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Developing a Professional Early Childhood Teacher Identity:

The Experiences of Three Teachers

Amy Shakespeare White

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Developing a Professional Early Childhood Teacher Identity:
The Experiences of Three Teachers

Amy Shakespeare White
Department of Teacher Education, BYU
Master of Arts

The purpose of this study was to better understand the impact experience and context have on the development of an early childhood education teacher professional identity. Using the *Listening Guide* (Gilligan et al. 2006), data were gathered and examined from interviews with three early childhood educators (ECE) currently teaching in a public school setting. Findings suggest that personal life experiences, teacher preparation, and career experience/contexts had a significant impact on the development of the teachers' professional identities. Examining *when* these early childhood educators committed themselves to the profession, and during which contexts and experiences they embraced early childhood tenets, provided important insight into how teacher preparation programs can bring forth candidates' past experiences for critical discussion to help preservice teachers make better sense of their developing early childhood teacher identity. Implications for provisionary teachers include support for navigating policy and societal influence in addition to day-to-day classroom teaching.

Keywords: early childhood teacher identity, early childhood education, professional identity, listening guide

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I stand with the apostle Paul in saying, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). In addition to thanking my Savior, I would like to thank each of my committee members for their specific mentorship. Kendra, thank you for your enduring support and encouragement—it has been a very long journey! Stefinee, thank you for welcoming me into your home when I was stuck and needed assistance. Beth, thank you for pushing back on my ideas and encouraging me to dig deeper and to expand my perspective. Lynne, thank you for reminding me to be bold in my writing. You ladies are all remarkable scholars, and I am grateful for your generous mentoring. I would also like to thank my editor, Katie, for bringing enthusiasm to the refining process. Lastly, I would like to thank my family who has patiently supported me through five years of graduate school. Hey kids, I am finally done!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE i

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS iv

LIST OF TABLES vii

LIST OF FIGURES viii

CHAPTER 1: Introduction 1

The Development of Teacher Professional Identity 1

Previous Life Experience 2

Teacher Preparation 2

Professional Experience 3

Exploring Early Childhood Education Teacher Professional Identity 3

Statement of the Problem 4

Statement of the Purpose 5

CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature 6

Tenets of Early Childhood Education 6

Expectations for Early Childhood Education Professionals 7

Previous Life Experience 7

Teacher Preparation 8

Early Childhood Education Career Experiences 9

Conclusions 10

CHAPTER 3: Methods 11

المنارة للاستشارات

www.manaraa.com

Context of the Study 11
Qualifying Survey 11
Determining Interview Candidates 12
Choosing Participants for This Study 12
Participants in Sub-Study 13
Sabrina 14
Hannah 14
Julie 14
Data Collection 15
Interview Process 15
Data Analysis 16
The Listening Guide Methodology 16
Trustworthiness 19
Statement of Positionality and Self-Reflexivity 19
CHAPTER 4: Findings 21
Plotlines of Early Childhood Teacher Identity Development 21
Sabrina's Plotline 22
Hannah's Plotline 27
Julie's Plotline 31
Looking Across the Teachers' Experiences 37
Choosing to Become an Early Childhood Teacher 37
Teacher Preparation 38
Career Experiences 38

المنارة للاستشارات
www.manaraa.com

Contrapuntal Voices Which Disrupt Early Childhood Teacher Identity 39

Contrapuntal Voices for Sabrina 39

Contrapuntal Voices for Hannah 40

Contrapuntal Voices for Julie 42

Conclusion 44

CHAPTER 5: Discussion 46

Commitment to the Early Childhood Education Profession 46

Guided Discussions 47

Being Mentored by a Fellow Early Childhood Education Professional 47

Implications for Early Childhood Teacher Education 48

Limitations and Recommendation for Further Research 49

REFERENCES 50

APPENDIX A: Consent/Institutional Review Board Approval Letter 59

APPENDIX B: Early Childhood Education Teacher Online Survey 60

APPENDIX C: Interview for Early Childhood Educators 65

APPENDIX D: I-Poems 67

المنارة للاستشارات

www.manaraa.com

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 *Participants at a Glance* 13

المنارة للاستشارات

www.manaraa.com

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 *Sabrina's Timeline of Critical Events* 24

Figure 2 *Hannah's Timeline of Critical Events* 28

Figure 3 *Julie's Timeline of Critical Events* 32

المنارة للاستشارات

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Teachers' professional identity is a key factor that influences their sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction and effectiveness (Day et al., 2006). Sachs (2005) explains further that, "teacher professional identity…stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be,' 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society" (p. 15). Thus, teachers' professional identity serves as a lens through which they view and act upon pedagogical decisions, collegial relationships, and advocacy for children. Because professional identity plays such a critical role in how teachers fulfill their responsibilities, many scholars have explored the specific factors which impact its development (see Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Bukor, 2015; Mockler, 2011).

The Development of Teacher Professional Identity

Teachers' professional identity has direct ties to contexts and relationships they have experienced (Alsup, 2006; Olsen, 2008b) and is the embodiment of stories to live by, which have been shaped over time (Clandinin & Huber, 2005). For example, personal experiences and social contexts (e.g., early schooling, relationships with teachers as role models, and opportunities to teach) can influence a person's decision to become a teacher prior to enrolling in a teacher preparation program (Schempp et al., 1998). Often the formation of teachers' professional identity begins early in life, although it also continues to shift and grow throughout their career. The contexts and experiences that influence professional identity development can be categorized into three main time periods: (a) previous life experience (personal or professional experiences that take place before entering a teacher preparation program; Al-Khatib & Lash,

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2017; Lavina, 2019), (b) teacher preparation (formal instruction and preparation, as well as endorsement programs; Androusou & Tsafos, 2018; Barron, 2016; Moss, 2010), and (c) professional experiences (experiences during teaching career; Bradbury, 2012; Furlong, 2013; Ryan & Gibson, 2016).

Previous Life Experience

Previous life experiences that foster a desire to enter the teaching profession may serve as the foundation of teachers' professional identity (Olsen, 2008a). Childhood interactions with family members, such as playing school, or relationships with key adults who are teachers allow individuals from a young age to observe and explore what it means to be a teacher (Bullough, 1997; Flores, 2001; Lortie, 2002). Time spent in school as a student may also contribute to the development of teachers' professional identity. As students observe their teachers they construct meaning and understanding of how teachers conduct themselves and what practices they employ (Britzman, 2003). Poignant experiences that orient toward the teaching profession can engender beliefs and ideals about teachers and teaching. Because of this, when teacher candidates enter teacher preparation programs they may already have a sense of their teacher identity (Olsen, 2008b).

Teacher Preparation

In conjunction with the main goals of instructing future teachers in best teaching practices, content, and pedagogical skills (Chong et al., 2011), teacher preparation programs focus on foundational principles or tenets of the discipline/teaching area to help students formulate a professional identity. Additionally, preservice teachers develop their identity as they reflect on their preconceived beliefs of teachers and teaching during teacher preparation courses and fieldwork (Buchanan, 2015; Bullough, 1997; Clandinin & Huber, 2005; Clandinin et al.,

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1999). When the reflection process is supported with guided discussions, it provides preservice teachers with discursive opportunities to examine the ideals and philosophies they developed through their previous experiences as students themselves (Alsup, 2006; Danielewicz, 2001; Lortie, 2002; Olsen, 2008a).

Professional Experience

As in-service teachers hone their craft and broaden their knowledge through practice and professional development opportunities, their teacher identity continues to shift and change (Chong, 2011; Olsen, 2008b). Once in the field, teachers are expected to stay up to date on curriculum standards, and teaching practices outlined by the specific discipline or grade level they teach (Datnow, 2020). Constraints created by policy can lead teachers to confusion and feelings of inadequacy as professional educators (Bradbury, 2012) which may also influence their professional identity.

Exploring Early Childhood Education Teacher Professional Identity

The early childhood education (ECE) profession includes a variety of contexts in which educators may work. These include ECE-specific contexts such as childcare and preschool, where young children up to age five are taught and cared for, as well as contexts such as elementary school (K-6) where young children ages five to eight are taught alongside older children ages nine to twelve. ECE professionals in childcare and preschool contexts most often work with colleagues who share a knowledge of and commitment to ECE principles and ideals, whereas ECE professionals in an elementary school context, work with colleagues who have been prepared as elementary educators (ElEd). Although there are many similarities between ECE and ElEd teacher preparation there are also fundamental differences (see Whitehead, 2008), which may influence how teachers view themselves and their work as educators.

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Most studies on ECE identity have been conducted within ECE-specific contexts (e.g., childcare centers, preschools, and Head Start), where ECE teachers are developing and enacting their identity in an environment which supports ECE principles and ideals (e.g., Androusou & Tsafos, 2018; Arndt et al., 2018; Bullough, 2015; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2018; Dalli, 2002; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016). To date, little ECE identity research has expanded to explore and understand the identity development of ECE teachers who work in a public K-6 school context (a conglomerate of educators who are ElEd prepared [1st – 6th grade] and ECE prepared [PreK – 3rd]). Many ECE program graduates go on to teach in public K-6 schools, yet we do not understand the impact these contexts and teachers' experiences within them have on the development of professional ECE identity.

Statement of the Problem

Professional identity is central to teachers' senses of purpose, commitment, and effectiveness (Day et al., 2006). The development of ECE teachers' professional identity begins during their previous life experience, continues in teacher preparation, and on into their teaching careers. When ECE teachers graduate from preparation programs and accept jobs in a K-6 setting, their identities continue to develop in a context that is not specifically ECE -oriented. Additionally, because of the overlap in certification, ECE teachers often find themselves on grade-level teams with ElEd teachers who may or may not have similar beliefs and knowledge regarding best practices for teaching young children. Further study is needed to understand the influence that working in a K-6 context has on the development of ECE teachers' professional identity.

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Statement of the Purpose

The aim of this study is to examine the common components of experience and context that influence ECE professional identity development as embedded in the narratives of three in-service public school (K-6) ECE educators.

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CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The ECE profession is unified by a shared knowledge base and specific skills/attributes required to be a successful ECE professional (Brown et al., 2017). However, the nuances and complexities of the ECE workforce, which are rooted in historical and current educational policies (Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Moloney, 2010; National Research Council, 2001; Petrie, 1992; Woodrow, 2007), can make it difficult for those working in ECE to find and assume a common professional identity. Historically, national policies concerning the care and education of young children have been developed separately (Bennett, 2011; Ranck, 2020). Thus, the goals of childcare (birth to PreK) and K-3 education can sometimes be misaligned and the individuals working in these contexts, although both considered ECE professionals (Curenton, 2006), have dramatically different teaching contexts/experiences (e.g., daycare center, preschool, K-6 public school). As stated previously, current research has been conducted to understand the identity development of ECE professionals who work and teach in childcare and preschool (e.g., Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2018; Katz, 1995); however, little is known about the identity development of ECE teachers who choose to teach in K-6 settings. To better understand what constitutes an ECE professional identity, regardless of teaching context, one must first recognize the unifying tenets and professional expectations for all ECE teachers.

