the historical roots of early learning teacher preparation programs, however, the model currently in use in most programs appears to be similar to the typical triad model of student teaching used in many K-12 teacher preparation programs. The triad model consists of university or college supervisor, mentor teacher, and student teacher.

An examination of the historical thread of student teaching identifies the central role of the mentor teacher in the student teaching experience. Since student teaching has been identified as fundamental to teacher preparation (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010) and research indicates that the mentor teacher has great influence on student teachers (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Watts, 1987) it becomes valuable to examine what it means to mentor, how mentoring is perceived by student teachers, and how learning occurs in the process. This literature review will provide a brief look at key research regarding mentoring, a review of mentoring within the student teaching experience, and the role of reflection in learning.

**Mentoring.**

There is a broad array of literature available on mentoring which suggests positive outcomes for those being mentored (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2007). In addition, there are some key mentoring concepts identified, such as studies on phases and stages of mentoring (Kram, 1983), developmental networks (Chandler & Kram, 2005; Higgins & Kram, 2001), and learning during mentoring (Baker & Lattuca, 2010; Certo, 2005; Lankau & Scandura, 2007). Further delineating the literature on mentoring are three specific areas of interest: youth mentoring, academic mentoring, and workplace mentoring (Eby, et al., 2007). Additionally, the general area of academic mentoring can be split into three distinct areas: support for students and faculty at an institution of higher learning, mentoring for beginning teachers, and mentoring for
student teachers (Martin, 1994). The mentoring of student teachers does not fit neatly within the parameters of mentoring as defined in the general literature. For instance, in the general literature, mentoring is often identified as a long term relationship, with phases and stages spanning multiple years (Kram, 1983), while mentoring relationships in student teaching typically last from one to three academic quarters. Common definitions of mentoring include the concept of an older and more experienced person helping someone new to the organization in their career development and in guiding them within the organization (Mathews, 2003), which fits the mentoring of beginning teachers in their first years, while student teachers are experiencing an introduction to the processes and world of teaching in general and are focused more on the practicality of the experience (Martin, 1994). For the purposes of this study, this literature review is focused on mentoring within student teaching.

*Mentoring in student teaching.*

Maynard and Furlong (1995) identify three common models of mentoring in student teaching: “the apprenticeship model; the competency model; and the reflective practitioner model” (p. 17). Their perspective is that none of the models is effective as a stand-alone, rather, it takes a combination of the three to prove effective. In the apprenticeship model, the student teacher works with the mentor, learning from practical experience and the modeling of the mentor. Maynard and Furlong (1995) suggest that the collaborative teaching of this model is useful for the early stages of student teaching. The competency model promotes skill development and the acquiring of a specific set of competencies. The role of the mentor becomes one of coaching and feedback, and is useful for the middle phase of student teaching (Maynard & Furlong, 1995), as the student teacher begins to develop a style of teaching. The reflective practitioner model is suitable for the final stages of student teaching, as students learn
to reflect upon their own teaching and on the learning of the children. In this phase, the role of the mentor becomes that of a “promoting critical reflection” (Maynard & Furlong, 1995, p. 21).

Studies identify many aspects of mentoring in student teaching. Table 1 offers a summary of insights drawn from key literature. Mentors assist student teachers in understanding their role as teacher in a variety of contexts, such as working in the classroom, working with families, working with other education professionals, and within the field. Student teachers value the skills, expertise and experience of their mentors and are influenced by the modeling of their mentors (Anderson, 2007). The student teacher develops a sense of what it means to be a teacher, which also leads to self-knowledge as the student begins to make meaning around the self as teacher (Alvestad & Rothle, 2007; Cuenca, 2010). Identity is influenced by how others reflect their vision of an individual back to that individual (Bullough, 2005; Harter, 1997). This would suggest that as mentor teachers interact with and evaluate student teachers, they reflect their perceptions of the student as teacher back to the student, thus contributing to the student’s sense of self as teacher. Conversations with mentors also help student teachers to interpret events, understand and place self within context, and lead to skill development (Daloz, 2012; Dobler, et al., 2009). Mentors use conversation to demonstrate and explain their actions, to question students and help them develop their thinking, to invite students to explain their thinking and decision-making, and to extend their understanding of the thoughts and actions of children (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987). Additionally, mentor teachers and college faculty are models of professionalism and expertise for the student teacher (He, 2009). Martin (1994) suggests that mentor modeling should be extended beyond replication of practices to “a basis for reflection” (p. 274).
Table 1  
*Mentoring in Student Teaching*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Insights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anderson (2007)</td>
<td>Explores roles of power and compliance in the student teacher/cooperating teacher relationship.</td>
<td>Student teachers value the skills, expertise and experience of their mentors and are influenced by the modeling of their mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvestad &amp; Rothle (2007)</td>
<td>Explores issues related to the identity formation of mentor teachers.</td>
<td>The student teacher develops a sense of what it means to be a teacher, which also leads to self-knowledge as the student begins to make meaning around the self as teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuenca (2010)</td>
<td>Discusses a conceptual framework for university supervisors in responding to the needs of student teachers.</td>
<td>Identity is influenced by how others reflect their vision of an individual back to that individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullough (2005)</td>
<td>Explore issues related to the identity formation of mentor teachers.</td>
<td>Conversations with mentors also help student teachers to interpret events, understand and place self within context, and lead to skill development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dobler, et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Examines collaboration between mentors, principals, and university supervisors in the development of student teachers.</td>
<td>Mentors use conversation to demonstrate and explain their actions, to question students and help them develop their thinking, to invite students to explain their thinking and decision-making, and to extend their understanding of the thoughts and actions of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feiman-Nemser &amp; Buchmann (1987)</td>
<td>Examines how interactions between the environment, teacher preparation program, and participants influence learning.</td>
<td>Mentors need to be intentional about their mentoring. This requires a shift in thought from their role as teacher of children, to being a teacher of teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feiman-Nemser (1998, 2012)</td>
<td>In educative mentoring, mentors think about tasks and activities that might help student teachers learn, as well as the questions they might ask to encourage thinking about teaching. They are intentional about mentoring, planning for the teaching of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Insights</td>
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<tr>
<td>He (2009)</td>
<td>A literature review on strengths-based mentoring.</td>
<td>Mentor teachers are models of professionalism and expertise for the student teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maynard and Furlong (1995)</td>
<td>Authors identify three common models of mentoring in student teaching: apprenticeship; competency; and reflective practitioner. Their perspective is that none of the models is effective as a stand-alone, rather, it takes a combination of the three to prove effective.</td>
<td>Mentoring in student teaching requires both coaching skills and mentoring skills, moving beyond the concepts of traditional mentoring, to include skill acquisition, induction, reflection, and experiential work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passmore (2007) Stowers &amp; Barker (2010)</td>
<td>Though definitions vary, coaching is often identified with skill development and mentoring with career development. Distinguishing differences between the two are hard to define resulting in the interchangeable usage of the terms.</td>
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</table>

The literature on mentoring in student teaching encompasses a wide variety of topics, including exploration of the roles of university supervisors and mentor teachers (Lu, 2010), as well as examining how mentor teachers learn their role (Lu, 2010) and perceive their role (Weasmer & Woods, 2003). Various literature reviews have been conducted, looking at topics such as identifying how mentors are selected and trained, and how they sustain the role of mentor (Martin, 1994) or examining perspectives of mentoring: roles and responsibilities, stages in teacher development, stages in the mentoring relationship, and personal perspectives, values, and assumptions (Hawkey, 1997). Additional studies examine the expectations of student
teachers concerning their mentoring (Ambrosetti, 2010), and power-hierarchies between university supervisors and mentor teachers (Veal & Rikard, 1998). Further studies examined research concerning aspects of mentoring in education, such as congruency of beliefs between mentors and student teachers (He & Levin, 2008; Karavas & Drossou, 2009) and the influence of context on mentoring the student teacher (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1995; Feiman-Nemser, 1998). The array of topics identified indicates the wide-ranging scope of research concerning mentoring in student teaching.

The work of Feiman-Nemser (1998) concerning educative mentoring is of particular interest, suggesting that teacher preparation programs need

… new models of mentoring that respect the complex and contextualised nature of teaching, that honour teachers’ knowledge and ways of knowing, and that engage novices, mentors and university-based teacher educators in a joint inquiry about teaching and learning to teach (p.66).

Citing personal experiences of being mentored, as well as experiences in mentoring student teachers, and the influences of John Dewey’s writings, Feiman-Nemser developed a concept of *educative* mentoring, designed to help “…novices learn to teach and develop the skills and dispositions to continue learning in and from their practice” (p. 66). Educative mentoring begins with an idea about what good teaching is and how best to impart that vision to student teachers. Educative mentors think about tasks and activities that might help student teachers learn, as well as the questions they might ask to encourage thinking about teaching. Educative mentors are intentional about mentoring, planning for the teaching of student teachers, reflecting upon the work they do, and the vision they hold (Feiman-Nemser, 1998, 2012).
Educative mentoring moves beyond the traditional view of mentoring as support and advice, to the more specific concept of preparing future teachers for entry into the profession, including the active planning and reflection that is encompassed in the role, thus providing a framework for examining mentoring within the context of student teaching.

*Mentors and coaches.*

There is some ambiguity as to the terminology used in the field concerning the concepts of coaching and mentoring. This study is framed by the Schon’s (1987a) concepts of coaching and reflection. Distinguishing differences between the two are hard to define (Passmore, 2007) resulting in the interchangeable usage of the terms (Stowers & Barker, 2010). Though definitions vary, coaching is often identified with skill development and mentoring with career development (Passmore, 2007; Stowers & Barker, 2010). Schon defines a coach as one “…whose main activities are demonstrating, advising, questioning, and criticizing” (1987a, p. 38). In organizational literature the general definition of mentoring is that it is the relationship developed between an older and more experienced person and a younger, inexperienced person in order to help the younger in career development (Ragins & Kram, 2007). In the student teaching model, the classroom teacher, known as the mentor teacher or the cooperating teacher, often acts as both mentor and coach, as suggested by these definitions. Student teachers learn skills such as guidance, classroom management, lesson planning and implementation, observation, and assessment (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009, 2011) from the cooperating teacher which can be seen as coaching functions. Cooperating teachers also introduce student teachers to “…the invisible world of teaching” (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987, p. 272). This includes discussing what they do, why they do it, asking questions and helping student teachers think about their own practices, helping students
recognize and address a child’s confusion, building on their understandings, and making pedagogical decisions (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987). These can be recognized as mentoring functions, necessary to the career development of the student teacher as they enter the teaching profession. Therefore, the role of the coach in Schon’s reflective practicum will be considered as part of the broader spectrum of mentoring.

**Reflection.**

There are many perspectives to consider when defining what it means to learn. In line with the constructivist view of this study, learning can be considered to be the construction of knowledge from one’s own experiences (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). In Experiential Learning Theory, learning is defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 41, as cited in Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Reflection is recognized as a key piece of the learning cycle, suggesting learning is a recursive process involving “experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194), during which knowledge is constructed. There are many theories and definitions of reflective thinking to be found. A summary of the key scholars reviewed for this study is offered in Table 2.

Table 2

*Literature on Reflection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Insights</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dewey (1910)</td>
<td>In this book examining how thought processes occur, Dewey discusses reflective thought in terms of examining beliefs and knowledge through the supports for each, as well as examinations of the</td>
<td>Each of these concepts reinforces the idea that learning occurs through reflection, through questioning our own ideas, methods, and beliefs. Reflection may include reflecting on the</td>
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Dewey explored the topic in his 1910 book *How We Think*, defining reflective thought as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Chapter 1, Section 1, Subsection IV, para. 3). Mezirow (1994) developed a transformative learning theory based in reflective thinking. Transformation theory posits that learning occurs when we reflect on content, process and personal foundational beliefs. Feiman-Nemser (2012) suggests that
reflective thinking is a “generic professional disposition” (p. 75), identifying conceptual orientations in reflection, such as academic, practical, or technological, among others. Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1987) claim that a necessary aspect of student teaching is learning to “…question what they see, believe and do…” (p. 272). Other researchers suggest that the use of reflection during the student teaching process increases student teacher learning and develops a habit of reflection that will sustain personal professional growth (Dobbins, 1996; Dell’Olio, 1998). Each of these concepts reinforces the idea that learning occurs through reflection, through questioning one’s own ideas, methods, and beliefs. Reflection may include reflecting on the implementation of a lesson, on how a child is thinking, or on personal views and beliefs. Each contributes to learning and personal development. Schon’s (1987a) concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action refine the reflective process further, looking at both the individual reflections of the student teacher and the combined reflections that occur between student teacher and mentor. Schon (1987a) suggests that reflection-in-action further contributes to learning as it “goes beyond statable rules – not only by devising new methods of reasoning…but also by constructing and testing new categories of understanding, strategies of action, and ways of framing problems” (p. 39).

_Reflection in- and on-action._

Schon (1987a) posits that in any given profession, there are areas of knowledge that cannot be simply articulated and taught. The only way to gain the knowledge is by actively participating in the associated actions, which involves continual assessing of the action, adjustments to circumstances on a second-by-second basis, and anticipation of consequences, all of which are based on personal learning and experiences. Schon indicates that there are two ways of thinking about this process - one is to “reflect-on-action” (Schon, 1987a, p. 26) and the
other is to “reflect-in-action” (Schon, 1987a, p. 26). Reflecting-on-action occurs after the fact, reflecting on what already occurred, while reflecting-in-action occurs during the event, and is the result of unexpected occurrences. Schon describes reflecting-in-action as a moment where “our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it” (1987a, p. 26). Reciprocal reflection-in-action occurs when the mentor teacher responds to the student teacher’s reflection-in-action through demonstration or discussion, eliciting a further reflection-in-action from the student teacher.

Through reflection-on-action the student teacher develops a sense of what it means to be a teacher, which also leads to self-knowledge as the student begins to make meaning around the self as teacher (Alvestad & Rothle, 2007; Cuenca, 2010). Further development of a teaching identity comes through interactions with mentors as they participate in reciprocal reflection-in-action. Through this process, mentors reflect their perception of the student as teacher back to the student, further contributing to identity development (Harter, 1997). Student teachers also learn to interpret events, understand and place self within context, develop skills and gain knowledge through reflection-on-action with their mentor teachers (Cuenca, 2010; Dobler, et al., 2009).

Some scholars argue that reflection-in-action is not possible as there is not time in the midst of action to stop and reflect (Roth, Lawless, & Masciotra, 2001). They further argue that teachers cannot be attentive to the situation at hand while pausing to reflect. Beck & Kosnik (2001) rebut this argument, suggesting that Schon’s goal is to eliminate the “dichotomy between practice and reflection” (p. 224) and to recognize that reflection is built into action as part of what teachers do every day. Munby (1989) reviewed several articles critiquing Schon’s concept of reflection in action, pointing to concerns about the ambiguity of the type of reflection
involved, as well as the same issue of time. Munby (1989) states “Schon is working in a complex area, and so it is not surprising that he is read in different ways” (p. 4). Munby (1989) asserts that reflection-on-action suggests a typical understanding of the term reflection and careful study of what is meant by reflection-in-action, focusing on the concept of *in-action*, clarifies Schon’s meaning of the term. Smith (2001) notes other areas of critique, including ambiguity about reflection-in-action and the praxis involved in reflective practices. Smith (2001) responds to these concerns with a discussion of repertoire, suggesting “the ability to draw upon a repertoire of metaphors and images that allow for different ways of framing a situation is clearly important to creative practice and is a crucial insight” (p. 14). In response to the first concern, ambiguity, Smith (2001) suggests that it is through reflection-on-action that the repertoire is developed, which in turn is then used when engaged in reflection-in-action. He suggests that it is the relationship between the two types of reflection that resolve the issues of ambiguity, as practitioners are able to describe how they use their repertoire during reflection-in-action, which was generated through the more traditional reflection-on-action. In response to concerns about practice, Smith (2001) points out that framing the problem is an essential step in reflection-in-action. In framing, the repertoire is used to determine which areas of the situation to focus on and which adaptations will be attempted, which then become the steps to reflection-in-action. Smith (2001) further cautions that Schon’s theories are often misapplied and reminds the reader that “for [Schon] reflective practice was to be enacted” (p. 14), that is, embedded in action.

The early learning classroom is a unique setting in education. The nature of the classroom is dynamic, varying with the needs of young children. Teachers provide nurturing care, as well as, focused attention on the physical, cognitive, social and emotional development
of each child (Guidelines Development Committee, 2012). Early learning teachers develop a repertoire of skills, experience, and ideas, as suggested by Smith (2001), in order to navigate the daily life of the classroom. Schon’s (1987a) concepts of the relationships between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, as well as how the dialogue of reflection occurs in the interactions between mentor and student, offer a suitable lens to examine reflective processes in a dynamic and variable classroom setting.

The concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action provide a framework for understanding the reflective practices of mentored early learning student teaching experiences. Both are engaged in the processes of practice. Student teachers are learning through their own actions and reflections, as well as through the reflection-on-actions of the mentor. This brings in the notion of reciprocity. In adding the concept of reciprocal reflection, Schon (1987a) recognizes the dialog between student and mentor: the mentor is seeking to discover the student understandings and confusions. In response, the mentor might demonstrate or use questions, descriptions, and critique to help the student. The mentor assesses, adjusts, and experiments in response to the student – reflection-in-action. The student strives to understand the responses of the mentor, testing personal constructions of meaning and application – reflection-in-action. These actions become reciprocal when the mentor responds to the student’s attempts as part of the conversation of the learning that is in progress.

**Reflection in Student Teaching.**

Reflectivity is widely supported as an essential component of teacher preparation and is regarded as a practice that moves the student teacher beyond simply replicating the practice of mentor teachers to thoughtful and inquiry-oriented practice (Etscheidt, et al., 2012; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009, 2011). Feiman-Nemser (2012) suggests
student teachers are using reflection to grow “…when they learn to question what they see, believe and do…” (p. 231) and identifies it as a core task of learning to teach. Reflective processes are also identified in the 2008 National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education Unit Standards for accreditation of teacher preparation institutions, which further supports the value of reflective processes in student teaching.

Many reflective processes have been explored including Schon’s (1987a) concept of reflection-in and –on action (Etscheidt, et al., 2012). Other examples include examining cognitive and critical elements, and teacher narratives found in reflective processes (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991) and typologies of reflective processes (Ward & McCotter, 2004). Common threads are found in the models, for instance, there are elements described by Mezirow (1994) such as addressing personal experiences, beliefs, and values (Etscheidt, et al., 2012; Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991; Ward & McCotter, 2004), or concepts similar to Schon’s (1987a) reflection-in-action (Van Manen, 1991; Ward & McCotter, 2004). Though the particulars of the reflective models vary, the essential goals of the reflective processes described include the personal and professional growth of the student teacher, an inquiry-oriented approach to teaching, a connection between theory and practice, and movement towards transformative reflection (Etscheidt, et al., 2012; Schon, 1987a; Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991; Van Manen, 1991; Ward & McCotter, 2004).

**Gaps in the Literature.**

A review of the literature found that studies of student teaching in K-12/university programs are predominant, while studies of student teaching in early learning programs at community colleges are lacking (Whitebook, et al., 2009). Further, a commonly held assumption implies that research regarding student teaching and student teaching models in university K-12
teacher preparation programs will also apply to early learning programs at community colleges. However, the two fields are different enough to warrant separate studies (Whitebook, et al., 2009). A variety of factors differentiate early learning from K-12, including the developmental needs of children ranging in age from birth to eight years, the care component involved in many early learning programs, student teacher placement in a wide variation of community-based child cares and preschools, and the varying educational levels of mentor teachers (Bogard, Traylor, Takanishi, 2008; Minimum Licensing Requirements for Child Care Centers, 2006; Professional Development Consortium, 2010). This study addresses this gap by contributing to the literature on student teaching in early learning programs.

Summary.

Reflective processes are a key component of teaching, leading to thoughtful and purposeful practice and self-development. Many theories contain elements of reflection, including experiential learning theory and transformative learning theory. The reiterative processes of the reflection and action that occur during experiential work as described by Kolb and Kolb (2005) link to Schon’s (1987a) ideas about reflecting and responding to what is occurring while it is occurring – reflection-in-action. Reflection-on-action includes reflection on content, process, and beliefs, which are also elements of Mezirow’s (1994) transformative learning theory. Additionally, Schon’s concepts provide room for examining reflective interactions when working with a mentor, which is an essential component of student teaching. It is generally understood that reflectivity is critical factor in teacher preparation and professional development that leads to improved practices (Etscheidt, et al., 2012); therefore, this study was designed as a qualitative inquiry into reflective processes embedded in the work between early learning student teachers and mentor teachers.
This chapter reviewed key concepts in the literature concerning mentoring, student teaching, and reflection. In particular, Schon’s (1987a) concepts of reflective processes were reviewed, as were concepts of mentoring in student teaching and how reflection is employed in student teaching. Next, Chapter Three presents a discussion of the methodology used in conducting this study.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology selected for examining early learning student teacher perceptions of the reflective processes embedded in the mentoring they received. It begins with a restatement of the purpose and primary research questions of the study, followed by research design, a description of participants, recruitment, and data collection, and analysis. Finally, a discussion of trustworthiness and researcher positionality is offered.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore early learning student teacher perceptions of the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience in early learning programs at Washington State community and technical colleges. The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How do early learning student teachers describe the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience?

2. How do early learning student teachers describe the role of their mentor in the reflective processes associated with their student teaching experiences?

3. How do early learning student teachers describe their reflective processes concerning their own learning associated with the student teaching experience, their mentor experience, and their overall teacher preparation experiences?

The following section will discuss the research design and analysis method selected for this study.
Research Design

An interpretive qualitative approach was selected for this study. The interpretive qualitative approach is based in the naturalist paradigm, which recognizes the complexity of subjective and multiple realities, contextual relevance, and the value-bound nature of research (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Mohammad, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Inherent in the recognition of multiple realities is the concept of social constructivism, which assumes that people construct their own meanings or interpretations of their life experiences (Creswell, 2009, Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Creswell (2009) suggests that researchers using a constructivist lens “often address the processes of interaction among individuals” (p. 8) and that these interpretations are viewed in conjunction with the context in which the experiences occur. Additionally, qualitative research generally occurs in the field, in the natural setting, with the researcher as the data collection instrument (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers using an interpretive qualitative approach are seeking to understand the meanings that others develop about the world, while acknowledging and positioning the influence of their own experiences on the interpretation (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Merriam, 2002).

Qualitative studies are the preferred method when the research goals involve understanding how participants make meaning of their experiences, how their context influences actions, and understanding the processes behind actions and events (Merriam, 2002; Maxwell, 2005). Use of an interpretive qualitative design aligns with the variety of contexts, experiences, and participant perceptions inherent to early learning, as well as for positioning the experiences, values, and biases of the researcher’s work in the field of early learning.

An additional characteristic of qualitative studies is the use of inductive data analysis (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Inductive analysis enables the researcher to look for
patterns and themes in the data, to “identify the mutually shaping influences that interact” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40) with the data, and to more explicitly identify the values of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Inductive analysis also allows “…research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data…” (Thomas, 2003, p.2). Further, inductive analysis allows the researcher to establish links between research goals and research findings (Thomas, 2003). Inductive approaches to analysis are a characteristic of qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002), therefore supporting an inductive approach to analysis in the design of an interpretive qualitative study.

The selection of an interpretive qualitative study using inductive analysis aligned with the defined purpose of this study. This research design adapted to the multiple contexts and experiences reflected in early learning student teaching, acknowledged and reflected the experiences of the researcher’s work in early learning, and provided the opportunity for recognition of patterns and themes in the data. A description of the early learning student population and study participants follows.

**Description of Participants**

Thirty-one Washington State community and technical colleges offer early learning programs (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2008). Of these, 27 reported demographic data for students enrolled in early learning programs during the 2011-2012 school year (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2012). Table 3 offers a summary of this demographic data as compared to the demographic data of the participants in this study.
An analysis of the data provided by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (2012) indicates 93% of the students are female and 7% male, 59% are White, and 41% are non-White. Demographic information concerning student status was also included. Students aged 25 and up are typically considered non-traditional students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Using this definition, 61% of the enrolled students are non-traditional, ranging in age from 25 to 72 years old (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2012). Other indicators of non-traditional status include family status (being responsible for dependents) and employment levels (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Forty-two percent of early learning students are responsible for children or other dependents, further indicating non-traditional status (Washington State Board for

Table 3

Participant/Population Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Study participants N=13</th>
<th>Total population of Early Learning Program Student Teachers N=2824</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>92% female (12) / 7% male (1)</td>
<td>93% female / 7% male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>69% Caucasian (9) / 0 Other 31% Data not available (4)</td>
<td>59% Caucasian / 41% Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependents (non-traditional)</td>
<td>46% with (6) / 23% without (3) 31% Data not available (4)</td>
<td>42% with / 58% without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age &gt; 25 (non-traditional)</td>
<td>54% over (7) / 15% under (2) 31% Data not available (4)</td>
<td>61% over / 39% under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status (working in early learning)</td>
<td>46% working (6) / 23% not working (3) 31% Data not available (4)</td>
<td>Data not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community and Technical Colleges, 2012). The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges 2008 Early Learning Report states “faculty members report that most early childhood education students are employed in low-wage early learning jobs while attending college to upgrade their skills” (p. 5), further recognizing many early learning students as non-traditional. Additionally, the report describes 88% of students as enrolled part-time.

The participant sample design sought variation in terms of the following: by which community or technical college participants received their degree, the amount of time since completing student teaching (from six months up to three years), demographics, and the type of site where participants had their student teaching experience. Variation was achieved in college, length of time since completing student teaching, type of site, gender, and student status.

Data was collected from 13 early learning students who had completed their student teaching experience. These 13 participants represented seven Washington State community and technical colleges. All participants had completed their student teaching practicum within the three year to six month range.

