INFORMAL LEARNING AND EARLY CHILDHOOD FACULTY: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTENTIONAL AND INCIDENTAL WORKPLACE LEARNING IN THE PREPARATION OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

by

BISA BATTEN LEWIS

(Under the Direction of Desna Wallin)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research project describes how novice Early Childhood Education (ECE) community college faculty, who may have little to no education or experience in early care or preschool education, informally learn about the early care and preschool facet of ECE. Through personal interviews and documents, the basic interpretive qualitative approach was employed using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model with Beckett and Hager's (2002) theory on practice-based informal workplace learning as a framework to portray the nature of informal learning among ECE faculty in community colleges.

The findings of this study highlighted three aspects of informal learning among ECE faculty. First, ECE faculty engage in both intentional and incidental informal workplace learning activities that enhance their early care and education knowledge. Second, ECE faculty intentionally learn content on child development theory and day care rules and regulations, but incidentally learn content on best practices in early care and learning. Third, the nature of

informal learning among novice ECE faculty can be characterized as intentional and incidental practice-based informal workplace learning occurring through a four-stage experiential learning cycle that enables improved practice. The very nature of their daily work enables ECE faculty to go through a continual reflective cycle of developing new theories, strategies, and behaviors based on experiences (Kolb, 1984).

An understanding of how novice ECE faculty get further acclimated to the early care and preschool aspects of the ECE field might inform ECE faculty in-general and assist them to employ informal processes to upgrade their own knowledge and proficiency.

INDEX WORDS: Adult learning, informal workplace learning, intentional and incidental learning, experiential learning, early childhood faculty, preschool teacher preparation

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DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to Cameron and Jordan for inspiring me to advocate for quality learning opportunities for children everywhere. Thank you for supporting me through this endeavor. I love you dearly!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Learning is the acquisition of knowledge, facts, skills, and methods, which can be stored for immediate or future use as needed. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) identify four major types of opportunities in which learning occurs for adults –formal settings (institutions), non-formal settings (community-based), informal (self-directed), and online (computer-based). These researchers make clear assumptions that all four categories are of equal importance in the adult learning enterprise and that there will always be overlaps among them.

Although opportunities for adult learning have been described by adult education researchers as either formal, non-formal, informal, or online (Foley, 2004; Merriam et al., 2007), adult learning activities can generally be categorized as either *formal* or *informal*. Formal adult learning activities include those that take place in a traditional classroom setting, which can also consist of online instruction. Informal adult learning activities include those that take place in a non-traditional setting, which may exist anyplace outside of the traditional classroom setting. Whether learning takes place in the classroom or outside of the classroom, formal and informal learning both have advantages and disadvantages for carrying on learning. Researchers continue to debate which type of learning is paramount.

While disputes over the preference between formal and informal learning continue, more research is emerging on specific types of informal learning, such as professional learning and workplace learning. Used predominantly in the field of education, professional learning includes organizational and staff development activities designed to improve student learning and

achievement and includes activities such as leadership, technical assistance, resources, and/or consultative services (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). Similar to professional learning, focus is rising on workplace learning. Fenwick (2003, 2008) studies emerging trends and perspectives on learning at work. As a result of the rising focus on professional and workplace learning, partnerships among education professionals have surfaced creating professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs can help increase leadership capacity, embed professional development in daily work, create a positive school culture and develop accountability (Hord & Sommers, 2007).

Just as informal learning among education professionals has become a topic of increasing importance, so too has the focus on the quality of education programs at all levels. Whether referred to as professional learning or workplace learning, American education has started to implement changes in its education structure concerning the professional development of educators. President Bush's *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) elicited massive reformation in American education, which was the impetus for developing more opportunities for professional learning in K-16 education. NCLB is based on four pillars: (1) stronger accountability for results, (2) more freedom for states and communities, (3) proven education methods, and (4) more choices for parents. NCLB puts emphasis on determining which educational programs and practices have been proven effective through rigorous scientific research. Federal funding is targeted to support such programs and teaching methods that are effective in improving student learning and achievement (US Department of Education, 2004).

As multiple reports and studies provided evidence that student achievement was rising across America due to NCLB accountability provisions (US Department of Education, 2006), the federal government provided dramatic funding increases to early education programs. Federal

funding for early education programs continues to increase, as America's current administration embraces the philosophy that 'the years before a child reaches kindergarten are among the most critical in his or her life to influence learning' (US Department of Education, 2009).

President Obama's Early Childhood Initiative further commits the federal government to provide the necessary support that our youngest children need to prepare for success throughout their school years. Supporting a seamless and comprehensive set of services and support for children from birth through age 5, President Obama urges states to impose high standards across all publicly-funded early learning settings, develop new programs to improve opportunities and outcomes, engage parents in their child's early learning and development, and improve the early education workforce (US Department of Education, 2009).

As America moves forward in improving education programs for young children, it is important to take a look back at how far early education has come. From European reading programs in the sixteenth century to the promotion and implementation of diverse early learning programs in the twenty-first century, the importance and value of education in the early years of life have been acknowledged for 400 years (Carter, 1987). Generally referred to as early childhood education (ECE), the quantity and types of programs designed for children from birth to 8 years of age have escalated since the openings of the first kindergarten programs in Germany in 1837 and America in 1856 (Morrison, 2003), and continue to rise (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

The opening of the first American kindergarten in 1856 was a pioneering movement for the development of diverse early learning programs throughout the country. The first teacher training program in America, specifically developed for kindergarten teachers, began 24 years later. There is little documentation of teacher training programs being initiated from the late

1800's to the mid 1900s (Morrison, 2003). This lack of teacher training programs leads to questions about how teachers acquired the necessary skills to work with young children.

In an effort to professionally prepare adults who are planning to work with young children, a number of states in America have begun to offer teacher training programs. These postsecondary programs enable graduates to gain and retain positions in programs for children from birth to age 8. However, preparing prospective teachers for the ECE workforce has challenges. One primary challenge is that the standards for ECE professionals and ECE programs vary from state to state (File, 2001). With ECE including all of the childhood years (NAEYC, 2009), it is difficult for ECE faculty to develop and facilitate programs that efficiently cover the full spectrum of ECE. As a result, the ECE field is widely fragmented in regards to supports, intents, purposes, and regulators causing the preparation and professional development of ECE professionals to be far from seamless (File, 2001).

In this chapter, the field of ECE is introduced as it stands in the twenty-first century. The formal and informal preparation of ECE faculty are discussed. Following this foundational information, the problem, purpose and significance of this study are outlined. This chapter is organized into six sections: Early Childhood Education Today, Early Childhood Education Faculty and Formal Education, Early Childhood Education Faculty and Informal Learning, Statement of the Problem, Purpose Statement, and Significance of the Study.

Early Childhood Education Today

The field of ECE has evolved since the first kindergarten programs in the 1800s (Carter, 1987). One study documented over 1,200 ECE teacher training programs nationwide, which translates into nearly one-third of all institutions of higher education (Early & Winton, 2001). There are many different categories of programs designed to support the goals of contemporary

professional early childhood education, including family child care, child care centers, Montessori schools, Head Start, Pre-K, kindergarten, and elementary schools (Day, 2004; Essa, 2003; Morrison, 2004). ECE professionals can now acquire positions as child care directors, assistant directors, preschool/child care teachers, infant-toddler caregivers, Head Start teachers, elementary teachers, special education aides, and after school care providers (American Association of Community Colleges, 2001; Chesla & Matic, 2002; South Carolina Technical College System, 2008; Technical College System of Georgia, 2008). As ECE programs and careers in ECE become more diverse, so do the need and demand for corresponding teacher training programs.

In an effort to align teacher training programs with the evolving needs of the contemporary workforce, postsecondary programs must train prospective teachers on how young children develop and learn. During the early childhood period, children grow rapidly and need support and guidance from competent early childhood educators to develop appropriate social, emotional, intellectual, and physical skills (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The increasing importance of an early education, the desire for parents to obtain the services of highly qualified individuals, and the required knowledge of children entering grade school have enhanced the need for more quality ECE programs specifically designed for preschool children, who range in age from birth to 5 years (Chesla & Matic, 2002; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Essa, 2003; Morrison, 2004).

As a result of the increase in the need for more quality ECE programs specifically designed for preschool children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), careers in the field continue to expand; nevertheless, the requirements for preschool teachers remain significantly low in America (United States Department of Labor, 2006). In their literature and reports on labor

statistics in America, the United States (U.S.) Department of Labor (DOL) refers to preschool teachers as "child care workers" (U.S. DOL, 2006). While standards vary from state to state, DOL documents that most child care workers can get jobs upon graduating from high school (U.S. DOL, 2006). Once hired, these workers learn by watching experienced colleagues; some may take the initiative to participate in formal classes (U.S. DOL, 2006).

Child care workers/preschool teachers who decide to participate in formal classes in ECE now have a number of options, which may vary by state and location. Formal education in ECE may range from a Child Development Associate (CDA) credentialing program, which leads to an entry-level credential recognized nationally in the field (Council for Professional Recognition, 2007), to an undergraduate or graduate program resulting in a baccalaureate or terminal degree from a four-year college or university. The long hours and low pay of child care workers (Chesla & Matic, 2002; U. S. DOL, 2006) make it less feasible for these laborers to attain four-year degrees. Since the associate degree can be completed in two years and certificates in as little as a few months (Chesla & Matic, 2002; South Carolina Technical College System, 2008; Technical College System of Georgia, 2008), these credentialing programs are more appealing to and accommodating for child care workers. This study will focus on the ECE credentialing programs at institutions awarding the associate degree as the highest credential. Cohen and Brawer (2003) refer to such institutions as "community colleges" (p. 5).

If a child care worker/preschool teacher wants to pursue a CDA credential, certificate, associate degree, or an undergraduate or graduate degree, he or she must be enrolled in a formal education program of study (American Association of Community Colleges, 2001; Board of Regents, 2006; Council for Professional Recognition, 2007). The structure of ECE teacher training programs vary from college to college since the spectrum of ECE is so broad (File,

2001). Some colleges may offer more ECE courses that focus on the preschool years, while others may offer more ECE courses that focus on the elementary school years (Board of Regents, 2006; South Carolina Technical College System, 2008; Technical College System of Georgia, 2008). The primary goal of ECE programs of study that focus on the elementary school years is to prepare graduates for teacher certification (Board of Regents, 2006). As a result, program structure varies from state to state, depending on the state teacher certification standards. This study will focus on the ECE programs of study designed to prepare preschool (birth to age 5) teachers for the workforce.

Early Childhood Education Faculty and Formal Education

The primary goal of a formal ECE program of study focusing on the preschool years is to teach prospective child care workers/preschool teachers to demonstrate proficiency in eight primary areas (Day, 2004), including: (a) safe and healthy learning environment, (b) physical and intellectual competence, (c) social and emotional development and positive guidance, (d) relationships with families, (e) program management, (f) professionalism, (g) child development, and (h) observation of children and record-keeping. These formal preschool teacher training programs are planned and implemented by ECE faculty who have earned at least a baccalaureate degree or higher in the field (Commission on Colleges, 2006).

Although the field of ECE covers the spectrum of child development from birth to age 8 (NAEYC, 2009), accrediting agencies count on the one baccalaureate credential to qualify all ECE practitioners in all occupations associated with young children (File, 2001). The requirements for ECE faculty positions vary from college to college and state to state, depending upon the accrediting agency and its standards. Whether an ECE professional works with preschoolers or school-age children, the ECE credential is considered to equally ‘qualify’ the

individual to work with any of these groups (File, 2001). In an effort to meet accreditation standards for faculty credentialing, community colleges usually seek candidates with baccalaureate and/or master's degrees in Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Child Development, Child and Family Development, or Family and Consumer Sciences with related work experience (Commission on Colleges, 2006). As indicated on ECE faculty job announcements (University System of Georgia, 2008), this prior work experience generally includes teaching in the ECE field, which may include a public and/or private school setting with preschool and/or school-age children. Some ECE faculty may graduate from an ECE teacher training program that focused more on the preschool years, while others may have graduated from a program that focused more on the school-age years. In an effort to attain, apply, and convey evolving knowledge and skills related to preschool children, ECE faculty, especially those who graduated from a program of study focusing on the school-age end of the ECE spectrum, must rely on additional learning that takes place outside of the classroom to better understand how children from birth to age 5 develop and learn.

Early Childhood Education Faculty and Informal Learning

Professional learning is under reconstruction in the United States. American educators and stakeholders are further recognizing that teacher development includes more than just formal education. A recent study by the National Staff Development Council (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009) confirmed that, in order for education systems to produce students with the higher-order thinking skills essential for success in the 21st century, they will need to develop teachers with higher-order teaching skills and deep content knowledge. Instead of states spending millions of dollars on academic courses, work time should be built in for collaborative inquiry, mentoring and coaching, and continual learning on the job.

According to Lohman (2000), formal education programs, coupled with informal learning experiences, increase the likelihood of making learning meaningful for educators. Consequently, ECE faculty can benefit from engaging in both formal and informal education. Leadbeater (2000) argues that "the most important capability and the one which traditional education is worst at creating is the ability and yearning to carry on learning. Too much schooling kills off a desire to learn" (p. 111). He further argues that "more learning needs to be done at home, in offices and kitchens, in the contexts where knowledge is deployed to solve problems and add value to people's lives" (p. 112).

In an effort to gain and retain knowledge about how preschool children develop and learn, ECE faculty may participate in learning beyond the formal setting. While formal education opportunities may add to their knowledge base of appropriate early care and learning practices, new knowledge can also be gained by other means to upgrade competence and performance. This study will focus on how adults learn informally through experience and self-direction.

The term "informal learning" has been defined by various authors in different ways. Researchers have defined informal learning as activities initiated by people in work environments that result in the development of their professional knowledge and skills (Lohman & Woolf, 1998; Watkins & Marsick, 2001). Informal learning has also been described as "everyday learning" (Illeris, 2004) and "spontaneous and unstructured learning" (Coombs, 1985, p. 151). Beckett and Hager (2002) analyzed practice-based informal workplace learning. Essentially acquired at work during a variety of activities and experiences, practice-based informal workplace learning is activated by individual learners and is often incidental. Although learning can be acquired through a variety of opportunities, environmental inhibitors can have a

negative affect on learning (Lohman, 2000). As a result, workplaces should influence participation in informal learning activities.