Tenets of Early Childhood Education

The tenets of ECE are strongly based in developmental and learning theories (Elkind, 2015; Mooney, 2013). These include but are not limited to using knowledge of child development to inform pedagogy and teaching practices, utilizing hands-on learning, incorporating play into instruction to connect learning to real life, observing students to gather

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assessment data to inform the needs and progress of each child, and recognizing that each child is unique and develops at an individual rate (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020). These beliefs and practices are universal to ECE teachers and set them apart from other educators.

Expectations for Early Childhood Education Professionals

In addition to these universal tenets, ECE professionals are unified by shared professional expectations. These include advocacy for young children, building family and community relationships, and promoting developmentally appropriate practices (NAEYC, 2012). ECE teachers are expected to be reflective practitioners and use their knowledge of child development to evaluate and make curricular decisions to help children reach their potential (NAEYC, 2020). ECE professionals adopt and develop these attributes, beliefs, and practices at various points and through varied means, all of which contribute to their identity as ECE educators. The next paragraphs will discuss the three time periods that influence ECE teachers' professional identity development.

Previous Life Experience

Teachers' previous life experience (personal or professional experiences before entering teacher preparation) can orient them toward ECE and ultimately bring them to the decision to become early childhood educators (Brooke, 1994; Moss, 2010). Bredekamp (1992) described three typical pathways that lead people to the ECE profession: (a) the traditional route, (b) the parent route, and (c) the serendipitous route. *Traditional-route* ECE teachers know from an early age that they want to be teachers. They may have had teachers who inspired them or prompted them to consider teaching as a profession. They go to college and likely major in child development or education. Conversely, *parent-route* ECE teachers may have been educated in a

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different field and discover ECE through first-hand experience as they raise their own children. These teachers may have also volunteered in their young child's classroom or participated in a cooperative preschool. Finally, *serendipitous-route* ECE teachers are led to ECE through happenstance. These teachers did not initially set out to be teachers or to work with young children, yet through accidental or fortuitous experiences, they choose to become ECE professionals. While there are various routes to the ECE profession, once individuals choose to become ECE teachers, their professional identity continues to develop through the experiences provided in more formal preparation for the classroom.

Teacher Preparation

As noted above, previous life experiences may orient individuals toward an ECE teacher identity; however, preservice teachers begin to develop a true professional ECE identity within a teacher preparation context (Sutherland et al., 2010). ECE teacher preparation contexts include university teacher preparation programs as well as ECE endorsement programs. Teacher preparation is intended to integrate knowledge, practice, and reflection (Ritblatt et al., 2013) as prospective teachers learn how to teach. A combination of academic courses and classroom field experiences provide preservice teachers with opportunities to develop a professional ECE identity as they draw from various sources (e.g., previous life experiences, coursework, or current context) to make sense of their work and role in the classroom (Moss, 2010).

To help preservice teachers grasp what it means to be an ECE professional, Barron (2016) suggested teacher educators engage in guided or mentored discussions of ECE professionalism, identity, beliefs, practices, and policies as part of teacher preparation courses. Additionally, Barron stated that beginning ECE teachers need greater support from teacher educators and mentor teachers to "negotiate the spaces between policy, theory, and beliefs as

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they seek constantly to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct ethical professional identities for themselves" (p. 338). La Paro (2016) voiced similar thoughts, stating that for "high-quality, carefully-crafted field-based experiences and to meet the goal of teacher education programs to prepare effective teachers, preservice teachers need opportunities to apply knowledge, practice their skills, and receive constructive feedback as they develop as teachers" (p. 220). Guided or mentored discussion allows preservice teachers to make sense of their coursework and field experiences. In addition to facilitating discussions, ECE teacher preparation programs should engender critical reflection upon beliefs and practices. This can aid preservice teachers in developing a professional ECE identity through reflective practices (Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014; Sahin et al., 2019). Being reflective practitioners is one of the hallmarks of the ECE profession (NAEYC, 2020), and facilitates constant growth and improvement in ECE teachers' practice and identity (Brooke, 1994). To grow as ECE professionals, beginning teachers must constantly strive to improve their craft and continue to learn and study, all of which continue into their careers as ECE professionals.

Early Childhood Education Career Experiences

Identity development continues throughout ECE teachers' careers (Troman, 2008). As ECE teachers become more settled in their professional identity by refining their craft and deepening their knowledge base, the supports and resources they need to continue to develop their identity change. Beginning teachers invent, explore, and redefine who they are as individuals and as professionals (Featherstone, 1993) and often require on-site assistance as they learn to navigate within their new careers. As ECE teachers mature in their careers, they require different support and experiences to develop in their role and identity as ECE professionals (Katz, 1995). Support for both beginning and more mature ECE educators often come in the

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form of professional development classes often provided by the institutions they work for. Because of common goals, beliefs, and practices, professionals working in childcare and preschool settings have readily available, ECE oriented support and professional development opportunities to help them implement and build on knowledge and skills acquired during teacher preparation. However, ECE teachers working in a K-6 setting may not have as many opportunities to be mentored in ECE practices because the institutions they belong to are not solely ECE oriented.

Conclusions

As noted previously, ECE teachers work in a variety of contexts. Regardless of setting, all ECE professionals must meet shared professional expectations, and uphold the tenets of ECE (NAEYC, 2020). Adopting ECE tenets and choosing to commit to the ECE profession is not a systematic, linear process, nor does it occur through isolated or "one-shot" experiences. Rather, the process of developing a professional identity is multifaceted, ever shifting, and develops over time and within multiple contexts (Clandinin & Huber, 2005; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Some scholars have suggested three influential time periods during which ECE teachers develop their professional identity: previous life experience, teacher preparation, and ECE career experiences (e.g., Al-Khatib & Lash, 2017; Barron, 2016; Bradbury, 2012). However, because ECE educators teaching contexts and experiences can be so dramatically different, especially for those teaching in K-3 settings, more research is needed to understand how a teacher's professional identity develops for ECE teachers working in K-3 contexts, which may or may not be different from ECE teachers in childcare and PreK settings. To date most of the ECE professional identity literature focuses on childcare and PreK settings.

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CHAPTER 3

Methods

While much is known about the identity development of teachers generally and of ECE teachers who work in pre-K settings, little is known about the professional identity of ECE teachers who work in K-6 environments. Thus, this study utilized a qualitative approach that allowed a careful exploration of a group of ECE teachers working in a K-6 context. This chapter will articulate the design and implementation of this study, including a description of study context, participants, data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness.

Context of the Study

The data for this study came from a larger study examining the development of professional ECE identity (See Appendix A for approved consent form). At the time of the larger study, students in the partnership school district were predominately White (94.1 %) with a total student population of 113,498. The district spanned 1,313 square miles across seven suburbs, with 30 elementary (K-6) and 18 secondary schools. Five of the 30 elementary schools offered a Title 1 preschool for qualifying students. Because the study was focused on the development of a professional ECE identity, only K-3 teachers (grades considered within the bounds of ECE) were invited to participate. Pre-K teachers were eliminated from this study for the sake of consistency.

Qualifying Survey

Data collection for the larger study included an online survey and a follow-up interview. Educators in public elementary schools (grades K-6) are typically comprised of teachers who are both ElEd (certified to teach grades 1-6) and ECE (certified to teach K-3) prepared. Accordingly, a survey was designed to gather basic demographic information as well as basic information regarding teacher preparation, certification, and career experience. A list of all K-3 educators for

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the district was obtained from the State Office of Education, and a link was emailed out to all teachers on the list. The survey served to recruit participants and to ensure participants met the criteria of being educators with an ECE teaching certificate or endorsement who were currently teaching in the selected university partnership district. At the end of the survey, teachers were invited to participate in a follow-up interview (see Appendix B).

Determining Interview Candidates

The online survey data were analyzed to determine candidates to participate in an interview. Of the K-3 teachers in the district, 42 respondents indicated that they would be willing to participate in follow up interview. Participant interview selection criteria included the following: (a) experienced a time in which they felt their identity as an ECE educator was called into question (either during teacher preparation or in-service teaching), (b) expressed a strong sense of professional identity or seemingly lacked a professional ECE identity, (c) was ECE certified or had dual licensure (grades 1-6 license as well as grades K-3 license). The study also sought to recruit participants from across the teaching career spectrum including beginning teachers (less than 5 years' experience), midcareer (5 to 15 years' experience), and veteran teacher (20+ years' experience).

Choosing Participants for This Study

After the interviews were completed and transcribed verbatim, narrative transcripts of three teachers were selected for this sub-study. Collectively, these teachers represented a broad cross-section of teacher experience. Participants were selected based on career stage (beginning [less than five years], middle [10 to 15 years], and end of career [20+ years]), as well as pathways that led them to the ECE teaching profession (previous experience, teacher preparation, and career experiences).

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Participants in Sub-Study

Each of the three participants selected for the sub-study were ECE prepared and varied in years of teaching experience. Here, each has been assigned a pseudonym: Sabrina, Hannah, and Julie. An outline of the teachers' background experiences pertinent to this study is provided below in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants at a Glance

	Sabrina	Hannah	Julie
Years of Teaching Experience	13	2	28+
Grades Taught	Kindergarten	Kindergarten Second	Preschool Kindergarten First Second Third Fourth Fifth Sixth
Teacher Preparation	ECE	ECE	ElEd
Endorsements	ESL	ESL	ECE Math
Internship/Grade Taught	No	Yes/Second	Yes/First
Student Teaching/Grade Taught	Yes/Second	No	No
Started Career upon Completion of Teacher Preparation	No	Yes	Yes
Wanted to be a Teacher from an Early Age	Yes	Yes	No
Desired Grade to Teach Prior to Career	Kindergarten	Younger Grades	First

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Sabrina

Sabrina is a White, female, kindergarten teacher with a bachelor's degree in ECE, as well as an English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement. Sabrina has 13 years of teaching experience and was chosen to represent mid-career ECE teachers. She was the only candidate who left teaching for a period to raise her family and then returned to the classroom. Although she had a very negative experience student teaching in a second-grade classroom and decided not to pursue a teaching career upon graduation, she always viewed herself as a kindergarten teacher. She currently works with two other White female teachers on her school's grade-level team.

Hannah

Hannah is a White, female, kindergarten teacher who recently graduated from an ECE teacher preparation program with an ESL endorsement. At the time of this study she was in her first year of teaching. During the interview, Hannah demonstrated a strong conviction to ECE principles and ideals, having found her niche teaching kindergarten after completing an internship in second grade as part of her teacher preparation. Like Sabrina, Hannah is one of two White females on her school's grade-level team.