Twelve participants were female, one was male. The majority of the group were White. Nine participants were willing to provide demographic data. Of those nine, eight indicated positive in one or more parameters that would define them as a non-traditional student, including age, family status, and employment level. Further, five were full-time students, three were part-time, and one did not specify.

Of the 13 participants, six were assigned to their practicum site and seven selected their own. Nine were either assigned or chose to do their student teaching practicum at a campus early learning center. Two participants selected private early learning centers, one selected a county Head Start site, and one selected an ECEAP site. In addition, two of the participants
engaged in their student teaching at their place of work. The participants worked with a spectrum of age ranges, from infant through age six.

Selection of mentor varied, with some participants choosing the room or age range they wanted to work with and consequently being assigned the lead teacher of that room as a mentor. Others selected the site based upon the person they wanted to mentor them. At one college, the mentor is always a college faculty member. Another participant asked a college faculty member to mentor her as she was doing her practicum in her place of work. In addition, three participants worked with two mentors. Most participants had an opportunity to meet their mentor prior to beginning the practicum, though some met their mentor on the first day of class.

There was a variation from campus to campus in terms of the practicum, with some encompassing a series taken over the course of an academic year and others utilizing an intensive quarter-based model. In addition, a variation in terms was encountered, with some participants referring to student teaching, while others simply referred to practicum. Most participants were the only student teacher in the room, while a few shared the classroom with other student teachers working at a different level of practicum. Three of the participants were engaged in a cohort model of student teaching, sharing the classroom with three to four other student teachers. Most participants had a seminar time associated with their college course, coming together with other student teachers working under the direction of a college faculty member. For the most part, this appeared to occur on a weekly basis, with an exception being the participants involved in the cohort model, who met daily.

Recruitment and Access

This study adhered to all Northeastern University Institutional Review Board requirements for the protection of human subjects. This included confidentiality, informed
consent, and the right to refuse to participate. Each participant received a description of the study and research protocols in a letter of informed consent (Appendix B). In addition, each participant had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. Further, former students of practicum courses taught by the researcher were excluded from the study in order to eliminate issues of power and coercion.

This study provided minimal risk to participants. Participants had already completed the student teaching practicum and were at no risk of reprisal in that course for sharing their stories. However, it was possible that participants could still be taking early learning courses, resulting in some risk for relating their experiences for this study. Given that risk, participants and any named persons in interviews were identified by pseudonyms. In addition, community or technical colleges and practicum sites were not identified by name. Descriptions of sites were generalized to prevent identification. Participants were protected through securing the data.

Finally, all required materials received approval from the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board before this study commenced.

**Data Collection**

This section begins with a brief overview of the four phases of data collection (Table 4). The following paragraphs describe the phases of data collection, beginning with a description of the pilot process, followed first by contact with key informants, and second, by contact with potential participants. Finally, the interview process is described. In addition to the described data collection, the researcher kept a dissertation journal, which was used to capture thoughts and ideas, including analytic memos, during data collection and analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). A description of how the journal was used in each phase is also included.
Table 4

Overview of Phases of Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase I: Pilot</td>
<td>Test equipment and method of interview. Test clarity of questions.</td>
<td>Equipment test was satisfactory. Minor modifications to interview guide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II: Key informant contact</td>
<td>Seeking student teaching alumni to participate in study.</td>
<td>Nine key informants responded, of the nine, seven were able to provide participant contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase III: Participant contact</td>
<td>Verifying criteria for study and interest in participation. Schedule phone or face-to-face interview.</td>
<td>Thirty-three potential participants contacted. Nineteen participants responded. Seventeen participants fit participant profile. Fifteen participants completed scheduled interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Collect participant data using interview guide.</td>
<td>Thirteen participants completed interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>Request reflections written during student teaching experience.</td>
<td>Two participants provided written reflections, totaling 10 documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation Journal</td>
<td>Track progress, correspondence, and capture thoughts during data collection.</td>
<td>Notes to self, ideas and interesting thoughts prompted by interviews, and emerging themes noted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase I: pilot.

Data collection for this study was piloted prior to actual data collection. The goal of the pilot was to assess the time required to interview, test the interview questions and equipment.

Two pilot participants were used: one faculty peer, interviewed and recorded in person, and one
former student teacher, interviewed via a recorded telephone call. Pilot participants were first
asked to paraphrase the interview questions in order to assess clarity, followed by the actual
interview. Slight modifications to interview probes were made following the pilot phase. Brief
notes from the pilot with the faculty peer were noted in the researcher’s dissertation journal. No
notes were made during the pilot student interview.

**Phase II: key informant contact.**

This study used a convenience sample gathered through key informants at the 31
community and technical colleges with early learning programs. For the purposes of this study,
key informants were college faculty members from community and technical college early
learning programs in Washington State. These key informants were selected due to their
knowledge about and participation in early learning student teaching, including connections with
recently mentored student teachers. Potential participants were recruited through
recommendations from key informants accessed via an early learning listserv email (Appendix
A). In addition, the same email was sent directly to nine Washington State community and
technical college early learning faculty members (Appendix A) the researcher had either met
during past work, was introduced to via a faculty peer, or in one case, where the researcher had
met several mentor teachers that worked with the specific college. Reminder emails were sent to
the listserv twice and to selected key informants once. There was one exception to the key
informant process. One participant forwarded the contact email to a peer, who then contacted
the researcher and offered to participate. The researcher responded using the same steps as were
used for other participants.
**Phase III: participant contact.**

Key informants forwarded an introductory email (Appendix C), including researcher contact information, to likely candidates for participation. Twenty potential participants were contacted. In addition, one key informant provided a list of program graduates with contact information. An email was sent to 13 candidates from this list (Appendix D). Eight emails were bounced back due to incorrect or expired email addresses. Those candidates were sent a letter via regular mail (Appendix D).

In total, 18 participants responded via email and one responded by phone. An email with suggested interview times was sent to all nineteen potential candidates, along with a letter of informed consent (Appendix B). Seventeen candidates responded by email with a confirmed interview time. Of those seventeen, two were disqualified because they had not participated in a student teaching experience. Two more missed their interviews, and despite multiple attempts to reschedule, did not complete the interview process. Thirteen participants completed the interview process and were included in this study.

Five participants emailed back the signed letter of consent, while eight used regular mail to return the letter. In three cases, the participant requested a printed copy of the letter, which was then sent, with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope. Dates of emails, responses, scheduled interviews, and participant name and college were tracked in the dissertation journal. In addition, receipt of each letter of consent was also noted in the dissertation journal.

**Phase IV: interviews.**

Each interview was conducted by phone. The phone was set to speaker mode, and the participant was formally asked for permission to digitally record the call. All thirteen participants gave permission. The audio file of each recorded telephone interview was sent to an
online professional transcription company for verbatim transcription upon completion of the interview. One file was returned by the transcription company because of the heavily accented speech of the interviewee. The returned file was then transcribed by the researcher. As each transcribed document was received from the transcription company, it was then emailed to the participant for verification and comments. Correspondence with participants was tracked in the researcher’s dissertation journal. In addition, each participant was asked for written reflections from their student teaching practicum. Two out of the 13 participants were able to share documents, providing a total of fifteen documents between them.

The goal of data collection was to capture the experiences with the reflective processes associated with mentoring during student teaching. An iterative process was employed, meaning after each participant was interviewed, open coding of the transcribed interview followed. Following initial analysis, a one to two page interview summary analysis (Appendix H) and a one-paragraph profile was created (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The summary analysis and profile were created to help the researcher clarify thoughts about the interview, and as a basic analytic memo of the interview (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This cycle was repeated until saturation was met, at which time three more interviews followed. The last round of interviews followed the same protocol, but were conducted with a confirmatory approach, to allow for verification of patterns that were uncovered in prior interviews.

**Specific methods.**

Data collection was an iterative process of four stages as follows:

1. Open-ended interviews. The primary data collection source was open-ended interviews with participants. Five open-ended questions were posed: an initial context question, three questions associated with the research question, and final reflections. (Table 5).
Participants were offered the option of interview by phone or in person. All elected to interview by phone. The interviews were conducted using the speaker phone feature and were digitally recorded with participant permission. Interviews ranged in time from 19 to 32 minutes. Interview questions can be found in Appendix E. No notes were taken during interviews, however, occasionally thoughts were noted in the dissertation journal following an interview.

Table 5

Research questions, dimensions, and associated interview questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do early learning student teachers describe the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience?</td>
<td>Mentor and participant interactions</td>
<td>To help me understand more about your mentor experience, can you describe how that relationship was setup, how it evolved, or worked in your situation? Probes: How did your mentor help you reflect or think about your own learning or development or choices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do early learning student teachers describe the role of their mentor in the reflective processes associated with their student teaching experiences?</td>
<td>Role of mentor during student teaching experience</td>
<td>To help me understand about your student teaching practicum, can you tell me about times when you might have had to make adjustments in what you were doing and how you went about doing that? Probes: Can you describe adjustments you made in instructional strategies? Can you describe adjustments you made in classroom management? Can you describe adjustments you made in the learning environment? How did you make decisions about what adjustments to make? How did your mentor influence your decisions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do early learning student teachers describe their reflective processes concerning their own overall teacher preparation experiences and the role of their mentor can you tell me how you</td>
<td>Overall teacher preparation</td>
<td>In reflecting upon your overall teacher preparation experiences and the role of your mentor can you tell me how you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
learning associated with the student teaching experience, their mentor experience, and their overall teacher preparation experiences?

| experience | think about your own learning and development as a teacher?
Probes: Can you tell me how you thought about the role of your mentor before your student teaching experience? During your student teaching experience? After your student teaching experience?

| Final thoughts | Any other final thoughts or reflections you would like to share with me?

2. Documents. Participants were asked to provide samples of any reflective journals or other reflective materials concerning their mentor program, curriculum, or student teaching experiences. Only two participants were able to provide a total of 10 documents. The other participants had not saved their written reflections after the course ended, or no longer had access to them. These documents were emailed following the interview. They were examined after categories were generated as a method of category confirmation.

3. Digital files were sent to an online transcription service. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. One interview was rejected by the transcription service as difficult to understand. The researcher transcribed the rejected interview.

4. Follow-up participant session. Each participant received a copy of their transcript immediately upon completion of transcription. Participants were invited to engage in a follow-up conversation, either by phone or email, to ascertain their response to and/or verification of the data as represented. The date each transcribed interview was emailed was noted in the dissertation journal. None of
the participants elected to engage in a follow up conversation, all were satisfied with their transcripts.

This section described the four phases of data collection. The next step in the process is data analysis. Data analysis followed the methods outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). These methods are described below.

**Data Analysis Overview**

The following paragraphs describe the data analysis process, beginning with an overview of data analysis process and the outcomes of the process, followed by a description of the cycles of data analysis. The final subsections offered are a discussion of trustworthiness and the researcher’s positionality statement.

Data analysis followed an inductive approach, moving from description, to thematic analysis to categorization. Categorization was followed by analytic analysis of each category, considering what the category meant, the reflective processes involved, or the influence of the category on reflective processes. The next step in the analysis was to look at the data again, from a higher level, a meta-analysis, to look for trends. Finally, categories and trends were considered in relation to the research questions to draw conclusions (Figure 2) (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).
Data was transcribed and analyzed concurrently with data collection (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This process began with data transcription and coding following each interview. Using guidelines from Thomas (2003, 2006) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), coding proceeded as is described in the following sections.

Cycles of Data Analysis.

Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) describe the process of analysis as “three concurrent flows of activity: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification” (p. 12). Data analysis followed these guidelines, working in a concurrent and iterative manner through the interview, coding, and summarizing process. An overview of this process is presented in Table 6.
Table 6

Overview of Cycles of Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase of Analysis</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Condensation (concurrent and iterative)</td>
<td>First pass - read and code transcribed interviews, using eclectic coding method. Thoughts noted in dissertation journal.</td>
<td>First pass coded interviews. Participant profiles and interview summaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second pass – reread as new themes emerge Thoughts noted in dissertation journal.</td>
<td>Additional codes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third pass – starting with fresh copy, another round of coding. Thoughts noted in dissertation journal.</td>
<td>Coded interviews, compared with first pass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data reduction: cut and paste codes/quotations to index card, sort by themes, reduce to six categories.</td>
<td>19 Themes Six categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Code documents, check against categories and themes.</td>
<td>Confirmed codes against categories and themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reread dissertation journal for prior thoughts and notes. Analytic memos concerning probable themes and categories.</td>
<td>Definition of categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Display</td>
<td>Develop chart with interview excerpts and applicable codes.</td>
<td>Fifty page chart of codes and excerpts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop cross-check chart of participants to themes.</td>
<td>Verified multiple participants per theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion Drawing/Verification</td>
<td>Meta-analysis of data, examine participant profiles, summaries, and categories.</td>
<td>Four general trends. Six conclusions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reread dissertation journal for prior thoughts and notes. Analytic memos concerning probable trends and conclusions.</td>
<td>Thoughts concerning trends and conclusions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first cycle in coding was data condensation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), which involved reading through each transcribed interview, immediately following receipt of the transcription. An eclectic method of coding was used, described by Saldana (2013) as “using a repertoire of methods simultaneously” (p. 188). In this first pass, both In Vivo coding and Descriptive Coding were used. In Vivo coding involves highlighting key excerpts of text and noting key words and phrases and was selected to reflect participants voices (Saldana, 2013). Descriptive Coding uses a summary word or phrase and was selected to capture the essence of particular segments of text (Saldana, 2013). A highlighter was used to mark key phrases and descriptive or In Vivo codes were noted in the margins. This was followed by a second read-through of the interview. The researcher then prepared a summary of the interview (Appendix H), including applicable quotations, and a one paragraph profile, which were referred back to several times during the analysis process. These summaries were emailed to each participant at the conclusion of the final coding process, and the date emailed was noted in the dissertation journal. Coding was an iterative process, with re-reads of preceding interviews as new probable themes emerged from the latest interviews. After each round of interviews, the researcher considered emerging themes. The researcher noted the iterative process, thoughts, and ideas in the dissertation journal throughout this process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The researcher often referred back to the dissertation journal to develop concepts found in the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

Finally, fresh copies of all interviews were read through a third time, with a second round of Eclectic Coding. This second round of coding was done using the review and comment feature of the Microsoft Word. Key phrases were highlighted and the selected code was noted in the comment box. The second round of coding was used to refine the coding from the first round
based on the themes and patterns emerging from the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Each transcript produced an average of 34 codes. The next cycle involved data display (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), which resulted in a 50 page chart (sample in Appendix F) cross-referencing the excerpts and codes of each participant with research and interview questions.

At this point the researcher began the process of merging codes into themes using a manual method of cutting and pasting text excerpts on to index cards (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Considering each excerpt of data and the associated code individually, the researcher considered the following question “what is this expression an example of?” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87) in order to discover themes. The answers to the question refined the codes into themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The cards were filed by theme, resulting in approximately 30 themes. Criteria was established for identification of a theme: it had to appear in more than one transcript and being evident across multiple participants. Using this criteria, approximately 30 themes were combined and reduced to 19 themes. After completing this step, the researcher then began the work of merging the recognized themes into six distinct categories by considering the meaning of each theme and whether it could be assigned to a larger category. Again, notes and analytic memos were recorded in the dissertation journal (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Finally, in another cycle of data display, the researcher crosschecked all themes against participants to verify that the established criteria were met (Appendix G).

After coding was complete and categories were established, the ten documents provided by two participants were coded for a successful confirmation of codes and themes. The documents provided included written reflections on implemented lesson plans, aspects of teaching such as culture and diversity, a reflective self-evaluation, a philosophy statement, and a
general reflection on the experience. The researcher was able to compare codes generated through examination of the reflective documents written during their student teaching experience to the codes generated from their post student teaching interviews, thus confirming the codes and themes found.

The third cycle described by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) is drawing and verifying conclusions. This process is interwoven into the cycles of data condensation and data display as the researcher interprets meanings, patterns, and explanations (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The researcher began to note trends in the data, through re-examination of participant profiles, summaries, and interviews, as well as considering what the implications of the six categories might be. From this meta-analysis, four general trends and six conclusions emerged. These are detailed in Chapter Four.

This section described the cycles of data analysis used in this study. Analysis was an iterative process of coding, summarizing, and analyzing resulting in six categories, four trends, and six conclusions. The next section will consider the trustworthiness of this study.

**Trustworthiness**

Thomas (2003, 2006) suggests three methods of assessing trustworthiness: independent coding, coding consistency checking, and stakeholder checking. The trustworthiness of this study was assessed through a coding consistency check and multiple stakeholder checks as described in the following subsections.

**Coding consistency check.**

To ensure trustworthiness, a copy of a raw transcript was sent to a faculty peer at a Washington State community college along with a list of themes and their associated definitions. The code check provided two matches for every one discrepancy. In reviewing the
discrepancies, it was apparent that differences were found in how the data was split. In some cases the researcher lumped the data, using the entire paragraph, and in others, split the data into phrases (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The code-checker followed the same pattern, alternating between the two methods. The discrepancies arose when one lumped the data and the other split the data. In all cases, the text was overlapping, able to be assigned to the themes selected by both coders. This is reflective of the assumption in qualitative coding that text may be used in more than one category (Thomas, 2006).

**Member checking.**

The second assessment of trustworthiness consisted of multiple stakeholder checks. These included member checking by participants, informal conversations regarding findings with early learning faculty peers, a preliminary review of the findings by an early learning faculty peer, and a review of the complete draft by an early learning faculty peer before submission. No modifications resulted from member checking.

**Positionality Statement**

This research is limited by the researcher’s subjectivity and experiences from working with and mentoring early learning student teachers. Prior to working as the college supervising faculty in a community based student teaching model, the researcher worked with student teachers in the combined role of mentor-teacher/college faculty in an on-campus laboratory school. This perspective of student teaching demonstrated the value of in-the-moment conversations with early learning student teachers, of daily observation of the students as they work with children, and in having time to reflect, together, on their classroom experiences. In addition, this perspective also highlighted the influence of mentor teacher modeling with the attendant early learning student teacher reflections on what was observed. The researcher’s
current role as supervising faculty in the traditional community-based triad model involves working with mentor teachers and early learning student teachers in community child care centers, family child care homes, preschools, and K-2 classrooms. In this model, observations by supervising faculty of the student teacher, mentor teacher, and children are limited in scope and number, supervising faculty do not have opportunities to work with the student in the classroom, and opportunities to meet with mentor teachers are few. As a result, in fulfilling the role of supervising faculty, the researcher depends on the written reflections of the early learning student teacher and group seminar discussions to elicit student teacher understanding of classroom experiences. The contrast between these two experiences led the researcher to the belief that understanding the reflective processes in mentored early learning student teaching experiences, as perceived by the student teacher, might lead to improvements in the researcher’s own practice.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology used for this qualitative study. Research design, participant descriptions, and the phases of data collection and analysis were reviewed. In addition, the trustworthiness of the study was discussed, as was researcher positionality. Next, Chapter Four offers a discussion of the findings.
Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of the data analysis process examining the reflective processes embedded in the student teaching experience of early learning programs in Washington State. It is organized into several sections, beginning with a restatement of purpose and research questions, followed by a description of study participants. Next, a brief overview of the research methods are presented. The four phases of research follow: description analysis, emerging codes and themes, trends in the data, and an analysis of the research in regard to the research questions. Finally, a summary concludes the chapter.

The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study was to explore early learning student teacher perceptions of the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience in early learning programs at Washington State community and technical colleges. This qualitative study explored three dimensions of reflective processes as perceived by early learning student teaching alumni during their practicums: mentor and participant interactions, mentor role, and their reflections on the overall process.

The next section briefly describes study participants.

Study Participants

Thirteen participants were interviewed for this study. Participants were alumni of seven Washington State community and technical college early learning programs, having completed their student teaching practicum between June, 2010 and June, 2012. Twelve of the participants were female, one was male. Most were non-traditional students, based on either age (over 25), having dependents, or employment level. A summary of participants and the setup of their mentoring arrangements is discussed in Chapter Three. The following section provides an
overview of the research methods, followed by a detailed description of the four phases of data analysis.

**Overview of Research Methods**

All thirteen participants participated in interviews. Two participants also provided written documents. An interview protocol with five questions framed the researcher interaction with all 13 participants (Appendix E). The interview questions were designed to enable understanding of participant perceptions regarding the reflective processes involved in mentoring. All interviews used the same five interview questions. The final three interviews used the same questions, as well as additional probing for confirmation of emergent themes. A detailed description of data collection can be found in Chapter Three.

Data analysis followed an inductive approach, moving from description, to thematic analysis to categorization. The next step in the analysis was a meta-analysis of the data to look for trends. Finally, conclusions were drawn from considering the categories and trends in relation to the research questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Data analysis proceeded in four phases. Phase I was descriptive, involving development of an individual profile for each participant. To develop these profiles, the researcher reviewed transcripts and notes, and listened to the recorded interviews for each participant. Phase II was a deeper analysis of the transcripts. This involved rereading the transcripts while looking for emerging codes and strong quotes relative to participant reflections on the mentoring experience. Each transcript produced an average of 34 codes, which were then merged into 19 themes, which were then grouped into six categories. Phase III involved looking across the 13 participant profiles, summaries, and interviews, and the six categories for trends in the data. Finally, Phase IV involved considering
the data analysis specific to the research questions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The following subsections will provide details related to each phase of data analysis.

**Phase I: Descriptive Analysis - Participant Profiles**

The first phase of data analysis was a descriptive analysis. This process began with a reading of the transcribed interview, followed by writing a two to three page summary (Appendix H), highlighting the essence of the participant’s perceptions about mentoring, including strong quotes from the participant. From this, a brief summary profile was developed. The criteria used to develop the profiles included demographic information regarding student teaching, information regarding practicum, current situation, and mentoring experience. The following section provides a brief profile of each participant. The name of each participant was changed to maintain anonymity.

**Julia.**

Julia is a 2012 alumni of an early learning program. Her student teaching occurred in a campus center with children ages 3-5. The practicum site and mentor were assigned and the mentor was college faculty. Julia is currently working as a nanny. Julia was part of a collaborative peer group student teaching model which encouraged reflection and exchange of ideas. Julia frequently referenced the positive experience with her mentor and her own evolution of confidence through interaction with her mentor, stating

I think I grew a lot after the laboratory school. And I actually think I really owe that all to my mentor. Because you’re not just getting the hands on experience but the feedback. For me … personally it’s really good to have that confirmation, I’m doing good. …I really appreciated going over with her and having those reflection times, not only on paper but with her. I felt like I’ve grown a lot and feel confident in myself.
Mentor modeling was a key factor in her experience. Julia said “After a couple times of watching her do it and having her come over and help solve things, I was able to do it on my own.”

Amy.

Amy completed her student teaching practicum in 2012. Her student teaching experience occurred in a campus center with children ages 3-5. The practicum site and mentor were assigned and the mentor was a college faculty member. Amy is currently working as a nanny. She was also part of a collaborative peer group model which encouraged reflection and exchange of ideas. Amy frequently referred to the stories told by the mentor and the modeling of the mentor when describing her experience: “She helped us go through everything and tell us stories that would happen in the previous quarters” and “She told me stories about which area that each boy is good at and that how I can make them better interact in something. … Once she told me that, I got better at arranging the activities so that each boy could participate.” Amy felt that she gained a perspective of the reality of the work, stating

And with practicum, it helped me learned that what usually can go… in a preschool setting, what exactly you have to do to set up the classroom every day. …And that it makes you take a step back in what you think - it’s going to be sunshine and flowers to what hard work can fit into it and what you can get … what you can receive back from it.

Katie.

Katie completed her student teaching experience 2011. Her student teaching experience took place in a campus center with children ages 3-5. The practicum site and mentor were assigned and the mentor was college faculty member. Katie is currently a stay-at-home mother and teaches violin lessons. Katie was also part of a collaborative peer group model which
encouraged reflection and exchange of ideas. Katie was disappointed in her experience, admitting her own attitude and personal life issues contributed to the breakdown of the mentor role, saying

…the role of the mentor, I think it just broke down for me to begin with because I didn’t really know the person and this was a program that I was in that was such a big build up to practicum and it was such a big build up to the whole philosophy that we’d been learning. And so, a lot of it’s my fault because I didn’t actually give the person a chance. She acknowledged that the mentor offered a lot of personal support, commenting “…And then as I was going through the quarter life changed so much and she was so very supportive on every other plane that it really made up for all of the things I thought … were shortsighted …” She also acknowledged the mentor was good in the planning area. Katie also felt like she learned unexpected things, but does not attribute that gain to the mentor.

**Lindsey.**

Lindsey completed her student teaching experience in 2012. Lindsey’s student teaching experience occurred in a campus center with children ages 2-6, as well as with infants and toddlers. The practicum site and mentor were assigned and the mentor was the lead teacher in children’s classroom. Lindsey is currently working as an on-call teacher’s aide for a school district. Each mentor worked with up to three student teachers, with each at different levels of practicum. Lindsey referred to mentor modeling and feedback frequently, which appeared to be a key factor in the development of learning and confidence. She said

They showed by example how they did it, and then when my assignment was due, they had me do it, and they observed me, and took notes, and then when my activity was done,
then they would try to direct me and show me … where I could improve, where I did really well.

Lindsey also felt that she made a connection between theory and practice, making the connections from her college classes to her practicum work, stating

… it started with me being in a classroom with my advisor, or instructor, and then, during the lecture, they taught us, they prepared us. And then when it was time to … go into our lab work, and they had specific assignments and observations that they wanted us to do and tasks they wanted us to do, and so, we prepared our activity guide and implemented it for what our plan was. And, then, the mentor we were assigned to, observed, took notes, and guided us along the way.