Experiential and self-directed learning theories suggest that adults learn in diverse ways, especially in terms of informal learning, which can occur at any time, in any place and in many ways (Garrick, 1998; Illeris, 2004; Lohman, 2000; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Often used synonymously with self-planned learning, self-teaching, autonomous learning, independent study, and distance education, self-directed learning can simply be described as directing one's own learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). All adult learners are not self-directed. Many must go through a process moving from dependency to self-direction -- first being interested in becoming self-directed, being involved in self-direction, then becoming fully self-directed (MacKeracher, 1996). Learning and performing the responsibilities of ECE faculty can require much self-direction, depending upon the support system and dynamics of the overall institution and faculty within the department. As ECE faculty attempt to be stewards of their own learning, they may decide to participate in formal and informal opportunities.

As ECE faculty attempt to enhance their knowledge and competence as practitioners in their disciplines, they may engage in a variety of formal and informal learning processes. Experiential learning, particularly self-directed learning theory, is significant in describing the nature of informal learning among ECE faculty. Occurring through direct participation in the events of life (Merriam et al., 2007), experiential learning can be formal or informal and often takes place outside of the classroom (Rose, 1989). Whether participating in voluntary activities, hobbies, or daily work experiences, knowledge and competence can be increased by simply being involved in diverse encounters (Rose, 1989).

Although many theories offer noteworthy ideas about how adults learn informally, this study specifically focused on research suggesting how adults learn informally through experience and self-direction. Fenwick (2003) examined five experiential learning perspectives. Of the five perspectives, constructivism, as discussed by Kolb (1984), is ideal for describing how the context and content of informal learning activities enable ECE faculty to improve their early care knowledge and practice. Constructivism suggests that learning is individualized and occurs through a cycle of experience and reflection. According to Kolb, learners perceive and process information in a continuum from concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

1. Concrete experience is being involved in a new experience.
2. Reflective observation is watching others or developing observations about one's own experience.
3. Abstract conceptualization is creating theories to explain observations.
4. Active experimentation is using theories to solve problems and make decisions.

Kolb's experiential learning process suggests that ECE faculty process information based on concrete experiences, which they are able to reflect on and adjust their practice.

The experiential learning process is important as ECE faculty prepare preschool teachers. Early childhood educators, in-general, are often responsible for their own professional development after they enter the field (Jalongo & Isenberg, 2004). Much of the learning that occurs in the workplace is informal or incidental (Lohman, 2000; Marsick & Watkins, 2001) and occurs through self-direction and experience (Merriam, 2001). This study attempts to explore the nature of informal learning among ECE faculty, with specific attention to how such learning occurs through experience and self-direction.

Statement of the Problem

Community colleges generally seek faculty holding the baccalaureate and/or master's degree in ECE with general experience in the ECE field (Commission on Colleges, 2006) to prepare current and prospective preschool teachers for the workforce. Being that the field of ECE is so broad ranging from birth to age 8 (NAEYC, 2009), the education and experience of each ECE faculty member may include more formal study on preschoolers or on school-age children.

Given that ECE faculty have varying amounts of formal education and experience related to how children learn in the preschool years (File, 2001), it may be necessary that novice ECE faculty, defined as those with less than five years of experience, rely on informal learning experiences when training preschool teachers. In an effort to acquire the requisite knowledge for such preparation, information may be gained independently, which may happen socially, perhaps through dialogue, or experientially, in a particular situation.

Although significant research has been conducted on the professional development of teachers (Kirby & Paradise, 1992; Maas, 1991; Spodeck & Saracho, 1990; Zeichner, 1981), little research has been conducted on early childhood faculty development, especially in terms of how novice faculty engage in learning non-traditionally. We know much about formal teacher preparation (Bredekamp, 1996; Early & Winton, 2001; Isenberg, 2000; NAEYC, 1996) and formal continuing professional development (Cervero, 1988; Daley, 2001; Eraut, 1994; Houle, 1989); however, we know little about how ECE faculty seek informal learning in their workplace. This study addresses the gap in knowledge on how novice ECE faculty informally acquire learning in the workplace through experience and self-direction and how this learning improves their practice.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify the nature of informal learning among novice early childhood education (ECE) faculty. The analysis was guided by the following research questions:

1. What informal learning activities have novice ECE faculty participated in since their employment that have facilitated their learning about early care and education?
2. What key content are novice ECE faculty learning during these informal activities?
3. In what ways do these informal learning experiences lead to improved practice?

Significance of the Study

Within the body of research on adult learning theory is significant data on how adult learners obtain information informally. Whereas much research has been conducted on how adults, in-general, learn informally and incidentally (Garrick, 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 1990; 2001), little research has been conducted specifying how ECE faculty learn informally.

Kolb's four-stage model of the experiential learning process was used as a framework for exploring the nature of informal learning among novice ECE faculty. By investigating these informal learning experiences, the content ECE faculty learn during informal activities and the contextual factors that shape these learning experiences were revealed. Using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model with Beckett and Hagar's (2002) theory on workplace learning, this study investigated the key content ECE faculty learn about early care and education during informal learning experiences and how that learning has affected their practice.

By looking specifically at how novice ECE faculty learn through experience and self-direction, this study offers strategies for ECE professionals as they independently approach learning information about early care and preschool education to fill gaps in their knowledge. An understanding of what new ECE faculty do to get further acclimated to the field might inform ECE faculty at-large and assist them to employ informal processes to upgrade their own knowledge and proficiency as they prepare preschool teachers. Consequently, having knowledge of the content ECE faculty learn about early care and preschool education during informal encounters and the context in which such learning is acquired could lead to improved practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to identify the nature of informal learning among novice early childhood education (ECE) faculty. Literature on informal learning has increased over the last decade with particular attention being paid to how professionals learn at work (Darling-Hammond et al, 2009). Studies have revealed that, in addition to the formal education and training professionals receive, more learning is taking place beyond what is planned by administration, educational institutions, or the industry (Beckett & Hagar, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al, 2009; Edwards & Clarke, 2002; Fenwick, 2008; Jamieson et al, 2000; Lohman, 2000; Solomon, Boud, & Rooney, 2006).

Professionals in the medical field, education, and business and industry are employing informal methods to improve their knowledge and skills. In this chapter, literature illustrating how professionals integrate informal learning processes in their work is explored. This literature provides a foundation for discovering the nature of informal learning among novice ECE faculty guided by the following research questions:

1. What informal learning activities have novice ECE faculty participated in since their employment that have facilitated their learning about early care and education?
2. What key content are novice ECE faculty learning during these informal activities?
3. In what ways do these informal learning experiences lead to improved practice?

There is a lack of literature connecting informal learning with ECE faculty. This chapter provides insight into the literature on ECE and adult learning theory. Two major categories of literature are presented.

First, the field of ECE is explored. While the early childhood years range from birth to eight years of age (NAEYC, 2009), this review focuses on the preschool years, which are the first five years of life. Specific attention will be given to literature that describes what key content ECE faculty need to know to properly prepare current and prospective child care providers/preschool teachers. The literature in this section provides a foundation for collecting data on the key content ECE faculty are learning during informal learning activities.

Second, literature on adult learning theory is presented. How traditional learning theory informs the understanding of how adults learn and the role experience plays in adult learning will be discussed. While theoretical literature suggests that adult learning takes place in a myriad of ways, including constructively, behaviorally, and cognitively, this review primarily focuses on how adult learning occurs informally through experience and self-direction. This literature lays the groundwork for establishing what informal learning activities ECE faculty have participated in since their employment that has enhanced their learning about early care and education.

Early Childhood Education

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), early childhood refers to the period from birth to eight years of age. During this rapid period of growth, the child develops a sense of self, in addition to language, social, emotional, problem-solving, and motor skills. Each of these accomplishments provides an important foundation for learning (NAEYC, 2009).

The following excerpt on early childhood education offers a succinct depiction of what goes on in a quality early learning environment:

> Early childhood education is not an exercise or a schedule or a machine. It is young children exploring their world with sensory thoroughness, experimenting with people and places and materials, encouraged by a teacher who respects and uses their ideas and ways of learning to help them discover what has meaning for them in our society. (Law, Moffit, Moore, Overfield, & Starks, 1966, p. 12)

Furthermore, the active and interactive play of primary-aged children is *the* way of providing guidance, education, reinforcement and enrichment for young children. Rather than chopping the day into separate periods for separate subjects with a fixed amount of time allotted for each, children are busy in learning centers –actively incorporating various subjects within single activities. Teachers incorporate their curriculum goals within these activities, introducing the knowledge and skills needed in the specific learning process (Cryer, Harms, & Riley, 2003).

The importance and value of education in the early years of life have been acknowledged for over 400 years (Carter, 1987). In Europe in the sixteenth century, great emphasis was placed on formal schooling and teaching children to read, which was spurred by Martin Luther (1483-1546) during the Protestant Reformation. In the following century, John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), who spent his life teaching school and writing textbooks, authored the first picture book for children entitled *Orbis Pictus*. English Philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) brought more attention to the value of early education by laying the foundation for environmentalism –the belief that the environment determines what children will become, instead of innate characteristics. Locke's theory suggested that children are born with a mind he describes as a *tabula rasa* or blank slate on which experience writes. His theory helped people to understand

that providing a quality early childhood education would make up for the deficiencies in family life, community, and socioeconomic contexts. As the centuries went on, more early education supporters, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), and Robert Owen (1771-1858), documented the importance of and need for an early education that helped to develop children's natural abilities. In 1837, the first kindergarten was opened by Frederick Froebel (1782-1852) in Germany with the first American kindergarten following in Watertown, Wisconsin in 1856. Advocates such as Maria Montessori (1870-1952), John Dewey (1859-1952), Jean Piaget (1896-1980), Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), Abraham Maslow (1890-1970), Erik Erikson (1902-1994), and others continued to promote and/or open early learning programs (Essa, 2003; Morrison, 2004; Rathus, 2008).

Although the first kindergarten opened in Germany in 1837 and in America in 1856, the first teacher training program for kindergarten teachers did not begin until 1880 in Philadelphia (Morrison, 2003). John Dewey started a laboratory school at the University of Chicago in 1896. From the late 1800s to the mid 1900s, there is little documentation of teacher training programs being initiated; however, there is significant documentation of early education programs for children being developed (Morrison, 2003). In 2001, teachers in Lakewood, Colorado earned the state's first child care professional credential (American Association of Community Colleges, 2001). Such documentation or lack thereof, illustrates that the quantity of early childhood programs for children has expanded a lot faster than the availability of teacher training programs.

Focus on ECE has become increasingly significant to the public in recent years, due to changes in the economy, family life, public awareness, and public support (Carter, 1987). Much of the focus stems from the changes in family life, which have brought about an increased need for child care outside of the home. These changes include complex factors, such as a rising cost

of living, an increased number of dual-income families, an increase in single-parent families, an increased number of teenage parents, greater mobility as families relocate more readily, and a decrease in the impact of the extended family (Essa, 2003; Morrison, 2004). According to the latest annual report by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), 63% of children under the age of 5 are in child care; and, children of working mothers spend an average of 36 hours per week in non-parental care arrangements (NACCRRA, 2009). Literature introducing child development, ECE programs, demographics of child care workers, and child care provider/preschool teacher preparation are all central to this study. These topics will illustrate the knowledge and skills necessary for ECE faculty to proficiently train current and prospective early childhood educators.

Child Development

As ECE continues to rise to the forefront of public awareness, so do the need, ability, and aspiration to understand child development –the science of how young children grow, develop, and learn (Rathus, 2008). Over the past several decades, successful publicly funded programs, such as Head Start and Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K), have demonstrated that high-quality early educational intervention can contest poverty and dysfunction (Essa, 2003). Recent research on the incredibly complex and rapid development of the brains of very young children has provided greater insight into the significance of the early years (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

The early childhood period consists of a wide-range of changes in growth and development during the first eight years of life (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2009; Rathus, 2008). Since preschool-aged children are the largest segment of children in early childhood programs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Essa, 2003), this study will focus on programs for very young children from birth to five years of age and the preparation of their

caregivers/teachers. It is the very early years that have been deemed to be extremely fundamental (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Day, 2004; Essa, 2003; Morrison, 2004; Rathus, 2008), given that ninety percent of all brain growth takes place during the first five years of life (NACCRRA, 2009).

ECE Programs

As the importance of ECE has increased in recent years, the variety of ECE programs has followed (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). There are several different categories of programs designed to support the goals of contemporary professional early childhood education, including family child care, child care centers, Montessori schools, Head Start, Pre-K, kindergarten, and elementary schools (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Day, 2004; Essa, 2003; Morrison, 2004). In this section, each of these ECE programs will be described.

The most common type of child care in America is called family child care, which is provided in a private home by someone other than the parent or a relative. Such programs usually serve around six children at one time with one caregiver present. Facilities offering children's programs for the full-day are usually referred to as child care centers. These programs usually serve 19 or more children with more than one caregiver present (Morrison, 2004).

Montessori schools, named in the early 1900s by their Italian founder Maria Montessori, offer an active and engaging environment for young children. Using the simple to complex tools developed by Montessori, children's senses are trained enabling them to learn to think and learn new concepts through practical experiences. The Montessori approach encourages children to "learn how to learn" with little adult guidance (Essa, 2003).