Julie

Julie is a White, female, first grade teacher who has a bachelor's degree in ElEd (grades 1-6), as well as an ECE endorsement. Julie has over 28 years teaching experience and represents late-career ECE teachers in this study. Julie was specifically chosen because of her vast and varied teaching experience. Of the three participants, she is the only teacher who was originally ElEd prepared. Part way into her teaching career, a critical event prompted Julie to obtain an ECE endorsement. Julie has taught every grade from preschool through sixth grade during her twenty-eight years of teaching. Most of her teaching career has been spent teaching first grade

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(10 years) and second grade (seven years). There are three other first-grade teachers, all White females, on Julie's school's grade-level team.

Data Collection

The data for this study consisted of responses from three participants obtained during one-hour, semi-structured interviews. The interviews were administered one-on-one. The semi-structured format afforded opportunities to ask follow-up questions to help uncover critical experiences and contexts that may have influenced the development of the participants' professional identities. The interview protocol was based on current ECE identity literature (e.g., Cabral, 2012; La Paro, 2016; NAEYC, 2012; Sutherland et al., 2010), and was comprised of questions designed to probe the interviewees' perspectives (McIntosh, 2009) of lived experiences relative to ECE teacher preparation and identity.

Interview Process

To gather the most accurate and raw feelings regarding their experiences of being ECE teachers in a public K-6 school context, I sought to provide a comfortable setting for the interviews. At the beginning of each interview, I took a few minutes to introduce myself as a fellow ECE professional who had also spent time teaching in a public K-6 school context. I emailed each of the teachers to set up appointments to be interviewed, offering to conduct the interviews either in their home or at my university office. Two of the teachers chose to come to my office, and one invited me to her home. Each interview was conducted one-on-one and lasted approximately sixty minutes. I asked each participant all of the questions on the interview protocol (see Appendix C). However, given my experience as an ECE professional, I wanted to ensure I did not make assumptions about their answers based on my own experience, therefore I

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asked unstructured follow-up questions to gain clarification and a greater understanding of their experiences. Each interview was transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began by reviewing each transcript for accuracy. Minor changes to the transcripts were made during this process. The Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2006) was then used to analyze the data from the three interviews. The following section will describe the purpose of the Listening Guide as well as how and why it was used to examine these data. The final section will provide a step-by-step explanation of the data analysis process for this study.

The Listening Guide Methodology

The Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2006) is a voice approach to data analysis which consists of a series of multiple readings/listenings of a transcript. The researcher systematically reviews a transcript multiple times, each time having a specific goal that differs and builds upon the previous review. The system is rooted in the premise that a person's voice is polyphonic and that different voices can be identified through a series of readings/listenings (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). The Listening Guide honors what is known about the development of a professional identity, namely that it is multifaceted, shifting, and develops over time and within multiple contexts (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Social contexts, and relationships are central to the current study; therefore, the Listening Guide was particularly suitable for the analysis of the narrative interview data this study produced.

To ensure a rigorous and robust study, qualitative analysis relies on *theoretical saturation*, "the point at which gathering more data about a theoretical construct reveals no new properties nor yields any further theoretical insights about the emerging grounded theory (Bryant

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& Charmaz, 2007, p. 611). Incorporating the Listening Guide as a data analysis tool helped to ensure theoretical saturation through multiple systematic readings/listenings of a single interview transcript, focused on "the *polyvocality* of a person's expressed experience" (Baker et al., 2020, p. 897), or *saturation of voice.* Saturation of voice is accomplished by "considering voice in a multiplicity of ways, not only as culturally and politically mediated and produced, metaphorical or performative, but as a multi-faceted living phenomenon that plays a crucial role in our intersubjective encounters" (Fisher, 2010, as cited in Baker et al., 2020). As outlined by Gilligan et al. (2006), each of the three verbatim interview transcripts were analyzed using a three-step reading/listening process: plotlines, I-poems, and contrapuntal voices.

Plotlines. For the first reading/listening, each transcript was examined using steps outlined by Gilligan et al. (2006). First, the contexts and experiences for each participant were identified to create a timeline. Next, the timeline was divided into the three time periods in which teacher identity is developed, as outlined in the literature: (a) previous life experience, (b) teacher preparation, and (c) career experience (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Moss, 2010; Sutherland et al., 2010). These three time periods represented the plotlines of each teacher's lived experience as it pertains to ECE identity development. Then, the plotlines and transcripts were reviewed to identify *critical events*, which for the purposes of this study are defined as experiences that oriented the participant toward ECE or that created a shift in ECE teacher identity (Nejadghanbar, 2021). Finally, the critical events for each participant were reviewed to pinpoint themes. During each step in this phase of analysis, the findings were corroborated by revisiting literature from Chapter 2, as well as turning inward to my own positionality.

I-Poems. With the data narrowed during the first listening to the critical events which made up the plotlines, the second reading/listening focused on extracting I-statements from these

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sections of the participants' transcripts. Once the I-statements for the critical events were collected, they were organized chronologically (as represented on the plotlines from the first listening) into stanzas to capture how the teachers viewed and represented themselves during these experiences to create an I-poem for each teacher. Reflecting on my own positionality helped bring understanding to the emotions, thoughts, and statements highlighted in the teachers' poems. This listening brought forth how these teachers represented themselves as ECE teachers and provided insight into their professional identities and how they view their work.

Contrapuntal Voices. The third reading/listening focused on *contrapuntal voices*, which, offers a way of hearing and developing an understanding of several different layers of a person's expressed experience as it bears on the question posed … [and] entails reading through the interview two or more times, each time tuning into one aspect of the story being told, or one voice within the person's expression of her or his experience (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 262).

For the third reading/listening, I read through each participant's transcript three more times to listen for different facets of the teachers' identities and the relationship between them. The first time I focused on the teachers' ECE identity and how they were verbalizing it in different contexts and experiences. This reading/listening identified the teachers' main voices. Next, I listened to focus on how the teachers expressed themselves during incidents of tension as it pertained to their ECE identities. This reading/listening identified the secondary voices. Lastly, I attended to the relationship between how they spoke about themselves and their ECE identity, and how they voiced their concern or frustration during times of tension. This final reading/listening brought the teachers' main and secondary voices together creating an instance of contrapuntal voices. The relationship between these two voices highlighted the tensions these teachers experienced leading up to and working in a K-6 context. The contrapuntal voices also

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revealed how each teacher chose to deal with tensions and how those tensions disrupted the further development of their ECE identities.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the following measures were taken: authentication of the accuracy of all transcripts, expert checking, member checking, and self-reflexivity based on current ECE literature and my positionality. As this sub-study was conducted from a larger data set, I consulted with the researchers (also ECE teacher educators) of the larger study throughout the analysis process to discuss my findings. Upon completion of the data analysis, I sent the final analyses and findings via email to the participants of this current sub-study for member checking. Two of the three participants replied. One stated that she felt I had accurately represented her. The other responded that she felt she had been represented accurately but had a few minor suggestions for word choice and timeline corrections. For example, Julie's timeline originally stated that her father passed away during her first semester of college, she corrected it to be during the first year of college. These changes were made to the final copy. However, none of the suggested changes impacted the overall tone or content of the findings.

Statement of Positionality and Self-Reflexivity

My role as the researcher for this study included conducting the interviews, analyzing the data, and reporting my findings. I am a White, female, in-service ECE professional and mentor teacher at a university ECE laboratory school located in the western United States. I attended a four-year early childhood teacher preparation program at a university and have been teaching for 18 years. The tenets of ECE are important to my identity as a professional in my field and guide this work. My identity as a fellow ECE professional provided me with insights into and further

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understanding of the experiences of each teacher in this study, and, to some extent, my own lived experiences and perspectives shaped my interactions, data analysis, and interpretations within this study. Despite being able to connect with each participant in many ways, I am limited in my ability to fully understand their individual identities as early childhood educators.

To mitigate my own influence on the outcomes of this study, I employed self-reflexivity during all phases of the study to actively consider the ways my perspective may have influenced the data analysis (Tracy, 2020). For example, prior to conducting the data analysis, I met with my thesis chair on five occasions to discuss the data gathered from the initial survey and how my strong identity as an ECE professional might influence my follow-up interview questions. As I examined the survey data, I found that my own experience as an ECE teacher led me to have specific questions about ECE teacher identity in response to specific participants. To help me determine if the questions I had prepared for the interview would allow me to gather data-rich answers, I filled out my own responses to each interview question to explore what type of responses the participants might give. Consequently, I revised my interview questions. As a result of this process, I eliminated questions I felt would not provide sufficient data or that would generate answers unrelated to my research question. Also, during the data analysis phase, my committee met several times to openly discuss how my positionality both informed and impacted the analysis and findings of the data. We specifically discussed how the experiences of the study participants were similar to or different from my experiences as an ECE professional.

Additionally, I journaled about the contexts and experiences which contributed to my ECE identity, including my own responses to the questions I asked the participants during the interviews. Journaling allowed me to validate the similar experiences uncovered in the participants' transcripts.

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CHAPTER 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine how context and experience influenced the teacher identity development of three ECE public school educators. The results for this study were produced through three distinct readings/listenings as suggested in the Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2006). Although each reading/listening yielded different findings, only two of the readings/listenings (plotline and contrapuntal voices) will be shared here. The first reading/listening (plotlines) created a timeline and context for the participants' critical experiences along their paths to ECE professional identity. The second reading/listening (I-poems) helped illuminate how the teachers' represented their teacher identity in first person and how they viewed their work. The I-poems are included in Appendix D, although the findings from that listening will not be shared here. The third reading/listening uncovered the relationship between different facets/voices of identity present in each teacher's account of experiences, highlighting the tensions she experienced within a variety of contexts and how these impacted the continued development of her ECE teacher identity. The findings from readings/listenings one and three will be described here with an initial focus on each participant individually followed by comparisons across all three participants.

Plotlines of Early Childhood Teacher Identity Development

The three recognizable plotlines found in the relevant literature were evident across the ECE identity development journeys of all participants: (a) previous life experiences that influenced the choice to become an ECE teacher (e.g., Al-Khatib & Lash, 2017; Lavina, 2019), (b) teacher preparation experiences (e.g., Androusou & Tsafos, 2018; Barron, 2016; Moss, 2010), and (c) ECE career experiences (e.g., Bradbury, 2012; Furlong, 2013; Ryan & Gibson,

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2016). Each participant had critical events which prompted her to choose the ECE profession, as well as formal teacher preparation wherein she began to realize her ECE identity. The plotlines of each of the teachers in this study—Sabrina, Hannah, and Julie—provided an account of each participant's journey. Passages from the transcripts provided evidence of each plotline and the variability across the participants.

Sabrina's Plotline

Sabrina's plotlines are represented in Figure 1. It begins with her choice to become a kindergarten teacher at a young age, followed by her difficulties during teacher preparation, and her delayed and apprehensive entry into a kindergarten teaching career. Each plotline is described in more detail below.