**Angela.**

Angela completed her student teaching experience in 2011. Angela engaged in student teaching at a campus center with children in a Pre-K classroom, as well as with infants. The practicum site and mentor were assigned and the mentor was a lead teacher in the children’s classroom. Angela is currently working as a teacher’s assistant in a Head Start classroom. Up to three student teachers worked with each mentor, with student teachers at different levels of practicum. Angela frequently referenced mentor support and availability for questions as important to the evolution of her learning and development of confidence. Angela said

Well, I learned a lot from my mentors. …they were really great. I mean, I think what I learned from them was just to be more confident and I think that came along with the experience but also knowing that they were there backing me up if something were to go wrong. Because it's scary, when you first hear that you're going to be in front of the classroom and you're kind of your own, … but they were always right there if you ever
needed something or … if you gave them a look of like, oh, my gosh, what do I do? They're always right there to give you that confidence that you can do it.

Angela felt that she learned by hands-on experience and mentor support. She relates current experiences and confidence back to her student teaching experience, saying … the experiences that I have now working for Head Start, I can always relate back to … I remember when this happened to me the first time and how I felt. And I'm like I can handle this. I can. I can do this. So afterwards, I felt that sense of confidence and just that sense of I can do it and this is what I want to do and I can do it.

Jenna.

Jenna completed her student teaching experience in 2011. Jenna selected a campus center preschool classroom for her first practicum and an Early Head Start Classroom for her second practicum student teaching experience. Her mentors were the lead teachers in each classroom. Jenna is currently subbing in Head Start, Early Head Start, and ECEAP classrooms. Jenna felt that she was not really mentored. She felt that because of her prior experience she did not need mentoring. She also mentioned needing more mentoring from her college professors in the theoretical aspects of the program: “I was just more comfortable in the classroom and I was so familiar with environment that I didn't have a lot of needs. I had more needs and more mentoring for the bookwork.” She later stated

I was one of those. You know, where I was really low maintenance. It was like I kind of put it all together myself and that is why I say I needed it more from [college professor], the theoretical, than I did of the mentoring type thing in the actual classroom.
Jenna mentioned planning together, mentor observation, mentor encouragement, and mentors answering questions as aspects of the experience that contributed to her growth. She recognized it as a valuable experience, asserting she needed it, while at the same time acknowledging that she said she did not need it. She also recognized the value of the experience in experiencing the teacher perspective of the work involved.

Alicia.

Alicia completed her student teaching experience in 2011. Her practicum occurred in a campus center with children from one to two years old. Her other practicum experience included working with infants up through the age of five. Both practicum sites were assigned and the mentors were lead teachers in children’s classrooms. Angela is currently a toddler teacher. She believes that mentoring is an essential component of student teaching, stating

I just think that it’s vital in education, in the field of education, to have somebody that already has the experience for you to be able to ask the questions of and …you can bounce ideas off of whether they’re going to work or not going to work. I think it’s vital to the student. It was vital to me to have somebody that had already been through the schooling and already been working in a classroom for years, could give me their opinion or input on how I was doing things, and their ideas on my activities, and if I was reaching the goals of the children. I don’t think that I would have learned as much as I did, or be the teacher that I am, without a mentor.

Angela found the experience of being mentored to be transformational, claiming it changed her life and made her a different person. Angela set a goal of becoming a mentor teacher herself and is currently working in that role.
Molly.

Molly completed her student teaching experience in 2011. Molly selected a county-sponsored Head Start program, with children ranging in age from three to five, as her student teaching site. Her mentor was the lead teacher in the children’s classroom. Molly is currently a lead teacher in the same Head Start program, though at a different site. Molly found that being mentored taught her a lot and relates most of her current work to her student teaching experience, stating “I mean, being a lead teacher in my classroom now, most of the things I am doing is what I learn from it. So, I will recommend it for anyone.” Molly made a strong connection between theory and practice, as well as noting the value of experiencing work in the field, saying…before I get my practicum I had to do some other classes. Those were tough because they make me struggle a lot. Because of the coordination of these classes with what I was doing. But by the time I was in my practicum, I can see the connection between doing some science or this area of requirement with my practicum. … When I actually get into practicum and I see different things…oh, I see this is what they were talking about …I have to remember this, for sure I have to remember that. So those connections end up making sense.

Caroline.

Caroline completed her student teaching experience in 2012. Caroline selected her own classroom, in a private preschool/childcare with children ages two-and-a-half to five, as her student teaching site. Her mentor was the director/owner of the center. Caroline still works at the site and is currently moving into an assistant director role. Caroline found working in her own classroom to be beneficial because she felt like the work made a difference and she saw it from a new perspective. Caroline feels she became more intentional in her teaching and her
interactions with children and families and that she now understands and is able to explain why she does the things she does in the classroom, stating

I have noticed that I’m much more intentional in the activities that I plan. I’ve been in this field for ten years now, and in school for three of those, the last three of those. In that time I have discovered that my activities and my thinking, and my words with children and families in much more intentional and I have much more purpose behind it. I can explain why it is I’m choosing that activity or doing something in this way, where before I think it was a lot of instinct and maybe some training, on-site training, from early on in my career.

Finally, because her mentor encouraged her to make connections beyond their small town, Caroline feels like she now has many mentors, stating “…I have made connections throughout [the county] so now when I go to professional development, I have a lot of resources and I have a lot more mentors that I can reach out for different things.”

Diana.

Diana completed her student teaching experience in 2011. She selected her own ECEAP classroom, where she was lead teacher, as the site for student teaching. Children ranged in age from three to five. As Diana had years of experience in her own classroom, arrangements were made for college faculty to mentor her. Mentoring consisted of the mentor observing Diana in her classroom, followed by shared reflection afterwards. Initially, Diana was hoping to audit courses due to her extensive experience, but decided to enter the program. She found the work to be beneficial, building a trusting relationship with her mentor and maintaining that connection to the present day, stating
I think I'm really glad that I went through it and didn’t try to get out of it like I was originally going to do … I'm really glad I went through it. I think that it was really beneficial to me and I feel like there's still a connection ... I know that I have a resource there if I need it any time.

Diana developed confidence and an understanding of the theory behind her own practices. She also noted that she became more intentional in her work, saying

Going from maybe, ‘oh, this could be a fun activity and I know the children will enjoy it’ to ‘yeah, I can still make it fun, but I have a specific reason to move them to the next step.’ I would say that would be…the biggest change in my teaching.

**Hailey.**

Hailey completed her student teaching experience in 2010. She selected a private preschool classroom where she had two mentor teachers for her practicum site. Children were ages 2 ½ to five. Hailey felt that she was able to gain more knowledge and benefit from separate areas of expertise by working with two mentors, stating “…they both have so much knowledge that I kind of wanted to pull from both of them … And they have different…areas that they are really good at so, I kind of went back and forth.” She learned both from watching her mentors work with children and parents and by implementing her own ideas in the classroom: “They just kind of let me…go on my own and do things and come up with ideas and come up with lesson plans and project ideas.” Her mentors were present during class to offer support, were available for questions, and shared in reflection with Hailey. Hailey felt that she grew in skills and in confidence during her student teaching practicum. She was hired to work full-time at her student teaching site upon completion of practicum.
Ethan.

Ethan completed his student teaching experience in 2010. Ethan’s student teaching experience occurred in a preschool classroom in on-campus center with a selected mentor teacher. Children were aged three to five. Ethan spent extra time in the classroom, beyond that required by his program, because he felt that was where he would learn the most. Ethan thought his mentor teacher was very good and was “…intentional as far as modeling” in her work with him. He felt she trusted him and allowed him the freedom to work things out in the classroom. Ethan also recognized the influence of other mentors, particularly recognizing similarities in philosophy between mentors. In addition, after completion of his practicum, a mentor involved in an early learning work-study experience encouraged him to develop and implement an innovative fresh food program for early learning centers. Finally, Ethan noted that while working with the mentor and in other classrooms he was

…sort of floored at the things I don’t know and the things that …as nurturing as an individual that I think I am, that there is a lot to learn about people and from people. …that concept is going to be something that stays with me for the rest of my life.

Looking back on the experience, Ethan recognized elements of induction, stating

It moves you into that sort of the next place, where I could be that person. Not necessarily that teacher and how she did things, but I could be the person teaching. I could be the person teaching, teaching not only children, but teaching other teachers how to do this.

Claire.

Claire completed her student teaching experience in 2011. Her student teaching occurred in a preschool classroom, in on-campus center. The mentor teacher was assigned by virtue of the
classroom selected. Children ranged in age from three to five. Claire is entering the field of early learning after 30 years in another career field. She believed most of the mentoring she received was self-initiated by asking questions and interacting with the mentors, stating

…you really develop how much mentoring you get based on how much you interact with the teacher. So if you aren’t questioning the teacher a lot, you are not going to get a lot of mentoring. But if you are questioning and looking for alternate ways or different views about things, then the mentoring will be there and it comes in.

She also identified modeling as a primary means of mentoring. Claire used self-reflection to adapt modeled skills and mentor advice to her own style. Even though she had previously stated that she didn’t think she was heavily mentored, Claire said “I believe it is the best mentoring I have ever had” following that statement with “Just the role modeling and the words I saw effectively used in class that …applied effective results, and in a positive manner.” She continues to use reflection in her current work, often thinking back to how her mentors might handle a situation.

This subsection provided a brief description of each participant in the study as part of the descriptive analysis phase. These profiles were developed following an initial reading of the transcript and the creation of a two page summary. The creation of these profiles concluded Phase I of the analysis. The next section describes Phase II, which consisted of an in-depth inductive analysis involving a reexamination of the transcripts while looking for emerging codes, themes, and descriptors.

**Phase II: Emerging Codes and Themes**

The purpose of Phase II was to identify codes, themes and categories. Phase II involved rereading the original transcripts, along with the descriptive profiles, to identify descriptors and
codes that captured the essence of the participant’s dialogue. At this point, the researcher began to refine clustered codes into themes, examining each code for meaning and verifying it as appropriate for the designated theme. Finally, the researcher crosschecked all themes against participants to verify that the established criterion were met (Appendix G). The final step was grouping themes into categories. Categories emerged from the research objectives and were named from actual phrases or meaning found in text segments (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

The following sections will summarize the six identified categories, first providing definitions, and then themes within category, followed by a table providing the link between category and research question. Examples will be included as each category is examined.

**Summary of categories.**

The following six categories were identified as a result of the coding process: *we learn by example*, *sometimes it was out of the classroom*, *fly by the seat of your pants*, *supporting me in the right ways*, *grow in so many ways*, and *I’m glad I did it*. A definition for each category is provided in Table 7.

Table 7

*Summary of Categories and Related Definitions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. We learn by example</td>
<td>The mentor responds to the actions, questions, and requests for help by the participant with demonstration or discussion, which in turn prompts further reflection by the participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sometimes it was out of the classroom</td>
<td>Reflecting on activities and events that have already occurred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fly by the seat of your pants</td>
<td>Adapting response or plan while in the midst of action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Supporting me in the right ways</td>
<td>The mentor creates a learning environment that is safe and comfortable, develops a relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Certain themes were evident in each category as shown in Table 8. After delineating themes, the researcher then cross-checked participant responses to each category and theme (Appendix G) to ensure that categories were representative of participant voices. Following this step, the categories were then linked to the research questions.

Table 8

**Summary of Categories and Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. We learn by example</td>
<td>Model: Mentor demonstrates for participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Talk: Mentor shares stories and discusses actions or ideas with participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help: Mentor offers help or participant asks for help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sometimes it was out of the classroom</td>
<td>With mentor: participant and mentor reflect together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independently: participant reflects alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fly by the seat of your pants</td>
<td>Children’s response: participant adjusts actions and plans based on the response from children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Switch/Flexible: the participant recognizes the need to switch gears and be flexible based on the responses of the children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Supporting me in the right ways</td>
<td>Create environment: The mentor is able to create an environment of support for the participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coach: the mentor acts as a coach for the participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback: the mentor provides the participant with feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presence: the mentor is present and able to offer support when the participant is working in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom.</td>
<td>Collaboration: the mentor teacher collaborates with the participant on planning, finding resources, and sharing ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence: the participant recognizes increased confidence in self.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation: the participant recognizes self-transformation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unexpected learning: the participant recognizes unexpected learning while student teaching.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory-practice connections: the participant makes connections between theory and practice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value: the participant recognizes the value of the mentoring experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience: the participant identifies the experience of teaching as valuable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction: the participant recognizes aspects of induction into teaching as a valuable portion of the student teaching experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, the categories were related back to the research questions. Two criteria for relating a category to the research question were used. First a relationship was determined by which interview question the participant was answering, as all the interview questions were originally linked to a research question in Chapter Three. The second criterion considered was the category in response to any research question. Table 9 provides a summary of the categories responding to each research question.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of Categories and Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How do early learning student teachers describe the reflective processes embedded in their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do early learning student teachers describe the role of their mentor in the reflective processes associated with their student teaching experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do early learning student teachers describe their reflective processes concerning their own learning associated with the student teaching experience, their mentor experience, and their overall teacher preparation experiences?</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This section presented a summary of the six categories drawn from the data. Categories were defined, followed by relating themes to categories, and finally, categories were linked to the research questions. The next section provides a discussion of each category with related themes, including exemplars from the data.

**Discussion of categories.**

The following subsections present the six identified categories of *we learn by example, sometimes it was out of the classroom, fly by the seat of your pants, supporting me in the right ways, grow in so many ways, and I’m glad I did it*. The themes within each category are presented, including examples from participants. Additionally, each category is discussed in regards to the associated research question.
**Category 1: We learn by example.**

The first category presented is *we learn by example*, which is further described by three themes of *model*, *talk*, and *help*. The definition for this category is as follows: the mentor responds to the actions, questions, and requests for help by the participant with demonstration or discussion, which in turn prompts further reflection by the participant. The themes associated with this category were prevalent in the majority of the participant transcripts and encapsulated participant descriptions about how they were able to develop their skills through reflection upon their work with their mentor.

*Theme: model.*

Twelve out of the 13 participants mentioned observing their mentor or modeling by their mentor. In these instances, modeling meant either observing mentors in action during their typical work or observing a mentor demonstration of how to accomplish a task. Many of the student teaching experiences began with mentors modeling their work with children, how to set up an environment, instructional strategies, and classroom management techniques. This was typically followed by opportunities for hands on experience, supported by the mentor. Amy explains

> She was more hands-on in the beginning because we had no clue what we were going into. We only knew that it was hard … And at the end, she kind of just stepped back … and let you get the fuller experience of it.

Often, the modeling appeared to be unintentional modeling, that is, simply the mentor working while the participant observed. Julia noted “And when you see situations about conflict between children or children are upset, there’s something going on and … it was nice to see her handle situations very calmly and collected and see how everything was ran so smoothly.”
Participants often mentioned using the same methods they had observed their mentor using. Hailey felt like she learned a lot from watching her two mentors, particularly in regards to communications with children and adults. At first Hailey would imitate what the mentors said to parents or children, but eventually gained the confidence to use her own words. “…at first I would kind of mimic what they had said previously, either to the kids or …to the parents about a certain issue…and now I’m feeling more comfortable and …I feel more confident in my own abilities…”

*Theme: talk.*

Six out of 13 participants mentioned *talk* as a key factor in their student teaching experience. Mentors often talked with participants, using stories and discussion to make points or generate ideas. Amy noted that her mentor would “tell us stories that would happen in the previous quarters,” later sharing an example of a time she was having difficulty planning an activity for three boys: “She told me stories about which area each boy is good at and that how I can make them better interact in something…. Once she told me that, I got better at arranging the activities so that each boy could participate.” Jenna mentioned talk in connection with planning for the day

Sometimes …you already know that you have a challenging behavior in the classroom because you have been before and the teacher may tell you 'hey, just letting you know so and so is kind of having a tough day today. If it starts to get out of hand, come and find me and we will work on a plan' or if they already have a plan of action or whatever.

Ethan also stated that his mentor “…was very open with just being verbal about what works, what doesn’t work,” while Hailey discussed the idea of “talking things through with them to make sure that I would do what they would want for their school.”
**Theme: help.**

Another aspect of the mentor role was helping the participant. Ten of the 13 participants mentioned mentor help as integral to their student teaching experience. Aspects of modeling and talk come into play here, though the difference is that it is instigated by either the participant asking for help or by the mentor recognizing that the participant needed help, resulting in a deliberate act of modeling or an intentional conversation. An example of mentor initiated help is given by Julia: “…at first when I would feel like I didn’t know what to do or how to handle the situation, she would kind of just jump in a little bit.” At other times participants used a signal or a look to ask for help. Participants would often look to their mentor when needing help during class, as explained by Julia: “We kind of exchanged a glance and know that it was okay for her to jump in and that would help me for the next time to know…” During work with children, Angela would look to her mentor for help “…I would kind of look in her direction because she was usually there with me…not sitting next to me but like for instance, if it was during a circle time…she would be sitting on the outside of the circle …” At other times, the help would be initiated by the mentor, typically via a signal such as a hand wave. Mentors would signal, and then provide a cue or direct comments aimed at helping the participant regroup. Molly said

She would remind me, she would stand in the classroom, she would kind of make a sign with her hand, or smile, or put her hands up…or ask a question just to remind me to switch my gear and that is how she would help me.

There were also times when the participants would directly ask for help, such as when Lindsey said “And if I needed assistance, and I just couldn’t find the words, and I was just being ineffective, then I asked my mentor to step in.” She followed that by commenting “And then I
observed some more, how she handled that situation,” illustrating the idea of intentional modeling.

In addition, help is also initiated by the participant asking questions. Participants mentioned asking questions while in the midst of classroom activities, essentially seeking direct help, as well as asking questions during planning, or during after-class reflections. Jenna said “When I had questions, they were there to answer them for me. Kind of give me encouragement and let me know that yeah, I was on the right track and doing the right thing.” In all cases the participant asking questions elicited help from the mentor, either in the form of modeling or talk. Alicia stated “I asked a lot of questions from my mentors about how they manage the classroom and how they keep their eyes on everyone in proximity and all of that. And then I took their advice and applied it.”

**Category 2: Sometimes it was out of the classroom.**

The second category presented is *sometimes it was out of the classroom*, which is further described by the two themes *with mentor* and *independently*. The definition for this category is as follows: reflecting on activities and events that have already occurred. The two ways in which participants indicate that reflection occurred are suggested by the themes: *with the mentor* and *independently*.

**Theme: with the mentor.**

Ten out of 13 participants gave examples of reflecting with their mentor on their work. Many times the participant would catch the mentor after class to discuss the day or ask for help in improving skills. Molly worked with her mentor daily: “at the end of the day we would sit down together and she would tell me “this is what you did, this is how you did’ and she would ask me ‘how did you feel about it?”’ In the collaborative peer group model of student teaching
experienced by three of the participants, a daily group reflection, facilitated by the mentor, was built into the schedule. Amy also commented on reflecting with her mentor, after being videoed while teaching, saying

One of the bigger reflections I had was when she video-records you, when you had to get two lessons taped. And then you reflect, and you watch the tape and you saw how well you did or what you didn’t do well … It really helped me find what I could do better the next time, or if I am going to be in that situation again, I know how to better handle it.

Other times the reflections were more formal, such as required written reflections or scheduled assessment sessions. Participants also noted periodic shared reflections that were of an assessment nature. Alicia said “…they would give me a weekly reflection on how my activities went for the week, what worked, what didn’t work, what I should modify. They would give me hints…” Alicia also noted a more formal review “And we also do the end quarter reviews, like where we would meet with the program coordinator and our mentor teacher and talk about how things were going and what goals we needed to work on.” Though these meetings offered elements of assessment in reviewing the participant’s work, they were also a method for the participant and mentor to reflect together.

By sharing in reflective activity, mentors were able to provide their perspectives, offer suggestions, and provide feedback. Angela noted

There were times that I would stay after and I would say, ‘I felt like the day was horrible. What can I do different?’ and so they were just really helpful with ‘Well, maybe next time you can try this and see where that might take you.’

Through this process mentors provided participants with an opportunity to expand their thinking and consequent learning.
Theme: independently.

Seven out of 13 participants also mentioned independent reflection, including written reflections. Though these solo reflections may not be directly supported by the mentor, as an active teacher in the classroom, the mentor is often a part of the reflections. The participant may reflect upon the lesson or activity just implemented, upon situations with children, and events or mentor actions that they have observed. Amy reflected on her own actions, noting “Sometimes it’s reflecting on what I just did that really led up to what could have happened,” while Hailey mentioned reflecting on the children “I learned about reflecting on what the child was doing…”

Reflection may also occur while planning, as the participant reflects on previous lessons or upon situations in the classroom, or on the need to make changes to the environment in response to exhibited behaviors. Julia commented

Well, my time to really reflect, I found, was when I actually would be working. I know it sounds like it’s still kind of an assignment but when I was starting to think about the next unit, what I could create for the next unit, I would still be actually, unknowingly, reflecting on how the previous unit had gone in order to make my next one better.

Claire reflected independently, recognizing her own ability to utilize reflection on mentor action for self-change: “But towards the end, from actually seeing the modeling and seeing how it worked with different teachers…then I could do my own self-reflection and self-changing…”

Category 3: Fly by the seat of your pants.

The third category presented is fly by the seat of your pants, which is further described by two themes of children’s response and switch/flexible. Fly by the seat of your pants is a common phrase that implies that decisions are made on the basis of gathered knowledge and past experience. The definition for this category is as follows: adapting response or plan while in the
midst of action. The themes associated with this category appeared in the majority of participant transcripts and include participant descriptions about their own adaptations.

*Theme: children’s response.*

Thirteen out of 13 participants indicated that they based their adaptations in instructional strategies, classroom management, and the environment on the responses of the children. The participants recognized behavioral changes as an indicator that adaptations were needed. Some participants noted adapting because it became “chaotic” or “crazy”, while others would see evidence of disinterest or distraction. Katie said “…it was just the attitude of the children changed, their tone of voice would change, their body language would change.” Hailey said …if you are at circle time when the kids are just really wiggly or the kid is not feeling what you’re doing or what have you, you’re always kind of flying by the seat of your pants and making adjustments.

All participants came to recognize the signs that a change was needed and learned to adapt their plans midstream. The capacity to do so demonstrates the ability to recognize the situation, reflect on prior knowledge and experience, and from that, select an appropriate adaptation, which in turn demonstrates learning a complex component of teaching. Further, each of the participants recognized this ability in themselves, demonstrating self-knowledge and progression in teaching skills. Claire recognizes this ability in herself, stating

Well what would make me realize it was reaction from children, observing the children and the environment around me … I’m pretty good at picking that up and will change according to what is going on at the time, so let’s say I’m reading a book and the children are starting to act up, their behavior is starting to misbehave because maybe they are bored with the book or whatever the situation is, and I am going to try a tactic of ‘Oh,
let’s listen to what the character has to say’, and that doesn’t do anything and the behavior is still continuing. Then maybe I might completely put the book down … of recognizing, okay, this isn’t working. …maybe in the beginning or the starting of my practicum, I probably would asked a teacher, ‘How could I have done that better?’ But towards the end, from actually seeing the modeling and seeing how it worked with different teachers and their personalities, then I could do my own self-reflection and self-changing, and at a moment’s notice.

Three further areas are of interest within the theme children’s response. The first area is emergent curriculum, in which participants noted the need to follow the children’s interests. Though it is part of the broader theme of responding to children, it is a response to interest rather than to behaviors. Participants recognized emergent curriculum as a way to engage children and expand knowledge based on the children’s interests. Ethan noted “going where the children would guide us to go”. He followed by saying “…some of those things, I think they’re improvisational, sort of track thinking. Like, if the kids have something else pop up then I felt like we should discuss that. And that was encouraged.” Angela explained …if I was doing a circle time and something was going on where the kids weren’t interested in what I was doing or what I was talking about, then we would definitely just have a shift of what we were doing and the mentors were always fine with that. …we have a lesson plan in place and we try to follow that but we have those times where emergent curriculums just pop up and if it's not working we’ve got to switch gears because we want to keep the kids interested in what we're doing.

This is considered a developmentally appropriate practice in early learning and a philosophy that was mentioned by many of the participants.
The second area of interest within the theme children’s response is recognizing safety issues that become evident during implementation of a lesson, activity, or the environment. This may include many responses, such as children putting objects in their mouths, throwing objects, or insufficient space for the planned activity. Diana mentioned “I’ve closed an area before where it’s obvious that we aren’t able to work in there safely. Maybe things are getting thrown or we can’t problem-solve together. Then we try it again the next day.” Alicia mentioned changing media in the middle of an activity with toddlers: “I had an activity that I was implementing that had to do with gluing in a waddler room. Instead of glue then I would use, like, Caro syrup, so that if they did it eat it…” In each case, the participant must make an adaptation based on keeping the children and classroom safe, therefore requiring an immediate modification.

The final area of interest in the theme of children’s response is having knowledge, meaning, as Jenna stated “…knowing your classroom and knowing your teachers, knowing your kids, and knowing when it is appropriate and when it is not.” Other participants mentioned recognition that each child is different and will require different responses, thus the need to be able to reflect and adapt in the moment. Hailey illustrated this, saying “Some kids need instruction to be just short and simple and others need more lengthy explanations of why are we doing this or why do I have to do it that way.” She also stated “…how I would say things to one child, I have to change with another.” Ethan also noted it is important to know the children in the classroom, stating

…every child is different and particularly in that age group, you can set a curriculum, but if you don’t truly know those children as individuals, then it makes it a little more difficult to actually…sort of create a rhythm in your classroom.
Finally, Claire affirmed the idea of adapting based on knowledge of the children, saying “So I try to determine first, okay, is this just a spur of the moment thing or is it something that is part of their personality and behavior? So I make my changes based on that judgment at that time.”

Theme: switch/flexible.