Head Start was created by the federal government in the 1960s, in an effort to surmount the negative effects of poverty on young children. Head Start programs usually serve children

ages 3 to 5; however, some programs have gained additional funding for Early Head Start allowing them to also serve infants and toddlers up to age 2. Head Start currently serves more than 900,000 children nationwide and is now required to coordinate with public schools at the state level (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Pre-K, kindergarten, and elementary schools are early childhood programs that usually begin serving children who are at least four years of age. Pre-K programs provide a transition from child care to the school environment. The very first kindergarten was opened in 1837 in Germany with the first American kindergarten opening in 1856. While original kindergarten programs were often in the home, today's kindergartens are normally in churches, public school systems, or private schools. Pre-kindergarten programs are increasingly offered through state funding and are part of school systems or other community settings (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

In addition to the programs discussed, there are other ECE programs. School-age programs offer before- and after-school care for children in elementary school. Parent cooperatives are formed and operated by parents who each have the mutual desire to be involved in their children's preschool experience. Laboratory schools are located on the campus of a postsecondary institution providing on-site training for adult ECE students. High school child care programs serve teen mothers attending high school (Chesla & Matic, 2002; Day, 2004; Jalongo & Isenberg, 2004).

Early childhood education programs have become more diversified over time. Social and economic changes in society have created an increased need for such programs. These changes include changes in family, changes in employers' attitudes, and changes in education attitudes. More specifically, with more women working and pursuing formal education outside the home,

in addition to many working women being either widowed, divorced, single, separated, or married to men earning salaries too low to support the family, the need for ECE programs is expected to increase, along with the need for early childhood teachers. Many employers are now taking a part in providing corporate/on-site child care or sponsoring child care benefits for their employees, which reduces employee stress about child care, in addition to the days they take off to care for ill children. As parents become more aware of their children's developmental needs, they are seeking quality environments that will support their children's growth and development. Only 6 percent of children were cared for in child care centers in the 1970s. Today, over 33 percent of children with working parents attend child care programs where they spend an average of 30 hours per week (Herr, 2008).

Demographics of Child Care Workers

As the need for diverse early childhood programs and services increases, so does the need for child care workers. The Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) documents that, in 2004, there were approximately 1.3 million childcare workers. Many of them worked part-time as babysitters or nannies in people's homes. About 1 out of 3 was self-employed. Others in the field worked as child care workers in places such as day care centers, government centers, schools, religious centers, and amusement parks. BLS further reports that the employment of childcare workers is projected to increase at about the same speed as the average of all occupations between 2004 and 2010 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006).

The growing need for caregivers and the desire for quality child care by parents have diversified career opportunities in early childhood more than ever before. Being that early childhood programs are operated in a variety of settings, including schools, homes, apartment buildings, centers, businesses, parks, and houses of worship, early childhood practitioners may

choose from a variety of career alternatives. While there are additional possibilities in business settings, community service, publishing and art, and entertainment, common careers in the early childhood field include nannies or au pairs, family child care providers, Pre-K, kindergarten or elementary school teachers, preschool teachers, program administrators, licensing specialists, early childhood college instructors and professors (Chesla & Matic, 2002; Day, 2004; Herr, 2008; Jalongo & Isenberg, 2004).

A nanny cares for children in their homes. An au pair performs duties similar to those of a nanny. The difference is that an au pair is from a foreign country and lives with the family. A family childcare provider differs from a nanny in that care is provided in the home of the care provider, not the family. Pre-K, kindergarten and elementary school teachers usually work with children from 4 years of age through the completion of fifth grade. These careers usually exist in programs governed by a state agency, if public, and a local sponsor or organization, if private. Preschool teachers work in a nursery or licensed child care facility with children from birth to age 5. They may hold positions such as lead teacher, assistant teacher, associate teacher, or simply child care worker. Every program needs an overseer, which is why careers in program administration exist. ECE program administrators may be directors, managers, supervisors, or coordinators. Regardless of the title, the general responsibilities of early childhood program administrators include marketing the program, recruiting children, hiring and supervising staff, and managing the budget. With the duty of ensuring that child care programs operate according to set standards, licensing specialists work with the state agency to monitor the policies and procedures of licensed child care facilities and registered family day care homes. Early childhood college instructors and professors provide direct instructional services to scheduled undergraduate and/or graduate postsecondary courses, provide academic advisement to students

majoring in early childhood education, aid the department and the institution by serving on committees, developing proposals, coordinating seminars, and engaging in all aspects of scholarly activity (Chesla & Matic, 2002; Day, 2004; Herr, 2008; Jalongo & Isenberg, 2004).

Although there are many career choices within the field of early childhood education, the increasing demands are centered on the need for "excellent early childhood professionals" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 33) who work with children from birth to age 5. In 2006, child care workers held about 1.4 million jobs with 35 percent being self-employed, primarily as child care providers. Projections data from the National Employment Matrix documents that the number of child care workers will increase from 1,388,000 in 2006 to 1,636,000 in 2016, which is an 18 percent difference (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006).

Child Care Provider/Preschool Teacher Preparation

The need for competent child care workers is on the rise due to the growing acknowledgement of the importance of early childhood education, the amplified expectations of parents seeking childcare providers with higher qualifications to nurture their children, the escalating requisite knowledge and skills of children entering kindergarten, and mandated accountability requirements (Chesla & Matic, 2002; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). As a result of these upgraded educational necessities, full-day babysitting is no longer an option for many parents. In an effort to ensure that their children are successful in school, many parents conduct intense research prior to selecting an early childhood program. Many of the inquiries by parents during the selection process relate to the education and competence of the staff (Child Care Aware, 2008).

Although the expectations of parents are often high when seeking quality child care, the requirements for child care providers and preschool teachers remain significantly low in

America. NACCRRA's 2008 Annual Report reveals that 30% of child care providers have less than a high school diploma with 18 states having no educational requirement for lead teachers in child care centers. The report also shows that the number of child care providers with a college degree declined from 43% in 1985 to 30% over recent years (NACCRRA, 2009). While standards vary from state to state, most child care workers can get jobs upon graduating from high school. Once on the job, these workers learn by watching those who are experienced and may participate in some classes on-site or at a nearby postsecondary institution (U.S. Department of Labor, 2006).

Postsecondary institutions at all levels -- technical/community colleges, four-year colleges and universities – often offer ECE programs of study. Technical colleges and community colleges appear to be the primary preparers of ECE professionals who work with children from birth to age 5, as these two-year colleges offer more courses and programs of study on early care and preschool education (South Carolina Technical College System, 2008; Technical College System of Georgia, 2008). According to the courses and programs of study offered for ECE students at the four-year level, four-year colleges and universities appear to primarily focus on preparing ECE professionals to work with school-age children (University System of Georgia, 2008). For the purposes of this study, the preparation of child care providers/preschool teachers at the two-year/technical/community college level will be explored since these programs of study appear to be the primary preparers of preschool teachers.

A number states in America offer ECE programs of study at the technical/community college level that enable graduates to gain and retain positions as child care directors, assistant directors, preschool/child care teachers, infant-toddler caregivers, Head Start teacher, elementary teacher, special education aides, and after school care providers (American Association of

Community Colleges, 2001; South Carolina Technical College System, 2008; Technical College System of Georgia, 2008). These programs, blended with traditional classroom instruction and supervised, hands-on instruction, offer numerous credentials in ECE ranging from certificates to the associate degree. In an effort to describe these ECE credentials, the curriculum offered through Georgia's Technical College System will be explored as a model.

In Georgia's Technical College System, the Department/Division of Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) organizes educational experiences for prospective educators of young children through the development of specialized credit programs, training and, on some campuses, the operation of a model child development demonstration center. The ECCE department/division provides services that prepare students with the knowledge, skills and professional competencies critical in acquiring employment and maintaining a career in the early education arena (Technical College System of Georgia, 2008). In the various ECCE programs within the technical college system, several ECE credentials are offered, including the Child Development Associate I Technical Certificate of Credit (TCC), the Early Childhood Care and Education Diploma, and the ECCE Associate Degree with paraprofessional or administrative specialization. The state also offers an Infant/Toddler Specialist TCC and a Family Child Care Provider TCC (Technical College System of Georgia, 2008). Each of these credentialing programs will be described in this section.

The Child Development Associate I is designed to meet the training needs of persons already working in the field of early childhood care and education. Persons enrolling in this program must have completed a minimum of 480 clock hours of work in the field with young children. This program is designed to provide the minimum formal training in ECE competencies required to apply for a national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential from the Council

for Professional Recognition in Washington, D.C. Once earned, this credential is recognized nationally by Head Start, Pre-K, and by many other public and private early care and education organizations. The curriculum for the CDA I includes 19 credit hours.

The ECCE diploma program is a sequence of courses designed to prepare students for careers in child care and related fields. The program emphasizes a combination of early childhood care and education theory and the practical application necessary for successful employment. The curriculum for the ECCE Diploma totals approximately 73 credit hours.

The ECCE associate degree program offers learning opportunities to develop academic, technical, and professional knowledge and skills required for job acquisition, retention, and advancement. Program graduates receive an ECCE Associate of Applied Technology (AAT) Degree with specialty as ECCE paraprofessional or early childhood program management director. The curriculum for the AAT Degree in ECCE is approximately 110 credit hours.

Whether earning a TCC, diploma, or associate degree in ECCE, it is essential that ECE practitioners demonstrate proficiency in eight primary areas to be considered "ready" to work with young children (Day, 2004). These eight primary areas include:

1. Safe and Healthy Learning Environment
2. Physical and Intellectual Competence
3. Social and Emotional Development and Positive Guidance
4. Relationships with Families
5. Program Management
6. Professionalism
7. Child Development
8. Observation of Children and Record-keeping

Safe and Healthy Learning Environment includes the ability to provide proper attention to safety precautions and supervision. Effective ECE providers keep children safe and healthy by reducing the risks of injury and preventing the spread of infectious diseases. Promoting good health through proper nutrition is included in this area.

Physical and Intellectual Competence includes being able to plan and implement appropriate teaching strategies to promote children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Included in this area are all subject-related concepts and skills, such as math, literacy, music, art, science, and social studies. It is necessary that the ECE provider plans a curriculum that is developmentally and culturally appropriate for all children in the assigned classroom setting, including those who may have special needs.

Social and Emotional Development and Positive Guidance refers to helping children grow and develop to be secure, loving, self-motivated, and successful people. These characteristics will better prepare children to deal with life's challenges and problems. Encouraging cooperative, friendly behaviors and how to deal with the natural behaviors children engage in on a daily basis are included in this area. Learning how to support children's positive social-emotional development through self-regulation and long-term healthy development provide a foundation for children's behaviors.

Relationships with Families includes the ability of the ECE provider to partner with families to assess children's strengths, needs, and interests, plan their experiences, and make decisions that influence how the program is implemented from day to day, month to month, and year to year. Such a positive partnership enables the ECE provider to support families in their attempt to appropriately rear their children.

Program Management refers to the ability to properly administer an ECE program. Developing written daily activity schedules and lesson plans that are appropriate for the age groups served are just a couple of the activities involved in managing a program.

Professionalism involves trying to make good decisions within an ECE program, based on the needs of the children and their families. Properly utilizing power, providing good quality care, protecting children, respecting parents' authority, supporting diversity, and helping protect consumers are included in maintaining professionalism in ECE programs. Demonstrating ethical behavior is primarily necessary to be a quality ECE professional.

Child Development is the science of how young children grow, develop, and learn. ECE providers must understand child development in order to provide quality programs that foster healthy physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Having knowledge about developmental milestones during early childhood and facilitating methods for appropriately guiding these experiences are included in this area.

Observation of Children and Record-keeping involves the ability to examine, collect, document, and maintain data on what children do. Effective ECE providers house forms, documents, and other records regarding the individual activities and experiences of young children.

With the varying standards for child care workers and programs from state to state (File, 2001) along with ECE including all of the childhood years (NAEYC, 2009), it is difficult for ECE practitioners to devise and implement programs to cover the full ECE spectrum. As a result, the early childhood field is widely fragmented in regards to supports, intents, purposes, and regulators (File, 2001). This fragmentation causes the preparation and professional development of ECE professionals to be far from seamless. File (2001) argues, "Should we expect programs

to prepare professionals across the field? If so, how can we attend to the multiple regulations, standards, and definitions posed by state teacher certification, state child care licensing, Head Start, and national professional standards? Or, should programs concentrate on preparation of a portion of the workforce (e.g., public school, child care or birth to five, five to eight)?" (p. 309). Mastering the body of knowledge under the entire ECE umbrella would be a huge challenge.

Helping to guide children through an exciting time of social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development, early childhood educators have a tremendous impact on the lives of children. They build a strong foundation in the formative early childhood years. Whether working in the home as a family child care provider or in an elementary school as a classroom teacher, early childhood educators are expected to meet the increasing demands of the public. The literature explored on child development, ECE programs, demographics of early childhood educators, and child care provider/preschool teacher preparation illustrates the necessity of ECE faculty gaining supplemental knowledge and remaining abreast of the most appropriate practices in caring for and guiding young children. It is essential that ECE faculty are persistent in their learning, to efficiently train practitioners for this diverse field.

Adult Learning Theory

ECE faculty are charged with proficiently training current and prospective early childhood educators for the diverse field of early childhood education. Whether training students to work as infant/toddler specialists, family day care providers, child care administrators, or paraprofessionals, ECE faculty must remain abreast of traditional and modern child development theories, as well as ever-changing ECE practices. As adult learners themselves, ECE faculty may approach and acquire learning new theories and practices in different ways. In this section, theories on how learning occurs will be presented, in addition to literature on the three learner-

centered theories of adult learning, which are andragogy, self-directed, and experiential. This literature will provide the foundation for understanding how novice ECE faculty approach and acquire learning informally.

Although there are many ideas about how adults learn, this study will focus on how adults learn informally through experience and self-direction. Each of the three learner-centered theories of adult learning –andragogy, self-directed, and experiential, share the central theme that adult learners choose learning opportunities according to interest, relevance to self/life, or need. Regardless of why they choose to learn specific information -- formally or informally -- adults attempt to acquire information to facilitate change in direction, efficiency, and/or perception of information. Even learners who learn for the sake of learning often apply the new information to their lives in some way resulting in resolution of problems/issues or completion of specific tasks/goals (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Andragogy

Coined by European adult educators as a parallel to pedagogy – "the art and science of teaching children", *andragogy* is defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles & Associates, 1984, p.6). Focusing on the adult learner and his or her life circumstances, andragogy was originally based on five assumptions (Knowles & Associates, 1984) and was later expanded to six (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998):

1. *Self-Concept of the Learner*

   An individual's self-concept evolves from dependent to self-directing, as he or she matures.