Choosing to Become an Early Childhood Teacher. From a very young age Sabrina knew she wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. This decision oriented her toward a very specific ECE teacher identity. Though sometimes dormant, Sabrina's identity as a kindergarten teacher was a constant throughout her plotlines. The following excerpt from Sabrina's transcript illustrates the origin of this identity:

> Honestly, I was probably maybe six or seven years old. For as long as I can remember I have always wanted to be a teacher. Um, you know I had a kindergarten teacher that I loved, and it was probably her. She was just kind and kind of motherly. I wanted to be her when I grew up.

From age six or seven, Sabrina imagined herself as her kind and motherly kindergarten teacher. It seems that Sabrina's kindergarten experience fostered her desire to become a teacher, and the image of being like her own kindergarten teacher impacted and guided her future decisions.

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Sabrina further elaborated on her commitment to being a kindergarten teacher in the following excerpt:

> Oh, kindergarten. I always knew it was going to be kindergarten. It's kind of crazy because I'm the youngest, so I never grew up with younger siblings. Um, what prepared me the most? Gosh, I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I just always, in my mind, knew that that's what I wanted to be. I didn't even like babysitting when I was a kid, so I don't know.

Here, Sabrina emphasized certain contradictory influences and interests in her life that she found antithetical to the desire to teach kindergarten: she did not grow up with young children around, nor did she seek opportunities to interact with young children prior to entering a teacher preparation program, and she specifically stated that she was not interested in babysitting. Despite all this, although she found it "kind of crazy," her desire to teach kindergarten and her early identity as a kindergarten teacher still came through. Her experience as a kindergartener herself seems to have had great bearing on her decision to become an ECE teacher, and specifically to become a kindergarten teacher.

Teacher Preparation. When asked about her teacher preparation program, Sabrina recalled her negative student teaching experience; she did not initially reveal much else about her university teacher preparation. She said of her student teaching:

> That was awful. It was the worst experience of my life. It was awful, they threw me in with a teacher, a second-grade teacher. She was in the classroom for just a few days, and she was gone. I couldn't even find her in the building. It was horrible. I had no support from the principal. It was basically, "Here's the teacher's manual. Go for it." I had no clue where to start. I was lost, completely lost. It was the worst. I don't know if it was

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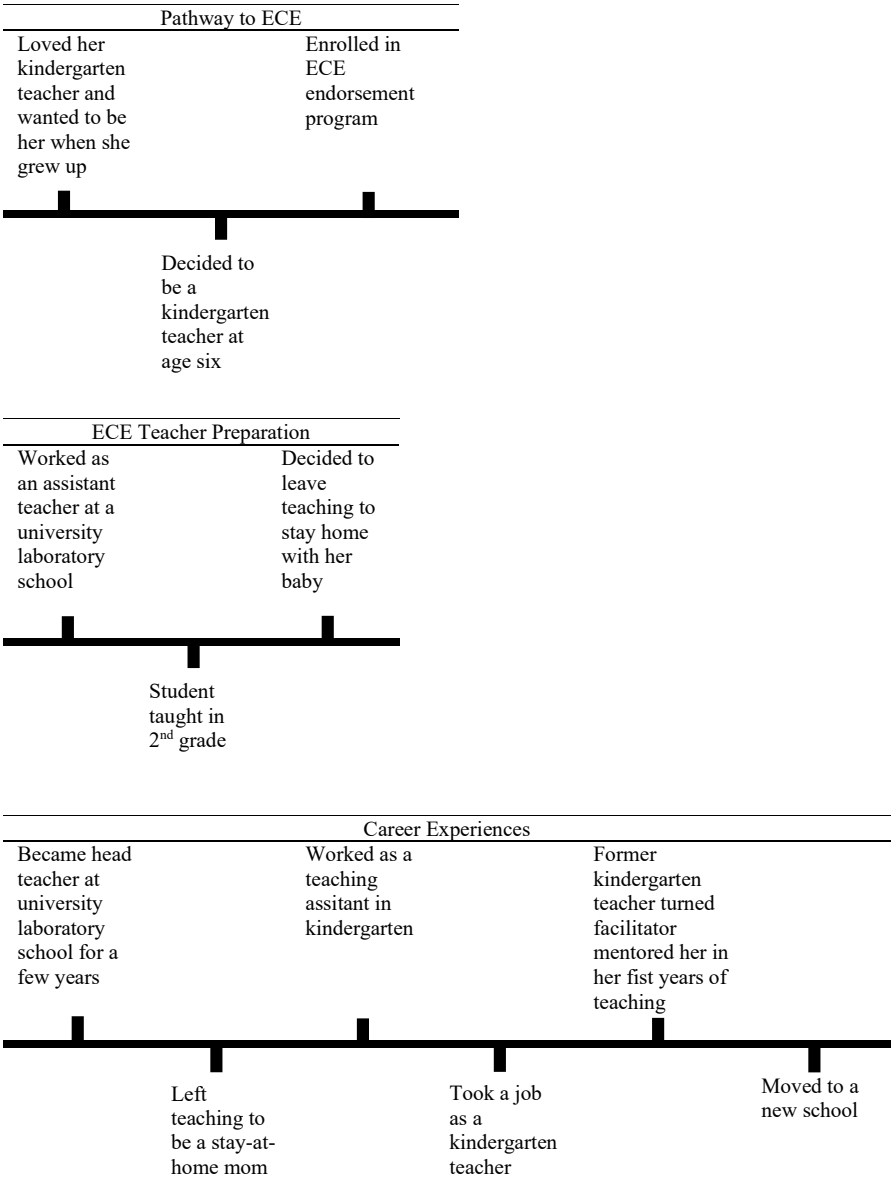
five or six weeks. It was horrible. It was horrible. I was pregnant at the time, and I knew that I wasn't going to teach. So, I wouldn't say that experience alone made me not want to teach, because I had already planned on being a stay-at-home-mom. If I wasn't pregnant, I probably would not have taught. It was that horrible.

Figure 1

Sabrina's Timeline of Critical Events



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Sabrina's teacher preparation experience was punctuated by this negative incident as a student teacher, and she cited it as one of the determining factors in her choosing after graduation. In this part of the interview, the negatives of her student teaching placement seemed to overshadow any recollections of positive experiences she may have had while enrolled in her teacher preparation program. However, Sabrina shared more positive experiences after we concluded the interview, and I was packing up my things. She recounted working in a university laboratory school as part of her preparation. She was first a teaching assistant and then became the head teacher of a preschool class after graduation. Her initial story was that her student teaching was so terrible she left teaching for 15 years, but then she shared the following subsequent experiences:

> While I was in school getting my early childhood, I did that [worked at a university laboratory school], but I was the head teacher after I had my one daughter. I was one of the teachers for preschool. I did have a good experience there. It was a good transition. What I had done was, I had graduated from college and even when I was in college, I was at the Mountain West University teaching that. Then as my family grew, I ended up not teaching it. And then you know I quit. Then I was home for like fifteen years. And then, but yeah it was a good transition.

Sabrina explained that the negative student teaching experience, as well as the demands of motherhood, probably influenced her decision to leave teaching. Yet, after a 15-year hiatus, Sabrina decided she wanted to try again. She got a job as a kindergarten teacher's assistant at a local elementary school to determine if she really did want to be a kindergarten teacher. Being in a kindergarten classroom and having a teacher who mentored her, led Sabrina to accept a kindergarten teaching position at the same school the following year.

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The stark contrast among her multiple experiences teaching in ECE contexts (i.e., student teaching, university laboratory school, and kindergarten), certainly influenced her ECE identity development. For Sabrina, having an opportunity to observe, try out and be supported when teaching proved to be a determining factor in her ability to realize an ECE professional identity. Furthermore, her experience teaching at a university laboratory school instilled in her a sense of professionalism and best practices for engaging young children, which she continues to draw on today. When describing her experiences as a lead teacher in the laboratory school, Sabrina explained:

> I remember being, you know they had the observation glasses, and I felt like I always had to be on my top game you know, because parents could be watching. And I kind of always [think] that even still. I've gotta be on top of things because people are watching. People can be, even though they might not be in my classroom they can hear things out of the classroom and stuff. I always have to be on top [snapping her fingers] of my game. I can't ever let things drop a little bit you know, just making sure that the kids are engaged. I feel like my voice has a lot to do with that. If I'm like talking monotone or whatever. Keeping things moving. [snap] You've gotta know that pace.

This specific memory of her teacher preparation and the things she learned during this critical event instilled in Sabrina what ECE teachers should do and the belief that she needed to always enact best ECE practices.

Career Experience. Sabrina's career experiences also contributed to the development of her ECE identity. As described above, she first had the opportunity to work as a kindergarten aide and then returned to the same school to be a kindergarten teacher. An on-site mentor during

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her first three years as a full teacher, influenced her profoundly. She reflected on this experience stating the following:

> The first couple years that they had the mentor program that was awesome. The administration would come in and observe and I had a great [mentor]. He had taught transitional kindergarten which I think helped because a lot of these [mentors], they teach the upper grades, and they just don't get the memo. But he was fantastic because he had taught transitional kindergarten. He'd come into the class, and he could give me real ideas.

Sabrina referred to the benefits of observing this mentor, trying out what she observed, and being supported by an ECE mentor throughout the process. Furthermore, her experience teaching at a university laboratory school, which had a two-way mirror to allow parents and university students to observe her teaching at any time, instilled in her a sense of always using best teaching practices. While she no longer teaches in a classroom with a two-way mirror, she continues to implement a high standard of teaching practices, stating that people are still watching her as they pass her classroom. Her university laboratory school experiences seemed to instill professional ECE practices which she continues to draw upon.

Hannah's Plotline

Hannah's plotline is represented in Figure 2. It begins with her decision to become a teacher at a young age, followed by her teacher preparation experience, and ends with career experience as a 2nd grade intern and kindergarten teacher. Each plotline is described in detail below.