Six out of 13 participants mentioned the need to be flexible in all areas of classroom work, as well as the need to “switch gears” as the situation warranted. Working with young children requires the ability to modify plans, guidance messages, and the environment, in the moment, in response to children’s cues. Lindsey explained the need for flexibility and references learning from her mentors: “…each day was different, so we all had to adjust to different situations, different surroundings, and they were phenomenal in being flexible. They taught us…how to be flexible and how to handle each difficult or pleasurable situation.” Molly mentions trying to be flexible in adapting to children’s responses, saying

…so being able to switch my brain and figure what they are saying and being able to connect it back to what I’m trying to get to them, was a little harder. … And before I know it, I found myself being able to switch a gear or connect what the children are saying, rephrase a little part or rephrasing it and turn it to what I am reading.

Caroline also talks about being flexible in planning, stating

Then I might end something sooner than I had anticipated because today, for instance, the sun came out, we haven’t seen it in a while so that … changes the mood of everybody so I’ve had to do, to change plans in the middle of what I’m doing and be flexible.

Category 4: Supporting me in the right ways.

The fourth category presented is supporting me in the right ways, which is further described by five themes of create environment, coach, feedback, presence, and collaboration.
The definition for this category is as follows: the mentor creates a learning environment that is safe and comfortable, develops a relationship of trust, coaches the participant in professional and skill development, offers feedback, and is present while participant is working. The themes of create the environment, coach, feedback, presence, and collaboration are components of support that appear to be fundamental to the mentor-student teacher relationship.

Theme: create environment.

Nine out of 13 participants recognized elements of the environment as essential to support. Several components of creating a comfortable and warm environment were mentioned. These included feeling like the mentor “knew me,” being understanding about life beyond school, supporting an atmosphere of positive learning, building a feeling of teamwork, and having a “patient and loving disposition.” Hailey said “…they are just the whole package and they never made me feel like I didn’t know what I was talking about or anything. They just made me feel comfortable and at ease …” Lindsey also noted the need for a welcoming environment, saying “when you’re soft and patient and loving and approachable, the students will thrive and come up to you and not be afraid of you. They come to you with their question.”

In addition, development of trust played a role in creating a positive learning environment. Participants recognized that the mentors extended trust to them in allowing them to work with the children in their classroom. Katie said “…to be trusted to work with kids… I think about that all the time, just how much I appreciate even going through the…experience…” Molly also talked about mentor trust when said “…she has faith in me, faith and confidence enough in me to leave the class.” Participants also mentioned that the mentors put trust in their ideas for the classroom and allowed them to try things out. Hailey stated “…they just put a lot of faith in me and let me have a lot of control and ideas.”
At the same time, the participants also acknowledged that they trusted the mentors, feeling able to ask questions without fear, to talk issues and ideas through with them, to be listened to, and to be approachable. Lindsey noted “People grow and students that have lack of experience need that softness, needs that patience and understanding. Then they begin to grow because they begin to trust you and if you’re comfortable, they'll come to you with questions.” Julia made a salient point when she said “I really grew to trust her in watching her interactions with the children,” in essence, identifying authenticity in the interactions and recognizing that she could trust in the modeling that occurred.

Theme: coach.

Seven out of 13 participants mentioned some aspect of coaching in their mentoring experience. As noted in Chapter One, the terms mentoring and coaching are often used interchangeably. In early learning literature, it is noted that skill development is often related to coaching and, in student teaching, can include development in areas such as guidance, classroom management, lesson planning and implementation, observation, and assessment (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009, 2011). Though the participants acknowledged mentor help in skill development, they also acknowledged other areas of coaching such as encouragement to work through an activity or lesson idea on their own, or to think through the theoretical processes behind the practices. Amy noted “She knew just what to say to help give me an extra push to go the extra mile,” while Julia said “She wouldn’t give us ideas but she would coach us to try that thought process ourselves.” Lindsey and Angela both mentioned encouragement from their mentors. Lindsay said “Instead of feeling like I failed an activity, they stepped in and did it with me, and I was …in an underlying way able to observe as the activity proceeded, and kept going.” Angela said
…they’re always right there to give you that confidence that you can do it. You’re able to do it, just take a deep breath. And you do it. So it was really building that confidence of what I’m doing and I think that’s where they helped me the most.

Another aspect of coaching is guiding, which was also recognized by the participants. Angela noted “…it was really just kind of they’re letting us lead but they’re also guiding us along the way.” Providing guidelines for how to work with children and guiding the student teachers in classroom decision making were both noted. Alicia commented “…you meet your classroom mentor and basically, they’re there to guide you, basically, in the decisions that you make in the classroom.”

*Theme: feedback.*

Four out of the 13 participants mentioned feedback as vital to the mentoring process. Comments included mentor confirmation of methods, planning, and ideas, encouragement, constructive criticism, and goals for improvement. Jenna noted

When I had questions, they were there to answer them for me. Kind of give me encouragement and let me know that yeah, I was on the right track and doing the right thing. There were a couple of occasions, I suppose where, you know, you are not quite got it here, let’s tweak this a little bit or whatever.

Alicia mentioned feedback as well, saying “I think the mentor that I had was really good about pointing out a lot of positive things I was doing and also had some wonderful ideas on things that she saw that we could improve on.” Alicia summed it up when she said

It was vital to me to have somebody that had already been through the schooling and already been working in a classroom for years, could give me their opinion or input on
how I was doing things and their ideas on my activities and if I was reaching the goals of the children.

Multiple participants mentioned beginning their experience feeling anxious about being observed while teaching and fearing critique. The positive way in which mentors managed critique and feedback resulted in opportunities to learn and a level of comfort in being observed. Hailey talked about this, saying she was a “…little intimidated before just because they are so awesome.” As the relationship developed she felt that the mentors were “…just the whole package… and they never made me feel like…I didn’t know what I was talking about or anything. You know they just made me feel comfortable and at ease…and really let me do things on my own.” She said “I just felt supported.”

*Theme: presence.*

Four out of 13 participants noted that their mentor was present in the classroom while they were leading activities or lessons. Participants felt supported and comfortable with the idea that the mentor was watching and available. Julia said

She would be there sitting right with the children…around the circle, just listening, waiting to do whatever it was that I wanted them to do or waiting for instructions. So, … when I would feel like I didn’t know what to do or how to handle the situation she would kind of just jump in a little bit.

Participants felt that they could signal for help, or even take a short break to regroup if needed. Amy said her mentor would give her a quick break so she could reflect: “…to kind of step out of what I’m thinking the problem is and to go more in depth…” Knowing the mentor was present and available resulted in participants feeling supported in their practice. Angela said
... there were a few instances where I would kind of look in her direction, because she was usually there with me, not sitting next to me, but like for instance if it was during a circle time and I was lead, so she would be sitting here on the outside of the circle so sometimes she might remind me...

Theme: collaboration.

The final subtheme found in the theme supporting me in the right ways is collaboration. Six out of 13 participants mentioned sharing ideas with mentors, asking for suggestions, reviewing and creating lesson or activity plans together, and working together to solve classroom problems. Angela said

We would present our lesson plan, this is what I was thinking about doing. This is what I want to bring in. These are my ideas. And then they would put in their input. Well, maybe we can try this or we have this available. Maybe we can do this or that and so it was kind of like a collaboration between what I had originally presented and letting us know what they had available as well.

Diana also noted working together, saying

Well the best, most valuable tools to me was she would come and observe me and then we would meet after the class, so it was neat that it could be pretty right away. ...So being able to look through her eyes and kind of see, hear what she heard or noticed I would say was the most helpful. Then we would kind of brainstorm together on some ideas.

Some participants felt like they were working on a team with their mentors, while others felt like they were peers. Hailey said
I was always wanting to bounce my ideas off of them but they just put a lot of faith in me and let me have a lot of control and ideas. But slowly I gained confidence and it just kind of happened naturally, that instead of feeling like a student I felt more like an equal.

The collaborative nature of these exchanges made the participants feel valued, contributed to their trust in their mentor, and feel supported.

**Category 5: Grow in so many different ways.**

The fifth category presented is *grow in so many different ways*, which is further described by four themes of *confidence*, *transformation*, *unexpected learning*, and *theory-practice connections*. The definition for this category is as follows: participants recognize the evolution of their own learning. The four themes within this category are discussed in the following subsections.

**Theme: confidence.**

Seven out of 13 participants developed confidence through their work with mentors. Some mentioned new-found confidence in their ability to handle a classroom and try new things, like Angela, who said “…I felt that sense of confidence and just that sense of I can do it and this is what I want to do.” Others, simply noted a sense of self-confidence, such as when Lindsey stated “I was confident, I had better self-esteem. I was stronger, a stronger individual. I grew a huge amount.”

Several participants also noted that the hands-on nature of student teaching contributed to the development of confidence. Amy said

And so the next time I had to do it, it really helped me know, all right, so I can do this and I was pretty good at it. … It really helped me find what I could do better the next
time, or if I am going to be in that situation again, I know how to handle it, better handle it.

Lindsey echoed the idea of hands-on experience helping her develop confidence

…it's very nerve wracking to be observed by other students and children, and your
mentor when you give your first two or three activities. It was very nerve wracking, and,
I didn’t think I was going to be able to do it. And, then, your hands-on experience, you
get more and more, I grew more and more. And my confidence grew, as I continued to
practice what I learned.

Finally, Angela noted

I think what I learned from them was just to be more confident and I think that came
along with the experience but also knowing that they were there backing me up if
something were to go wrong because it's scary.

Working with mentor teachers helped participants develop confidence in their abilities and skills
in teaching.

Theme: transformation.

Two out of 13 participants, Lindsey and Alicia, felt that the student teaching experience
was transformational. Though only two participants contributed to this theme, it offers a
powerful testimony to the work of mentors, and so has been included. Lindsey describes
entering college expecting to fail, and having moments where she didn’t think she could do the
work. She noted

I grew immensely. I walked into [college] knowing, not to be really negative, but how I
grew, you want to know how I grew, I walked into [college], because education is so hard
for me, I knew I wasn’t going to make it. I just felt like... I’m not going to make it. But,
it’s something, I got to give it a try. And, when I left [college] I was a totally different person. I was confident, I had better self-esteem. I was stronger, a stronger individual. I grew a huge amount.

Lindsey later relates her growth to working with her mentor, saying

…when I felt down and couldn’t do it, she said, ‘You can do it. You can do this. I’ll help you through it. You can do this. I have confidence in you.’ And she was … they were all very verbally encouraging. And when I get shook my head, and can’t, then ‘let’s do it together then.’ They stepped in and we did it together. And that’s how I built that confidence, too. Instead of feeling like I failed an activity, they stepped in and did it with me...

Through this process, and the experiential nature of the practicum, Lindsey said “And everyone that knew me, just saw me blossom, saw me grow.” She said that she left college a different person from when she entered.

Alicia also felt that she was transformed by her work in the early learning program. She said

…I wouldn’t raise my hand and ask questions in the beginning, I was super shy and inverted, and through all of the early childhood courses, they kind of bring you out of your shell. So, it enabled me to ask questions and not to be afraid to speak my mind, and to know that I have a voice and I should use it. It did help me learn through that…It changed my whole life. It made me a different person.

Alicia said she felt very supported by her mentors, and learned best when they supported her in the classroom where she could immediately try out their suggestions. Alicia also noted that she appreciated that her mentors were trying to help her become a better teacher.
**Theme: Unexpected learning.**

Two out of 13 participants experienced unexpected learning during the student teaching experience, leading to personal growth. Ethan noted that he was surprised by “…the things that I don’t know and …that, as nurturing as an individual as I think I am, there is a lot to learn about people and from people.” The mentoring experience did not live up to Katie’s expectations, however, she also said that the experience was valuable and she grew in unexpected ways:

And I feel like the … school that I learned in was incredible because I learned things that I didn’t even know that I was even going to learn. And I think that that’s so important, going through any type of education and that there’s so much that you don’t know until you go through it.

Katie later said “…you grow in so many different ways. And you grow where you’re supposed to, even though you don’t really know or want to grow in that area; you’re [going to] grow there no matter what.” These participant reflections illustrate growth during their student teaching experience, even when they did not expect it.

**Theme: theory-practice connections.**

One of the goals of the student teaching experience is to translate the theories acquired in college courses into practice in the early learning classroom. Seven out of 13 participants acknowledged this accomplishment as part of their growth, including new understandings of the connections between theory and practice. Some participants discussed the progression from theory to practice, first learning about a concept in their college course, then preparing and implementing activities in the early learning classroom based on those ideas. Molly commented:

I didn’t realize this, because it’s so easy to read and think this is how things are. But at the end of the day we are really doing it, you realize it’s kind of different. I mean, the
emotions that you end up getting there…it’s entirely different when a child talks to you or they smack you or they do something and you are like ‘I thought this would be easy – they are little children,’ but it’s totally different.

She later adds

… I think it’s easy, what I think about practicum, it’s easy to go to school and not have the experience. Practicum gives you the experience. …So, to me it’s like “oh…this is what it means, oh…” I didn’t realize this, because it’s so easy to read and think this is how things are. But at the end of the day we are really doing it, you realize it’s kind of different.

Working with the mentor teacher was an essential piece of this progression, including reflective practices discussed earlier, such as modeling, asking for help, and mentor support. Jenna and Caroline also noted moving from theory to practice. Jenna said “So for me, just taking on those skills I had learned in my college classes and applying them into the classroom, was a really good experience.” Caroline also noted theory to practice connections, saying

I think it was nice to be able to apply those ideas and those theories in a situation that was important to me because I was already working in that environment and so it wasn’t just some ideas in a notebook that I tried or I did, but they actually made a difference with children.

Participants also acknowledged making a connection between theory and practice as they began to understand the thinking behind the lessons and activities they taught. Caroline notes that she is “much more intentional” in her planning and in her work with children and families. She also “…can explain why it is I’m choosing that activity or doing something this way…” and concludes “I understand what I’m doing better than before when I was just doing things. And so,
because I understand the ideas behind it I can choose to make better choices with my time and with the children’s time.” Diana also recognizes a better understanding of the theory behind practice. She said “I think the biggest thing is it’s helped me feel more self-confident and also knowing why I’m doing what I’m doing.” She also stated

Going from maybe, ‘Oh, this could be a fun activity and I know the children will enjoy it’ to ‘Yeah, I can still make it fun, but I have a specific reason to move them to the next step’. I would say that that would be the biggest change in my teaching.

Diana has moved from selecting activities based on whether the children would enjoy them, to selecting activities that while still enjoyable, have a purpose behind them and are intended to move the children forward in their learning.

**Category 6: I’m glad I did it.**

The sixth, and final, category presented is *I’m glad I did it*, which is further described by three themes of *value, experience* and *induction*. The definition for this theme is as follows:

Participants appreciate the value of the student teaching experience. The following subsections present the three themes found within this category.

**Theme: value.**

Twelve out of 13 participants attributed value to having worked with a mentor, indicating they “learned a lot” from their mentors and that the mentors were “great”. They also valued the expertise offered by the mentors, often noting the knowledge and experience levels of the mentors. Hailey said “…they have a lot more experience. …just kind of in awe of them how much good they are with the kids and how good they are with the parents. But their different areas of expertise - really impressive.”
Many participants also reflected on mentoring, noting it is valuable and necessary. Alicia said:

"About mentoring, I just think that it’s vital in the field of education to have somebody that already has the experience for you to be able to ask the questions of and you can bounce ideas off of, whether they’re going to work or not going to work. I think it’s vital to the student [teacher]."

All the participants, including those who did not think they needed mentoring, or were disappointed in their experience, acknowledged that it was worthwhile. Katie was disappointed in her experience, yet said:

"So, I feel like that’s really needed to be said because it, it sounds like it’s a really negative but it actually ended up being extremely positive. And I feel like the … school that I learned in was incredible because I learned things that I didn’t even know that I was even going to learn."

In addition, when asked about her own learning in practicums, Jenna replied “It was wonderful. I needed it. Even though, I said I don't need it.” Diana also said:

"I think I'm really glad that I went through it and didn’t try to get out of it like I was originally going to do. I have a family, I'm working and I thought, ‘Gosh I've been doing this for so long. Is there any way I can get out of this?’ I'm really glad I went through it. I think that it was really beneficial to me."

All participants found the experience to be worthwhile and valuable.

*Theme: experience.*

Seven out of 13 participants spoke about the worth of gaining experience in a children’s classroom. They found value in having a safe place to try out their ideas and skills, in having the
robust experience of hands-on work, and in spending a substantial amount of time in the classroom working with children and mentors. Katie talked about having a safe place to try new things, saying

Because really the …school basically makes it so that you can try out what you want to do and where you want to go. And while somebody’s still kind of there, that it seems to me that that is actually ultimately responsible. And I know it sounds kind of funny, where you’re just like, ‘Oh if I could just do whatever I want and then somebody else is responsible.’ Well it’s kind of true to certain degrees and that person is responsible for safety and that you can try out different activities and I think that’s so important.

Ethan noted “I spent more time in the classroom environments than what was required.” He added “…I actually took that … upon myself, to spend as much time as I possibly could…that was very relevant to my learning…adding to a lot of the conversations that I can have with those teachers and with the children.” Working with a mentor provided a model of expertise, classroom experience and a safe place to take risks.

Theme: induction.

The final theme touches on induction, the introduction of the student teacher to the real world of teaching. Though this process did not appear to be formalized, eight out of 13 participants mentioned aspects of induction. Angela noted that the experience helps get student teachers ready to move into a variety of programs in the field, saying

I thought it was a really great experience. It really helps you to get ready for the next step …some of us went on to work for Head Start. Some went to care facilities. Some went to, we all ended up spread out everywhere, kind of.
Participants mentioned a new understanding of the work that goes into setting up an early learning classroom, gaining the “teacher perspective,” and the opportunity to see if a career in teaching was a fit for them. Molly mentioned the idea that it helped her know whether it was a job she wanted. She said

…if somebody don’t take the class and there’s no practicum and you finally go to real work, you may find out you’re in the wrong job. You have to have the connection, yes, of both of them, to really know what you are getting yourself into.

Amy recognized that practicum helped her see the reality of teaching, saying

And with practicum, it helped me learned that what usually can go…in a preschool, or in a preschool setting, what exactly you have to do to set up the classroom every day. And usually there aren’t five of you in the classroom. There’s one or two, if you’re lucky. And that it makes you take a step back in what you think - it’s going to be sunshine and flowers to what hard work can fit into it and what you can get … what you can receive back from it.

Jenna noted that it gave her a new perspective, saying “I literally had no clue as to other side of the classroom and the teacher perspective. I was always just classroom support.” She later added “So it was just like oh these are all the things you teachers are doing kind of behind the scenes that I did not notice so much.”

One additional interesting point made by three participants was that the experience helped them move from thinking that teaching in early learning was similar to parenting, to the realization that it is completely different. Molly noted

…doing the ECE class was easy because I had children at home. So going home, I would do my assignment with them, I would do some experiments with my kids. But I know the
practicum changed the dynamic of it because having my children is different from somebody else’s kids.

Hailey made a similar connection, saying

I knew what I knew as a Mom, but I didn’t know all the strategies about positive reinforcement and encouragement and not using praise overly, [like] just walking by and saying ‘good job’ over the simplest thing. I learned about reflecting on what the child was doing, so I have grown a lot since I first got in the classroom.

Alicia also noted that parenting was not like teaching, saying

I was really, really nervous because I was already a mother of two, almost teenagers, and so I thought I’m a parent, I can do this. You know what I mean? So I was nervous about hearing somebody’s opinion about how I parent. But then once I realized that is has nothing to do with that I kinda let that go.

Finally, several participants said that the experience helped them to see themselves as a teacher, and in a few cases, to set a goal of eventually becoming a mentor themselves. Ethan stated “I could be the person teaching, teaching not only children, but teaching other teachers how to do this.” Lindsey also noted a desire to mentor, saying

I would love to be a mentor. Oh, I would love to be one. I wish I had the opportunity to be a mentor. I would love to help other students because I came from low self-esteem. I came from lack of confidence. And then I saw, I can do this, and now I no longer can say can't. I no longer can say I’m a failure because I succeeded and I did it. I want to give other students that opportunity that may feel kind of intimidated about the whole education role and being able to teach. If I can do it, they can do it and I want to help others to be able to do it. I would love to be a mentor.
This section presented Phase II data analysis, which identified the six categories of *we learn by example, sometimes it was out of the classroom, fly by the seat of your pants, supporting me in the right ways, grow in so many ways*, and *I’m glad I did it*, as well as associated themes. These categories were drawn from an inductive analysis process. The next subsection discusses additional insights that the researcher deemed relevant, but did not find significant enough to become a category.

**Additional insights: student disposition and student-initiated mentoring.**

Two additional insights were found in this study that did not fit into the previously discussed categories as they were not evident across multiple transcripts. These insights were drawn from notes in the dissertation journal and are included because they are relevant to the research questions and the focus of the study. The first concerns the participant’s approach to mentoring and the related influence on the reflective processes and mentoring relationship. The second is a thoughtful response to mentoring offered by one student.

Jenna reported that she didn’t recall any “direct mentoring” or feel that she was “heavily mentored.” She stated multiple times that she did not think she was as “needy” as her classmates. She also mentioned that she did not need much mentoring due to her prior experiences as a parent in a preschool classroom. However, Jenna stated that the practicum experience is “extremely important.” Katie was disappointed in her mentoring experience, as she had preconceived ideas about how she wanted it to go. She recognized that her own attitude and personal life issues contributed to breakdown of the mentor role. She acknowledged the value of the experience and that she grew from it, but does not attribute those gains to the mentor. In both cases, the participants mentioned interactions with their mentor such as modeling and answering questions, which other participants considered to be part of mentoring.
In addition, both acknowledged the value of the experience. This leads the researcher to consider how expectations, understandings, and attitude towards mentoring affect the experience. It is possible that the reflective processes shared between mentor and participant were diminished for these two participants due to their own beliefs and attitude.

The second insight that came from this study is the result of a thoughtful response by Claire:

…you really develop how much mentoring you get based on how much you interact with the teacher. So if you aren’t questioning the teacher a lot, you are not going to get a lot of mentoring. But if you are questioning and looking for alternate ways or different views about things, then the mentoring will be there, and it comes in.

Claire raises the idea that mentoring may be student-initiated, that the value of the experience will depend on how much the participant asks questions and seeks advice. This concept relates to the experiences of Jenna and Katie in that their preconceptions and attitudes may have prevented them from initiating the mentoring relationship.

The additional insights presented here are participant perceptions that may influence the reflective processes embedded in the work between mentors and participants. Participant attitude toward mentoring may influence the ability to receive or recognize mentoring. In addition, participant initiative in instigating mentoring may also influence the mentoring received. The next section will present general trends found during data analysis.

**Phase III: Trends in the Data**

In this section, four general trends emerging from Phases I and II of the analysis are identified. These general trends are relative to the early learning student teachers participating in this study concerning their experiences in being mentored. First, a discussion of participant
understanding of mentoring is presented, followed next by an examination of the progression of student teaching, then by a discussion concerning participant framing of their work, and finally, participant identification of reflective processes.

The first general trend identified is in regard to what is recognized as mentoring. Participants had a limited understanding of mentoring. For the most part, participants did not talk about the specific characteristics of their mentor, nor did they talk specifically about how their mentor worked. Instead, they talked about aspects of mentoring, such as feeling like they were listened to, or feeling comfortable in asking questions. In addition, participants described mentoring acts, but did not always relate them to mentoring. For instance, participants would describe instances of observing their mentor working with children, which is essentially modeling, but did not see that as an act of mentoring. Participants seemed more likely to identify feedback and answering questions as acts of mentoring.

The second trend evident in the data has to do with the progression of reflection in student teaching. It appeared that participants moved through a series of steps during the student teaching experience. Most began with observations, then mentor-supported hands-on experience, then finally, became independently immersed in the classroom work. It was not clear that the observations were mentor-focused, instead, they were observations of children, but within those observations, students were able to see the mentor in action, and later, used those observed actions as a model for their own work with children.

The third identified trend has to do with how participants framed their work in the classroom. Participants frequently mentioned modeling (even if it was not identified as such) and talk as common elements used in framing their work in the classroom. In addition, many mentioned pulling in the concepts learned in their college courses. Modeling included observed
mentor-child interactions, mentor-led activities, and general mentor work in the classroom, including setting up the children’s learning environment. Talk included asking questions, mentor stories, guidelines provided by the mentor, sharing or brainstorming ideas, feedback, and evaluations. Many students also mentioned making theory-to-practice connections, either in their intentionality in lesson and environment planning, or in being able to recognize moments where theory came to life in the classroom.

Finally, the last trend has to do with how participants identified reflective processes. Participant understanding was limited to explicit instances of reflection such as: post-action reflection in shared discussions with their mentor, reflection on prior work when planning future work, independent reflection as they thought back over the day, assigned written reflections, and evaluative reflection in the feedback from mentors. Participants did not recognize the implicit reflection found in their work, such as the back and forth reflections occurring as mentor teachers supported them during activities and interactions with children, or mentor intervention as the result of in-action reflection by the mentor. Further they did not recognize their own adaptations in response to mentor intervention as a result of reflection. In addition, participants did not identify the in-action reflection that occurred during moments when they responded to the behaviors or changes in children’s demeanor, or in moments when they adapted their plans, in the midst of implementation, in reaction to children’s responses. These reflective processes were evident in the data and were identified by the researcher; however, they were not necessarily identified as reflective processes by the participants.

In this section, four general trends in the data were identified. A discussion of each of the following trends was presented: participant understanding of mentoring, the progression of student teaching, the framing of work in the classroom, and participant identification of
reflective processes. The next section will present general insights from the data in regard to the
three research questions framing this study.

**Phase IV: Analysis Related to Research Questions**

This section presents insights from each category in response to the research questions. It begins with a restatement of the purpose and the research question. Next, general insights regarding each research question are discussed. Table 9 provides a summary of the categories relating to each research question.