2. *Prior Experience of the Learner*

   An adult accumulates an emergent pool of experience, which expands to a wealthy resource for learning.

3. *Readiness to Learn*

   The readiness of an adult to learn strongly correlates with the developmental tasks of his or her social role.

4. *Orientation to Learning*

   In learning, an adult is more problem-centered versus subject-centered applying knowledge more immediately than futuristically.

5. *Motivation to Learn*

   Adults are more apt to learn by internal factors than external.

6. *Learner's Need to Know*

   An adult needs to know why it is important for him or her to learn specific information and how he or she can apply it to life (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998).

In his "model of assumptions" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43) or "system of concepts" (Knowles, 1984, p. 8), Knowles outlined implications for the design, implementation, and evaluation of adult learning activities with regard to the physical and psychological state of the classroom climate, in addition to camaraderie among teachers and students creating an environment ideal for adult students to learn through self-direction and evaluate such experiences (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Of course, andragogy as a theory has its detractors. Many educators, psychologists, educators and others have shared their assessments of Knowles' scholarship of andragogy. Among them, Hartree (1984) assessed that Knowles' theory, if it can be considered a theory at

all, was unclear, since whether he was presenting a teaching theory or learning theory could not be determined. She also could not distinguish if Knowles was presenting variation in the way children learn from that of adults. Additional critiques about whether andragogy only describes adult learners led to Knowles' change of his 1970 title *Andragogy versus Pedagogy* to the 1980 subtitle *From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) reflecting the fact that both terms can be utilized with children and adults, dependent upon their individual experiences and motivation to learn, hence pedagogy is not limited to the description of children's learning, as andragogy is not limited to the learning of adults. Both describe "a continuum of learning ranging from teacher-directed to student-directed" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 275). With andragogy being the primary model of adult learning for 30 years, research outlining its validity is rare (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Educators and trainers have tested the model by exposing adults and children to both andragogical and pedagogical practices; however, it has been difficult to document any correlation to achievement or satisfaction. While many questions about andragogy remain unanswered, it is clear that this model has impacted the way learning is planned for adults, thus paving the way for scholars to continue research on planning, implementing, and evaluating effective instructional practices *with* adult learners, instead of just for them.

Self-directed Learning

Self-directed learning, also used interchangeably or similarly with self-planned learning, self-teaching, autonomous learning, independent study, and distance education, has undergone significant evolution over the years (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). In the 19th Century, Hosmer (1847) viewed the concept as self-education, simply describing it as education that occurs without a teacher or oral instruction. Hosmer's general perspective was that the only

distinguishing factor of self-education was how it was acquired. The concept later evolved into a lifelong learning perspective with Kidd's work (1973), in which self-direction was described as learning that takes place across the entire lifespan. He describes the education/learning as "inner-directed" and the learner as "self-operating" (p. 47). Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning as a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes. Tough (1979) focused on the planning and deciding aspects of learning as a process in his research on self-planned learning. According to Tough, about 90 percent of all adults conduct at least one self-directed learning project per year. He maintains that adults engage in self-directed learning for many reasons, including attempting to learn new skills, knowledge, and attitudes to improve work performance. Gibbons and Phillips (1982) referred to self-directed learning as self-education, which they describe as choosing to learn what he can or deciding not to learn. According to Brookfield (1984), self-directed learning is an internal change of consciousness. Many authors continued to write about the concept and misconception of self-directed learning through the years, including Boshier (1983), Fellenz (1985), Oddi (1984, 1985, 1987), and Candy (1991). Self-directed learning, according to Heron (1989, 1993) and Nesbit, Leach, and Foley (2004), is the idea of learning being guided, instead of taught, encouraging adults to direct their own learning.

Hersey and Blanchard (1988) offer four distinct stages of learners. Stage 1 learners have low self-direction needing an authority figure to tell them what to do. Stage 2 learners have moderate self-direction with motivation and confidence, but are principally ignorant of subject matter to be learned. Stage 3 learners have intermediate self-direction with the skill and basic knowledge viewing themselves as ready and able to explore a particular subject area with a good

guide. Stage 4 learners have high self-direction and are willing and able to plan, execute, and evaluate their own learning with or without the help of an expert. Whether they are Stage 1 learners or Stage 4 learners, novice ECE faculty may find the need to become self-directed in preparing practitioners to meet the increasing needs of high-quality ECE programs.

In Hiemstra's (1976) original thinking about the concept, "self-planned learning" is described as "a learning activity that is self-directed, self-initiated, and frequently carried out alone" (Hiemstra, 1976a, p. 39). Brockett later defined the concept accordingly:

> Broadly defined, self-directed learning refers to activities where primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating a learning endeavor is assumed by the individual learner. (Brockett, 1983, p. 16)

In *Self-direction in Adult Learning: Perspectives on Theory, Research and Practice* (1991), Brockett and Hiemstra argue that self-direction in learning refers to two distinct but related dimensions. As an instructional process, a learner assumes primary responsibility for the learning process. As a personality characteristic, a learner desires or has a preference for assuming responsibility for learning. As a result of these two distinct but related dimensions, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) developed a model they call the Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) model of self-direction in adult learning. The PRO model encompasses both dimensions of self-directed learning – learning as an instructional process and learning as a personality characteristic and enables one to understand the similarities and differences in both dimensions. The model helps to understand self-direction and the important role that social context plays in learning.

The notion of personal responsibility, as used by Brockett and Hiemstra in the PRO model, means that learners have choices about the directions they pursue as learners. Along with

these choices is a responsibility for accepting the consequences of one's thoughts and actions. Although personal responsibility does not mean that a person has control over personal life circumstances or environment, he or she does have control over the way they respond to a situation. In the PRO Model, the primary focus of the learning process is on the learner, as he or she interacts within the context (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991).

Brockett and Hiemstra's work (1991) appears to coincide with the work of Moore (1980) and Brookfield (1980). Moore (1980) is noted for describing an autonomous learner as an individual who can "identify his learning need when he finds a problem to be solved, a skill to be acquired, or information to be obtained. He is able to articulate his need in the form of a general goal, differentiate the goal into several specific objectives, and define fairly explicitly his criteria for successful achievement. In implementing his need, he gathers the information he desires, collects ideas, practices skills, works to resolve his problems, and achieves his goals. In evaluating, the learner judges the appropriateness of newly acquired skills, the adequacy of his solutions, and the quality of his new ideas and knowledge" (p. 23). Similarly, Brookfield (1980) uses the term "independent learning" to describe a process occurring in situations "when the decisions about intermediate and terminal learning goals to be pursued, rate of student progress, evaluative procedures to be employed, and sources of material to be consulted are in the hands of the learner" (p. 3). Each of these theories about self-directed learning and self-directed learners share the common theme that, in an effort to solve problems or in situations where there is a need to learn, adult learners decide what information needs to be learned or what skill needs to be acquired, focus on the acquisition of that knowledge or skill, decide if the information or skill acquired is applicable to and efficient for the need, and recommence the process if/when needed.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) suggest five foundational concepts in self-directed learning:

1. Assumes that humans grow in capacity and need to be self-directing.

2. Learners' experiences are rich resources for learning.

3. Individuals learn what is required to perform their evolving life tasks.

4. An adult's natural orientation is task or problem-centered learning.

5. Self-directed learners are motivated by various internal incentives – self esteem, curiosity, desire to achieve, and satisfaction of accomplishment.

Like Knowles' conception of andragogy, Merriam and Caffarella's foundational concepts suggest that learners approach and acquire learning according to their need(s) at a given time.

After nearly a century of research, several factors are known about self-directed learning: (a) Individual learners can become empowered to take increasing responsibility for various decisions associated with learning; (b) self-direction is best viewed as a continuum or characteristic that exists to some degree in every person and learning situation; (c) self-direction does not necessarily mean all learning will take place in isolation from others; (d) self-directed learners appear able to transfer learning, in terms of both knowledge and study skill, from one situation to another; (e) self-directed study can involve a variety of activities and resources, such as self-guided reading, participation in study groups, internships, electronic dialogues, and reflective writing activities; (f) effective roles for teachers in self-directed learning are possible, such as dialogue with learners, securing resources, evaluating outcomes, and promoting critical thinking; (g) some educational institutions are finding ways to support self-directed study through open-learning programs, independent study options, non-traditional course offerings, and other contemporary programs (Hiemstra, 1994). As a result of the extensive research,

scholarship, and interest in self-directed learning, an array of new programs, practices, and resources for facilitating self-directed learning have been produced. These productions include such media as online learning programs, self-help books, support groups, independent study courses, electronic networking, e-books, and computer-assisted learning. It will be interesting to find out what programs, practices, and resources ECE faculty have consulted to extend and upgrade their knowledge in such a wide-ranging field.

Literature on self-directed learning suggests that novice ECE faculty may range from low self-direction to high self-direction. Additionally, individual learners have the aptitude to become self-directed (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Knowles, 1975, 1984; Tough, 1978). Of the theories discussed on self-directed learning, the one that under-girds this study is Brockett's suggestion that "self-directed learning refers to activities where primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating a learning endeavor is assumed by the individual learner" (Brockett, 1983b, p. 16). This study will determine what activities ECE faculty employ that facilitate a self-directed learning process. More specifically, data will be collected to discover how ECE faculty plan, carry out and evaluate their own learning activities.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning occurs when an opportunity is given to apply knowledge, skills, and feelings in an immediate and relevant setting or context (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). It is a direct encounter. Education that occurs as direct participation in the events of life can be classified as experiential learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Rose (1989) describes experiential learning as learning that takes place outside of the classroom, which includes voluntary activities, hobbies, or the work experience itself. Although the availability of empirical research on experiential learning is less prevalent (Merriam & Brockett, 2007), many theorists have added

to the concepts of experiential learning, including Dewey in the 1930s, Lewin in the 1940s and 1950s, Freire in the 1960s-1970s, Honey and Mumford, and Kolb and Fry in the 1980s (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, 2007; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Merriam et al., 2007).

Through the work of Lewin (1951) and Kolb (1984), a four-stage model of the experiential learning process has been developed with some variations being used by other scholars. This model parallels Jean Piaget's psychological models (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). According to Kolb's work (1984), learning occurs through a repetitive four-stage process whereby learners go through experience (concrete experience), reflect on that experience (reflective observation), develop theory based on their reflection (abstract conceptualization), and then form strategies for new behaviors (active experimentation), which becomes a foundation for further experience.

1. Concrete experience is being involved in a new experience.
2. Reflective observation is watching others or developing observations about one's own experience.
3. Abstract conceptualization is creating theories to explain observations.
4. Active experimentation is using theories to solve problems and make decisions.

Each of these four capabilities is reflected differently, pending the learning environment or context. As a result, the learners demonstrate different kinds of strengths in various learning styles (Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Kolb's 'four-stage cycle of learning' is a central principle in his experiential learning theory, in which 'immediate or concrete experiences' provide a basis for 'observations and reflections'. These 'observations and reflections' are assimilated and refined into 'abstract concepts' producing new implications for action which can be 'actively tested', therefore creating new experiences (Kolb, 1984).

Experiential learning can be formal or informal and often takes place outside of the classroom (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, 2007; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Merriam et al., 2007). Some critics argue that experiential learning can diminish the value of a college education and reinforce society's overemphasis on credentialing (Rose, 1989). However, supporters believe that such an approach may make available higher education that would be otherwise unattainable for some adults (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Research on the value of learners' experiences has helped to shape techniques of collaborative inquiry or collaborative learning, which involves sharing information in equal relationships. This type of learning promotes new growth in each of the participants involved (Jackson & MacIsaac, 1994). Brooks and Watkins (1994) compiled a number of concepts to bring theory and practice together with greater emphasis on taking action informally and through experience.

According to experiential learning theory, individuals learn from life's experiences (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, 2007; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Merriam et al., 2007). Each individual develops expectations from schemes constructed in diverse situations. "Experience strengthens and refines our structures of meaning by reinforcing our expectations about how things are supposed to be or requires new meaning schemes to provide coherence" (Mezirow, 1990, p.224). Because learning often occurs haphazardly, we seldom know *that* we learned or *what* we learned from a given situation or event, until we must access the information to assimilate another experience. Learning in a familiar environment or context may yield a different return than in an unfamiliar environment or context.

According to Caffarella and Merriam (2000), the contextual approach to learning encompasses two important dimensions: the interactive and the structural. Interactive acknowledges that learning is a product of the individual interacting with the context. In the

structural dimension, consideration of factors such as race, gender, class, cultural diversity, and power and oppression are considered. According to Bierema and Kiely (2005), learners are encouraged to participate and remain motivated when they can relate to the information and context in which learning occurs.

In order for adults to develop professionally and learn from experience, many scholars believe that reflection is necessary (Boud et al., 1985; Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983, 1987) and enables one to "gain deeper insights that lead to action" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 173). Dewey's perspective in *How We Think* (1910, 1933) made a unique impact on education. Dewey's model offers five aspects of reflection, which provide a good starting point for looking at some of the elements of the reflective process. Building on Dewey's work, Boud et al. (1985) address the emotional aspect of critical reflection. Adapting Dewey's work, these authors describe reflection as an activity in which people "recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it" (p. 19). Schön (1983) contributes by bringing the notion into the center of any understanding of what professionals do through the ideas of reflection in and on action. "The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation" (Schön 1983, p. 68).