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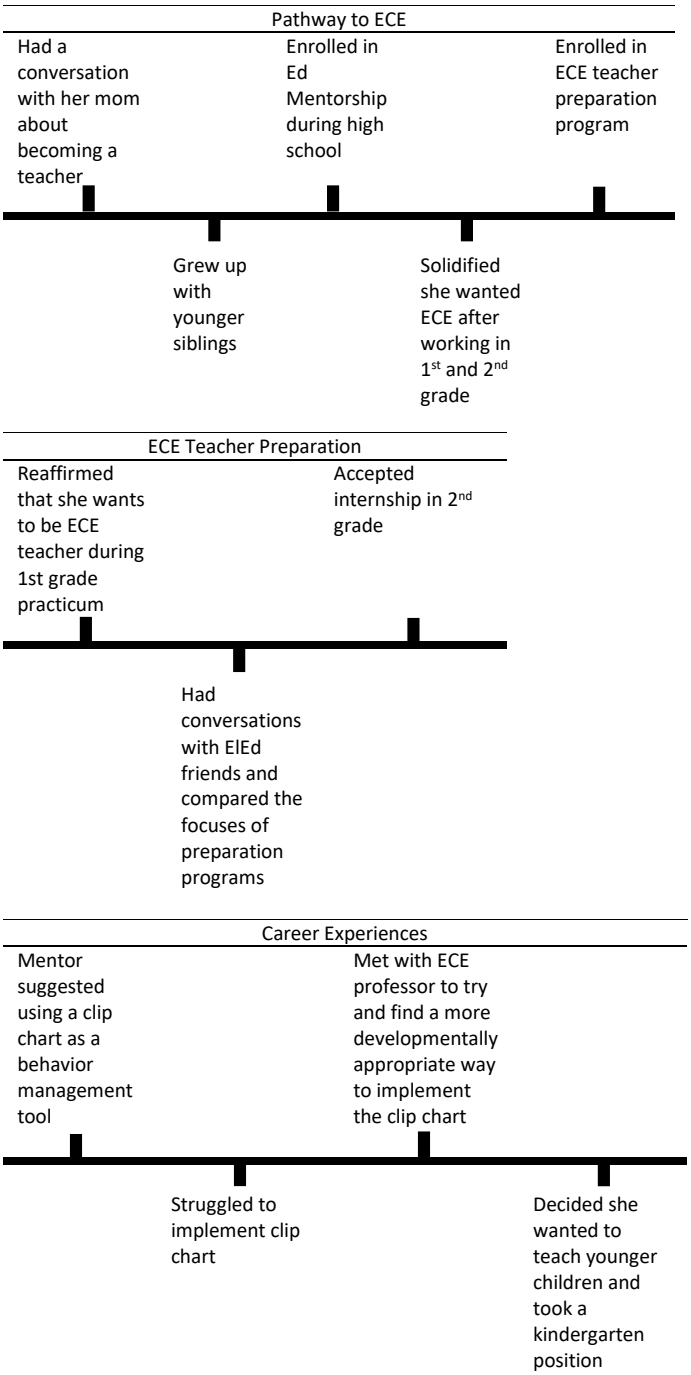
Figure 2

Hannah's Timeline of Critical Events



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Choosing to Become an Early Childhood Teacher. Hannah expressed a love for her teachers and knowing she wanted to become a teacher at an early age. During a conversation with her mother while she was a child, Hannah realized that being a teacher would allow her to meet her career and personal desires to be both a mother and a professional. Hannah grew up with younger siblings and felt very comfortable around young children. She mentioned that her desire to become an ECE teacher was further solidified in high school during an internship program where she went to a local elementary school every day for a semester to help in a first- and second-grade classroom. She recounted the following:

> I have wanted to be a teacher since I was really little, like first grade. I don't know where it started, but I love school. I love my teachers. Talking to my mom it was like, "That's the perfect job if you want to be a teacher and a mom. You can do both." I've just wanted it ever since. So, I grew up with a lot of younger siblings, well four younger siblings. They were like significantly younger than I was. . . it was just what I was used to. And then in high school I was able to do elementary mentorship. They called it Ed Mentorship where I went into the elementary school in first and second grade every day for a semester. I think that maybe just solidified like, "This is what I want. This is what I love," for me.

Hannah's commitment to working with young children was influenced by two things: her experiences with her younger siblings and the high school internship. These, positive experiences, coupled with a guided conversation with her mom, informed Hannah's choice to work with young children and launched her toward enrolling in an ECE teacher preparation program.

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Teacher Preparation. Hannah's teacher preparation provided further affirmation that ECE was where she belonged. Conversations she had with friends who were enrolled in the ElEd teacher preparation program caused her to evaluate the tenets of her ECE program as well as contrast them with those of the ElEd program. She recalled the following:

> During practicums, I was put in first grade a lot. I was like, "This is awesome. I love this." This just might be me and what I took out of the [ECE] program. What I noticed most is my [ElEd] friends, like a lot of what comes up, they talk about like it's all "the procedure" and the "how-to" and "this is everything listed" and "this is how we do everything." And that their education was focused on "how-to." That is not what I got out of it [ECE program] at all. For me it was "the why" and the understanding of what we were doing as teachers. That was like so much more powerful for me in school than any of the "this is how we do it."

Here, as Hannah contrasted teacher preparation for ElEd and ECE, she described a key difference in identity between the two roles. These experiences and reflections during her teacher preparation helped solidify her commitment to ECE principles.

Teaching Experiences. In lieu of student teaching, Hannah chose to accept an internship in second grade. This year of experience served as a beginning to her teaching career, however she was still considered a university student and received significant mentoring. However, Hannah's mentor did not espouse ECE ideals, which created tension for Hannah and caused her to reflect upon and further evaluate her ECE beliefs. She stated the following:

> I remember my intern year. It all goes back to management for me. That's the hardest thing and the most conflict I feel between what I believe or what I'm trying to figure out that I believe and what the school wants me to do or suggests. And so, I remember at the

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> beginning of my intern year my [mentor] was like, you know she is like, "This is what we suggest, but you figure it out," right then I could tell they wanted, like they really wanted me to put up a clip chart. I was like I don't, I don't want to use a clip chart. That sounds awful. That sounds awful, and it was. A lot of discussion, both my [mentor] and also I remember I had a long discussion with [my university professor] about it before school started like, "What should I do? How else can I handle it?" Different things like that.

In addition to the obvious conflict Hannah experienced during her internship year, the career experiences she shared reflected her commitment to being an ECE teacher. She willingly engaged in efforts to achieve balance between what was expected in a school context that did not fully align with her ECE sensibilities and enacting who she wished to be as an ECE teacher. Hannah did not want to blindly enact top-down mandates and therefore turned to a university professor for support during this time. After completing her internship in second grade, Hannah decided that she wanted to work with younger children. She explained that younger children often do not know or understand rules and respond well to the child guidance practices that were more in line with her beliefs as an ECE teacher. She took a kindergarten teaching position for the following school year.

Julie's Plotline

Julie's plotlines are represented in Figure 3. It begins with her choice to become an ECE teacher after several years working as an ElEd teacher, followed by her ECE preparation in an endorsement program, and her career experiences. Each plotline is explained in more detail below. Julie's career experience as an ECE advocate will be presented in the contrapuntal findings.

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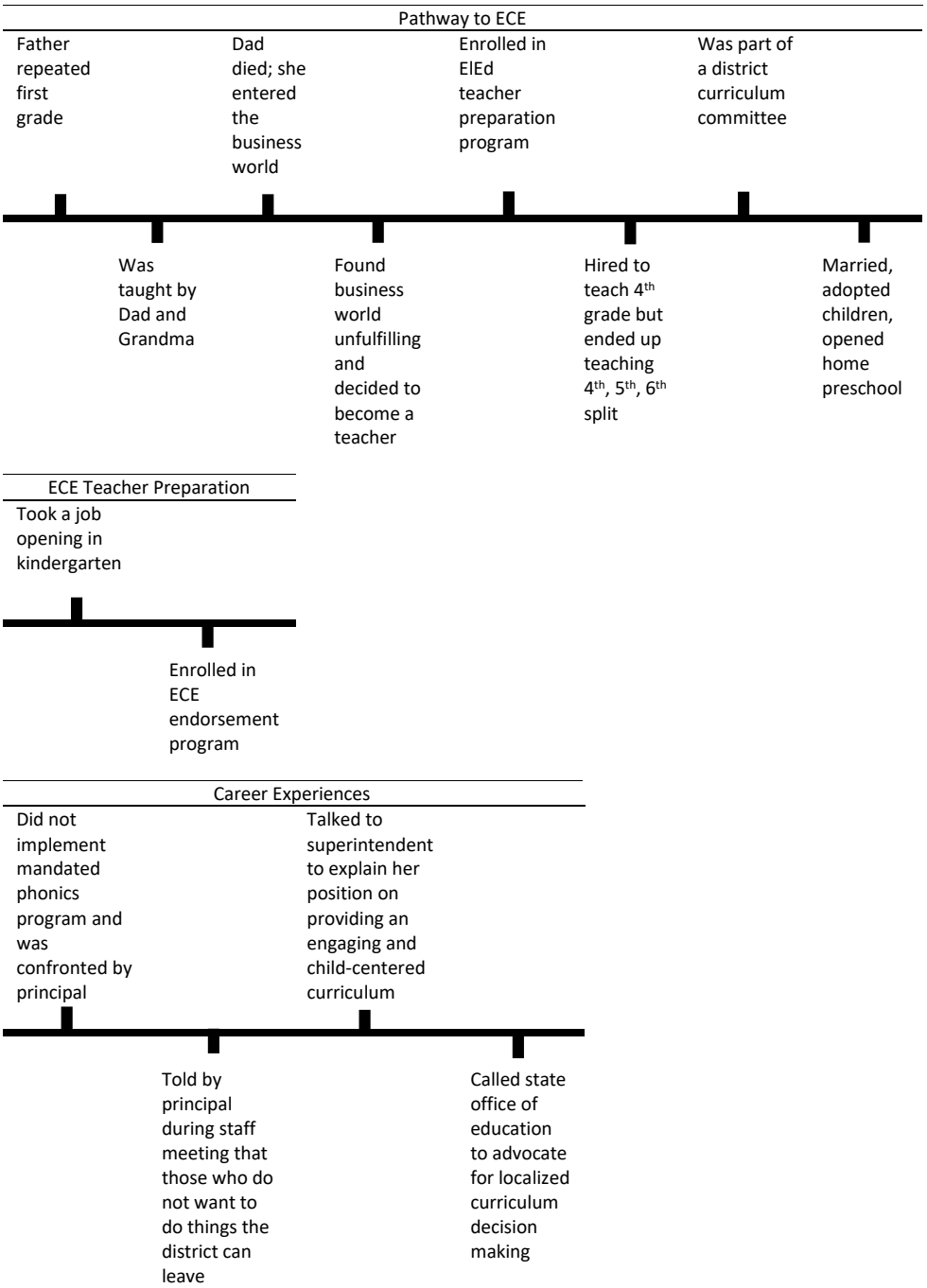
Figure 3

Julie's Timeline of Critical Events



Choosing to Become an Early Childhood Teacher. For Julie, the only participant who began her teaching career as an ElEd teacher, her early experiences engendered an affirmative

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attitude toward teaching, but they did not instill a desire to be an ECE teacher. She recounted how her close relationship with her father led her to initially choose business as a career. Upon his passing, Julie found the business world unfulfilling and realized that she was not happy with this path. She reflected on what she really wanted to do and accomplish. Julie determined that if she went into elementary education, she could make a difference in the world. As part of the ElEd program application process, Julie was required to fill out a survey regarding educators. She explained:

> My father died in my first year [of college] and it kind of threw me, I was the oldest of three girls, and so I just, it kind of threw me into an okay what-am-I-really-wanting-to-do mode. And so I think it was about that time that I started thinking more about education. I ended up as a result of the father passing away, I ended up in the business world. There was like some kind of cheating things going on. I just thought, "Where can you have your greatest influence?" and "When is the greatest time to have that influence?" So I think that is when I decided to go into elementary education. At the time you had to fill out a survey or a questionnaire about how many of your family were educators. My father hadn't even graduated from high school. His dad died before he was even born. I mean, there was a whole story, you know all the family stories calculate into that. He, as a tall person, had to repeat first grade. I thought, "Well if I want to do something different, I want to make a difference maybe I'll go into education." So I did.