The purpose of this study was to explore early learning student teacher perceptions of the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience in early learning programs at Washington State community and technical colleges. Three research questions were posed:

1. How do early learning student teachers describe the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience?
2. How do early learning student teachers describe the role of their mentor in the reflective processes associated with their student teaching experiences?
3. How do early learning student teachers describe their reflective processes concerning their own learning associated with the student teaching experience, their mentor experience, and their overall teacher preparation experiences?

**Analysis and research question one.**

This subsection presents categories one and two in response to research question one, which concerns reflective processes in mentor and participant interactions. Category one, we
learn by example includes the themes model, talk, and help. Category two, sometimes it was out of the classroom, includes the themes with the mentor and independently.

Analysis identified the reflective processes embedded in mentor modeling and talk as a response to research question one. The themes model and talk encompass the concept of the mentor as a reflective focus for the participant. As mentors engaged in the activities of modeling and talking with participants, participants reflected on the activities of teaching, such as mentor-child interactions and methods used by the mentor. Participants were later able to use these reflective moments when engaging in their own activities of teaching. Participants did not always explicitly recognize these activities as elements of reflection, but it was evident that learning occurred through observing the mentor in action in the classroom, through discussion and shared reflections, and through the help, both action-oriented and verbally-oriented, provided by the mentor. Participants were able to translate the skills modeled by their mentor, as well as drawing from their shared discussions to use in their own activities in the classroom, which implies reflection has occurred. These elements were mentioned by all participants and are exemplified by Claire: “But towards the end, from actually seeing the modeling and seeing how it worked with different teachers…then I could do my own self-reflection and self-changing…”

Alicia also addressed the topics of mentor help and talk, stating “I asked a lot of questions from my mentors about how they manage the classroom and how they keep their eyes on everyone in proximity and all that. And then I took their advice and applied it.” Both examples demonstrate participant ability to reflect on the observed action or given advice and translate it into their work in the classroom.

In the themes model and talk, the mentor may or may not be intentionally engaged in modeling or in provoking reflective thought through talk, but instead, may simply be engaged in
classroom work alongside the participant, who then reflects on mentor actions and talk. This nuance of intentionality distinguishes help as a separate theme within in this category. In the themes of model and talk, the focus is on the reflections that are prompted through mentor modeling and talking during the course of their work. In the theme help, actions are a deliberate response to a need for or a request for help, implying intentionality on the part of mentors in response to the needs of participants. Julia explained how her mentor would help, saying “We kind of exchanged a glance and know that it was okay for her to jump in and that would help me for the next time to know…” Again, participants reflected back on the modeling or the shared discussions that occurred as they worked in the classroom.

Whereas the first theme, we learn by example, reflects the idea of the mentor as a focal point, in the second category, sometimes it was out of the classroom, the focus shifts to reflections on events and activities that have already occurred, both with the mentor and independently. In post-action types of reflection, the reflective processes were typically carried out in a setting separate from the early learning classroom. Alicia gave an example of reflection with the mentor, saying “…they would give me a weekly reflection on how my activities went for the week, what worked, what didn’t work, what I should modify. They would give me hints…” Amy noted independent reflection, saying “Sometimes it’s reflecting on what I just did that really led up to what could have happened.” Angela described the varied ways that reflection occurred, stating “So sometimes it was out of the classroom. Sometimes it was while we were in the classroom. Sometimes, just on our own.” Post-action reflection provided an opportunity for participants to consider children’s behaviors and responses, their own planning and implementation, mentor actions, and their own actions.
This subsection presented categories one and two as responding to research question one. It was through reflecting on the modeling and dialogs shared with their mentors that participants were able to move from observation in the classroom to work in the classroom. The next subsection addresses responses to research question two.

**Analysis and research question two.**

This subsection presents category three in response to research question two, which concerns the role of the mentor during the student teaching experience. Category three, *supporting me in the right ways*, encompasses five themes: *create environment, coach, feedback, presence*, and *collaboration*.

Though it does not speak directly to reflective processes, it is evident that participants found support to be an integral part of mentoring, verifying the common perception that mentoring includes support of the mentee. It appeared that a feeling of support was foundational to participant ability to engage in the reflective processes with the mentor. Alicia said

“They're absolutely supportive and positive to supporting learning. Like any projects that we had in our classes, and I'd discuss it with my mentor teachers and they were completely supportive of them. They would talk through my activity plans and let me know what they thought …might work and what they thought might not. And then they would let me implement them and then go back and reflect on it.

Components of support were mentioned by all participants, most notably in the creation of a safe environment for the participant to learn, ask questions, take risks, and practice skills. Julia noted “I felt like it was a safe environment to learn and grow and talk things out” summarizing the responses of all participants. Trust was noted as a vital element of a safe environment. Further, trust was seen to be important in both directions: from participant to
mentor and from mentor to participant. Hailey commented that her mentors “…just put a lot of faith in me and let me have a lot of control and ideas,” demonstrating the trust mentors had to have in participants in order to turn their classrooms over to them. Julia noted the importance of trusting her mentor, saying “I could go to her and ask questions and not feel as if my questions were dumb questions or irrelevant questions.” When participants felt safe, they were able to seek help and engage in conversations that extended their learning. When they felt trusted with the children, they felt comfortable in trying out new activities and skills in the classroom.

Further themes of support were coach, feedback, presence, and collaboration. All were mentioned in connection to feeling supported in participant work and growth during the student teaching experience. Participants were coached in skills and in implementing activities, as well as receiving feedback from their mentors regarding activities and interactions with children. In addition, participants noted mentor support when mentors were present in the classroom during participant student teaching activities. Participants also mentioned collaborating with their mentors on planning activities and managing behaviors. Caroline summarized the value of support, stating “I have had mentors before just working in the field, but having it done in this way was much better because I had the right people supporting me in the right ways…”

This subsection presented category three as responding to research question two. Participants recognized support, including themes of creating a positive environment, coaching, feedback, presence and collaboration as essential to the student teaching experience. The next subsection addresses responses to research question three.

**Analysis and research question three.**

This subsection presents categories four, five, and six in response to research question three, which concerns reflections on the overall teacher preparation experience. Category four,
fly by the seat of your pants includes the themes children’s response and switch/flexible.

Category five, grow in so many different ways, includes the themes confidence, transformation, unexpected learning, and theory-practice connections. Category six, I’m glad I did it, includes the themes value, experience, and induction.

Category four, fly by the seat of your pants, appears to be the area where the prior support of mentors provided participants with an opportunity to act on their own. In discussing their ability to adapt instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, and the early learning environment while in the midst of action, participants clearly indicated that those decisions were based upon the responses of the children. Participants noted that the ability to adapt developed based on prior experiences, the modeling of their mentor teachers, observing children, and on the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom.

In reflecting on their work in the classroom participants identified their ability to adapt their activities and interactions with children, while concurrently engaged in those activities and interactions, as an area of development over the course of their student teaching experience. It appeared that as participants became more proficient in adaptations, the need for mentor support lessened. Participants noted that the ability to adapt developed based on prior experiences, the modeling of their mentor teachers, observing children, and on the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom, indicating an ability to reflect in the moment, drawing upon a repertoire of experience and skill to determine a course of action. As an example, Lindsey said “I had to adjust my teaching skills or my plan, my teaching plan, accordingly, to how the children were reacting.” Caroline also noted

…sometimes if I take a book that I am trying to read to the group that’s just not capturing the moment, they’re not interested, and they’re clearly not paying attention, you kind of
have to wrap up what you’re doing and take their lead and either …do it in a different way or just kind of end the activity and move on to the next so that the kids are engaged and happy and the transitions are smoother.

This type of in-the-moment reflective processing responds to research question three as an area of learning in the student teaching experience.

Notably, this category does not suggest an answer to research question two regarding the role of the mentor. Rather, the themes that emerged were the ability of the participant to switch gears and be flexible, as well as the strong indicator of children’s response. Mentor actions were noted in helping the participant acquire flexibility and in mentor reminders to base adaptations on the response of the children, but in essence, this category is about participants having internalized those messages through reflective processes, adding to their repertoire of response, and being able to base their own responses upon instant internal reflection. Participant mastery of adaptations while in the moment appears to be the culmination of working with mentors and may be an indicator of the appropriate moment for the mentor to begin to step back from direct mentoring.

Category five, *grow in so many different ways*, concerns participant reflections on their own growth. All participants recognized growth in themselves over the course of their practicum experiences, and also from the beginning of the teacher preparation program to the end. Participants attributed the growth to working with their mentors, as well as to getting hands-on experience. Angela referred to this, saying

I think what I learned from them was just to be more confident and I think that came along with the experience but also knowing that they were there backing me up if something were to go wrong because it's scary.
When the student teaching experience is considered in the context of the first three categories, we learn by example, sometimes it was out of the classroom, and fly by the seat of your pants, and the reflective processes shared by the mentor and the participant in each, then it becomes evident that participant growth was related to those processes. Although participants did not directly address the reflective processes when discussing personal growth, by virtue of acknowledging growth in regards to the experience of student teaching and working with a mentor, they made an indirect connection to the reflective processes. Alicia summed it up when she said “I don’t think that I would have learned as much as I did or be the teacher that I am without a mentor.”

Category six, I’m glad I did it, is similar to the previous two categories, in that reflective processes are not directly described. However, the participants acknowledge the mentoring process as significant, which relates to the reflective processes as outlined in categories one through three. Participants describe personal growth and recognized value in their student teaching experience as they reflected back on their experience. Almost all participants recognized general growth and many identified specific growth in confidence. Lindsey noted “I became stronger, more open, more flexible, more confident.” Alicia said “I don’t think that I would have learned as much as I did or be the teacher that I am without a mentor.” Both offer evidence of recognized growth by participants. Further, participants valued the experience, describing it as “positive” and “wonderful.” Jenna summed it up by saying

It was wonderful. I needed it. Even though, I said I don't need it. I literally had no clue as to other side of the classroom and the teacher perspective. I was always just classroom support. So for me, just taking on those skills that I had learned in my college classes and applying them into the classroom, was a really good experience. I really enjoyed it and I
just really liked it and I just think it was absolutely necessary to have experiences in order to be effective in a classroom.

As Jenna reflects on her experience, she captures several concepts mentioned by other participants as valuable: gaining the teacher perspective, translating theory to practice, and simply gaining experience in the classroom.

This section related general insights from data analysis back to the three research questions posed in this study. Mentor modeling, talk, and help were identified in response to research questions one, which asked how student teachers describe the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers. Research question two asked how student teachers describe their mentor role in those reflective processes. Participant response indicated that mentor support was an essential component of the mentor role. Research question three asked how early learning student teachers describe their reflective processes concerning their own learning associated with the student teaching experience, their mentor experience, and their overall teacher preparation. Being flexible and adaptable, participant growth, and the value of the experience were recognized in response to question three. The next section offers a summary of this chapter.

**Summary**

This study explored the perceptions of early learning student teachers regarding the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers. The resulting categories indicate that mentors and participants reflected together in multiple ways. The mentors might have been directly involved in reflection as the participant and mentor together considered past events and actions, or may have been more subtly involved as the participant reflected on mentor interactions in the classroom, mentor advice, and mentor support. In addition, participants were
found to use reflection in responding to immediate concerns and in adapting their actions to those concerns. Further, the mentor’s ability to create a warm and welcoming environment, develop trust, and be present all support the reflective processes, as does coaching, feedback and collaboration. The participants valued the experience of being mentored and recognized personal growth as a result of their experience. Two additional insights are also of note, specifically, student teacher attitude may influence their perception of mentoring and that mentoring may be student-initiated. Chapter Five will present the researchers conclusions based upon her interpretation of the analysis presented in this chapter, as well as implications for theory, future research, and practice.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore student teacher perceptions of the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience in early learning programs at Washington State community and technical colleges. Schon’s (1987a) concepts of reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reciprocal reflection-in-action framed this study, providing a lens for examining reflective processes. Thirteen alumni of seven Washington State community and technical college early learning programs were interviewed, providing rich data concerning their experiences of being mentored in a student teaching practicum. This was an interpretive qualitative study using an inductive analysis approach to explore how participants made meaning from their experiences in student teaching (Creswell, 2007, 2009). Data analysis followed an inductive approach, moving from description, to thematic analysis to categorization. Four phases of data analysis produced six categories and evidence of general trends in the data. From this, the researcher drew six conclusions concerning reflective processes student teaching in early learning.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the conclusions and implications drawn from the findings of this study, the implications for future research, and implications for practice. First, a summary of the conclusions will be presented. Next, each conclusion will be discussed including a rationale and a brief statement of implications for practice. Following the presentation of the conclusions will be a discussion of implications in regard to the conceptual framework used in this study, for future research, and for practice. Finally, concluding thoughts will be offered.
Interpretations and Conclusions

Six conclusions emerged from this study of student teacher perceptions of reflective processes in early learning. The relationships between each conclusion, the category it was drawn from, and the guiding research question are summarized in Table 10. First, this study concludes that reflecting on mentor modeling and talking are key elements of how student teachers learn from their mentor during the student teaching experience. Second, it concludes that reflective processes in student teaching include opportunities to reflect-on-action, collaborate, plan, and problem solve. Third, mentor support is fundamental to student teacher reflection, including development of trust. Fourth, this study concludes that reciprocal reflection-in-action is an element of interactions between student teachers and mentor teachers. Fifth, Reflection-in-action is used in making adjustments to teaching while in the midst of action. And finally, the sixth conclusion drawn is that student teachers recognize personal growth as well as professional growth throughout the early learning program as well as in their student teaching experience.

Table 10

Summary of Conclusions, Categories, and Research Questions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusions</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Conclusion 1: Reflecting on mentor modeling and talking are key elements of how student teachers learn from their mentor during the student teaching experience.</td>
<td>Category 1: We learn by example. The mentor responds to the actions, questions, and requests for help by the participant with demonstration or discussion, which in turn prompts further reflection by the participant.</td>
<td>RQ1: How do early learning student teachers describe the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
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<td><strong>Conclusion 2:</strong> Reflective processes in student teaching include opportunities to reflect-on-action, collaborate, plan, and problem solve.</td>
<td>Category 2: Sometimes it was out of the classroom. Reflecting on activities and events that have already occurred.</td>
<td>RQ1: How do early learning student teachers describe the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion 3:</strong> Mentor support is fundamental to student teacher reflection, including development of trust.</td>
<td>Category 4: Supporting me in the right ways: The mentor creates a learning environment that is safe and comfortable, develops a relationship of trust, coaches the participant in professional and skill development, offers feedback, and is present while participant is working.</td>
<td>RQ2: How do early learning student teachers describe the role of their mentor in the reflective processes associated with their student teaching experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion 4:</strong> Reciprocal reflection-in-action is an element of interactions between student teachers and mentor teachers.</td>
<td>Category 1: We learn by example. The mentor responds to the actions, questions, and requests for help by the participant with demonstration or discussion, which in turn prompts further reflection by the participant.</td>
<td>RQ1: How do early learning student teachers describe the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion 5:</strong> Reflection-in-action is used in making adjustments to teaching while in the midst of action.</td>
<td>Category 3: Fly by the seat of your pants. Adapting response or plan while in the midst of action.</td>
<td>RQ3: How do early learning student teachers describe their reflective processes concerning their own learning associated with the student teaching experience, their mentor experience, and their overall teacher preparation experiences?</td>
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This section presented the researchers conclusions as drawn from the four phases of data analysis. In addition, the associated relationship to the categories and research questions was provided. The following subsections will discuss each conclusion and the associated implications for practice of each.

**Conclusion 1: Reflecting on modeling and talking.**

This section examines modeling and talking in the student teacher-mentor relationship. Though the participants did not often use the term modeling, the researcher concluded that in their discussions of observing the mentor at work in the classroom, they were discussing mentor modeling. The participants also frequently referenced various forms of talking: asking questions, sharing ideas, giving and receiving feedback, shared reflections, and the use of stories and examples. First, the conclusion is discussed and then a brief implication for practice is presented.

The first conclusion of this study is: *reflecting on mentor modeling and talking is a key element of how student teachers learn from their mentors during the student teaching experience.* This conclusion is drawn from the category *we learn by example.* Mentor modeling may be
unintentional, simply occurring as student teachers observe mentors engaged in their typical daily work. Ethan’s perception that his mentor “was intentional as far as modeling” may indicate intentional modeling such as that described in Feiman-Nemser’s (1998) concept of educative mentoring, wherein mentors thoughtfully plan the mentoring of the student teacher. Mentor modeling may also be intentional in response to student teachers seeking help, questioning, or actions. This type of intentional modeling is identified as reciprocal reflection-in-action (Schon, 1987a), occurring when the mentor responds to the student teacher’s action through demonstration or discussion, which then elicits further reflection-in-action from the student teacher. Lindsey provided an example of this process, stating

If I needed assistance, and I just couldn’t find a word, and I was just being ineffective, then I asked my mentor to step in. And then I observed some more, how she handled that situation. And then if there was another situation, then I’d try a different skill or a different way about handling it and approaching the situation.

Whether intentional or not, modeling was recognized by the participants as a valuable point of reflection in the student teaching experience. Anderson (2007) clarified this further, finding that student teachers find value in the skills, expertise and experience in the modeling of their mentors. Further, modeling is often enough to influence the behaviors of student teachers (Anderson, 2007).

The participants in this study also identified talking as a means of mentoring. Daloz (2012) describes the purpose of dialog between mentor and student as “to help the student engage different perspectives, different ways of viewing a problem or a phenomenon” (p. 219). Other research studies indicate that mentor-student discussions help the student interpret actions and events, understand self and context, and contribute to skill development (Cuenca, 2010;
Dobler, et al., 2009). Findings from this study suggest talk between mentors and student teachers included conversation, storytelling, problem solving, and collaboration within the theme of *we learn by example*. Additionally, talk was also a common thread in the shared reflections found in the theme *sometimes it was out of the classroom*. Finally, talk was also identified in the theme *supporting me in the right way*, as mentors provided feedback, affirmation, and encouragement.

Through reflection on mentor actions and shared conversations, each participant was able to develop a repertoire. Participants were then able to draw on their experiences and reflections to try select strategies in response to children. Participants were engaged in the recursive process of knowledge construction, as they were “experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194).

**Conclusion 1: Implications for practice.**

Recognizing modeling and talk as key elements in student teacher learning leads to two implications for practice. First, many student teachers noted that the student teaching experience began with observation. However, these observations are often focused on the children. Mentor-focused observations could prove useful to student teachers. Observations of the mentor as a precursor to the student teacher’s own work in the classroom could provide a foundation for student teachers to begin their work with children. Observations with a specific focus on mentor interactions with children, guidance practices, instructional strategies, parent interactions, and mentor set up of the environment would provide student teachers with many opportunities for reflection-on-action and discussion with mentors. Additionally, written reflections on the focused mentor observations could be required as part of the college coursework, or incorporated into seminar discussions, thus ensuring reflection-on-action occurs.
Second, mentor training varies by college. Mentoring student teachers is typically a voluntary task taken on by lead teachers in addition to the responsibilities in their own classroom. Further, mentors often have little or no connection to the college early learning program, including some of the campus-based centers. As a result, mentor training is often minimal to non-existent. Some programs provide a set of guidelines, others do not. Some provide training, many do not. It might be useful to share the findings from this study with mentors, providing them with information regarding the value of modeling and talk in as reflective processes involved in student teaching. This information could include suggestions to allow time for student teachers to ask questions, to reflect together, and to offer student teachers feedback. The information could be disseminated either through a formal mentor-training or through a mentor handbook.

This subsection presented a discussion of modeling and talking as a significant element of student teaching. From this discussion, implications for practice were presented. The following section presents the second conclusion, concerning reflective processes.

**Conclusion 2: Reflection-on-action, collaboration, planning, and problem solving.**

This section examines the reflection-on-action as used in student teaching as described by study participants. Though the participants did not use Schon’s (1987a) terminology of reflection-on-action, the researcher identified several occasions where this process occurred. First, the conclusion is discussed and then a brief implication for practice is presented.

The second conclusion of this study is: *reflective processes in student teaching include opportunities to reflect-on-action, collaborate, plan, and problem solve.* Many studies suggest that reflection is a fundamental aspect of learning (Dobbins, 1996; Dell’Olio, 1998; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Student teachers must
learn to question their thoughts, beliefs and practices in order to grow. One method of doing so is reflection-on-action as described by Schon (1987a). Many student teaching courses include reflective assignments, prompting reflection-on-action. In addition, reflection-on-action often occurs as student teachers engage in self-reflection, through the prompting of mentors, or via student teacher questioning of mentors. Reflection also occurs as the student teacher and mentor collaborate on future activities and as they work together to solve problems. Reflection-on-action provides an opportunity for student teachers to modify practices, make connections between theory and practice, and in generating classroom plans.

Reflection-on-action is important, both independently and with the mentor. Independent reflection-on-action by student teachers allows them to consider their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as possible modifications to practices. Reflecting with the mentor can lead to further or unexplored areas of reflection on the part of the student teacher. Alicia illustrated this in her comment:

…they would give me a weekly reflection on how my activities went for the week. What worked, what didn't work, what I should modify. They would give me hints and then I just took their advice and would do my own reflection. I would take the paper that they gave me home and then I would read it and basically reflect on it myself and kind of think of things that I could do to modify the plans. …I did my own reflections on the day that I implemented, but then I also reflected over the weekend after I received my reflections from my mentors.

Planning and collaboration between student teachers and mentors is reflective processing, drawing on the experiences of both. Finally, written reflections, often required as assignments
by college faculty, also contribute to student teacher reflection-on-action, sometimes via
prompts, and sometimes simply by virtue of being a requirement.

**Conclusion 2: Implications for practice.**

Reflection-on-action should be explicitly included in student teaching coursework. Though many courses currently require written reflections, opportunities for shared reflections with the mentor teacher should also be included. These could include shared discussion, planning, and collaboration. Student teachers would benefit from hearing mentor thoughts, ideas, and suggestions.

This subsection presented a discussion of reflective processes found to be an element of student teaching. From this discussion, implications for practice were presented. The following section presents the third conclusion, concerning mentor support in student teaching.

**Conclusion 3: Mentor support is fundamental.**

This section examines mentor support in student teaching. Participants frequently referenced aspects of support as critical to their student teaching experience. First, the conclusion is discussed and then a brief implication for practice is presented.

The third conclusion of this study is: *Mentor support is fundamental to student teacher reflection, including development of trust*, drawn from the category *supporting me in the right ways*. Daloz (2012) describes support as “…those acts through which the mentor affirms the validity of the student’s present experience” (p. 206) and further suggests that support promotes growth when there is an element of challenge included. Mentor support encompasses a wide range of elements, however, in this study, essential characteristics described by student teachers were developing trust, feeling safe and comfortable in the environment, coaching, providing feedback, being present, and collaboration. Elements of support and challenge allowed student
teachers to share their thoughts and ideas, and try new ideas in the classroom, and learn to make adaptations while in the midst of interactions with children.

Trust has been noted in other studies as an important element in the relationship between students and mentors (Daloz, 2012), and was also noted as essential by the student teachers in this study. Student teachers must feel trust in their mentor at many levels, for instance, trusting that the practices modeled are appropriate and effective, trust that the mentor will treat them with respect, trust that they are safe in asking questions and seeking help, and trust in the support of taking risks. Lindsey explained her perception of a mentor as follows:

Patience and a loving disposition. People grow and students that have lack of experience need that softness, need that patience and understanding. Then they begin to grow because they begin to trust you and if you’re comfortable, they’ll come to you with questions. If you’re harsh and demanding, like some mentors, some instructors… I have seen them be this way. They're intimidating. The students were afraid to approach them. So that held back their growth and their learning ability. When you’re soft and patient and loving and approachable, the students will thrive and come up to you and not be afraid of you. They come to you with their questions.

At the same time, mentors must develop trust in student teachers. This includes trusting student teachers to teach the children in their classroom, to plan and implement lessons, and to use appropriate actions in the classroom. Molly recognized mentor trust when she stated “…she has faith in me, faith and confidence enough in me to leave the class.” When trust goes both ways, the environment becomes comfortable and safe for the student teacher.

In addition to trust, creating a safe and comfortable environment includes welcoming exploration and inquiry, supporting students with feedback, offering suggestions for
improvements, recognizing strengths as well as weaknesses, coaching, and encouragement in skill development. Hailey described the positive environment created by her mentors:

…they are just the whole package and they never made me feel like I didn’t know what I was talking about or anything…They just made me feel comfortable and at ease, and really let me do things on my own. …I just felt supported. …they would just be there to help me and I knew they were there so that kind of helped me be at ease.

The student teachers in this study indicated that mentor support was vital to a successful student teaching experience.

**Conclusion 3: Implications for practice.**

The selection of the mentor and student teaching site is of concern when considering support. The selection or assignment of mentors and practicum sites in this study varied, including sites where mentors were assigned based on the age group that the student teacher wanted to work with, to assigned mentors, and mentors in the student teachers place of employment. However the mentor is assigned or selected, consideration should also be given to the mentor’s ability to create an environment of support. The mentor should be willing to fulfill the role, should have time available to spend with the student teacher, and should be able to provide feedback in a non-threatening way.

This subsection presented a discussion of mentor support as a significant element of student teaching. From this discussion, implications for practice were presented. The following section presents the fourth conclusion, concerning reciprocal-reflection-in-action.

**Conclusion 4: Reciprocal reflection-in-action in interactions.**

This section examines reciprocal-reflection-in-action as shared by the student teacher and mentor during the student teaching experience. Participants did not recognize reciprocal-
reflection-in-action during their student teaching experience; however, the researcher identified several occasions where this process occurred. First, the conclusion is discussed and then a brief implication for practice is presented.