Fenwick (2003) examines the work of experiential theorists and presents five theoretical perspectives of experiential learning: (1) constructivism, (2) situated learning, (3) psychoanalytic insights into learning, (4) critical and political understandings or cultural, and (5) ecological theories associated with complexity and emergent systems. The constructivist perspective is

primarily based on the work of Kolb (1984) and Mezirow (1990). In constructivism, learning is individualized. The learner has experiences, reflects on each one and, in turn, develops knowledge each time. The situated perspective suggests that individuals learn through participation and interaction with their community and that learning is derived from physical activities and tasks. The psychoanalytic perspective suggests that learning is derived from interactions in both the conscious and unconscious mind as they wrestle to make sense of the individual's environment. Critical and political understandings suggest that the power structure of dominance among teacher, learner, and environment significantly impacts learning experiences, cognitions, activities, identity, and meaning. Ecological theories suggest that learning occurs through cognitive and sensory analysis and that both the mind and the environment work together to foster learning. An individual's presence alone impacts his or her environment. According to Osterman and Kottcamp (2004), critical examination of discrepancies between people's beliefs (espoused theories) and theories-in-use (actions) commence with a feeling that improvement could occur in one's practice. During the process of such improvement, people think about their espoused beliefs, examine what they actually do and the results, and contrast their espoused beliefs with practice to ascertain their actions.

Regardless of the type of job a professional has, many opportunities arise that require what laypersons refer to as "learning on our feet"; consequently, it is necessary for practitioners to learn how to use experiences in diverse situations to facilitate future decisions, actions and judgments. Even when top professional development programs are planned for diverse practitioners, it is imperative for adult learners to be engaged in activities that show them *how* to transition learned knowledge and skill to successful practice, which has been suggested by many researchers to occur as a result of reflection. Schön (1983) summarizes in *The Reflective*

Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action: "Many practitioners, locked into a view of themselves as technical experts, find nothing in the world of practice to occasion reflection. They have become too skillful at techniques of selective inattention, junk categories, and situational control, techniques which they use to preserve the constancy of their knowledge-in-practice. For them uncertainty is a threat; its admission is a sign of weakness" (p. 69). In order for professionals, including college faculty, to continue to develop professionally, it is necessary that they learn how to reflect on their experiences, beliefs and actions. The works of scholars, including Dewey (1910, 1933), Mezirow (1990), Knowles (1998), and Schön (1983), suggest that adults need to be able to make sense of or find meaning in their learning, for a true learning experience to take place.

Recent studies on reflective practice seek to address the controversy surrounding reflective inquiry and its alleged benefits for professional development and professional practice. These recent studies support theories of reflective practice providing data on *how* professionals learn through reflection in their examinations of 'reflective engagement'. Analogous with reflective practice, reflective engagement helps professionals to actively consider and reconsider their beliefs and practices through multiple approaches, such as inquiry and interaction in diverse contexts (Lyons, 2006; Rodman, 2010). Lyons (2006) defines reflective engagement accordingly:

> Reflective engagement involves a deliberate and intentional act of interrupting, or suspending, one's teaching practices to interrogate or inquire into them systematically and to heighten one's conscious awareness of one's practices and of one's students and then using that consciousness to redirect one's practice and actually acting to change. This intentional act of inquiry may engage a person alone or in collaboration with others,

> colleagues, students, other practitioners or researchers. Attention is paid to gathering and examining evidence of teaching and of student learning, of what students know and understand, as a ground for reflective inquiry. The process is likely to be sustained over long periods of time and benefit from collaborative review. It likely involves narrative, for it is a story of meaning, and it can raise ethical issues for the people involved. Reflective engagement leads to the construction of new knowledge; new meanings, understandings, new knowledge of practice, of processes, of the content and theories, of the people involved. (p. 166)

Lyons (2006) examined reflective inquiry among university faculty and how it affects and/or changes their professional practice. Similarly, Rodman (2010) studied the affects of reflective engagement on pre-service teachers and how their pedagogical knowledge, growth, teaching performance and professional development could be enhanced through the repeated use of reflection during their teacher preparation experiences. Reflective engagement is one of many suggested theories on how adults may learn informally.

While many theories offer significant ideas about how adults learn informally, this study will focus on the research on self-direction and experience. It is these studies that best describe how the context and content of informal learning activities enable ECE faculty to improve their preschool knowledge and practice. Kolb's (1984) four-stage model of the experiential learning process will be used as a framework for exploring what content novice ECE faculty are learning about early care and preschool education during informal activities and what contextual factors shape these learning experiences. More specifically, interviews and documents from ECE faculty will reveal the experiences in which they engage (concrete experience), how they reflect (reflective observation) and develop ideas (abstract generalization) based on those experiences,

and then form strategies for new behaviors (active experimentation), which become a foundation for further experience (Kolb, 1984).

Informal Learning

Learning is the acquisition of knowledge/facts/skills/methods, which can be stored for immediate and/or future use as needed (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Mocker and Spear (1982) identified four categories of lifelong learning –formal, "where learners have no control over the objective or means of their learning;" nonformal, where "learners control the objectives but not the means;" informal, where "learners control the means but not the objectives;" and self-directed, where "learners control both the objectives and the means" (p. 4). In their research, Mocker and Spear (1982) explained that the objectives are the purposes of learning; and, means are the processes of learning. Foley (2004) contends that there are at least four forms of adult learning – formal (traditional) education, non-formal (nontraditional) education, informal (self-directed) learning, and incidental (involuntarily) learning. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) originally identified three major types of opportunities in which learning occurs for adults – formal settings, non-formal settings, and informal or self-directed contexts. In an era of continual technology advancements, online learning was added as a fourth opportunity for adults to learn (Merriam et al., 2007). Learning is often impromptu and implicit and its substance may be technical, social, cultural, and/or political. Learning is a personal experience, which is influenced by the context of adult life and shaped by what an individual wants and needs to learn within a societal context (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). This review of literature on informal learning will include an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon, informal learning processes, and workplace learning outlining contextual factors that may influence the ability to learn.

The term “informal learning” is used to refer to activities initiated by people in work environments that result in the development of their professional knowledge and skills (Lohman & Woolf, 1998; Watkins & Marsick, 1992). Unlike formal learning, informal learning can be planned or unplanned and structured or unstructured and may include such activities as talking and sharing materials with other colleagues, surfing the Internet for certain content, and experimenting with new strategies (Lohman, 2000). According to Coombs (1985), informal learning is the most prevalent form of adult learning. He defines informal learning as “the spontaneous, unstructured learning that goes on daily in the home and neighborhood, behind the school and on the playing field, in the workplace, marketplace, library and museum, and through the various mass media” (p. 92). Illeris (2004a) refers to the same type of learning as “everyday learning” taking place in “all the private and non-organized contexts of everyday life” (p. 151). Each of these definitions of informal learning shares the common theme that the acquisition of such knowledge is not always planned, structured, or organized, but can be planned structured, or organized according to an individual’s need to acquire new learning.

Researchers in social anthropology have long expressed concern with informal learning (Heath, 1983; Henze, 1992), which has led to thoughts about practice (Heath & McLauglin, 1993; Smith, 1994). Studies indicate that professionals learn a great deal through informal learning in the workplace (Cseh, Watkins, & Marsick, 1999). Reports show that as much as 90% of new learning is acquired through informal learning activities in the workplace, instead of during organizationally planned activities away from the workplace (Brinkerhoff & Gill, 1994; Lovin, 1992).

In recent years, interest in informal learning has increased (Merriam et al., 2007). Bentley (1998) has examined learning beyond the classroom; Bierema (2001) and Hayes (2001) focused

on women, work, and learning; Coffield (2000) the necessity of informal learning; Marsick and Watkins (1990) and Dale and Bell (1999) informal and incidental learning in the workplace; and McGiveney (1999) informal learning in the community. Although there has been considerable attention to this phenomenon among many adult educators and researchers, no significant interest has been reflected in policy statements or reviews. The focus remains on formal provision, qualifications, and accountability (Coffield, 2000).

Although formal provision, qualifications, and accountability remain to be the focus of policy statements and reviews, more attention is starting to be paid to informal learning (Coffield, 2000). While formal learning processes include activities taking place in a planned, structured, and organized classroom setting, which is often away from the workplace, informal learning processes include activities that are unplanned, unstructured, and unorganized and take place wherever people have the need, motivation, and opportunity for learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Informal learning activities can be either intentional or unintentional. Intentional informal learning activities include, but are not limited to, networking, mentoring, working in teams, receiving feedback, and performance planning (Garrick, 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Unintentional informal learning processes are referred to as incidental learning, which include the hidden agenda of an organization's culture or a teacher's class, learning from mistakes, and the systematic process of trial and error (Garrick, 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Networking, a supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups with a common interest, is an informal learning process (Garrick, 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 2001) that enables professionals to form a set of connections from which to access learning resources, implement activities, and evaluate learning during processes that may be self-

directed, as described by Brockett and Hiemstra (1991). Networking can emerge at meetings, conferences, and other events. Professionals often exchange business cards upon meeting and/or realizing that there is a common interest. This exchange can be used to build relationships and allow professionals to intentionally seek and gain information informally.

With technology constantly advancing, some professionals have developed group distribution lists in their email programs, so that they are able to communicate electronically with all of the individuals in the group at once. Email and distribution lists create an online learning community for acquiring and disseminating information informally. Such networks are becoming more prevalent and practical among professionals. Individual schools and education institutions, in addition to some public school systems and postsecondary systems create system-wide distribution lists with sub-categories for each grade group, academic program, and administrative team.

Technology has enhanced the ability of ECE faculty to engage in networking. With the World Wide Web, Internet, campus and/or system Intranet, integrated online search engines, and email, they can locate and collaborate with other professionals to gain the requisite knowledge to implement and evaluate their own activities. Though Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) identify online learning as a separate venue for adult learning from formal, informal, and non-formal settings, it appears that online learning can be a by-product of networking when intentionally seeking information informally. ECE faculty may use online learning as an intentional informal learning process for gaining knowledge.

The nature of the network within a particular place or grouping is of fundamental importance when making judgments about seeking content. Humans are social animals and learn through imitation of and identification with others (Bandura, 1976). Connection and interaction

both widen and deepen what we can achieve. ECE faculty can and may learn a great deal by making connections and interacting with a fellow professional in-person and/or online.

Like networking, mentoring can be a medium for learning informally. Mentoring involves the formation of a peer-tutor type relationship, in which a more experienced professional becomes the overseer of the novice professional's development (Garrick, 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Much of the literature on mentoring relates to formalized mentoring programs in organizations or formalizing informal mentoring (Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Cohen, 1995; Hansman, 2000; Horkey, 1997; Wilson & Cervero, 1996). In these programs, mentors and protégés are often matched by human resource personnel or selected by staff, with help, at formal seminars (Hansman, 2000). This study will focus on literature related to informal mentoring relationships, which are formed intentionally and/or naturally.

According to Scribner and Cole (1973), mentoring can be deemed as an informal learning process. They arguably refer to mentoring as the most visible form of a practice where informal and formal learning meets. Mentoring allows for informal learning concepts to be transferred to formal domains (Garvey & Alred, 2001). Mentoring can be formal or informal and planned or unplanned, yet highly intentional. Johnson and Ridley (2004) use the term *intentional mentors* to refer to "professionals who deliberately select protégés and carefully manage the development and course of relationships" (p.63).

All mentoring does not occur in an institutional setting; some mentor-protégé relationships are formed informally during networking and/or coaching. Philip (1997) refers to mentoring that emerges informally as *natural mentoring*. According to literature on informal mentoring, the mentor and protégé voluntarily collaborate, build an intimate and trusting

relationship, negotiate agendas and goals, and maintain non-authoritative relations (Jeffs & Smith, 1987; Philip, 1997).

The literature on informal mentoring suggests that novice ECE faculty may identify with other ECE faculty who seem to have more knowledge and success. They may develop an intimate and trusting relationship that enables informal knowledge to be transferred to formal practices.

Workplace Learning

Like formal training or professional development, more research is starting to emerge on everyday learning and how workers learn informally in the workplace. Informal learning environments are attracting more attention relative to learning spaces (Edwards & Clarke, 2002). Jamieson et al. (2000) examine how space and time are integral in understanding social relations and in turn understanding learning in workplaces. Solomon et al. (2006) attempt to expose everyday learning at work by focusing on how professionals develop in spaces and times when 'social and work' overlap, such as in the break room, meeting room, or lunchroom. These 'hybrid spaces' are neither entirely work-related nor entirely social. The authors document that the nexus between being a worker and a social being provide for rich expanses for engagement in everyday learning.

Many of the texts analyzing workplace learning either describe it as predominantly informal (Beckett & Hager, 2002) or non-formal (Eraut, 2000). According to Beckett and Hager (2002), practice-based informal workplace learning is contextual, activity and experience-based, arises in situations where learning is not the main aim, and activated by individual learners, rather than formal teachers or trainers. Practice-based informal workplace learning is often collaborative and collegial. The literature on practice-based informal workplace learning

suggests that ECE faculty basically trigger their own learning and seek collaboration when needed.

Studies on informal learning suggest that adults *can* and *do* learn from everyday experiences (Garrick, 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Solomon et al., 2006) and that learning is often embedded in everyday practices, action and conversation (Fenwick, 2008). Whether intentional or unintentional, these planned or unplanned, structured or unstructured experiences take place wherever and whenever people have the need, motivation, and opportunity for learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Research on informal learning provides a framework for understanding how ECE faculty learn through experience and self-direction. The presented literature suggests that research on informal learning has recently increased (Merriam et al., 2007). However, for the purposes of discovering what informal learning activities novice ECE faculty have participated in since their employment in the early childhood care and education program at the community college level, Beckett and Hager's (2002) theory on workplace learning will be used. Their study analyzes workplace learning and describes it as predominantly informal. Through the work of these scholars, this study will explore how practice-based informal workplace learning among ECE faculty is contextual, activity and experienced-based and if/how such learning arises in situations where learning is not the main aim and whether it is activated by individual learners.