As she reflected on her journey of becoming an ECE teacher, Julie explained that experiences with family members played a prominent role in shaping the ECE teacher she had become. Julie mentioned the impact her parents had on her; she also recounted how experiences with her grandmother had a great influence in shaping her identity as an ECE teacher: She shared:

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> I loved riding with my dad on his own business. I remember sitting in the cab of his truck driving places and he would talk to me about landscape, and he'd tell me these stories. I'm thinking that was the most pivotal thing was that I had parents who taught me and maybe not formally, but they were teachers. . .You know I really think it came back to my home with a grandmother that would take the time to put me on her knee and read to me or show me that funny looking grasshopper on the wall. I think I have had very good teachers. None of them are official teachers, but they just love me, and they believed in me and they [parents and grandmother], "You know you can do that," kind of an attitude.

Upon reflection, Julie cited these early experiences as helpful in constructing an ECE identity, but it was not until later into her teaching career that she began to identify as an ECE teacher. Julie began her teaching career working in the upper grades, and was then assigned to teach first grade. This was pivotal in Julie taking up an identity as an ECE teacher. She explained the following:

> I hired on as a fourth-grade teacher and ended up having to go back and they said they didn't have enough enrollment at the school where they had hired me on, so I went across the district and did a fourth, fifth, and sixth split. Having all three of those grades at one time was like the atom bomb of my teaching experience. So, it was like, "Okay, I don't know if I can prepare for this many preparations every day." So, I took the next grade level opening. Again, it was in first grade, and I have loved first grade because that's where they get their reading and writing skills. . . I have had some more curriculum as well. Especially after that fourth, fifth, sixth I was asking, okay so why did they assign all these different things to different grades. I did get on a curriculum committee at the West

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> School District where we took the whole curricular structure apart and tried to decide what we felt was important. So, I was part of that effort, so it's kept me in teaching.

Experience teaching fourth, fifth, and sixth graders made Julie more aware of curriculum content and its variation from grade to grade. While the change to first grade was initially overwhelming, it required Julie to become more knowledgeable about cognitive development, the curricular demands placed on young students, and how these demands affected young learners. It was an assignment, not a specific commitment to young children, that initially drew Julie to teach the younger grades. However, her professional teacher identity expanded to include specifics of an ECE identity with this opportunity, causing a shift from ElEd to ECE.

Teacher Preparation. After adopting her children, she took a leave of absence from her ElEd teaching career. While her children were young, she ran a preschool in her home. She recounted how she decided to pursue an available a kindergarten position in her local district:

> There was a kindergarten opening that came up and I got it. They said, "Oh, they'll give you a couple of years to get your endorsement." So, I quickly got on the endorsement trail. There were some great classes. I thought that maybe some of the stuff that I missed in the elementary training. . . I was really grateful for some of that coming out in my training. I didn't really have to do a student teaching because I was living it.

Having diversified teaching experiences in both upper grades (fourth through sixth grade) and lower grades (first through third grade), Julie was able to recognize the substantive differences between ECE and ElEd teacher preparation during her endorsement program. She indicated the importance of this difference and how it supported her intellectual development as a teacher of young children.

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Career Experiences. Julie was the participant with the most teaching experience and the most varied career experience. Teaching pre-K through sixth grade, engaging in curriculum work at the district level, and obtaining an ECE endorsement uniquely positioned Julie to be keenly aware of the affordances, constraints, and developmental differences between each grade-level. She indicated how her knowledge and varied career experiences positioned her as an advocate for young children. She described the draw of the curriculum of the upper grades and her commitment to her young learners, stating the following:

> You know I think I wanted to teach first grade because my dad had to repeat it. Seriously. I mean I student taught in first grade. I do like fourth grade; I do like the curriculum. I've done a little bit of traveling. It's fun to talk about those kinds of things. But I, I felt like I had more to say for the first graders. . . When I was teaching kindergarten, I also had a preschool in my home because I had adopted children *from another country,* and I took three years off. I tried to do the preschool-in-my-home thing. For me the earlier, the harder it is, but the more rewarding. Because, I don't know, fourth, fifth, and sixth is more content. The content is exotic and fascinating, and I love that kind of thing, but the hormones kick on and their peers become more important. Every grade has its pluses and minuses. I kind of gravitate toward first grade because in kindergarten it was you only have them for half a day, and they keep asking you to do more and more things. Lately it's been more and more academic, and a little less play and a little more--I don't know if they checked out the developmentally appropriate nature of some of these curricular demands that's being put on them. I have felt a little more comfortable in first grade because at least I have them all day. We can create our own world for a longer period of time. They are different. They all have their pluses. It's been nice to have had

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> that range so that I could kind of know where I fit on that continuum of how the kids grow.

Julie reiterated her commitment to ECE and making a difference for her young learners throughout the course of her interview.

Looking Across the Teachers' Experiences

When examined together, the findings of the teachers' plotlines lend important insight into the development of a professional ECE identity. Cross-case findings for the plotlines will be presented in the following order: choosing to become an ECE teacher, teacher preparation, and ECE career experiences.

Choosing to Become an Early Childhood Teacher

Choosing to become an ECE teacher and having that choice actualized is not a singular event; rather, it is a process and product of various experiences. Additionally, choosing to be an ECE teacher and embarking on the path to ECE identity development begins at different points for different teachers. However, each of the ECE teachers in this study began developing their ECE identity with an educational experience within early childhood settings. Sabrina as a young student imagined herself as an early childhood teacher. Hannah was influenced by high school internships and conversations with her parent, and Julie was assigned to an ECE classroom from the upper grades. Other experiences also seem to have a significant impact on the development of these teachers' ECE professional identity such as teaching young children, reflecting upon, and evaluating teaching practices, and engaging in advocacy for developmentally appropriate practices.

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Teacher Preparation

All three participants envisioned themselves as teachers and enrolled in a teacher preparation program. Sabrina and Hannah chose to enroll in an ECE teacher preparation program whereas Julie began her teacher preparation as an ElEd teacher. Teacher preparation programs generally, and ECE programs specifically, strive to instill a teacher identity within their students, to provide the knowledge to support enactment of the identity, and to launch a new generation of educators into the workforce (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Ritblatt et al., 2013). The plotlines from this study suggest that scaffolding and comparative discussions integrating coursework and experience as part of a formal teacher preparation program greatly impacted the development of an ECE identity. Sabrina and Hannah both recounted experiences where they debriefed with others through daily conversations linked to the content they were learning in their coursework. Hannah described how these conversations led her to see the value of the "why" rather than "how to" orientation of her ECE preparation. Julie, who received her ECE endorsement after her initial ElEd training, argued that this later preparation solidified and expanded her understanding of teaching and teaching practice.

Career Experiences

The career experiences of the three participants are varied but gaining experience in an ECE setting solidified the teachers' professional identity and reinforced their choice to be ECE teachers. Additionally, each teacher had opportunities to assert her professional ECE identity in different ways. These moments of assertiveness suggested that tension created an opportunity for reflection and affirmation of the teachers' ECE beliefs and principles; this became a driving force for advocacy, decision making, and individual understandings of ECE professional identity.

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Contrapuntal Voices Which Disrupt Early Childhood Teacher Identity

The interviews from each participant revealed experiences and elements both related to their ECE identity and those which distracted from or ran counter to that identity. This dichotomy or these contrapuntal voices (Gilligan et al., 2006) generated further insight into each teacher's ECE identity and the contexts, relationships, and emotions that shaped it (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). This section will highlight the contrapuntal voices for each of the three participants, putting together a series of quotes from each teacher's interview. Each voice will be shared first, followed by a discussion of the interplay between the two voices for each teacher.

Contrapuntal Voices for Sabrina

Sabrina expressed that being a teacher of young children has brought love and joy to her life. This and similar sentiments from her interview were represented by Sabrina's main voice, her "I love my job!" voice. However, a contrapuntal voice emerged during analysis, her "teacher's lament" voice. Sabrina expressed both that she loves her job and that there are times when she feels overtaxed, underappreciated, and wonders whether she should continue to work as an ECE teacher.

Sabrina's "I Love My Job!" Voice.

> Teaching to me is my happy place. Whenever I get ready and go to school, you know my husband will say, "Well, have a good day or whatever." And I'll say, "Yup! I get to go play with my little 5-year-old-friends!" It's seriously the best job I could ever have ever. I don't know. I it's my happy place. I love it. . . Every day I come in and I just feel so loved like, what a great job! I saw one of my students yesterday at the store and he just came over and gave me a big hug. I just thought, "This is why I do this. Because they just

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> love their teacher." Like these little kids just, I don't know. . . They just are so happy to come to school. They just love, love, love their teacher.
>
> **Sabrina's "Teacher's Lament" Voice.**
>
> In kindergarten there is so much preparation as far as everything has to be a manipulative. My whole summer is spent cutting things out and making activities for the kids. I've got this project, and this project, and this project, and this project going. . . I feel like it's just very overwhelming and disorganized. Sometimes those projects don't get done. I never feel on top of it. I always feel like I'm in "survival mode.". . . I'm half-day but I'm not half-day. I easily put in 40 to 50 hours a week. Easily. Ugh. Why do I do this? I'm not even getting paid for this. . . The expectations are so crazy when we, as kindergarten teachers, we're expected to teach a full day of curriculum in half a day. It's just impossible.

Sabrina expressed love for her young students and seemed motivated to keep teaching by the love they expressed for her, but she also expressed feeling stifled by the top-down curricular demands placed on her as a part-time kindergarten teacher. Her commitment to providing engaging lessons for her students led her to put in more hours than she was compensated for; this became a limitation because she worked without pay and tried to include all the learning experiences young children need in a system that only allowed for half the necessary time. Sabrina found a lot of satisfaction in working with young children, yet she lamented that she was not compensated for her efforts.

Contrapuntal Voices for Hannah

Hannah's interviews revealed a strong sense of who she wished to be as an ECE teacher: engaging, creative, and attentive to the cognitive, social and emotional needs of her students.