The fourth conclusion of this study is: reciprocal reflection-in-action is an element of interactions between student teachers and mentor teachers. This conclusion is drawn from the category we learn by example. The adaptations in action described by the student teachers are examples of Schon’s (1987a) concept of reciprocal reflection-in-action. Student teachers asked for help, sometimes through direct requests, other times through actions, such as a glance at or a signal to the mentor. Sometimes mentors intervened when student teachers were observed to be struggling. Mentors responded immediately, with either intentional modeling or talk, offering student teachers a chance to reflect on mentor actions or comments and adapt their own responses accordingly. Molly’s mentor combined both, using what Molly termed “cross talk”, meaning the mentor would talk through her actions out loud while modeling the actions. Molly’s description of how this worked follows:

…so if I am having a challenge in my area…maybe I am struggling… she would cross talk to me… to kind of remind me, “what about this?” …but in a cross talk way so I can still be in charge, but [she] is really expecting me to figure out what I need to do then. …she is giving me [an] idea of what are things I can do or the child can do. So she is helping both of us solve the issue in a different way.

Schon (1987a) describes the dialog between student and mentor as an effort for each to understand the meaning of the other. Student teachers use their understandings of theory and practice to guide their interactions with children. Mentors observe and interpret student teacher actions, responding to them through talk or modeling. Student teachers then have another
opportunity to interpret mentor comments and modeling through adapted action. The cycle continues as students continue to gain knowledge and strategies for teaching.

**Conclusion 4: Implications for practice.**

In order for the cycle of reciprocal reflection-in-action to work, the mentor must be present and willing to intervene as the student teacher works with children. The student teacher must be open to suggestions and ready to adapt. This in turn, requires the elements of support and trust discussed earlier. This reflective process between mentor and student teacher may be missed in cases where the mentor is not an active presence in the classroom, as in the case of a student teacher conducting their practicum experience in their own classroom.

This subsection presented a discussion of reciprocal-reflection-in-action as a significant element of student teaching. From this discussion, implications for practice were presented. The following section presents the fifth conclusion, concerning reflection-in-action.

**Conclusion 5: Reflection-in-action and adjustments during action.**

This section examines the reflection-in-action as described by study participants. Though the participants did not use Schon’s (1987a) terminology of reflection-in-action, the researcher identified several occasions where this process occurred. First, the conclusion is discussed and then a brief implication for practice is presented.

The fifth conclusion resulting from this study is: *Reflection-in-action is used in making adjustments to teaching while in the midst of action,* drawn from the category *fly by the seat of your pants.* Reflection-in-action occurs when “our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it” (Schon, 1987a, p. 26). In the case of student teaching, evidence of reflection-in-action is found in the adaptations student teachers make while in the midst of interactions with children, either during lesson implementation, moments of classroom
management, or in adapting the environment. Every student teacher in this study indicated that they adapted based on the responses of the children, which is aligned with best practices in the field. Further, in a presentation given at a meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Schon (1987b) identified listening to children as form of reflection-in-action, as he stated “when a teacher turns her attention to…. listening to what they say, then teaching itself becomes a form of reflection in action…” (p. 4). In addition, student teacher responses indicated this was a gradual process, beginning with reciprocal reflection-in-action and eventually moving to reflection-in-action. It appears that this progression leads to eventual reduction of the mentor role as the student teacher gains teaching skills.

**Conclusion 5: Implications for practice.**

The student teaching experience should be planned as a gradual progression of student teacher activity in the classroom, beginning with an observation period and moving through mentor-supported interactions to eventual independent interactions. This expected progression should be made explicit for mentors during their training. In addition, many student teachers mentioned mentor evaluations as part of their experience, often as an element of assessment in their college coursework. This is contradictory to the typical role of a mentor as outlined in traditional mentoring literature, in which it is thought that the prospect of evaluation harms the mentor-mentee relationship (Anderson, 2007). However, it is evident that evaluation is part of many mentoring experiences in student teaching, as it was mentioned by several student teachers in this study. In cases where evaluation is a part of the assessment process, reflection-in-action could be considered as a sign of student teacher growth. Indicators could include the ability of the student to engage in reflection-in-action independently, and whether the resulting actions are appropriate.
This subsection presented a discussion of reflection-in-action as an important element of student teaching. From this discussion, implications for practice were presented. The following section presents the sixth conclusion, concerning personal and professional growth.

**Conclusion 6: Personal and professional growth.**

This section examines personal and professional growth as identified by the study participants. Participants acknowledged significant growth during the student teaching process, as well as throughout the student teaching program. First, the conclusion is discussed and then a brief implication for practice is presented.

The final conclusion of this study is student teachers recognize personal growth as well as professional growth throughout the early learning program as well as in their student teaching experience. All student teachers recognized growth while enrolled in their early learning program. Reflective thinking has been noted as a process that helps student teachers connect theory to practice (Etscheidt, et al., 2012). Student teachers recognized growth in connecting theory to practice, either in developing intentionality in their planning or in recognizing theory and implementing theory in practice. In addition, elements of induction and recognition of self as teacher were also acknowledged. All are evident in the categories grow in so many ways and I’m glad I did it. Student teachers are developing a sense of self as teacher, an identity that they will carry forward into their career (Daloz, 2012; He, 2009). Identity is influenced by how one sees oneself reflected in the eyes of others (Harter, 1997). For student teachers, the concept of self as teacher is partially interpreted by the mentor’s vision of them as a teacher. This becomes important in how the mentor approaches feedback, critique, and in how the mentor responds to student teacher actions. Lindsey’s desire to be a mentor demonstrates the power of mentoring on student teacher identity:
I would love to be a mentor. Oh, I would love to be one. I wish I had the opportunity to be a mentor. I would love to help other students because I came from low self-esteem. I came from lack of confidence. And then I saw, I can do this, and now I no longer can say can't. I no longer can say I’m a failure because I succeeded and I did it. I want to give other students that opportunity that may feel kind of intimidating about the whole education role and being able to teach. If I can do it, they can do it and I want to help others to be able to do it.

Lindsey’s aspiration to become a mentor is evidence of the influence and power of mentoring upon the student teacher’s self-image. In addition, the actions and words of mentors are also an introduction to the profession of teaching for many student teachers (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987). Several student teachers indicated that working in a classroom gave them a view into the daily work of the profession, as well as the attitudes and dispositions of those who work in the field.

**Conclusion 6: Implications for practice.**

Mentors have influence on their student teachers, and as such, need to use care in their work with student teachers as their words and actions can influence the student teachers identity of self as teacher and their concept of work in the field. Not only are mentors modeling teaching skills and attitudes in their work with children, they are also modeling teaching as they interact with student teachers in their role as mentor. Mentoring is a complex activity that goes beyond simply teaching skills. As such, mentors would benefit from some type of training regarding mentoring in student teaching.
This subsection presented a discussion of personal and professional growth as described by participants. From this discussion, implications for practice were presented. The following section presents the implications of this study in regard to the conceptual framework used.

**Implications for Theory**

Donald Schon’s (1987a) concepts of reflection-in and on-action, as described in *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, served as a conceptual framework for this study. Three reflective processes were considered during the data analysis phases: reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, and reciprocal reflection-in-action. Based on participant descriptions the researcher was able to identify Schon’s (1987a) concepts of reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reciprocal-reflection-in-action as processes occurring during early learning student teaching experiences. Participant descriptions of adaptations made while in the midst of work with children indicate the occurrence of reflection-in-action, while reflection-on-action was identified in written reflections and during discussions with mentors. In addition, both concepts are related to modeling as participants observed their mentors while they were engaged in work. Reciprocal-reflection-in-action was found during the instances where mentors intervened in participant work, demonstrating or discussing alternative methods, and in the participant’s adapted response.

Based on the descriptions of the participants in this study, reflection-on-action appears to be a continuous and ongoing event. Participants began by observing and reflecting on the mentor’s actions as observed in the classroom and continue to reflect on classroom activities and their own work throughout practicum. For all participants, the next step of the student teaching process was to begin work in the classroom. Several participants described at least one cycle of reciprocal-reflection-in-action during this stage. In some cases, the cycle was initiated by the
mentor, through immediate intervention involving either modeling (demonstrating appropriate actions) or talk (explaining how to do it). The student teacher would then attempt to adapt their practice based on the suggestions. This may occur in one cycle, in a single moment, or over the course of several days, as the participant tried different adaptations, with mentor feedback. In other cases, participants began with reflection-in-action, with the realization that things were not proceeding as planned. Participants then requested help, thus initiating the cycle of reciprocal-reflection-in-action. Unexpectedly, it was through interview questions associated with the role of the mentor that evidence of reflection-in-action was strongest. The researcher assumed that in asking about adaptations in instructional strategies, classroom management, and the environment, that participants would describe elements of reciprocal-reflection-in-action, thus illustrating the role of the mentor. Though some instances of this were described, for the most part, participants described reflection-in-action. This is interpreted as evidence of participant learning and consequent reduction of the mentor role in the reflective processes. Participants were able to describe adaptations made based on their own experiences and on prior work with the mentor, in essence, describing reflection-in-action. From this, the researcher suggests that reflection-on-action is an ongoing process for student teachers, while reciprocal-reflection-in-action occurs once work in the classroom begins, and fades to reflection-in-action as the student teacher nears the completion of practicum. For these participants and this study, the early learning student teaching experience is confirmed as a reflective practicum using the reflective processes as described by Schon (1987a).

This section described the reflective processes found in the student teaching experience through the lens of Schon’s (1987a) concepts of reflection-on-action, reciprocal-reflection-in-action, and reflection-in-action. The researcher suggests that student teachers gain the ability to
use reflection-in-action as they near the end of the student teaching experience, resulting in a reduced role for the mentor in the reflective processes. In addition, the researcher suggests that for this study and these participants, Schon’s (1987a) concepts of reflective processes were confirmed. The next section examines implications for future research resulting from this study.

**Implications for Future Research**

This section describes implications for future study arising from this research. The suggested areas are drawn from the limitations of the study, from participant transcripts, from the researcher’s prior knowledge, and from examination of findings. Specific ideas are suggested in the following paragraph.

Several areas of future study arise from this research. First, the participants in this study were unaware of Schon’s (1987a) reflective processes. Repeating this study, with the inclusion of a brief tutorial for participants on Schon’s reflective processes prior to interviews might provide a different participant perspective. A limitation of this study suggests future studies examining the experience from various perspectives within the student teaching triad, such as examining the experience from the mentor or college faculty perspective. Other approaches could look at the dyads that form within the triad, such as mentor-college faculty, mentor-student teacher, or college faculty-student teacher. Next, a few student teachers mentioned additional mentors, including college faculty and other teachers at the site. This leads to the idea of developmental networks and a possible study of the role developmental networks play in student teaching. Additionally, further studies on how mentors are selected and trained would be of use. Methods of mentor selection appears to vary from campus to campus. In addition, mentor training is variable in early learning programs, with some providing training, some providing handbooks or guidelines, and other programs providing nothing. Research into various methods
of mentor selection, the delivery of training, and the efficacy of each would prove useful. Additional areas of interest arise as findings are examined. These include looking at the communications process embedded in the relationships of the student teaching triad and how those might affect reflective processes. A further suggestion might use management and leadership literature to leverage a study concerning mentor feedback. Finally, two future studies arise out of the additional insights of this study. Examining the effect of student teacher attitude and disposition in regard to how mentoring is perceived is of interest, as is a study exploring the concept that mentoring is student-initiated.

The researcher suggested several areas of future study arising out of this research. Suggestions include other aspects of mentoring, such as developmental networks and mentor training, as well as further study from the student teacher perspective. The following section will present general implications for practice.

**Implications for Practice**

This section will present several implications for practice on a broad scale. The researcher has developed these implications based on the perceptions of the participants within this study and with practical knowledge of her experience in the field. The following paragraph presents the identified implications for practice.

President Barack Obama has made early learning a priority at the national level, as indicated by the monies allocated for early learning in his proposed 2014 budget. His plan provides “a new comprehensive and coordinated vision of early education that would represent the largest federal investment ever in preschool and child care” (Nyhan, 2013, para. 1). His proposed budget allocates $75 billion dollars over the next ten years to partner with states in implementing and supporting universal access to high-quality early learning programs (Schorr,
In addition, the suggested budget allocates an additional $750 million to support states in building model programs (Schorr, 2013). National recognition of the value of early learning teachers is reflected in a report by the Equity and Excellence Commission noting “Highly effective teachers with specialized training in early childhood teaching get better results” (2013, p. 28). The suggested early learning investment in the proposed national budget, as well as the recognition of the role of early learning teachers in providing quality programs, indicates the timeliness and value of this study regarding student teaching in early learning teacher preparation programs. Further, the continued commitment to improving early learning by Washington State leaders is equally indicative of the value of this study for early learning teacher preparation programs in Washington State community and technical colleges. Interest in early learning continues to grow in Washington State, with the newly-elected Governor, Jay Inslee, (Washington State Office of Financial Management, 2013) continuing to offer financial support for early learning. In addition, as a recipient of the federally-funded Race to the Top Grant (Washington State Department of Early Learning, 2011), the state has made a commitment to continued improvement in the field.

This study is of value in Washington State, as it considers one component of early learning: the preparation of early learning teachers at the community and technical college level. From this study, the researcher identifies several implications for practices in student teaching that apply to all early learning programs. As stated in earlier conclusions, mentor training is of interest. This training should include trust and relationship building, as well as recognition of how mentoring occurs. Of course, as mentors are working teachers, time for training can become an issue. One way of addressing this would be to offer tuition credits at the sponsoring community or technical college. This provides a double professional development benefit to the
mentor, as they would receive both mentor-specific training and be able to enroll in a college course of their choice. Establishing mentor training is likely to occur at the program level, which has implications for policy and for consistency in teacher preparation. In addition, funding for training must be considered. Therefore, it is important to consider mentor training at a broader level. Perhaps this work could be considered by the statewide early learning faculty group.

A second implication is similar to the first, finding time for the mentor and student teacher to meet for shared reflections, mentor feedback, and planning. Perhaps additional funding could be found through the awarded Race to the Top grant money to fund a few hours a month of meeting time. In addition, it occurs to the researcher that some type of mentor network could be of use. Formation of a community of practice, where mentors could come together to share ideas, improve practices in their work with student teachers, and gather support from others would be beneficial. It is possible that this could be accomplished in an online format through existing social media. Including student teachers in this community of practice would provide additional opportunities for discussion and reflection, as well as, additional support from both mentors and fellow student teachers.

Finally, early learning programs should acknowledge the specific steps of mentor observation, working with the mentor in the classroom, and eventual independent work within the classroom through formalization of these steps within the coursework. This recommendation can be addressed by the statewide early learning faculty group presently active in Washington State.

This section identified several implications for broader practice across all state community and technical colleges. These implications have the potential to improve early learning teacher preparation, an area currently of interest in Washington State, as well as on a
national scale. In the next section, a summary and conclusion of this study is offered, along with implications for the researcher in her own practice.

**Summary and Reflections**

The following section concludes this study. A summary of the research is presented, along with identification of the reflective processes involved in the student teaching experience as perceived by the study participants. Finally, the researcher offers reflections on the implications in working with student teachers.

This study of reflective processes embedded in the work between mentors and student teachers in early learning programs in Washington State includes the perceptions of 13 former student teachers from seven community and technical colleges. Overall, it was found that reflective processes between mentors and student teachers include reflection-on-action, reciprocal reflection-in-action, and reflection-in-action. This study also found that mentor support is needed for these reflective processes to occur. Additionally, the student teachers in this study recognized personal growth while enrolled in early learning programs, as well as finding value in the student teaching experience. Further, this study offers insight into the perceptions of early learning student teachers at Washington State community and technical colleges. Though this study focuses on one aspect of the work between student teachers and their mentors, it is hoped that it will provide a forum for thoughtful discussion and further study in Washington State community and technical college programs. Finally, as a scholar-practitioner, the researcher engaged in this study in an effort to improve her own practices as an early learning college faculty member working with student teachers. Based on the findings of this research, the researcher offers the following reflections for her own practice:
1. Mentors must be carefully selected and be willing to mentor. If student teachers are allowed to self-select, they should be encouraged to choose a mentor based on quality of teaching rather than on convenience of site.

2. Mentors should be encouraged to create a welcoming environment and build a relationship of trust with student teachers.

3. Student teaching should progress from focused observation of mentor, to supported interactions with children, to independent interactions with children.

4. Mentor must be present and available during student teacher interactions with children.

5. Include requirements for written reflections by student teachers.

6. Ensure adequate time is built into student teaching model for shared reflections with mentor.

7. Include reflection-in-action as an indicator in student teacher evaluations.

8. Mentor training should be provided. This could be in the form of face-to-face meetings, an online forum, or provision of a handbook or guidelines.

9. Handbooks and trainings for mentor teachers should introduce the idea that student teachers develop their identity of self as teacher through their work with mentors. In addition, a reminder that the mentor is introducing the student teacher to work in the field should also be included.

10. Remind student teachers that they can initiate mentoring through seeking help and asking questions.

The goal of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of how student teachers perceived the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers in early
learning student teaching programs at Washington State community and technical colleges. This goal was achieved, as this research provides valuable insights for early learning teacher preparation program practices. Additionally, this study contributes to the broader educational community by adding to the literature on teacher preparation programs: first, as a response to current nationwide interest in improving teacher preparation programs (Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States, National Research Council, 2010), and second, by contributing to the study of early learning student teaching programs at community colleges, an area in which there is a scarcity of research (Whitebook, et al., 2009). This study also adds to the literature regarding viable and effective reflective processes in the mentoring of student teachers. Finally, this study contributes directly to the practices of the researcher in her work with student teachers during their practicum experiences at community-based early learning sites.
References


Appendix A: Key Informant Email

Dear Colleagues,

My name is Michelle Barnes and I am ECE adjunct faculty at Everett Community College. I am currently in the research phase of my doctoral studies at Northeastern University and am in need of study participants. The purpose of my study is to explore early learning student teacher perceptions of the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience in early learning programs at Washington State community and technical colleges.

I am interested in interviewing students or beginning teachers who have participated in a student teaching experience working with a mentor teacher within the last eighteen months. I need a total of 15 participants. I am asking for your help in contacting students who might fit these parameters. If you have someone who you think might be a good fit for my study, please pass them my contact information, along with this brief introduction. If you have any questions about my study, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you,

Michelle Barnes
[contact information supplied]

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Margaret Gorman Kirchoff
[contact information supplied]
Appendix B: Letter of Informed Consent

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Department of Education

Name of Investigator(s): Michelle Barnes, Doctoral Student, Dr. Margaret Gorman Kirchoff, Principle Investigator

Title of Project: Enhancing Reflective Processes: Early Learning Student Teacher Perceptions About Mentored Experiences

I am inviting you to take part in a research study. The goal of this study is to explore how early learning student teachers learned from their mentor teachers during their student teaching experience. This letter will explain what participation in the study means; however, I will also explain it to you. Please ask me any questions that you may have. Participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, I will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

We are asking you to participate in this study because you have completed an early learning student teaching experience at a Washington State community or technical college in the last two years. Participation in this study includes:

- Participating in an in-depth interview exploring your student teaching experience. This interview will last approximately 45 minutes and will be digitally recorded. You will be interviewed at a time and place that is convenient for you, or by phone.
- In needed, be available by phone for follow-up questions.
- After the interview is transcribed, a written copy will be sent to you for review. This is to ensure that I have accurately represented your point of view.
- In addition, I would like to examine any written reflections you have from your student teaching experience.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, by doing so you may help us learn more about the mentoring that occurs during the student teaching process, which may lead to improved student teaching experiences in the future.
Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated. Any reports or publications based on this research will not identify you or any individual as being of this project. Also, the digital recordings of your interview will be destroyed once the analysis process is complete.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact Michelle Barnes at [phone number] (voice mail is confidential) or by email at [email]. You may also contact Dr. Margaret Gorman Kirchoff at [email].
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, [contact information supplied]. You may call anonymously if you wish.

____________________________________________  _____ ___________________
Signature of person [parent] agreeing to take part                   Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________________  _____ ___________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent                   Date

_____________________________________________
Printed name of person above
Appendix C: Introductory Email

My name is Michelle Barnes and I am ECE adjunct faculty at a Washington State community college, currently working with student teachers. I am also in the research phase of my doctoral studies at Northeastern University and am in need of study participants. The purpose of my study is to explore early learning student teacher perceptions of their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience in early learning programs at Washington State community and technical colleges.

I am interested in interviewing you about your student teaching experience. This would take approximately 45 minutes and can be conducted at a time and place of your choosing, or if you prefer, via phone. If you are willing to participate, please respond to me at this email address and I will contact you with further information. If you have any questions about my study, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you,

Michelle Barnes
[contact information supplied]

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Margaret Gorman Kirchoff
[contact information supplied]
Appendix D: Direct Request Introductory Email/Letter

Hello,

… at … Community College suggested you as someone who might be able to help me with research that I am conducting on the early learning student teaching experience.

My name is Michelle Barnes and I am ECE adjunct faculty at a Washington State community college, currently working with student teachers. I am also in the research phase of my doctoral studies at Northeastern University and am in need of study participants. The purpose of my study is to explore early learning student teacher perceptions of their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience in early learning programs at Washington State community and technical colleges.

I am interested in interviewing you about your student teaching experience. This would take approximately 45 minutes and can be conducted at a time and place of your choosing, or if you prefer, via phone. If you are willing to participate, please respond to me at this email address and I will contact you with further information. If you have any questions about my study, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you,

Michelle Barnes
[contact information supplied]

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Margaret Gorman Kirchoff
[contact information supplied]
Appendix E: Interview Script

My name is Michelle Barnes and I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University in the Doctor of Education program. I have been working at community colleges in the field of early learning for the past 19 years. I have worked with cooperative preschools, in a campus laboratory preschool in the combined role of director, mentor teacher, and college faculty, and I am currently teaching a student teaching practicum course at a local community college.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this dissertation research. The purpose of this study is to capture the experiences of early learning student teachers in relation to their student teaching practicum, experiences with their mentor, and overall teacher preparation. This interview will have a specific focus on your reflections and learning. I would like to remind you that all information will be kept completely anonymous and confidential. No identifiable information will be used. Your participation is completely voluntary. If it is okay, I will be recording this session and I will provide you a copy of the transcript for your review. Is it okay to proceed?

1. Let’s start with a little background information to help me understand your experiences.
   a. Can you tell me a little bit about what you are doing now?
   b. How long ago did you complete your student teaching practicum?
   c. At what type of site did you do your practicum and how was that location selected?
   d. What was the age range of the children you were working with?
   e. And how about your mentor, how was he/she selected or assigned?
2. To help me understand more about your mentor experience, can you describe how that relationship was setup, how it evolved, or worked in your situation?
   a. How did your mentor help you reflect or think about your own learning or development or choices?

3. To help me understand about your student teaching practicum, can you tell me about times when you might have had to make adjustments in what you were doing and how you went about doing that?
   a. Can you describe adjustments you made in instructional strategies?
   b. Can you describe adjustments you made in classroom management?
   c. Can you describe adjustments you made in the learning environment?
   d. How did you make decisions about what adjustments to make?
   e. How did your mentor influence those adjustments?

4. In reflecting upon your overall teacher preparation experiences, can you tell me how you think about your own learning and development as a teacher?
   a. Can you tell me how you thought about the role of your mentor
      i. Before your student teaching experience?
         1. How did that change during your student teaching experience?
      ii. After your student teaching experience?

5. Any other final thoughts or reflections you would like to share with me?

Thank you for participating. I’ll be in touch with you about a copy of your transcript.
# Appendix F: Sample Coding Chart

## Sample Participant-Key Word Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>1a</th>
<th>1b</th>
<th>1c</th>
<th>1d</th>
<th>1e</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>Nanny</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
<td>Campus center assigned</td>
<td>Ages 3-5</td>
<td>Assigned College faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Nanny</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
<td>Campus center assigned</td>
<td>Ages 3-5</td>
<td>Assigned College faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Stay at home</td>
<td>December 2011</td>
<td>Campus center assigned</td>
<td>Ages 3-5</td>
<td>Assigned College faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey</td>
<td>Teachers Aid School District</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
<td>Campus center Assigned</td>
<td>Infant/toddler Ages 2-6</td>
<td>Assigned lead teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Teachers Assistant Head Start</td>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Campus center Assigned</td>
<td>Infants Pre-K room</td>
<td>Lead teacher in room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- SW</td>
<td>Subbing at Head Start, Early HS &amp; ECEAP</td>
<td>December 2011</td>
<td>Campus center Selected</td>
<td>12 month-3 yr Ages 3-5</td>
<td>Lead teacher in room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>Toddler Teacher</td>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Campus center Assigned</td>
<td>1-2 years Infant-PreK</td>
<td>Lead teacher in room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Lead Teacher, Head Start</td>
<td>March 2011</td>
<td>County Head Start site Selected</td>
<td>Ages 3-5</td>
<td>Lead teacher in room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>Assistant Director</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
<td>Private preschool &amp; childcare Selected (place of work)</td>
<td>Ages 2.5-5</td>
<td>Owner &amp; director, selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Co-op Teacher Play &amp; Learn Teacher</td>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>ECEAP classroom Selected (place of work, lead teacher)</td>
<td>Ages 3-5</td>
<td>Selected college faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hailey</td>
<td>Lead and Assistant</td>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td>Private Preschool</td>
<td>Ages 2 ½ - 5</td>
<td>Lead teachers (also owners)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ1: How do early learning student teachers describe the reflective processes embedded in their work with mentor teachers during the student teaching experience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. To help me understand more about your mentor experience, can you describe how that relationship was setup, how it evolved, or worked in your situation?</td>
<td>NOT TEACHING YET INTRODUCED SELF PLANNING, PREPPING COLLABORATION OBSERVE FIRST MODELING “CONFIDE” “ASK QUESTIONS” “NOT DUMB” OR “IRRELEVANT” “WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE” “GREW TO TRUST” MODEL: “CALM AND COLLECTED” HOW TO HANDLE THINGS HOW TO RUN THINGS “STRAIGHTFORWARD” “THIS IS HOW IT IS GOING TO GO” “HANDS-ON IN THE BEGINNING”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>It was underlined we hadn’t started with the teaching She introduced herself and told about her background We really spent a lot of time just planning and prepping Bounce ideas off of each other The first few days, so that we would feel more comfortable, she taught Really nice to see her interact and have that example set for us. I could confide in her I could go to her and ask questions and not feel as if my questions were, you know, dumb questions, or irrelevant questions She always had a wealth of knowledge I really grew to trust her in watching her interactions with the children See her handle situations very calmly and collected See how everything was ran so smoothly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Very straightforward and would tell you this is how it’s going to go. She was more hands-on in the beginning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And at the end, she kind of just stepped back
Let you get the fuller experience of it.
During the first few weeks, she would demonstrate for us.
She helped us go through everything
Tell us stories that would happen in the previous quarters.
If we had a problem or we didn’t know what to do, we’d have her come over.
She’d say what she thinks could go
You could either go off what she said
If you thought of some way to do or work out a problem, then she helped with that.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>2a. How did your mentor help you reflect or think about your own learning or development or choices?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Julia     | We wrote down on paper our reflections. She would make little notes in there. She’d mark in red on my paper and we would be able to continue conversations after that. A couple times throughout my quarter of working in the Lab School, she would actually have us be each individually, one at a time, come into her office and we’d sit down and we’d talk about, you know, how we feel things are going, you know, as a whole, as a group, with her as a teacher. I feel like she knew me, she knew my style of teaching. She knew just what to say to help give me an extra push to go the extra, you know, mile. It was really personal that way I really appreciated it.