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed on the field of early childhood education illustrates the wide-range of knowledge and skills that ECE faculty must obtain to effectively educate and train current and prospective child care workers/preschool teachers to competently foster the growth and development of young children. The literature explored on adult learning theory delineates

the informal ways that ECE faculty may approach the acquisition of such knowledge and skills through self-direction and experience. Brockett's (1983) description of self-directed learning is employed to find out what self-directed informal learning activities ECE faculty engage in to acquire the requisite knowledge on early care and education. Using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model with Beckett and Hager's (2002) theory on workplace learning, this study investigates what key content ECE faculty learn about early care and preschool education during these informal learning experiences that supports their preparation of preschool teachers.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to identify the nature of informal learning among novice early childhood education (ECE) faculty. The analysis was guided by the following research questions:

1. What informal learning activities have novice ECE faculty participated in since their employment that have facilitated their learning about early care and education?
2. What key content are novice ECE faculty learning during these informal activities?
3. In what ways do these informal learning experiences lead to improved practice?

This chapter describes the methods undertaken to conduct this study. The following sections are included: Design of the study, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, researcher bias and assumptions, and chapter summary.

Design of the Study

In this section, I discuss background information on my method of choice, the qualitative methodology and describe why this was the best choice for examining the nature of informal learning among novice ECE faculty. The participant selection criteria with rationale and the sample selection process are outlined.

Using a qualitative methodology, this study examined the context and content of informal learning activities among novice ECE faculty in community colleges. A qualitative approach was

best for this study, because thick-rich description was necessary to identify and analyze diverse learning experiences. Qualitative research is most concerned with the usefulness of findings, the interest of people, and if and how information will help people make decisions, plan programs, share information, empower others and engage in social action (Merriam & Associates, 2002); therefore, this methodology provided the most useful data for this study.

With roots in hermeneutics, phenomenological sociology, and the Verstehen tradition, qualitative research (QR) or qualitative inquiry is "a blanket designation for all forms of social inquiry that rely primarily on qualitative data (i.e., data in the form of words)" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 213). The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of human action, instead of just reporting numeric data. Qualitative procedures may consist of unstructured, open-ended interviews, and participant observation, while quantitative research may be represented by structured questionnaires, psychometric measures, and tests. Qualitative procedures best fit the design of this study, since I was seeking to understand the context and content novice ECE faculty learn informally. Unstructured methods of data collection were necessary for securing such information.

There are five key commonalities in the various types/forms/genres of interpretive qualitative research designs. First, all qualitative methods share the view that reality is constructed by individuals as they interact with and in their social worlds (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Second, qualitative researchers strive to understand the meaning people construct about their world and their experiences (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Third, in qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Fourth, the process of conducting qualitative research is inductive, as data are gathered by the researchers to build

concepts, hypotheses or theories (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Finally, the product of qualitative inquiries is richly descriptive because words and pictures are used to convey the researcher's learned phenomenon (Merriam & Associates, 2002). This study fit the qualitative methodology, because it was my desire to examine how early childhood faculty in community colleges interact within the ECE profession (context) to gain information (content). As the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data, I wanted to build concepts, hypotheses and/or theories about the methods, interactions and activities in which ECE community college faculty employ to learn informally. Rich description was used to convey information I learned about ECE faculty and informal learning. Consequently, this study aligned with all five key commonalities in interpretive qualitative research designs.

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is not centered on numeric figures and statistics. Qualitative research investigates the problem and its implications and does not focus on people's surface opinions or on cause-effect, but on how people do things and what meaning they give to their lives. Questions concerning meaning, understanding and process are QR-appropriate. Qualitative research first identifies and describes the information that has been discussed and uses new information to fill in the gaps, then investigates how such information can contribute to the world, therefore improving practice (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

At least 68 qualitative research methods, orientations, traditions, approaches, and strategies have been documented (Creswell, 1998, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 1990, 2002; Schwandt, 2001; Tesch, 1990). I chose to conduct a basic interpretive qualitative study. The goal of basic interpretive qualitative research is to discover the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences or how people make sense of their experiences (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In

this study, I wanted to discover the meaning early childhood faculty in community colleges have constructed from their informal learning experiences (content), along with where they have engaged in informal learning experiences (context), and how such experiences have contributed to their practice. Consequently, the basic interpretive qualitative approach was ideal for attaining the goals of this study.

Participant Selection

According to Miles and Huberman (1984), it is important to know that "one cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything" (p. 36); therefore, it is necessary for the researcher to limit the parameters of the study. The authors continue to argue that the researcher must think about why he or she is considering a particular kind of informant, and then find such individuals that should be interviewed. This method is ideal for controlling bias (Maxwell, 2005).

Purposeful sampling was used to identify the nine participants. Purposeful, purposive or judgment sampling (Patton, 2002), consists of finding participants who are most likely to inform the intent, topic, and aim of a qualitative study. The following participant criteria were established for this study: (a) must be employed full-time as an ECE instructor, (b) must be employed at a college awarding the associate degree as its highest credential, (c) must have earned the baccalaureate and/or master's degree in Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, or discipline unrelated to child development or early care, from an accredited college or university, and (d) must be novice ECE faculty – employed at the same community college for five years or less.

The rationale for criterion (a) –must be employed full-time as an ECE instructor –was that the responsibilities of full-time and adjunct/part-time ECE faculty vary significantly. While an adjunct ECE instructor may teach as few as three hours each week with little or no additional

responsibilities, a full-time ECE instructor may teach up to 30 contact hours each week with the responsibility of completing a number of diverse tasks. In addition to facilitating adult learning experiences, full-time ECE faculty may supervise and evaluate practicum/internship experiences and sometimes manage the institution's child development demonstration center(s). All of these duties are performed during a prescribed 40-hour work week, which consists of 30 minimum hours of traditional, online and/or hybrid classroom instruction, academic/career advisement, student observations, on-site visits and evaluations, community involvement, job placement, program administration and more (Technical College System of Georgia, 2007).

The rationale for criterion (b) –must be employed at a college awarding the associate degree as its highest –was that community colleges primarily prepare prospective preschool teachers and paraprofessionals. Since the focus of this study is how ECE faculty learn and implement child development pedagogy, it is necessary to focus on those institutions that offer credentials for students planning to work with preschool children. Cohen and Brawer (2003) describe the community college as an institution awarding the associate degree as its highest credential; therefore, two-year colleges offering at least one ECE credential best fit the parameters of this study.

The rationale for criterion (c) –must have earned the baccalaureate and/or master's degree in Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, or discipline unrelated to child development or early care, from an accredited college –was that these programs at four-year institutions primarily prepare prospective elementary school teachers, not prospective preschool teachers. However, standards set by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Commission on Colleges (SACS COC) indicate that the formal education requirement for ECE faculty is an earned baccalaureate and/or master's degree in Early Childhood Education or

related field from an accredited college or university (SACS COC, 2006). Although ECE faculty may have earned credentials in Child Development, Family and Consumer Sciences, or Child and Family Development, I was interested only in those with the Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, or discipline unrelated to child development or early car credentials, because those baccalaureate and master's degree programs often focus on preparing prospective elementary school teachers for state teacher certification, rather than preparing preschool teachers for child care/preschool work.

The rationale for criterion (d) –must be novice ECE faculty –employed at the same community college for five years or less –was that novice ECE faculty are still experiencing new learning experiences and may still be making a transition from facilitating elementary classrooms to imparting child development knowledge, theory and practices. Choosing faculty who have been teaching in the field for a while may not yield results that are as useful since veteran faculty have often engaged in diverse learning experiences and participated in more formal training opportunities to fine tune their pedagogical knowledge and practices. Although the learning of veteran faculty may be richer, it may be difficult for them to reflect on the acquisition of knowledge and experiences that have become so routine in their daily work.

Sample Selection Process

The participants were selected by collaborating with the instructional division of a large community college system in the southeastern United States. I electronically solicited participation by formally asking the state coordinator of the division to send a prepared email message to the state-wide ECE faculty list-serv (see Appendix B). While awaiting approval from the legal division of this community college system, I used snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) to expand the number of participants by sending the same email to several ECE constituents at

various agencies, including the early childhood division of United Way and the local affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). From these electronic exchanges emerged 15 responses from ECE community college faculty expressing interest in participating in my study. After further investigation by phone and/or email exchanges, I discovered that only nine of the interested responders were eligible to participate.

Data Collection

In this section, qualitative data collection methods are discussed. The data collection choices for this study –interviews and documents --are described.

Patton (2002) maintains that, "Qualitative data consist of quotations, observations, and excerpts from documents" (p. 47). Patton further clarifies that qualitative data describe, capture and communicate someone else's experience in his or her own words, tell a story, and take the reader into the time and place of the observation revealing what it was like to have been there.

According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), "The researcher has three major ways of collecting data: by asking questions through a survey, by observing, or by testing" (p. 145). There are three major sources of such data collection: interviews, observations, and documents; however, one method is often the primary with support from another of the methods (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Since basic interpretive research focuses on how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon and describe it through collecting data via interviews, observations or document analysis (Merriam & Associates, 2002), one of these data collection methods with support from another would be a good match for gathering information on the nature of informal learning among ECE faculty. Therefore, I used interviews as the primary method of data collection with support from documents.

Interviews

Interviews are the primary source of qualitative data (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Schwandt (2001) describes three interrelated ways to examine the practice of interviewing within qualitative studies. The most common perspective is to regard interviews as a medium for gaining direct access to a person's experience by asking the right logical questions to elicit authentic emotional responses.

In an effort to best illuminate when, where, and how participants experience informal learning, I utilized the interpretive interview approach, in which the researcher attempts to understand the participants' understanding of the phenomenon or interest, mediated by his or her particular disciplinary perspective (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Much of the literature on professional development confirms that adults must not only learn knowledge, but also be able to apply information relative to self, life and/or need. These learning experiences allow adults to find value and meaning in their learning, reflect on beliefs, behaviors and actions, then transfer the knowledge to practice (Merriam & Brockett, Merriam & Caffarella, 2007; Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007; Schön, 1983; 1999). By interpretive interview questioning, I found thick, rich data to address my research questions.

Interviewing is an excellent choice for this study, because one of the best ways to find out where and when ECE faculty encounter learning is by simply asking them. On the other hand, being that adults are not always aware when they learn or that they learned at all, interpretive interviewing enabled me to extract meaning from their diverse experiences.

Although technology makes it possible for interviews to be conducted via email, text messaging, or in chat rooms, I gathered my data by conducting in-person interviews. Data-gathering in a traditional manner enabled me to inductively identify and analyze to identify

recurring patterns or common themes among the data. A list of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

I transcribed the interview tapes, and then securely stored in a sealed box in my office, where only I have access to the tapes. They will not be publicly disseminated. The tapes will be maintained for one year subsequent to the interview for future reference as related to the study and destroyed thereafter. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants upon the transcription of each tape. Participants were titled using a name different from their given name. No master list identifying participants was created.

Documents

Documents are another major source of data and can be written, oral, visual, or cultural artifacts. Photographs, public records, personal documents, and physical materials are all types of documents that can be utilized in research. The researcher may ask the participant, before or after the study has begun, to maintain a diary or log of activities, take pictures, or even write a life history related to the phenomenon or theoretical framework being studied. Regardless of when the documents are generated, prior to the study or at the request of the researcher, they often contain revealing intimations into the phenomenon (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Entire studies have been and may be built around documents, as in historical publications such as *The Diary of Anne Frank.*

Documents provided good data for this study, because it was important to know which of the many resources available to education professionals ECE faculty found most useful in their work. Novice ECE faculty may consult a variety of documents, from a parent brochure to a refereed journal, in an effort to gain knowledge about preschool children. The advancement of computer technology and the World Wide Web enable professionals to access and collect more

documents online. Online documents may include information on websites, papers, illustrations, and games. I visited faculty offices to inquire about the books, articles, or other publications they are reading and/or consulting related to preschool children. It was interesting to discover what websites related to young children that the faculty participants had explored. I used these documents to uncover themes among informal learning processes ECE faculty engage to increase knowledge and competence.

Data Analysis

This section outlines the methods I employed to analyze the collected data. The constant comparative method is defined, along with specific strategies I used to analyze the interview transcripts and documents collected.

I used the constant comparative method to examine the collected data. This inductive procedure involves separating material into essential elements or features, according to how they are related, constantly making comparisons (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002). Using such an approach enables the researcher to determine and/or explain the nature or proportions of a particular phenomenon, which is one of its strengths.

The data I chose to collect were interview transcripts and documents. I analyzed the interview transcripts for emerging learning spaces, content, and improved practices related to early care and preschool education. I also looked for documents as I entered and exited the faculty offices and classroom. In an effort to analyze the interview transcripts, I organized interview transcripts using lined pages and color-coding. When analyzing the interview transcripts, I specifically looked for key settings/situations (context) and key preschool knowledge/skills/practices (content) that represent informal learning experiences. I used color-coding to identify key terms and phrases that may exhibit such learning. More specifically, I

color-coded by highlighting informal learning spaces and documents (contexts) in blue, early care and preschool knowledge, skills, and practices (content) in orange, and improved practices in pink.

Grouping learning experiences according to content and context following each interview enabled me to constantly compare newly-collected data with the previous data. Another constant-comparative strategy I used was creating interview analysis tables (Tables 3.1 through 3.4) to illustrate the results of the collected data. I devised these comprehensive tables illustrating frequency and repetition in interview responses. Of the nine interviews, only contexts, content, and improved practices revealed in at least one-third (three) responses appear in these findings.

Table 3.1

Key Informal Learning Spaces (Context)

	Networking/Mentoring	Internet	Lab Observations	Print Materials/Documents	Parenting
Sonya	X	X	X	X	X
Brenda	X	X	X		X
Carol	X	X	X	X	
Laura	X	X	X	X	X
Wilma	X	X		X	
Rachel	X	X		X	X
Karen	X	X	X	X	X
Ann	X	X	X	X	
Brian	X	X		X	

As with the interview transcripts, I observed and noted documents that ECE faculty may consult enhance their understanding of early care and preschool education. Types of documents appearing three or more times (from at least one-third of the participants) were noted.