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Thus, "the ECE teacher I want to be" was the main voice found in her interview transcription. Counter to this voice is her "the teacher I am expected to be" voice that she described when discussing her internship year and her struggles with a prescribed behavior management clip-chart.

Hannah's "The Early Childhood Teacher I Want to Be" Voice.

The days that are awesome…and this is really like I'm working hard on this because I feel like…it's the days when my plans are on point. It's engaging. It's something that they want to be doing. If you create lessons where they're pulled in, they they're going to want to be engaged. That conversation like happens naturally. You don't have to worry about students shouting things out because you're just all engaged in what you need to be learning. It just kind of takes care of a lot of behavior issues. I think also my attitude…if my lessons are awesome and I have the right attitude of, "you know what we're just rolling with it. We're going." I'm not frustrated by all these little hiccups. Then I just, I handle it better.

Hannah's "The Teacher I am Expected to Be" Voice.

So, I tried to use it for a specific, for us it was "talking during lessons." This was in second grade and so I tried to use it mostly for that. But then it ended up being always the same students moving down. And it was just, it was frustrating for them and frustrating for me. And I mean, it becomes kind of manipulative. Because you start using it to like, "Oh, well I need students to start doing this, so I am going to clip them up that are doing this." You try to pull them into that, which is like, what we sometimes do as teachers, we praise students for what they're doing in hopes that other students will start that behavior. But I feel like that is definitely more of an elementary technique that they are like, "This

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is really good. This is what we do." For me it feels manipulative. I'm like, I've got to figure out how to make this work better or how to make it so that everyone feels the love.

Hannah's statements of wanting to find a way to teach within the confines of the context within which she worked illustrated her commitment to ECE ideals. She wanted to teach her young students and nurture their social and emotion wellbeing. Even in the early stages of her career, Hannah's primary voice articulated her commitment to improvement and becoming the teacher she wants to be. However, there was also a lament in her contrapuntal voice focusing on the pressure she felt as an ECE teacher. She felt this lament during student teaching and with the current demands of her institution to hold young children to learning that is beyond their age and developmental level. Hannah seemed conflicted between these two voices when enacting her ECE identity.

Contrapuntal Voices for Julie

Julie has had a variety of career experiences, finding fulfillment in teaching grades pre-K-6, and working at the district office with fellow educators. She has a vast knowledge of curriculum and how the school system works. These aspects of Julie's identity were represented as her "I am an educator" voice. But the other prominent voice for Julie came from her experiences and action in advocating for young learners. While examples of advocating for fellow educators were also present in Julie's transcript, most of her advocacy efforts have been for young learners. Therefore, her contrapuntal voice is titled her "I am an ECE advocate" voice.

Julie's "I am an Educator" Voice.

Doing the fifth and sixth grade "rah, rah," I liked that. I liked doing the district office thing. I liked working curriculum. I liked being able to say, "We are going to do this, and we do need you and we want to hear your voice too." I liked saying that to the teachers,

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> but I feel like the opportunities for integration and um, just exploring the world are so much greater in the early grades. Part of that is due to the testing structure that is in place because you have your SAGE test and all those other things that upper grades are feeling like, "Man, we're wall-charted every time we turn around, so we can't really take a bird walk if someone brings a bug in a jar and We can't talk about the three body parts and all that kind of stuff because it may not be in our curriculum level stuff for today." So, I don't know, I think you can be more human in the lower grades.

Julie's "I am an Early Childhood Advocate" Voice.

> And especially when administration sees education as an assembly line and more just widget on the assembly line kind of a thing and they don't see the grandeur of negotiating with kids and helping them to rise to their potential and use their own preferences it's really, it has been a struggle, but I do try to smooth the waters. I do try to, I mean today, there's no law that says I can't call the State Office and say, "Are you planning to revise this nine-year-old document? Talk to me about it." I feel like it's a free world and you can usually try and talk to them and if I do have an issue, I do like to sprint into it. They do have some letters from me. I've talked to them about Common Core for example. I just said, "Look if it hasn't been vetted. If a lot of early childhood people are speaking against it, why aren't you looking at it."

Julie is fundamentally an educator; she took on the components of an ECE teacher identity after being assigned to teach first grade. This educator voice was revealed when Julie discussed her love of learning and her love of teaching concepts and content to students of all levels. She recounted her fascination with the curriculum in the upper grades and the importance of giving support and validation to her fellow teachers. It was this range of knowledge and understanding

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that constituted Julies main voice, “I am an educator.” Julie’s contrapuntal voice supported the “I am and educator” voice, but it produced acts of advocacy, particularly for ECE students. Julie was not hesitant to raise issues during faculty meeting when plans have not considered kindergarteners. Julie’s passion toward appropriate education for young children supported her voice for advocacy to champion the cause of ECE in a K-6 public school setting.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of the plotlines for each of these three ECE teachers, I identified three themes in the journey of developing an ECE identity: (a) previous life experiences which influenced the choice to become an ECE teacher, (b) teacher preparation, and (c) ECE career experiences. Having an immersive teaching experience in an ECE setting—whether in childhood, preservice teaching, or career assignments— led these ECE teachers to embrace, solidify, or orient their identity toward ECE. ECE preparation seemed especially valuable to identity development when the teachers’ experiences integrated the content of their teacher preparation courses with their own teaching experiences with young children. Career experiences provided opportunities for the participants to deepen their understanding of and commitment to ECE. This produced a commitment to an ECE identity and a recognition of the need to advocate for young children’s learning, particularly in K-6 settings. The trends identified in the plotlines illustrated that there was not a singular pattern in the development of ECE teachers. However, by way of a general pattern, positive personal experiences with educators that are either formal or informal and at a young age along with experiences as an adult in an ECE classroom seemed to influence the participants’ identities as ECE teachers.

The contrapuntal voices revealed the conflict felt by the teachers in different aspects of their ECE teacher identities. All three teachers had contrapuntal voices that seemed to represent a

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common lament of most ECE teachers in K-6 settings: the fact that imposed mandates are often not developmentally or intellectually appropriate for young children. While the teachers responded to and described this lament in different ways, all three teaches felt the daily forces that pushed back against their ECE identities, and this conflict seemed to complicate the process of fully embracing their ECE identities.

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CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Similar to the findings of Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992), this study revealed the importance of both experience and context in the development of an ECE teacher identity. In this study, examining the experiences of three ECE teachers who work in a K-6 context, revealed four key aspects of ECE teacher identity development. These are: (a) understanding that initial and continued commitment to the ECE profession emerge at different points, (b) guided discussions about ECE tenets and teaching practices influence ECE teacher identity development, and (c) mentoring by an ECE professional s with an ECE commitment can facilitate ECE identity development.

Commitment to the Early Childhood Education Profession

As demonstrated by these three teacher's experiences, ECE professional identity can emerge at different points and through different time periods (Androusou & Tsafos, 2018; Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014). Regardless of the process, the data from this study also suggests that an initiating experience prompting an individual to consider becoming an ECE teacher is vital. Furthermore, experiences working with young children appear to be some of the most critical. Within the data, this held true whether the experiences took place in formal ECE settings (as in the cases of Julie and Hannah, who worked with young children in schools before officially becoming ECE educators) or in informal settings (as in the case of Sabrina, who based her decision largely on her own childhood experience).

Throughout the data, it was also clear that each of the three participants embodied a wide constellation of characteristics of ECE teacher identity while also being united in following the universal tenets of ECE (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This was demonstrated through examples

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of developmentally appropriate curricula, beliefs about children's learning and development, and expressions of advocacy for young children and their families. Interestingly, the teachers' consistent commitment to these ECE tenets also appeared to increase their opposition to and frustration with the curriculum and policy mandates that all three experienced during their careers. The third listening (contrapuntal voices) revealed some of the on-tensions (the lament) that ECE teachers who teach in K-6 school contexts may experience.

Guided Discussions

The plotlines of all three participants also indicated the impactful role of guided discussion in the development of an ECE teacher identity (Androusou & Tsafos, 2018; Barron, 2016). For example, Sabrina's guided conversations during her experience teaching at a university laboratory school instilled ECE practices which she has continued throughout her career. Sometimes these discussions were routine and took place in a formal setting as was the case with Sabrina, and sometimes discussion were prompted by a critical event. For Julie, being asked to implement curriculum she deemed developmentally inappropriate, prompted her to initiate a conversation with administration to discuss best practices in teaching young children. This experience allowed Julie to demonstrate her commitment to ECE beliefs through advocacy.

Being Mentored by a Fellow Early Childhood Education Professional

Across the three participants' plotlines, there was a consistent theme of mentoring. Each participant shared experiences of being mentored by fellow ECE professionals and the sense of confidence and empowerment it brought to them. For Sabrina, being mentored by a fellow ECE professional gave her the confidence to be the kindergarten teacher she imagined and was significant in molding her ECE identity. Moreover, all three participants were influenced by mentors who supported and encouraged ECE principles in their own work as advocates for

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young children. For Hannah, it was the university ECE professor she sought out to obtain guidance on how to navigate imposed management systems which were contrary to her ECE beliefs.

Implications for Early Childhood Teacher Education

Teacher educators are uniquely positioned, through what Alsup (2006) calls borderline discussions, to draw preservice teachers' experiences and ideas forward. This includes fostering guided discussions in which ECE teacher candidates are encouraged to examine their commitments to and beliefs about ECE principles and ideals. As discussed in Chapter 4, Hannah engaged in critical discussions comparing ECE and ElEd beliefs and practice during her teacher preparation which allowed her to make a clear delineation between the expectations of her intern supervisor and how she wished to enact her ECE identity. However, for her, these poignant discussions were private friend-to-friend discourse and not part of her teacher preparation coursework. Candidates like Sabrina and Julie, who did not engage in these types of personal discussions during their teacher preparation programs, missed out on the benefit of engaging in critical discourse to deepen their commitment to their ECE identity until much later in their careers. Teacher educators can help replicate Hannah's valuable experiences more universally for other students by including opportunities for critical, reflective discussion in their courses.

Mentoring and support were also common themes in the journey of these teachers which teacher preparation programs should consider. Sabrina's lack of support during her student teaching experience initially turned her away from being an ECE teacher, while subsequent support from a mentor helped her launch her career. While Sabrina was student teaching the public school context lacked the support she needed to feel confident enacting her ECE identity. Is there more that can be done to support ECE ideals in the public schools? Can teacher

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preparation programs better prepare ECE teachers to navigate mandated programs in a way that allows them to be true to their ECE identities?

Limitations and Recommendation for Further Research

The participants, as well as me, the researcher, all came from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and were all White females. To more fully understand the role, experience, and context at play in shaping ECE identity, further research should include participants with a more diverse range of socioeconomic, gender, racial, and ethnic identities.