. there was the papers and we would . . . they had questions about, you know, how we felt we did, how we felt the team had been working, how we felt our mentors could help us better and things like that. There was the one-on-one with my mentor teacher.

. . . every day we’d kind of debrief after we cleaned up. After all the parents and children left and we’d go, “Okay, well how do you think today went then?” That was really helpful too. We’d all sit down

“AT THE END …STEPPED BACK” “LET YOU GET FULLER EXPERIENCE OF IT” “DEMONSTRATE FOR US” “HELPED US” “TELL US STORIES” “HAVE HER COME OVER” MENTOR OFFERED HELP USE MENTOR SUGGESTIONS WOULD HELP YOU WITH OWN IDEAS

WRITTEN REFLECTIONS FEEDBACK FOLLOW UP CONVERSATION

SHARED REFLECTION KNEW ME KNEW MY STYLE “EXTRA PUSH” ENCOURAGE PERSONAL APPRECIATED GUIDED WRITTEN REFLECTIONS

ONE-ON-ONE WITH MENTOR. DAILY COHORT REFLECTION
together and we’d all talk about, “How was it from your angle?”

| Amy | At the end of each class … we went over what we did and what we saw in the class. | END OF CLASS REFLECTION COHORT |
Appendix G: Cross Check Participant/Themes

Table G1

Category 1 Participant Count

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Talk</th>
<th>Help</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindsey</td>
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<td>Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hailey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethan</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
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Table G2

Category 2 Participant Count

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sometimes it was out of the classroom</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>With mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
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<td>Amy</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Alicia</td>
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Table G3

**Category 3 Participant Count**

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<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Children’s Response</th>
<th>Switch/Flexible</th>
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<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindsey</td>
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<td>Angela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
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<td>Alicia</td>
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<td>Molly</td>
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Table G4

**Category 4 Participant Count**

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<th>Themes</th>
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<td>Create environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Jenna</td>
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<td>Diana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hailey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethan</td>
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<td>Claire</td>
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### Table G5

**Category 5 Participant Count**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 5</th>
<th>Grow in so many different ways</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Growth</td>
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<td>Amy</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
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<td>Lindsey</td>
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<td>Angela</td>
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<td>Jenna</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
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<td>Diana</td>
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<td>Hailey</td>
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<td>Ethan</td>
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### Table G6

**Category 6 Participant Count**

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<th>Category 6</th>
<th>I’m glad I did it</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Value</td>
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<td>Amy</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
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<td>Hailey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
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</table>
Appendix H – Participant Interview Summaries

Julia: Summary
Phone interview.
Graduated June 2012.
Campus center – assigned.
Ages 3-5.
Mentor – college faculty, assigned.
Student teaching was collaborative model with a group of peers. All worked together in planning curriculum and in the children’s classroom.
Currently nannying. Moved w/military after graduation to border town. Jobs require bi-lingual, currently working on acquiring second language, nannying in the meantime. Intent is to work in field.

Mentor offered emotional support, wealth of knowledge.
Mentor developed trust with student and among student peer group.

Modeling was key to this student’s experience. Mentor teacher began experience by teaching children, modeling environment, instructional strategies, and classroom management techniques. Students then had opportunities for hands on experience, supported by mentor.

Student began quarter insecure and lacking confidence. Was worried about asking questions because she thought the mentor would expect her to have the knowledge and skills prior to beginning. Instead, “healthy” relationship developed, mentor coached, was optimistic and positive. Also, student declared mentor had a “wealth of knowledge” and was “versatile” (“she could come up with all different types of ideas to help us out.”) Student gained confidence, feels like “I know what I’m doing” and “I know how to teach a story time or teach…art or something like that.”

Student felt she could confide in mentor, ask questions and not feel like they were “dumb questions or irrelevant questions.” “She not only, you know, I feel like she knew me, but she knew my style of teaching and she knew just what to say to help give me an extra push to go the extra mile.” Mentor developed safe and secure environment, “It was a safe environment to learn and grow and talk things out.”

Student frequently mentioned learning from observing her mentor teacher.

ROA: Written reflections were required, mentor offered feedback. Daily peer group reflections took place after class, guided by mentor. Mentor offered one-on-one a couple of times during the quarter. Student used reflection as she was planning for next class.

RIA: Mentor was present, sitting with children, during student’s teaching experiences. If student felt like she needed help “we kind of exchanged a glance and know that it was okay for her to jump in and that would help me for the next time to know, okay, it really is okay that I don’t have to do my exact plan as written out on paper if they don’t go the way that I had hoped.” Also, “after a couple of times of watching her do it and having her come over and help solve things, I was able to do it on my own.” When student was wondering whether to change an aspect of the environment based on current behavior of the children: “After looking at my mentor teacher and discussing with her, she was encouraging them to continue to make this elaborate spider web.”
**Amy: Summary**
Phone interview.
Practicum – March 2012.
Campus center – assigned.
Ages 3-5.
Mentor – college faculty, assigned.
Student teaching was collaborative model with a group of peers. All worked together in planning curriculum and in the children’s classroom.
Currently nannying.

Mentor was nice and straight forward. Told student teachers how it was going to go, told what to expect and how to respond. Later became hands-on.

Mentor stories and modeling was key for this student. Mentor demonstrated at first, told stories about what happened in previous quarters. Stepped back later to allow hands-on experience. “And then, in the beginning, she would…If we had a problem or we didn’t know what to do, we’d have her come over. And she’d say what she thinks could go, and you could either go off what she said, or if you thought of some way to do or work out a problem, then she helped with that.” Used daily group reflection to help “…if she picked up on something, she could tell us ‘well, maybe you should try this again next time’.” Also, student observed and reflected on what she saw other student teachers doing. “She told me stories…” “Once she told me that, I got better at arranging the activities so that each boy could participate…”

RIA: “And so the one kid that did want to do it, I had to re-say it about three times ‘til…I finally broke it down simply enough that I wasn’t giving him three commands at once for what we’re going to do and so that I could understand it better. And I had to switch and think, ‘Oh, yeah, what can…what are they full capable of saying or remembering what to do?’”

Had mentor teacher give direct modeling in behavior management and then followed it the rest of the year.

Used ROA to modify environment based on children’s behavior and mentor stories.

Student teacher felt supported by mentor. “Mainly, if we would get overwhelmed or something, she would notice it and help us.” Mentor provided guidelines, also taught student to take a break in action to quickly reflect. “…she would fill in for us and tell us that it happened before and just to go along with it and to reflect on what we did …” “That’s one way she helped me learn is because if I need to take a five-second break and need to walk away, then have someone watch your kids and just walk away and come back with a better mind and to kind of step out of what I’m thinking the problem is and to go more in depth of who did this and who did that.” “And then that’s when my teacher started helping me to realize you can do this and that towards the end, I kind of got better.”

Mentor helped at the beginning, later backed off “so that we could get the full-on experience of being in a preschool on our own, or a daycare.”

Mentor taught student to stay calm. “I learned the best way to handle any situation, that even if you are quite annoyed, from her, it’s to approach it calmly and to make…and let the children know that you’re calm.”
Had heard “pretty bad stories of other students who’ve gone through it and didn’t like it” about practicum. Thought it would be crazy and scary. She thought the mentor was really nice and helped a lot. “I thought they went a lot better than what I was expecting.”

Mentor videoed the students in action, then they reflected on the video together. “And it made me feel more empowered instead of defeated when I did it. And so the next time I had to do it, it really helped me know, all right, so I can do this and I was pretty good at it.” “It really helped me find what I could do better the next time, or if I am going to be in that situation again, I know how to handle it, better handle it.”

Student realized “And that it makes you take a step back in what you think – it’s going to be sunshine and flowers – to what hard work can fit into it and what you can get…what you can receive back from it.”
**Katie: Summary**

Phone interview.
Practicum – December 2011.
Campus center – assigned.
Ages 3-5.
Mentor – college faculty, assigned.

Student teaching was collaborative model with a group of peers. All worked together in planning curriculum and in the children’s classroom.
Currently stay-at-home Mom, violin lessons.

Student was put-off and disappointed that mentor teacher was new to lab school. Felt there was a big build up to practicum and then mentor was inexperienced in program. Said mentor seemed competent and very excited, she was comfortable talking to her. “I feel that the actual value of the experience didn’t come from the mentor, it just came from the experience with the children and with actually being able to try some things out that we wanted to try out.”

Stated that over the quarter the relationship got better and it got worse. There was a lot of pressure, plus a personal issue adding to it. Mentor was understanding, offered emotional support, was “open to helping”, allowing student to be gone for a day as needed, allowing her to make things up and still feel like part of the group. “It got better and worse and better and worse; stuff that think mostly … I think it was mostly personality conflict. I’m a very timely person. When class ends, it should probably end at a certain time … and it really didn’t do that and so there was a lot of sitting around and talking after work.” (Later notes that a lot of things were learned through the after class reflections)

Student felt a lot of pressure switching over curriculum each week, found it really intense.

Student used RIA during class – observing children, thinking about situation, responding. Felt conflict with mentor – mentor would intervene when student was trying to observe a situation. Student got a lot out of observing various styles of peers in classroom.

“With the mentor it kind of ended up happening behind the scenes and afterwards. That was more with like my fellow students and myself; it more happened during the moment” ROA/RIA

Thought some of the ROA occurred from not “…understanding of hierarchy and responsibility. Like we kind of didn’t really know where that really lies.” Therefore issues were addressed after class rather than in the moment.

Responded to children’s behavior with shifts in environment and plan (RIA). Talked about need for flexibility with peer group (ROA).

Recognized moments of theory-to-practice, seeing program philosophy in action. Drew on own life experiences.

Liked stories in other classes, wished program offered more practical stories and less theoretical concepts. Started out nervous about working in front of other people. Lab school had one-way-observation room, never knew if teachers/parents/peers were watching. Eventually became comfortable and confident, realized teachers will always be under scrutiny. Found this to be biggest piece of growth.

Mentor influence “…I think just allowing us to just be was good.”
Felt that role of mentor broke down for her. “I think it just broke down for me to begin with because I didn’t really know the person and this was a program that I was in that was such a big build up to practicum and it was such a big build up to the whole philosophy that we’d been learning. And so, a lot of it’s my fault because I didn’t actually give the persona a chance.”

Realized it’s not just modeling for the children…” that is a thing that the mentor does do, but it wasn’t really that it was just more of taking care of everybody because the class that we took, it was the last school where the mentor was there and she was in charge of everybody’s safety and everybody’s welfare and all of that and that was a little rusty.” Saw the mentor in a different light in the planning portion. Supportive, helped to develop ideas, was excellent. “…had I had that same relationship in classroom would have felt better about it.” Added “I do realize that a lot of it was my own personal attitude to begin with and a lot of it was the style of the program that I was in.” “I very much had my own views on how I really wanted that quarter to go.”

Commented on how her personal life changed so much and that the mentor “was so very supportive on every other plane that it really made up for all of the things I thought which were shortsighted and very supportive aspect and the reality of life …”

“I feel like that’s really needed to be said because it sounds like it’s a really negative, but it actually ended up being extremely positive.”

“And I feel like the lab school that I learned in was incredible because I learned things that I didn’t even know that I was even going to learn.” “And you grow where you’re supposed to, even though you don’t really know or want to grow in that area; you’re gonna grow there no matter what.”

Reflections happened after school (ROA), in peer group (ROA), personal (ROA). Also through collaboration with peer group.

Mentor teacher was “…so hands on to begin with and then she let go like quite a bit and I think that’s because she kind of trusted us more and so that kind of helped us to learn to trust each other and to trust our instincts.”

“Because really the lab school basically makes it so that you can try out what you want to do and where you want to go and while somebody’s still kind of there that it seems to me is actually ultimately responsible…” “…that person is responsible for safety and for …that you can try out different activities and I think that’s so important.”
Lindsey: Summary
Phone interview.
Practicum – June 2012.
Campus center – assigned.
Infants & Toddlers, Ages 2-6.
Mentor – center staff (lead teachers), assigned.
Up to three student teachers in room, different levels of practicum
On-call teacher’s aide, school-district.

Mentors introduced selves in college classroom, gave opportunity to know them a little before starting. Worked with multiple mentors over several practicums, main one was 15 hours/week with “lab teacher.”

Had to learn to be flexible “…each day was different, so we had to adjust, we all had to adjust to different situations, different surroundings, and they were phenomenal in being flexible.” “They taught…me how to be flexible and how to handle each difficult or pleasurable situation.”

First observing mentor, eventually implementing plans.

Learned to redirect through mentor modeling, how to “keep on track.” Knew to move on when children’s attention wasn’t on her any longer (RIA). Learned to adjust plan to how children were reacting (RIA). Mentor modeled flexibility, “I learned to be flexible and the mentor showed me how such flexibility was really important.”

Modeling and feedback: “…they showed by example how they did it, and then when my assignment was due, they had me do it, and they observed me, and took notes, and then when my activity was done, then they would guide and direct me and show me, what …where I could improve, where I did really well.”

Theory to practice – mentioned learning in classroom with advisor or instructor, during lecture, then assignments and tasks that related. Prepared “activity guide and implemented it for what our plan was. And then, the mentor we were assigned to, observed, took notes, and guided us along the way” (RIA and ROA).

First watched mentor, then as gained confidence, worked with children. “If I needed assistance, and I just couldn’t find a word, and I was just being ineffective, then I asked my mentor to step in. And then I observed some more, how she handled that situation. And then if there was another situation, then I’d try a different skill or a different way about handling it and approaching the situation”

Theory to practice, emergent curriculum: learned how kids study, how taught. Go into classroom with mentor, observe. Communicate together, share ideas, get suggestions, implement, mentor observed, took notes/graded. Moved on when children were not interested or tired of activity. Followed their interest, led to impromptu activity (RIA). Also, expanded activities based on reactions. Learned to expand activities based on observation of mentor, instruction from instructor, reminded that “…children teach us. And so we learn from them, so go and take advantage of that opportunity. When they’re interested in something else, how can I make this activity expand, and expand with knowledge and education and experience, on what they are already interested in?”

Reflections: one-on-one with mentor twice/semester (ROA), lecture once a week, peer review (ROA), after activities (ROA)
Student entered college expecting to fail “education is so hard for me, I knew I wasn’t going to make it” “But, it’s something, I got to give a try” “And when I left...I was a totally different person. I was confident, I had better self-esteem. I was stronger, a stronger individual. I grew a huge amount. So totally different.” Came from multiple sources: hands-on experience, learning to be observed by others.

Very intimidated by own ability, very insecure at start. During student teaching “…that went away. I became stronger, more open, more flexible, more confident because I had knowledge now. Because the knowledge is power, and the more knowledge I gained from the various different instructors and mentors, the more powerful I felt and confident because I had knowledge now.” “And everyone that knew me, just saw me blossom, saw me grow.”

Mentor gave emotional support and worked alongside: “…she said ‘you can do it. You can do this. I’ll help you through it. You can do this. I have confidence in you’.” “And when I just shook my head, and can’t, then let’s do it together then. They stepped in and we did it together.” “Instead of feeling like I failed in an activity, they stepped in and did it with me, and I was… in an underlying way, able to observe as the activity proceeded and kept going” (RIA)

Student would love to be a mentor, to give back what she got. “I no longer can say I’m a failure because I succeeded and I did it. I want to give other students that opportunity that may feel kind of intimidated about the whole education role and being able to teach. If I can do it, they can do it and I want to help others to be able to do it. I would love to be a mentor.”

Mentor: patience, care, loving disposition, trust, comfortable to approach. “People grow and student that have lack of experience need that softness, needs that patience and understanding. Then they begin to grow because they begin to trust you and if you’re comfortable, they’ll come to you with questions.” “…when you’re soft and patient and loving and approachable, the students will thrive and come up to you and not be afraid of you.”
Angela: Summary
Phone interview.
Campus center – assigned.
Infants, Pre-K.
Mentor – center staff (lead teachers), based on room selection.
Up to three student teachers in room, different levels of practicum
Teacher’s assistant, Head Start class.

Met mentor teachers in meeting prior to entering classroom. Met as a group, then assigned to classroom/mentor. In meeting, mentors set expectation for student teacher: what they would do, the goals of their room, daily schedule.

Mentors were always available for questions. Could ask at end of day, before leaving. Could also ask right in the middle of something. Sometimes in classroom, sometimes out of classroom. Mentors offered suggestions and support.

During work with children, student would look to mentor “…where I would…kind of look in her direction because she was usually there with me…not sitting next to me but like for instance, if it was during a circle time…she would be sitting on the outside of the circle so sometimes, she might remind me…” about things like timing.

Shifted directions during activity based on children’s interest. “…we have those times where emergent curriculums just pop up and …if it’s not working, we got to switch gears because…we want to keep the kids interested in what we’re doing.” Mentors didn’t mind at all: “…and they a lot of times were like…”that was a good catch that you did that and did not try to stick to exactly what was planned out if that’s not working”

Mentors and students knew each other well, knew if there were toddlers that were more bonded to other adult, would switch off with them as needed based on child’s response.

Presented lesson plan to mentor, mentor would provide input, “well, maybe we can try this or we have this available. Maybe we can do this or that, and so it was kind of like a collaboration between what I had originally presented and them letting us know what they had available as well.”

Two students/one mentor.

Mentors taught her a lot, learned to be more confident. Confidence came from experience but also from “…knowing that they were there backing me up if something were to go wrong…”

Would look to mentors when needed help: “if you gave them a look of like, oh, my gosh, what do I do?” They are always there to give you confidence.

Taught her to keep things open-ended. “You know, talk to the kids. Never be afraid to ask questions. Ask the kinds what they want to know. You know, what do they want to learn?”

Also, not to worry if things are going according to plan. “It’s just your guideline to follow. If thing…get off of that a little bit, that’s okay”
Gained this learning by “doing it” and “by them just talking. Talking to me” They would give ideas, were there to guide us. “…or they would say ‘I remember when this happened to me, and …it’s okay…we’ve all been there’.” They also give new ideas to try, offer resources.

“…they’re letting us lead, but they’re also guiding us along the way.”

Begin by observing, end by working as lead teacher.

Wasn’t sure what to expect before starting, experience was structured to level of student teaching.

Was “…completely scared” before starting. “…I didn’t know what they were talking about. I didn’t know what was going on…when I got in there.” Having peer group discussion/reflection in seminar setting really helped.

Loved it and misses it. “We all felt like a big family, and so it was, it was hard to leave.” “It’s one of those things that kind of sticks with you.”

Relates back to experiences from student teaching: “…like the experiences that I have now working for…. I can always relate back to ‘Well, I remember when this happened to me the first time…and how I felt.” “And I’m like…I can handle this. I can. I can do this.” Gained a sense of confidence. “”I felt that sense of confidence and just that sense of I can do it and this is…what I want to do and I can do it.”

Observe and reflect (ROA)
Seminar reflections (ROA) “it was nice to have class once a week were we would…reflect on what had went on, what we were doing, what we could try, what went wrong…what we could do differently.”
Seminars were college instructors.

Met with mentors at certain times of year or if they felt like they needed to meet with student.

Great experience. Gets you read to go out and work.

“I was really thankful that I did have great mentors along the way and I still feel if I needed to go to them for something going on that I could still do that.”
Jenna: Summary
Phone interview.
Practicum – December 2011.
Campus center – choose room.
Ages 3-5, 12 months – 3 years.
Mentor – center staff (lead teachers), based on room selection.
Subbing in Early Head Start.

Student felt like she did not need much mentoring based on prior experiences as a parent in Head Start. “….mostly just need mentoring on making sure I was doing things correctly…."

Student felt that she only needed “…affirmation that I was following developmentally appropriate stuff, kind of double-checking my things to be sure I was doing things correctly, but for me, personally, most of my needs were just observation-based.” The philosophy of the particular classroom led to a lot of observation (RIE – observation based philosophy, kind of emergent).

Interviewed mentor teachers after room selected. Began practicum series with observations. Met with mentor teachers once/week for one hour. It was an opportunity to ask questions. Also, could ask questions during practicum class. Kept a daily journal (will try to send some pages).

Student made theory to practice connection: “I pretty much would just come into the practicum classroom and build on those skills that I learned about but hadn’t put into practice yet.” “I didn’t really have a whole lot of questions. It was more observations.”

Reflecting back on experience: “Now, I feel like I was kind of on my own, but I didn’t feel that way at the time.” Asked a lot of questions for confirmation of progress. Did not recall any “direct mentoring.” “It was more of just encouragement…”

Student reviewed plans with mentor prior to implementation. Based planning on in-class observation of students, knowing the children. Might make adaptations in class based on what is happening, would go to mentor teacher to talk about making a change in the plan.

Student was able to understand a prior classroom experience better after taking classes.

Student thinks guidance is “…probably knowing your classroom and knowing your teachers, knowing your kids and knowing when it is appropriate and when it is not.” Unless “preapproved to handle those situations, it is best to at least look at the teacher and see what their cue is for you to do or say…” Also mentioned collaborating with other teachers in the room.

Environmental changes are in response to children. “You have to be aware of what is going on with the kids.”

Student felt strongly that she did not need much mentoring “this was not my first experience” and “I was not as needy as some people that I went to school with.” Recognized that need for mentoring varies by student: “…you have people that are coming to get their degrees that are administrators at childcare centers, you know 15-years of background in classrooms. Their needs are not the same as someone who has never been in a classroom before.”
Student recognized need for student teaching experience to gain teacher perspective. “It was wonderful. I needed it. Even though I said I don’t need it, I had. I literally had no clue as to the other side of the classroom and the teacher perspective.” Again, recognized theory to practice: “…just taking on those skills that I had learned in my college classes and applying them into the classroom was a really good experience.”

Student did not think about the student teaching experience as a mentoring experience when she was in it. “I think, for me, it was just like I built relationships to some extent with these teachers and then we just kind of coexisted in the classroom. When I had questions, they were there to answer them for me. Kind of give me encouragement and let me know that yeah, I was on the right track and doing the right thing.” “…I would not necessarily feel that I was heavily mentored…” Student felt like she got more mentoring from her college professor than from mentor teachers: “I kind of feel like I got a little bit more mentoring from her that I did from probably my practicum teachers.” “…I was just more comfortable in the classroom and I was so familiar with the environment that I didn’t have a lot of needs. I had more needs and more mentoring for the bookwork.” (Needed more support in the theoretical aspect than the practical aspect).

Student felt like she gained “behind the scenes” knowledge of teaching. “So it was just like ‘oh, these are all the things you teachers are doing kind of behind the scenes that I did not notice so much’.”

“…I was really low maintenance. It was like I kind of put it all together myself and that is why I say I needed it more from [my college professor], the theoretical, than I did of the mentoring type thing in the actual classroom.”
Alicia: Summary
Phone interview.
Campus center – assigned.
Ages 1-2 years. Infant-pre-K.
Mentor – center staff (lead teachers), based on room selection.
Toddler teacher.

Student felt that mentoring is vital to student teaching: “I just think that it’s vital in education, in the field of education, to have somebody that already has the experience for you to be able to ask the questions of and …you can bounce ideas off of whether they’re going to work or not going to work. I think it’s vital to the student.” “It was vital to me to have somebody that had already been through the schooling and already been working in a classroom for years, could give me their opinion or input on how I was doing things, and their ideas on my activities, and if I was reaching the goals of the children. I don’t think that I would have learned as much as I did, or be the teacher that I am, without a mentor.”

Student met mentor on first day of practicum. It worked because everyone was flexible. Student felt mentors were they to help. “very supportive” “really helped me learn a lot” “…I really freaked out or got upset when it was time for me to start planning activities; I was worried that I wasn’t going to hit the goals of the children. And…they kind of walk you through it and show you how just even meeting the basic needs of the children, you’re teaching them.” Observed first, then assessment, then moved to planning/implementation. “…in full control the whole final year of your practicum.” Shared with up to three students, varying practicum levels.