Table 3.2

Key Early Care and Preschool Documents (Context)

	Textbooks	Websites	Supplementary Materials	Journals and/or Newsletters	Email Messages
Sonya	X	X	X	X	X
Brenda	X	X	X		X
Carol	X	X	X	X	
Laura	X	X	X	X	
Wilma	X	X	X	X	X
Rachel	X		X	X	X
Karen	X	X	X	X	
Ann	X	X	X	X	
Brian	X	X	X	X	

After analyzing the documents for contextual data, I constructed a table (Table 3.3) illustrating the occurrence of learned preschool knowledge/skills/practices (content) within the disclosed documents. Only content that appeared three or more times was noted as ‘key content'.

Table 3.3

Key Early Care and Preschool Knowledge, Skills, & Practices (Content)

	Child Development Theory	Best Practices in Early Care and Learning	Rules and Regulations for Day Cares
Sonya	X	X	X
Brenda	X	X	X
Carol	X	X	X
Laura	X	X	
Wilma	X	X	X
Rachel	X	X	X
Karen		X	X
Ann	X	X	
Brian		X	X

In addition to the tables to analyze the content and context of learning among ECE faculty, I constructed a Key Improved Practices table (Table 3.4) illustrating the frequency of improved practices revealed during the interviews. Practices appearing three or more times were noted.

Table 3.4

Key Improved Practices

	Increased Early Care and Preschool Knowledge	Confidence in Abilities to Offer Accurate and Appropriate Content	Developed Practical Application Skills
Sonya	X	X	X
Brenda	X	X	X
Carol	X	X	X
Laura	X	X	X
Wilma	X	X	X
Rachel	X	X	X
Karen	X	X	X
Ann	X	X	X
Brian	X	X	X

In analyzing the compiled data, I was the only instrument and attempted to identify common themes and patterns following each interview by comparing the new responses to the previous interview responses. As new themes emerged, I developed a category separating them into essential elements and features. Constantly comparing the most recent interview responses to the previous interview responses revealed important themes and patterns. Likewise, constantly

comparing the most recently reviewed documents with the previously reviewed documents enabled new and recurring themes and patterns to emerge.

Validity and Reliability

In this section, methods for ensuring trustworthiness of the study are outlined. Internal and external validity are described, including methods for my use of data triangulation. Methods for ensuring reliability are discussed, including researcher's position or reflexivity and audit trail.

Schwandt (2001) describes both validity and reliability as epistemic criteria because they are deciding factors in epistemology -- the study of the nature of knowledge and justification. Validity argues that the findings of scientific investigations are indeed *true* -- accurately representing the referenced phenomenon and *certain* -- substantiated by evidence. Reliability is the extent to which the findings can be replicated or found again by another inquirer (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Schwandt, 2001).

In qualitative research, researchers must establish internal validity and external validity. Internal validity is the congruence of findings with reality and is the strength of qualitative research (Merriam & Associates, 2002). External validity is the extent to which findings can be applied to other situations. In other words, external validity asks whether the findings are generalizable or transferable. Commonly used in quantitative research, generalizability and transferability can also be possible in qualitative research (Merriam & Associates, 2002). According to Erickson (1986), qualitative researchers can transfer what they learn in a particular situation to subsequently encountered situations. Eisner (1991) adds that, like abstractions, skills and images can also be generalized. Valid and reliable information are important in qualitative research because qualitative findings are supposed to represent the viewpoints of a specified group of people with possible relevance to other groups with similar experiences. Being that it is

the goal of qualitative researchers to attempt to understand the meaning people construct about their world and experiences supported by data to build concepts, hypothesis, and theories (Merriam & Associates, 2002), qualitative information should at least be justifiable and trustworthy.

Methods that are used to insure internal validity are triangulation, member checks, peer/colleague examination, statement of researcher's experiences or assumptions/biases, and submersion or engagement in the research situation (Creswell, 2002; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Patton, 2002). Of these methods, I utilized data triangulation to validate my findings. The purpose of triangulation is to seek clarity and validity in results.

Data Triangulation

Analyzing the data collected through a combination of interviews and documents, I verified the trustworthiness of the data by using triangulation. I specifically used data triangulation to seek "truthfulness" (Merriam, 1995, p. 54) in the emerging findings by collecting data from multiple sources, including interviews and documents (Merriam, 1995). During my analysis, I did not find that I was unsure of any of the data or did not have enough, so there was no need to schedule a second interview with any participants. By only reporting context and content data appearing three or more times in either interviews or documents, the results are perceived as internally valid.

Reliability is necessary for establishing whether an account or interpretation of a social phenomenon is accurate; however, the criterion alone is not enough for establishing such accuracy (Schwandt, 2001). While all repeatable observations or accounts are not necessarily deemed as valid by social scientists, in principle, all valid accounts are at least replicable. Methods used to insure reliability are triangulation, researcher's position or reflexivity, peer

review, and audit trail (Creswell, 2002; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Patton, 2002). In this study, I used researcher's position or reflexivity and audit trail.

Researcher's Position or Reflexivity

Understanding that my engagement in critical self-reflection regarding assumptions, biases, and relationship to the study may affect the investigation (Merriam & Associates, 2002), I included a full section on researcher bias and assumptions. In addition to explaining my position on the topic I studied, I clarify my insider/outsider status as the primary research instrument.

Audit Trail

During the entire period of investigation, I maintained a journal of reflections, questions, and decisions on the problems, issues, ideas encountered during the data collection process. This audit trail enabled me to keep a detailed account of how I collected data, how I derived categories, and how I made decisions throughout my study (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

In this section, my position as the researcher in this qualitative study is discussed. My insider/outsider status as the primary instrument in this study is described. The researcher is positioned very centrally in qualitative research. This positioning requires a high degree of reflexivity on the part of the researcher who needs to be aware of the way that her own position and prior knowledge and assumptions impact all aspects of the research, including development and design, data collection and interpretation. Given that qualitative research is explicitly interpretive requiring the researcher to interpret the meanings, values, experiences, opinions and behaviors of other people, it is important for the researcher to determine positionality as an insider and/or outsider (Merriam et al., 2000).

Working at diverse levels of the ECE profession over a continuous 16-year period placed me in the positions as both insider and outsider (Merriam et al., 2000) in conducting this study. My work as a full-tine ECE faculty member at a university and adjunct ECE faculty at a community college allowed me to claim insider status. The advantage of my insider status was that I have easy access to possible ECE faculty research participants who feel comfortable talking to me and may have felt that I understand their perspectives. I believe my insider status caused participants to share openly during the interview. My female gender also afforded me insider advantages, given that women are the dominant gender in the ECE profession (Essa, 2003). As an African-American, my race could have made me either an insider or outsider, depending on the demographics of the participants eligible to participate in this study. Like race, my age, a female in her late thirties, could have made me either an insider or outsider causing my power status to become an advantage or disadvantage, based on the demographics of the eligible study participants. The fact that I have never worked as a full-time ECE faculty member in a community college made me somewhat of an outsider among ECE community college faculty. Furthermore, as a former full-time ECE administrator in a community college, my power status could have either become a disadvantage as an outsider or an advantage among some faculty. Of all the aspects of my insider/outsider status, I believe that, most of all, my insider status as an ECE professional and former ECE faculty gave me the biggest advantage of all. Each of the participants seemed to have felt free in disclosing his or her thoughts offering candid responses to my interview questions. I am proud to report that, as an African-American female in my mid thirties, a former adjunct ECE faculty member at a community college, and former full-time ECE administrator in a community college, I completely felt like an insider with each participant as I

conducted each of the interviews. I wonder if the participants felt the same about me, because as a researcher I am automatically an outsider.

Incorporating both insider and outsider perspectives enabled me to gain a richer, fuller picture of informal learning among ECE community college faculty (Merriam et al, 2000). In harmony with my insider/outsider status, the literature reviewed on early childhood education and adult learning theory led me to make four assumptions in conceptualizing this study. First, I believed that learning is continuous and can occur in both formal and informal settings. Second, I believed that, with ECE covering the spectrum of childhood from birth to age 8 (NAEYC, 2009), it is necessary for ECE faculty to engage in some informal learning processes to effectively plan, organize, and implement a quality ECE program. Third, I believed that much of the informal processes in which ECE faculty engage are self-directed and experiential. Fourth, I believed that these informal learning processes vary so greatly among ECE faculty that they often result in inadequate student preparation for the preschool/childcare workforce.

Having worked as an ECE adjunct faculty member and administrator within the community college system, I further felt that the interview questions and other data collection activities would be well-received coming from me. I can relate to the participants' and other ECE professionals' experiences. One weakness may be that some of the faculty may still remember me as an ECE administrator and decide to limit their responses during the interviews. I had to be careful not to indulge so much in the conversation and allow participants to share their perspectives, feelings, and experiences. Although I was somewhat anxious to share my own, I remembered my role as the interviewer/researcher.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology I utilized to explore the nature of informal learning among novice ECE faculty in community colleges. The design of the study, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and researcher bias and assumptions were described. Employing a qualitative research design, I collected data primarily through in-person interviews with documents as a supporting source. The selection of the sample population began with a state-wide ECE faculty search followed by snowball sampling. Data analysis was conducted using the constant comparative method. Strategies for insuring validity and reliability were triangulation, researcher's position or reflexivity, audit trail and thick descriptions. Four beliefs were shared to describe my underlying biases and assumptions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to identify the nature of informal learning among novice early childhood education (ECE) faculty. The analysis was guided by the following research questions:

1. What informal learning activities have novice ECE faculty participated in since their employment that have facilitated their learning about early care and education?
2. What key content are novice ECE faculty learning during these informal activities?
3. In what ways do these informal learning experiences lead to improved practice?

This chapter will highlight the nine ECE community college faculty who participated in this study and describe the findings that emerged from the interviews, as they relate to the three research questions. The following sections are included: participant profiles, overview of findings, informal learning and ECE context, informal learning and ECE content, informal learning and ECE practice, and chapter summary.

Participant Profiles

There were nine participants in this study – eight females and one male. Four of the participants were African American; five were Caucasian. At the time of the interviews, each participant was employed full-time as an ECE instructor at a community college -- a college awarding the associate degree as its highest credential (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Each participant

earned the baccalaureate and/or master's degree in Early Childhood Education or Elementary Education from an accredited college or university and had been employed at the same community college for five years or less.

Interviews were scheduled via email and held in the office or classroom of each faculty member. I traveled to conduct a face-to-face interview with each of the participants, which gave me an opportunity to observe their work space and collect additional data on documents they may use to support their knowledge of preschool education.

Sonya

Sonya serves as the department chairperson and instructor for the ECE division and has been employed full-time for two and a half years. She earned the Bachelor of Science (B.S.) and Master of Education (M.Ed.) degrees in Early Childhood Education. Prior to her appointment as ECE college faculty, she worked as a second grade teacher for five years, third grade teacher for three years, first grade teacher for one year, and reading intervention teacher for seven years. Altogether, Sonya's experience in ECE includes 16 years as an elementary school teacher, one year in a preschool setting, and two and a half years as ECE college faculty. In addition to facilitating ECE practicum/internship courses and administering the ECE credentialing program, Sonya acts as the director of the institution's on-site child development demonstration center (CDDC). Serving infants up to preschoolers in state-funded pre-kindergarten, the CDDC is nationally accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Since Sonya's only exposure to preschool education was the one year she worked at a day care nearly 20 years ago, her primary means of gaining information on preschool education has been through reading course textbooks, observations in the institution's on-site CDDC and at community practicum/internship sites, conducting intentional research on the Internet, and

networking with fellow child care center directors and child care resource and referral staff. Through these resources, she has learned how children learn through play, which has better enhanced her understanding of child development and preschool education. These experiences and resources enable Sonya to feel confident in preparing future early childhood educators to appropriately care for and guide young children.

Brenda

Brenda earned the B.S. and M.Ed. degrees in Early Childhood Education. She has worked as full-time ECE faculty for two years. Prior to her appointment as ECE college faculty, she worked as a public school teacher in second through fourth grades for a total of 11 years. Having no prior work experience in a preschool setting, Brenda primarily learns about preschool education through mentorship from her ECE department chairperson and colleagues, observations in the institution's on-site NAEYC-accredited CDDC, discussions with ECE students who are currently employed in an ECE setting, course textbooks, and intentional Internet research. Hired at a time when staff development budgets were reduced or even frozen, Brenda has been allowed few training opportunities that would advance her knowledge of preschool education. Restrictions on state travel budgets have resulted in the cessation of the system's statewide ECE faculty consortium meetings. As a result, Brenda's networking resources have only included the faculty in her building. It is her desire to meet more ECE faculty members around the state, so that she can build a network with which to consult. Brenda's informal experiences and resources have taught her best practices in preschool education, which she has transferred to her ECE students.

Carol

Carol earned the B.S. and M.Ed. degrees in Early Childhood Education. She has worked as full-time ECE faculty for five years. Prior to her appointment, she worked as a kindergarten teacher for seven years. Although she has no prior work experience in a preschool setting, Carol's seven years as a kindergarten teacher have been instrumental in shaping her knowledge of preschool education. Defined as children ages 3 through 5 years (NAEYC, 2009; Rathus, 2008), preschoolers include children in kindergarten. Carol often adapts her previous kindergarten teaching strategies to fit the preceding age groups. "I just reflect on what children have to learn in kindergarten, then think of ways to prepare younger children for those experiences," says Carol. Hired at a time when staff development funds were plentiful and administrative support was prominent, Carol has attended an array of high-quality preschool training, including the nationally-renowned five-day WestEd Infant/Toddler Institute, two-day training on the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), two-day training on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), and annual ECE conferences. Carol feels that attending such trainings during her first year of employment as ECE faculty provided a strong foundation for her professional growth. Carol stated, "I have a global view of what child care and early learning should look like." She relies on the mentorship of veteran ECE professionals, intentional Internet research, and observations in her institution's NAEYC-accredited CDDC for continual professional development. Now that she has been implementing practical, yet research-based strategies for five years, Carol feels more confident that she is sharing with her students accurate and extensive information on preschool education.