In addition, the shorter length of this study and its reliance on interview-based data limited its scope. Longitudinal work that follows a group of ECE teachers from when they enter pre-service programs through their teacher preparation and then into their teaching careers would be helpful in understanding the critical experiences that are part of ECE teachers' development. Further research examining how beginning ECE teachers reflect on their teacher preparation could provide helpful insight for those who mentor ECE teachers during their provisional years. Finally, all the participants in this study made a willing personal choice to pursue careers in ECE education. It would be valuable to study teachers not prepared as ECE teachers who have been assigned to those roles. Further work could also be done through examining team meetings of ECE teachers to see how they enact their identities and how they influence or are influenced by their ElEd colleagues.

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APPENDIX A

Consent/Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction

Our names are Kendra Hall-Kenyon and Janet Losser and we are faculty members in the Department of Teacher Education at Brigham Young University. We are currently conducting a research study focused on how early childhood education is understood in elementary schools.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- you will be interviewed for approximately forty-five (45) minutes about early childhood education and how it is viewed in elementary schools
- the interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements
- the interview will take place at a time and location convenient for you
- total time commitment will be 45 minutes

Risks/Discomforts

There are minimal risks to you as a participant. However, you may feel uncomfortable being interviewed or answering particular questions about your perceptions and/or experience. You are not required to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable and the interview may be discontinued at any time.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to you. However, there may be potential benefits to the field of education at large as we begin to better understand early childhood education (ECE) in the context of public schools.

Confidentiality

The research data will be kept in a secure location and only the researcher will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, all identifying information will be removed and the data will be kept in the researcher's locked office.

Compensation

There is no compensation for your participation in this research study.

Participation

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without any consequence.

Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Kendra Hall-Kenyon at kendra_hall@byu.edu or (801) 422-4439.

Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant contact IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; irb@byu.edu.

Statement of Consent

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Name (Printed): _____ Signature _____ Date: _____

Institutional Review Board
8-12-2016 Approved
8-11-2017 Expires

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APPENDIX B

Early Childhood Education Teacher Online Survey

https://byu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8kKySVHjkqb6mHz

Members of the Department of Teacher Education at BYU are studying Early Childhood Education (PreK-3rd grade) teachers' experiences teaching in elementary public schools. We invite you to complete this background survey, which includes basic demographic information and questions about your pre-service teacher preparation program. The purpose of the survey is to help us learn more about early childhood education and how you think about your preparation to teach young children. We very much appreciate your participation in our study and your honest response to each of the survey questions. Please be assured that your identification will be kept STRICTLY confidential. Those who complete the survey will be entered to win one of four $50 visa gift cards.

Some of you will also be contacted to participate in a follow-up interview focused on your beliefs and practices as a teacher of young children. If you are selected and participate in an interview (45-60min), you will also receive a $25 visa gift card as a thank you for your time.

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Marital Status:
4. Number of Children:

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5. Which of the following grades have you taught?

Preschool

Kindergarten

1st

2nd

3rd

4th

5th

6th

6. Please indicate how many years have you taught at each grade level:

Preschool

Kindergarten

1st

2nd

3rd

4th

5th

6th

7. Grade level you are currently teaching:

8. Number of consecutive years in current teaching assignment:

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9. What teaching licenses and/or endorsements do you have? Check all that apply:

    K-3

    K-6

    1-6

    1-8

    Reading Endorsement

    ESL Endorsement

    Gifted and Talented Endorsement

    Math or STEM Endorsement

    Other:

10. What year did you complete your undergraduate degree?

11. Where did you complete your undergraduate degree?

12. Teaching certification (such as: K-3, K-6, 1-8, SPED…):

13. Were you an intern? If so, for how long?

14. Did you student teach? If so, for how long?

15. How would you describe the focus or emphasis of your teacher preparation program?

16. What books (2-3 titles) do you remember reading from your preparation program?

17. Think back, what aspects of your education program do you think were most helpful to you as you entered your first year of teaching young children?

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18. Over the course of your career, what aspects of your teacher education program have endured and proven themselves to be of lasting value?
19. Were there some aspects of your teacher education program that really were a waste of time? If so, what were these?
20. If you could go back, what specifically would you change about your teacher education program?
21. Reviewing your experience in your teacher education program, what was the most powerful idea/concept taught? What was the most valuable experience?
22. Briefly describe the most significant professional relationship you developed during your preservice program. (Please be sure to include the position of the person—supervisor, mentor teacher, peer, professor as well as how that relationship developed).
23. What is the most significant thing you learned about yourself during your teacher preparation program?
24. At what age did you decide to work with young children?
25. In a sentence or two, please explain why you decided to become a teacher of young children.
26. I am willing to be interviewed by a university staff member. (If you are selected, you will receive a $25 Visa card for your time)

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27. If you would like to be entered into the drawing to win one of four $50 Visa cards, please provide the following information:

Name:

Email:

Phone number:

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APPENDIX C

Interview for Early Childhood Educators

Introduce yourself.

Today is _____(date). Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I assure you your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Will you please state your name? Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

As you know, this interview is a follow-up to your having filled out a survey that is part of a study being conducted by faculty at BYU. The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding of who you are, both personally and professionally. We are particularly interested in how you view yourself as a teacher of young children. We very much appreciate your willingness to participate in the study. At the end of the interview you will receive a $25 visa gift card as a token of our appreciation.

To the interviewer: be sure you let the interviewee know that they are speaking to a fellow traveler, someone committed to the importance and value of ECE teaching.

1. Think back, when did you decide to be a teacher? Who or what most influenced that decision? Before you became a teacher, what grade did you imagine you would be most comfortable teaching? What was it about this grade level that drew you to it? Have your views about the "best" grade level for you to teach changed over time? You are teaching ___ grade. Why not teach___ grade? (opposite end).

To the interviewer: Probe to get at their motivation to teach, what they hoped to get from teaching and why they hoped to be able to accomplish (do) as a teacher.

2. What do you say when someone asks you what you do? Do you ever say, "I am an early childhood educator?" Why? Why not? What makes someone an ECE teacher?

3. Of your life experiences, which proved to be most important for preparing you to teach young children? Of these experiences, what proved most important in shaping how you think about teaching and yourself as a teacher?

4. Some fill in the blank:
   - As a teacher, if I could, I would be more _____.
   - As a teacher, if I could, I would be less_____.
   - My teammates would say _____ is my best quality as a teacher.
   - I am best suited to teach young children because I am _____.

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5. Tell me about your role as a classroom teacher. Tell me about your role as a _____ (grade) teacher at this school.

6. Share a teaching experience that captures your best teaching.

7. What does a typical day in your classroom look like?

8. In the survey you mentioned _____ about your teacher preparation program. Can you tell me more about that?

9. When you think of yourself as a teacher, what sort of images come to mind, what sort of metaphors? Think: For me teaching is (or is like)_____.

10. Thinking back on your teaching career, has there been a time when you felt tension between what you are asked to do by school or district administration and your beliefs as a teacher of young children? If yes, what were the circumstances and how did things play out?

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APPENDIX D

I-Poems

Sabrina's Dream
I have always wanted to be a teacher.
I always knew it was going to be kindergarten.
I had a kindergarten teacher,
I wanted to be her when I grew up.
I didn't even like babysitting.
I just always knew in my mind,
I wanted to be a teacher.
I was an aide in preschool
I became a preschool head teacher.
I student-taught in second grade.
I had no clue, I was lost.
I left teaching.
I was an aide in a kindergarten room.
I became a kindergarten teacher.
I know everyone here, we get along great.
I'm a kindergartener at heart.
I've never taught another grade.
I feel it just comes naturally,
I've just never really struggled.
I have a lot of patience and don't really get upset.
I just keep my cool.
I've always kind of been that way.
I've always liked the young age.
I am that motherly, grandmotherly figure,
I just give them a squeeze,
I give that child an extra bit of love.
I love them and they love me.
I feel just like a celebrity.
I think about those kids a lot.
I've had to really advocate.
I persevered and got them in.
I always knew I would be a kindergarten teacher.

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Hannah's Desire
I don't know where it started.
I have always wanted to be a teacher.
I love school.
I love my teachers.
I've wanted it for so long.
I grew up with younger siblings.
I was able to do an elementary internship,
I went into the elementary school.
I think that maybe just solidified it.
I liked the younger grades.
I knew that that was what I was most comfortable with.
I finally got into the classroom.
I love this!
I teach young children.
I belong.
I didn't want to use a clip chart.
I felt like it was manipulative.
I used it before guidance.
I don't need this extra tool.
I am working hard on this.
I think it has driven me to find different ways to do things.
I feel like when my plans are on point,
I have the right attitude,
I'm not frustrated,
I handle it better.
I don't know, it just flows.
I feel like it feels better.
I think that it's a skill you develop when you work with young children.
I think it's extremely important,
I mean the kids are all coming from different backgrounds.
I need to be able to plan out the year.
I'm giving them those opportunities,
I'm helping them develop social/emotional skills.
I'm a teacher,
I teach kindergarten.
I studied early childhood education.
I love recess.
I can talk with my students.
I'm getting to a lot of students and having meaningful conversations.
I am able to connect individually with my students.
I don't have to be concerned about anything else.
I have this deep desire,
I want to teach and guide and help young children.

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Julie's Choice
I was young.
I fell in love with every teacher.
I think those attitudes started young.
Yet,
I ended up in the business world.
That's when I found myself in,
"What-am-I-really-wanting-to-do mode."
I want to make a difference.
I decided to go into Elementary Education.
I don't know, 4th, 5th, and 6th is more content,
I love that kind of thing.
I got my early childhood endorsement.
I learned things I'd missed in the elementary training.
I don't know if I had ever heard the word "developmentally appropriate" before then.
I just felt like it was more child-centered.
I feel like it was useful,
I just was in a different venue.
I had a little girl who was very distractible.
I think she got in trouble for drawing at the wrong time.
I think if you have a developmentally appropriate classroom,
You can honor those differences and celebrate who they are.
I do form opinions,
I have had conflict.
I lament,
I wasn't more proactive in explaining why,
I do things.
I like autonomy.
I do not need it to tell me what to do,
I haven't followed it.
I was called on the carpet for that.
I'm having a little cognitive dissonance.
I didn't fill out the workbook.
I don't think was properly vetted.
I try to first of all communicate with administration.
I called the state office of education.
If I do have an issue,
I like sprint into it.
I'm not afraid to try something.
I have to think if there is a dissonance,
I've done a bad job of PR.
I do make mistakes.
I feel like in some ways we don't have enough dialogue.
I do try to smooth the waters.
I've coached them.
I had people coach me.

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I'm a member of the team
I've had to kind of wrestle.
I kind of gravitate toward first grade,
I am creative.
I've never grown up.
I love to learn.
I had more to say for the first graders.
I feel like they bring a freshness,
I really have loved it.
I feel like I could teach other grades,
I don't necessarily always want to.

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