Mentors would talk through activity plans with student, share opinions. Mentor and student would reflect together after implementation. Student reflected on own activities after implementation. Mentors provided student with a weekly reflection on student’s activities. Student would follow with own reflections after reading mentor reflections. Would adapt based on these reflections. Reflection with peers in college course, all same practicum level.

Student feels that discussion and reflection is valuable in this field: “…discussion is so valuable in this field, discussing and reflecting, and just talking about new ideas is huge, it’s very important.”

Student based adaptations on needs of the children, would respond to the children.

Asked mentor lots of questions about classroom management. Took their advice and applied it. Researched at NAEYC and applied it.

Mentor would intervene as needed in the classroom, modeling and talking to student. “…that’s the way I learn best is if they were to do it right then and there.” They would explain the theory behind the practice: “…’oh, this is why we don’t do this and this is how you should do it’.” Student would directly ask for help as needed: “I just said ‘I don’t know what I’m doing and I need help’.”

Student had many opportunities to reflect with mentors: “They were great about making times to discuss things.” Also had end of quarter reviews, including goal setting.

Student was nervous at the beginning. Thought that she would be judged as a parent, eventually realized it was not related and let it go. Student used to feel “paranoid and nervous” about people watching her. Mentor observation/videoing got her used to. Appreciates observation and feedback now.
Student was “…thankful and appreciative of it because, I realized that they were there to make me the best teacher I could possibly be.” Student felt very supported “…I was like the quiet one that would sit in the back of the classroom and not raise my hand and because I had such great support from my mentors, by the end of my career I was giving speeches about what really helps.”

Left program with a goal to be a mentor teacher. Works with former mentors as a peer now, is a mentor-teacher herself. Goes to former mentors for help in mentoring her own students.

Student experienced transformational learning: “…like I said, I wouldn’t raise my hand and ask questions in the beginning, I was super shy and inverted, and through all of the early childhood courses, they kind of bring you out of your shell. So, it enabled me to ask questions and not to be afraid to speak my mind, and to know that I have a voice and I should use it. It did help me learn through that…It changed my whole life. It made me a different person.”

Student retained reflective practices, reflects daily and weekly.

Mentors used constructive criticism. Mentor approach was positive. Turned negative situations into a positive example. “I realized they weren’t out to get me; they were there to help me through it.”
Molly: Summary
Phone interview.
Practicum – March 2011 (per data sheet).
Head Start - selected.
Ages 3-5 years.
Mentor – lead teacher at site, plus manager at work.
Lead teacher at Head Start. Different site than practicum.
Transcribed by researcher.

Participant felt mentoring was valuable because it connected what she learned in college classes to the classroom. It helped her to realize this was a field she wanted to work in.

Mentoring began with a week of observation and learning the classroom routine. Mentor helped with planning and participant took over the class with mentor helping. Mentor and student teacher reflected at the end of the day “…when class was done…at the end of the day we would sit down together and she would tell me ‘this is what you did, this is how you did’ and she would ask me ‘how did you feel about it?’” Participant and mentor worked on lesson plans together, also reflection together. “So reflection we did every day, after class is over. Reflect on what happened, how did we do, what should we try again, or what we did right and stuff like that.”

Mentors helped her learn to “switch gears” and follow children’s interest. Mentor would be in the classroom, give participant “a sign” or ask a question that would remind her to switch gears. Eventually participant was able to do it on her own. “She would remind me, she would stand in the classroom, she would kind of make a sign with her hand, or smile, or put her hands up…or ask a question just to remind me to switch my gear and that is how she would help me. And before I know it, I found myself being able to switch a gear or connect what the children are saying, rephrase a little par or rephrasing it and turn it to what I am reading.”

Mentor would help by using cross talk – a way of talking to children that guided the student teacher. It allowed student teacher to remain in charge while redirecting activity as needed. “…so if I am having a challenge in my area, should not come to me and overtake…she would cross talk to me…to kind of remind me, like ‘what about this?’ but in a cross talk way so I can still be in charge, but is really expecting me to figure out what I need to do then.” “We are talking about a child, but actually, she is giving me idea of what are things I can do or the child can do. So she is helping both of us solve the issue in a different way.”

Mentor pointed out where difficulty might lie, but had participant persist in plans to see difficulty for herself, then used cross talk to help her solve the problem. “…we were rearranging the class and she noticed what I did was going to cause some running space for some kids we have in the group, but she told me…‘this is what I think and I don’t want you to change it – I want you to see what’s going to happen’.” During class when problem occurs, mentor prompts with cross-talk.

Participant was nervous at beginning. “I was nervous, because when somebody is mentoring you they have to write a review of what they think of what you do. It’s scary.” “But I was nervous about … how she is going to handle me, what she going to do or if she would be open-minded enough for me to learn, or is she just going to one to criticize me.” “But at the end of the day, I really learn a lot and I think after the first review, no, the second review, I kind of feel relaxed and it’s okay. … that she’s just trying to help you learn and it’s going to be okay.”
Participant relates most of what she does in the classroom to her student teaching experience. “It was fun and actually I enjoyed it. I mean, being a lead teacher in my classroom now, most of the things I am doing is what I learn from it. So, I will recommend it for anyone.”

Participant recognizes value of experience: “…it’s easy to go to school and not have the experience. Practicum gives you the experience.” “So, to me it’s like ‘oh…this what it means, oh…’ I didn’t realize this, because it’s so easy to read and think this is how things are. But at the end of the day, we are really doing it, you realize it’s kind of different.” “…it’s entirely different when a child talks to you or they smack you or they do something and you are like ‘I thought this would be easy – they are little children’ but it’s totally different.” “…I look back and it is because of my practicum. Because, without that, I would never be able to know how to handle this or do things this way.” “…doing the ECE classes was easy because I had children at home. So going home, I would do my assignment with them, I would do some experiments with my kids. But I know the practicum changed the dynamic of it because having my children is different from somebody else’s kids.” Participant sees practicum as a way to allow a person to experience the job “…if somebody don’t take the class and there’s no practicum and you finally go to real work, you may find out you’re in the wrong job.” “You have to have the connection, yes, of both of them to really know what you are getting yourself into.”

Theory to practice: “…before I get my practicum I had to do some other classes. Those were tough because they make me struggle a lot. Because of the coordination of these classes with what I was doing. But by the time I was in my practicum, I can see the connection between doing some science or this area of requirement with my practicum.” “When I actually get into practicum and I see different things…oh, I see this is what they were talking about …I have to remember this, for sure I have to remember that. So those connections end up making sense.”

Participant admired and wanted to emulate mentor: “…she’s a very effective teacher and I hope I can be like her…"
Caroline: Summary
Phone interview.
Practicum – June 2012.
Private preschool/childcare – selected – place of work.
Ages 2.5-5 years.
Mentor – owner/director.
Transitioning to assistant director.

Participant found value in doing her student teaching practicum at her place of work under the mentorship of the owner/director: “…I got to look at the situation and the requirements from the class and kind of look at it through different eyes.” “I actually got to go into the classroom and make those changes.” “So I actually go to do things that made a difference.”

The mentor encouraged the student to develop a network with other professionals in the area. “…she helped me to get out into the county to meet with other professionals and encouraged me to go to other gatherings where other people were. So that has made a big difference in a lot the things that I do, I have a lot more connections now.” The site is located in a “really small town” “... we don’t have as many people surrounding us that are in, that are pushing and working in those professional ways…” “…I have made connections throughout so now when I go to professional development, I get to, I have a lot of resources and I have a lot more mentors that I can reach out for different things.”

Participant learned to adapt based on responses of children in activities: “…sometimes if I take a book that I am trying to read to the group that’s just not capturing the moment, they’re not interested, and they’re clearly not paying attention, you kind of have to wrap up what you’re doing and take their lead and either …do it in a different way or just kind of end the activity and move on to the next so that the kids are engaged and happy and the transitions are smoother.” Also in environment: “…if I didn’t set it up correctly and I didn’t give the expectations of the activity itself, and I just assumed, maybe that they would know what to do in that situation, then I would have to stop the activity, back up and either change it because it’s gotten too much or start over and introduce it in the proper way…” “…I’ve had to…change plans in the middle of what I’m doing and be flexible.”

Mentor helped participant learn to transition children into activities “…it might be the children who are coming in late…we need to make sure that we are including them and not just assuming that they’re going to… join right into what’s happening, they need a little bit more support in that and of course we are always encouraging and making sure that we’re being aware when children will need more support than others when they come into a group setting.”

Mentor was encouraging and talked to participant, also used modeling: “I’ve had her do story time before and watched how she read storied and interacted with the kids during, like a small group time or watcher her…encourage the kids writing their stories or whatever they’re working on with their papers. And the way she interact with kids, just wanting to show her the puzzle they finally completed on their own and they are so proud of, and the way she interacts with those kids.” Learned by observation and reflection.

Participant sees herself as much more intentional in her teaching: “I have noticed that I’m much more intentional in the activities that I plan. I’ve been in this field for ten years now, and in school for three of those, the last three of those. In that time I have discovered that my activities and my thinking, and my words with children and families in much more intentional and I have much more purpose behind it. I can explain why it is I’m choosing that activity or doing something in this way, where before I think it was a lot of instinct and maybe some training, on-site training from early on in my career.” Participant is
making a theory to practice connection. “I understand what I’m doing better now. I understand what I’m doing better than before when I was just doing things. And so, because I understand the ideas behind it I can choose to make better choices with my time and with the children’s time.”

Participant was unsure at the beginning of mentoring what it would be like: “I wasn’t sure what was going to be involved with it, really… I didn’t give too much thought into it, I wasn’t sure what I was going to do with that time…” Found that it gave her time to try out ideas “…because I got to do it at the place that I work at, I had some really specific ideas in mind of things that I wanted to see different in the classroom. And that opportunity gave me the chance to make those changes or try things that maybe didn’t work out that I had originally planned on.” After the experience, the participant felt “…it was nice to be able to apply …those ideas and those theories in a situation that was important to me, because I was already working in that environment and so it wasn’t just some ideas in a notebook that I tried or I did, but they actually made a difference with children.”

Mentor helped her fine tune her goals and also to narrow down big ideas to something doable. Participant felt that doing student teaching in practicum “…having it done in this way was much better because I had the right people supporting me in the right ways.” “More for a purpose, there was something that was going to be accomplished by the end that felt much different than just kind of getting on the job training kind of mentors.”
**Diana: Summary**
Phone interview.
ECEAP classroom – place of work.
Ages 3-5 years.
Mentor – college faculty.
Co-op teacher, new school. Also Play & Learn.
(Both through Volunteers of America)

Participant had many years of experience teaching in ECEAP program and was a lead teacher in her own classroom at the time of practicum. She was hoping to audit classes because of her years of experience, but decided to take the courses, and in the end found them to be of benefit. “I think I’m really glad that I went through it and didn’t try to get out of it like I was originally going to do.” “I think that it was really beneficial to me…”

Participant also still feels connected to mentor: “I … feel like there’s still a connection…I know that I have resource there if I need it at any time.” Felt that mentor relationship developed into teamwork. “…just talking, the relationship built as more of a teamwork relationship for me.” Also developed trust “….I think as you get closer, as you work together, as you spend time, so that trusting relationship.” “I think the mentor that I had was really good about pointing out a lot of positive things I was doing and also had some wonderful ideas on…things that she saw that we could improve on.”

Participant felt that she became a better teacher: “I think a lot of the requirements for my classes helped me become a better teacher…” Participant developed confidence and gained understanding of theory behind practice: “I think the biggest thing is it’s helped me feel more self-confident and also knowing why I’m doing what I’m doing.” Participant became more intentional in her work: “Going from maybe, ‘oh, this could be a fun activity and I know the children will enjoy it’ to ‘yeah, I can still make it fun, but I have a specific reason to move them to the next step. I would say that would be…the biggest change in my teaching.”

Mentor and participant shared reflection-on-action after mentor observations: “Well, the best, most valuable tools to me was she would come and observe me and then we would meet after the class…being able to look through her eyes and kind of see, hear what she heard or noticed, I would say was the most helpful. Then we would kind of brainstorm together on some ideas.” Mentor ROA helped make lasting changes: “So that has changed a lot of things for me. ….it just really made me think about wait times and how disruptive that is and that’s something I hadn’t really thought about. It also has caused me to do some work, maybe game playing while we’re waiting in line versus just standing and watching the children that aren’t doing what I’ve asked them to do.”

Mentor saved all suggestions/comments for ROA, no RIA.

Participant makes adjustments to instructional strategy, classroom management, and environment based on the reactions of the children. (RIA).

Participant was nervous about being observed and critiqued, but drew on prior experience with mentors to realize it was of benefit to her.

**Hailey: Summary**
Phone interview.
Private preschool.
Ages 2½ -5 years.
Mentors – selected, two lead teachers/owners.
Lead and assistant preschool teacher at former practicum site.

The participant selected two mentors at her practicum site and worked part-time with each of them during her practicum. She selected the site after occasionally subbing for the teachers. She felt that she was able to gather more knowledge by working with two mentors and that each had specific areas of expertise that she wanted to draw upon. “…they both have so much knowledge that I kind of wanted to pull from both of them.” “And they have different…areas that they are…really good at, so I kind of went back and forth.” The two mentors and participant also met occasionally to collaborate as a group. During the practicum the participant “…was more like an assistant teacher and was just just in the classroom helping kids…” After the participant was done with her practicum, she was began working at the site full-time as a lead and assistant teacher.

The participant felt that the mentors let her try things out and come up with her own ideas: “They just kind of let me…go on my own and do things and come up with ideas and come up with lesson plans and project ideas.” They encouraged her and gave her confidence to try things: “…that kind of encouraged me…and gave me confidence to try more things.” The mentors offered support through answering questions, talking things through, and reviewing participant’s ideas: “…I asked a lot of questions and would talk through things with them…” “I was always wanting to bounce my ideas off of them…” Through this process, the participant gained confidence and felt like the relationship began to develop into that of equals. “I gained confidence and it just kind of happened naturally that instead of feeling like a student I felt more like an equal.”

The participant felt like she learned a lot from watching the mentors, particularly in regards to communications with children and adults. “I definitely learned a lot from watching them. Just how they talked with the children and also how they talked with parents.” “I really watched them and listened to how they speak to the parents and I’m still learning from that one.” (Participant is now employed at the practicum site). At first the participant would “mimic” what the mentors said to parents or kids, but eventually gained confidence in her own abilities. “…at first I would kind of mimic what they had said previously either to the kids or …to the parents about a certain issue…and now I’m feeling more comfortable and …I feel more confident in my own abilities…”

The participant adjusts her instructional strategies, classroom management, and environment based on the responses of the children. “…if you’re at circle time when the kids are just really wiggly or…the kid is not feeling what you’re doing…you’re always kind of flying by the seat of your pants and making adjustments.” “…but the kids weren’t really getting into the story so I kind of changed things around and would just ask each child to…” Participant also adjusted based on developmental level of the child: “…well, with every child it is different. You know you … want to treat everybody equally, but kids are so different you can’t. I find that…how I would say things to one child, I would have to change with another. …some kids need instructions to be just short and simple and others need … more lengthy explanation of why…”

The participant also collaborated with mentors on how to make adjustments using reflection on action: “…sometimes there would be…and issue in class…where we would talk it over, the three of us or maybe just two of us…we would talk about it and we would kind of brainstorm ideas together.” “…we go back and forth and it depends on what the issue is…if I try to do a couple of things and it hasn’t worked, it’s
like I need some help trying to figure this out and we’ll all brainstorm.” And sometimes would use RIA: “And sometimes you just have to fly by the seat of your pants and just make it an executive decision I guess.” Participant learned to be flexible in the classroom by observing her mentors. The mentors let her work on her own, but were there if she needed help. “…they let me do what I wanted to do and they were just there if I needed help.” Mentors would help her in the moment as well as after class – participant would ask for direct help: “Ms. D, what am I trying to say here’ or I would say ‘Ms. D, can you think of anything else that have forgotten?’ and …they would just be there to help me and I knew they were there so that kind of helped me to be at ease.” Sometimes the mentor would step in: “The kids just really weren’t into it and they were talking to each other and touching each other and one of the other teachers goes, ’you know, Ms. M, I think the kids just really aren’t ready for this right now, how about we close this up and we move on’”. “She stepped in, but most of the time if I needed them to step in, I would ask for help and then they would be there for me.”

Participant was “in awe” of her mentors before beginning her student teaching, and felt “…their different areas of expertise [were] really impressive.” “…just kind of in awe of them, how good they are with the kids and how good they are with the parents.” Her mentors had a lot of experience, including Head Start, ECEAP and Montessori. She was also a “…little intimidated before just because they are so awesome.” As the relationship developed she felt that the mentors supported her “…just the whole package… and they never made me feel like…I didn’t know what I was talking about or anything. You know they just made me feel comfortable and at ease…and really let me do things on my own.” “I just felt supported.”

Participant recognizes that she has grew in confidence over the course of her student teaching, relating some of it to her classes at the college and a lot of it to observing her mentors. “I have grown and changed a lot…mostly in my confidence.” “…When I started I was just basically volunteering in … my daughter’s classroom when she went to preschool and I really didn’t know much at all.” “…I have grown a lot since I first got in the classroom. …a lot of that came from the school…and the classes, but a lot of it did come from observing the gals that I work with…”

Participant currently works at her practicum site and consequently feels like her mentors are still there for her, though now they are work more as equals. “I feel like I still ask for their advice on some things, but they also ask for my advice, too. So I still learn from them… I think…we are all just equal now.”
Ethan: Summary

Phone interview.
Campus Center, selected.
Ages 3-5 years.
Mentors – selected, lead teacher.
Food and Nutrition Specialist at two campus-based Child Development Centers for one college district (different than practicum college).

The participant selected a preschool room in a campus-based center for his practicum experience. He also selected the mentor teacher he would work with. He felt like the time in the classroom environment of the center was “…was where the real learning happens.” The participant spent extra time in the classroom, beyond what was required because of this belief. He felt that his mentor was “…intentional as far as modeling” in her work with him, and that she was “…very open…being verbal about what works, what doesn’t work.” They engaged in weekly informal written assessments of his work and monthly sit-down discussions.

The student visited several classrooms before selecting his mentor teacher. He said he “sort of felt a little more comfortable, I think, with the teacher …” and also mentioned “…allowing me freedom to work with kids but also being very patient and sort of dragging me into where I need to be.” The relationship began with observations and written documentation by the participant, and moved into participating in the classroom.

The participant believes “… in any teaching, particularly with the younger ages, a lot of improvisation happens” and saw that modeled by his mentor. Adaptations in instructional methods followed children’s emergent thinking. There were plans, “…but that was definitely sort of kind of going with, where the children would guide us to go.” He was encouraged to follow the children’s interests “…some of those things, I think they’re improvisational, sort of, well, track thinking you know. Like, if the kids have something else pop up, then I felt like we should discuss that, and that was encouraged.”

Adaptations in guidance were based on knowledge about each child. “I think I actually spent a lot more time getting to know certain children. ….well, actually getting to know all the children.” “…every child is different and particularly in that age group, you can set a curriculum, but if you don’t truly know those children as individuals, then it makes it a little more difficult to actually, not discipline, but actually, sort of create a rhythm in your classroom.” “…it was sort of feeling it out and treating the kids like they are individuals.”

Participant gave one example of environmental adaptation related to safety. Response was based on an allergic reaction of one child that required an immediate change in the environment. Participant tried to be intentional in setting up classroom environment, incorporating theme into every level, “…tried to incorporate it on every level, actually. As far as math, science, reading, motor skills – all kinds of different things.”

Participant felt that his mentor teacher recognized his intentionality and his extra time in the classroom, and based on that developed trust in him. “But I also think, she was sort of meticulous with some people as far as the trust level, you know. …she did recognize that there was a lot of …that I was being intentional with what I was doing.” “And being in the classroom as much as possible, and I think that for that teacher to pay attention and recognize that, yes this works and the kids are receptive.”
The mentor teacher was present in the classroom and observing while the participant was implementing activities, but does not remember direct interventions. Instead, there would be later ROA with the mentor.

Participant felt the overall experience was “positive and it was nurturing.” He also said “But I do feel like I sort of initiated a lot of that…I wanted to get as much as I could.” He recognized his mentor as “…a great teacher.” Participant thought that there could have been more of a connection between the college program and the center in regards to practicum: “…it could’ve been more effective if there was a little more organization with the early learning program and the CDC because there was sort of this disconnect of it being a little more formal.” However, he reiterated that “…she was great and she was doing what was expended of her…and I think she even went beyond that as far as the nurturing piece.” He also recognized that she helped him build confidence “…she was very good at allowing that confidence to sort of…she was very nurturing to allow this confidence…to say, well, your personality is going to be part of who you are as a teacher and part of what the kids learn. …and that was a pretty big piece of it.”

Participant recognized the challenge of time for the mentor: “…I think some of the detailed stuff was actually….there wasn’t a lot of time, I think, for the teachers. Not enough time anyway to actually sit down and do more of the sort of meticulous curriculum things. …the detailed stuff…I think that the trial and error thing came in and that’s good and that’s fine but I do think that sometimes it needs to be a little more structured.”

The participant felt nervous, partially based on a previous experience with a mentor in another professional field and on his own personality: “So I was a little nervous…I’m sort of a go-getter. I kind of learn stuff by myself. So taking in other’s information and input and advice, it wasn’t something that I was fully used to.” “That was definitely a learning thing for me and it was good for me. It was very good for me.” As work with the mentor continued, the participant noted that while working with the mentor and in other classrooms: “…sort of floored at the things I don’t know and the things that …as nurturing as an individual that I think I am, that there is a lot to learn about people and from people. …that concept is going to be something that stays with me for the rest of my life.” In reflection, the participant recognizes that the mentoring experience “…moves you into that sort of the next place, where I could be that person. Not necessarily that teacher and how she did things, but I could be the person teaching. I could be the person teaching, teaching not only children, but teaching other teachers how to do this.”

The participant also recognized that two other teachers he worked with in the program had positive effects on him “And I can actually remember not just that one teacher, but with two other teachers that I worked with briefly…sort of being on the same wavelength…” He also noted significant mentoring by a director and assistant director during a later work-study that led him to develop and implement an innovative fresh food program in early learning.
Claire: Summary
Phone interview.
Campus Center, selected.
Ages 3-5 years.
Mentors – lead teacher of classroom.
Substitute preschool teacher Head Start and ECEAP

The participant selected a preschool room in campus-based center for her practicum experience. She was able to have her college counselor also be a mentor because of this choice. She felt that the mentors “...don’t really instruct you while you are in the classroom...there is no heavy mentoring going on. It really takes place outside the classroom.” She also noted that the mentoring received depends on the student: “...you really develop how much mentoring you get based on how much you interact with the teacher. So if you aren’t question the teacher a lot, you are not going to get a lot of mentoring. But if you are questioning and looking for alternate ways or different views about things, then the mentoring will be there and it comes in.” The participant felt that mentoring “came at intervals” over the quarter and at the end of the quarter in presenting her work and getting her grade. “So I don’t feel that there was an ongoing mentoring throughout the whole practicum experience unless I brought forth the questions or the concerns or the areas that I felt I needed work in or some guidance in.” Participant indicated that she did draw out the mentoring “I had the available tools in myself to do that…” and indicated she was referring to self-reflection.

Participant asked questions and asked for help, saying “...it is my calling. I know it, I love it and I like it, but that also prompted me to question everything, every time.” She also said “...what I saw in class, unless the student had that excitability to raise those topics or ask those questions…unless you could do that, I didn’t feel that there was a lot of free mentoring going on…”

Participant used RIA in class – she would ask for help, listen to the response, and adapt it to her own style: “And after they gave me their explanation, which would be clear direction, then I would determine myself...maybe if I tweaked it this way, that might work better for me. But I did that internally.” She stated that she did not get mentor feedback on these decisions. Participant said “The most mentoring I got from that was from self-realization. Self-reflection.”

The participant also recognized that mentor modeling played a role, indicating that they modeled “Excellent, appropriate practices that you could learn from.”

Participant cited “…reaction from children, observing the children and the environment around me…” as the main causes of adaptations to her teaching. She stated that at the beginning of practicum she would ask for help. By the end of the experience she was fully immersed in RIA: “…towards the end, from actually seeing the modeling and seeing how it worked with different teachers and their personalities, then I could do my own self-reflection and self-changing and at a moment’s notice.”

In guidance, she continued to use RIA to make adaptations: “So I make my changes based on that judgment at the time.” She reiterates that adaptations are “…always based from the child’s point of view.”

Participant continues to use reflection in her current work, often thinking back to her mentors: “Because a lot of times, if I am stumped right now, I will think back to my teacher in my class and think how would she handle that or how would she do it, and kind of adapt it to my own personality.”
In regards to her learning and development, the participant believes that her development came from her own work on self-development and some modeling from mentors: “…I would have to say that I used more of my own tools to develop as a teacher. The mentoring comes in more to play with me as far as the role modeling and seeing the effectiveness in the class.” “…I think I have kind of developed as my own teacher and just grabbed the things that I saw that worked, and did not work that I thought could work, and adapt it that way.”

The participant recognized some theory to practice in saying “…there are some specific classes that helped me more than a lot of the other classes, like the [guidance] class which is probably the one class that will make my career. That I know.”

The participant was “very nervous” before beginning the mentoring experience, expecting it to be “…more authoritative. I thought the mentor would be more authoritative and more directional, and that wasn’t the case, and I was very happy about that.” She felt that having two mentors provided her with a broader experience: “…So I got mentoring, I would have to say, from both sides of the track, and I think that was more beneficial to me because I can now relate these kinds of skills to different levels of thinking in children.”

In reflection on the experience, participant stated “I believe it is the best mentoring I have ever had.” Even though she had earlier stated that she didn’t think she was heavily mentored, she believed “Just the role modeling and the words I saw effectively used in class that …applied effective results, and in a positive manner.” She stated that she was “very happy.”