Laura

Laura earned the B.S. degree in Early Childhood Education and Master's degree in Environmental Sciences with a concentration in Child Development. She has worked as a full-time ECE instructor for four years. Prior to her faculty appointment, she worked as a kindergarten, first grade and fifth grade teacher for a total of four years in the public and private sectors. Unlike many of the participants in this study, Laura has prior work experience in a preschool setting. She worked in a preschool for six years as a teacher of 3 year-olds and later Inclusion Coordinator, in a research university's CDDC. Those six years working in a nationally accredited child development center were instrumental in shaping her knowledge of preschool education. Laura focuses on application and practicality while training her students for the early childhood workforce. She finds it necessary to pull from her experiences as a preschool teacher and parent to give examples, in an effort to help students make sense of the various child development theories. She admits that her baccalaureate program focused on school-age children and was not successful in clarifying child development theories or applying the theories to real-life situations. As a result of this lack of formal preparation, along with some emotional family situations, she experiences challenges in training prospective teachers on topics related to social issues and child development theories. Like many of the other participants, Laura intentionally seeks preschool knowledge by attending training and conferences, surfing bookmarked websites, reviewing course information prepared by the program coordinator and previous instructors, and by reading the course textbooks and journal articles. Specifically, she mostly utilizes the websites and publications from NAEYC and attends the annual conference sponsored by NAEYC's state affiliate. Laura presents at this state conference each year and learns more about preschool education as she prepares for her sessions. In addition to learning from current and

previous colleagues over the phone, at a scheduled dinner, or via email, the greatest commodity she has found useful in attaining knowledge about young children is her current institution's CDDC, which was closed the previous year due to funding and enrollment. Laura stated, "I think that every program should have a child care center. I miss ours so much. I could just look through the window and apply information. The students could go and observe it. I could give them an assignment where they could go look for it."

Wilma

Wilma earned the B.S. degree in Early Childhood Education and a Master's in Foundation degree which focused on Adult Education. She has worked as a full-time ECE instructor for two years. All of her prior education and work experience has been in the public school system, where she taught for 10 total years in grades second through fifth. Wilma is the only full-time ECE instructor at her institution. Having no prior work experience in a preschool setting and no on-site colleague to consult with is a major challenge for her. Wilma depends on ECE instructors closest to her geographical area, along with the nearest child care resource and referral agency and curriculum coordinator at the local Head Start, to gain knowledge and clarification about best practices, rules and regulations in preschool education. Like many of the other participants, Wilma conducts intentional research on the Internet and reads the course textbooks to get familiar with preschool education, before being able to teach her adult students. She reads the state's ECE course guides and standards, then searches for related information in textbooks and online. She stated, "A lot of it is personal research – just getting out there to see what's available, subscribing to whatever newsletter is available, whatever information can be sent to you. Reading, it's reading." Although she has connected with a few colleagues and resourceful ECE professionals, Wilma added, "The majority, though, has been research on my

part –just getting out there and looking at what they [students] need to know and finding out that information." The state's department of early care and learning website has been the most beneficial in her quest for knowledge. Wilma's greatest challenges have been learning about the national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and teaching students about discipline and diversity. Relying on her experiences as a parent and appealing to the student's love for their own children has eased the process of learning appropriate approaches in teaching these topics. Not having a child development center on-site is a challenge for Wilma. She shared, "I would like to have a daycare here onsite, because there are a lot of things you can talk about in a classroom, but it's difficult for them to comprehend, unless they can see it. Videos are just expensive and in two years a video is out of date."

Rachel

Rachel earned the Bachelor of Arts degree in Language Arts & Literature and Master of Arts Degree in Elementary Education. She has worked as full-time ECE faculty for two years. Prior to her faculty appointment, she worked as a preschool teacher with 3 year-olds for one year and 4 year-olds for one year, then a first grade teacher in a private school for two years for a total of four years in the classroom. Having only a couple of years of prior work experience in a preschool setting, Rachel primarily learns about preschool education through mentorship from her ECE department chairperson and colleagues, course textbooks, on-site print materials, conferences, websites and journals. Prior to Rachel's employment, her institution operated a pre-kindergarten program. The program was closed prior to Rachel's hire. Having no formal education in ECE and no on-site venue to gain first-hand knowledge, Rachel shared the following in regards to her informal learning experiences, "It's basically been the only early

childhood I've had. So, my colleagues have been very instrumental. They have *been* my source of education."

Karen

Karen earned her Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education and Master's Degree in Early Care and Education. She has worked as full-time ECE faculty for over three years. Prior to her faculty appointment, she worked as a fifth and sixth grade teacher for three years, pre-kindergarten teacher in two separate programs for a total of 10 years, program coordinator in the public school system for five years, and acting director at a day care center for two years. Although Karen has an extensive background in preschool education in another state, she must constantly seek updated information on child care licensing, best practices, and legalities in the state where she works. Having no children of her own, Karen has often found herself on-edge when watching children play, especially boys. She has learned from colleagues and parents that, "children don't break". In an effort to learn how children engage in play and how to operate a preschool program, Karen seeks assistance and information from her ECE program advisory committee, trustworthy colleagues, and her students who are already working in early childhood settings. She is not a big fan of textbooks and views them as being "dry." Therefore, when preparing to teach a course, Karen reviews the instructional notebooks already prepared from previous semesters and instructors, finds related articles in the *Exchange Everyday* e-newsletters and/or in NAEYC's ECE journal *Young Children*, then uses video clips from U-Tube to bring the information to life. Like Laura and similar to Rachel, Karen's institution closed its pre-kindergarten program shortly after her hire. Karen considers people, including parents of young children, her family, colleagues, and her adult students, her greatest resources for learning the necessary information to appropriately prepare preschool teachers.

Ann

Ann earned her undergraduate and Master's degrees in Early Childhood Education and has been teaching as full-time ECE faculty for one year. As the Program Chair for Early Childhood Education, in addition to teaching ECE courses, she supervises all ECE faculty and staff who work in the on-site CDDC. Ann and her husband have owned a child care center for 29 years. Although they still own the child care center, neither of them currently work there. They pay a director to operate it. Ann's 29 years of experience owning/administering a child care center have enabled her to effectively prepare prospective preschool teachers for their daily work with young children. In addition to her previous preschool experience, she relies on the NAEYC website and state department of early care and learning website to remain updated on trends and information in the field. She finds any print publications that come from these agencies authentic and reputable. Occasionally, Ann finds herself pulling or seeking information by sending or viewing email correspondences on her state department's ECE college faculty list-serv. Daily observations in the college's on-site CDDC, which is in the same building as her office and adult classrooms, along with preparation using the course textbooks, are her primary sources for learning emerging philosophical approaches and preschool trends.

Brian

Brian earned a Bachelor's Degree in Graphic Design and Master of Education Degree in Early Childhood Education. He has been a full-time ECE instructor for two years. Brian has taught drama/theater, music and movement, art, and mathematics in a college preschool and private schools at the elementary level. He also owned and operated a primary school for two years, serving kindergarten through second grade. Although he has no formal experience as a full-time or full-day preschool teacher, Brian gained, and continues to gain, experience as a

contracted consultant teaching aesthetics (art, music and movement, drama/theater) in up to six different preschools around the city. Upon hire as full-time ECE faculty, he relayed to administrators the importance of his maintaining working relationships with preschools. These relationships enable him to stay current with trends in the field. Working voluntarily as a NAEYC Validator, he learned a lot about how quality preschool programs operate, using a standard tool to evaluate each site. Considering programs seeking national accreditation through NAEYC as some of the top programs in the country, Brian primarily attributes his knowledge and philosophies about preschool education to his volunteer work with NAEYC, along with information learned from their publications. He does not prefer to use the state's ECE faculty list-serv or networking with faculty colleagues to gain information about best practices in preschool education, but rather preschool administrators and staff with whom he has developed professional relationships and the state department's early learning standards, which he retrieves from their website.

Table 4.1

Overview of Participant Information

Participant's Name	Credentials in ECE or Elementary Education (Elem. Ed.)	Years as Full-time ECE Faculty	Years of Prior Experience as Preschool Staff
1. Sonya	B.S., M.Ed.	2.5	1
2. Brenda	B.S., M.Ed.	2	0
3. Carol	B.S., M.Ed.	5	0
4. Laura	B.S.	4	6
5. Wilma	B.S.	2	0

6. Rachel	M.A. – Elem. Ed.	2	2
7. Karen	M.Ed. B.S. – Elem. Ed.	3	12
8. Ann	B.S., M.Ed.	1	29
9. Brian	M.Ed.	2	0

Table 4.1 illustrates the participants' formal education in Early Childhood Education and the number of years each of them has worked as full-time ECE faculty in a community college and as a full-time staff member in a preschool. Six of the nine ECE faculty participants earned an undergraduate degree in ECE. One of them earned the B.S. degree in Elementary Education. Six of the nine earned the Master of Education degree in ECE. One earned the Master of Arts degree in Elementary Education. Four of the nine earned both the Bachelor of Science and Master of Education degrees in ECE. Although neither of Rachel's formal credentials is in ECE, she earned the Master of Arts degree in Elementary Education, which is considered a related field and qualifies her to teach ECE courses. Five of the nine participants are in their second year as full-time ECE faculty, although several of them revealed teaching as an adjunct instructor prior to their full-time appointment. Four of the nine participants have no prior experience working as a preschool teacher or administrator. Although Brian shared that he was contracted to teach aesthetics in up to six preschools, his experience did not include managing a preschool class or program for a full day, therefore the experience could not be counted. Of the five participants who indicated they have experience working in a preschool setting, Laura, Rachel and Ann have the most recent preschool experience. They worked full-time in a preschool, just before being

hired as full-time ECE faculty. The other three participants worked in preschools up to nearly 20 years ago, prior to working in public/private school settings.

In summation, by earning formal credentials in Early Childhood Education Elementary Education, or in areas other than Child Development or Birth to 5, and by working as full-time ECE faculty in a college with the Associate Degree as its highest credential for five years or less, each of the nine participants met the criteria to participate in this study. During the individual face-to-face interviews, each participant was able to offer significant data on how and what they informally learn about early care and preschool education and how those experiences improve their practice.

Overview of Findings

The findings of this study address the analyzed data as it relates to the three research questions. This section will reveal the details concerning: (1) the context in which ECE faculty have learned informally, (2) key content learned during these informal experiences, and (3) how these experiences have led to improved practice. Table 4.2 offers an overview of the findings. In an effort to make the findings of this study valid and reliable, only data that was revealed by at least one-third of the interviewed participants are included (Patton, 2002).

Table 4.2

Overview of Findings

1. What informal learning activities have novice ECE faculty participated in since their employment that have facilitated their learning about early care and education?
a. Networking/Mentoring
b. Consulting the Internet
c. Referencing Print Materials and Documents

d. Conducting Lab Observations

e. Parenting

2. What key content are novice ECE faculty learning during these informal activities?

a. Theories of Child Development

b. Best practices in Early Learning

c. Day Care Rules and Regulations

3. In what ways do these informal learning experiences lead to improved practice?

a. Knowledge

b. Confidence in Abilities

c. Practical Application Skills

d. Cyclical Process of Experiential Learning

Informal Learning and ECE Context

During the interviews, each of the nine ECE faculty participants shared the diverse informal learning activities in which they have engaged to enhance their knowledge about early care and education. From those activities, a variety of informal learning contexts emerged. Of the contexts that emerged, five were mentioned by at least one-third of the participants, meeting the standard for inclusion in the findings of this study. Those five contexts – networking/mentoring, the internet, print materials/documents, lab observations, and parenting -- will be discussed in this section.

Networking/Mentoring

Networking is a supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups with a common interest and is an informal learning process (Garrick, 1998; Marsick

& Watkins, 2001) that enables professionals to form a set of connections from which to access learning resources, implement activities, and evaluate learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Each of the nine participants shared that they learn about early care and education through networking with fellow colleagues, child care administrators and their adult students, as well as mentoring from veteran professionals in the field. Whether utilizing online tools, such as their state's faculty list-serv, making individual or group contacts via email, or seeking assistance by phone, each participant revealed that they frequently interact with another ECE professional and/or students in their classes as a means to gain information about their work. Rachel reflected accordingly on networking/mentoring with colleagues:

> I tell my students now that ECE, like any field, if you want to be successful, you have to continue your education to be effective. So, we really have to rely on conferences and everything to keep up. Research is always changing things up, so we have to keep up. So, those sources [colleagues and ECE conferences] have been my education – FREE – didn't have to pay for that; don't owe anybody any money for that [*laughing*].

Many of the participants revealed that they attend annual conferences as a source of early care and education. Statewide ECE faculty meetings were also considered a key context for networking and gaining information about their work. With decreases in funding and budget cuts, fewer faculty have been approved for travel to attend conferences. For the same reason, statewide faculty meetings are no longer scheduled and have seemingly become events of the past. According to Brenda and Rachel, networking/mentoring has been their source of preschool education. Brenda was hired after the last statewide ECE faculty meeting and has only been able to attend one state ECE conference, where, according to Karen, "Yeah, there are round tables, but I need sessions on the very latest research." Karen feels that such information can be attained

at NAEYC's annual conference, but she can only attend when it is held in her area. Being that the state faculty meetings are no longer scheduled and travel to conferences has been reduced, Brenda feels that she is out of the ECE loop and is forced to primarily depend on colleagues in her department for her preschool education.

Most of the participants discussed how essential mentor-protégé relationships with preschool administrators and other ECE professionals have been in their work. Sonya shared that she often contacts a couple of directors, whom she met at directors' association meetings and has become good friends with, to attain information about preschool education. Likewise, Brian, Rachel, Ann, Wilma, Carol, and Laura specifically shared how they maintain relationships with preschool administrators, curriculum coordinators, previous employers and/or coworkers, and/or staff at their local child care and resource and referral agency to remain aware of field updates and practices. Laura schedules lunch with her constituents on a regular basis – about every two weeks. The others contact their mentors on an as-needed basis.

Carol and Karen admitted that they openly ask students in their classes who are currently working in the field about appropriate practices, rules and regulations in family/group day care, state pre-kindergarten and center-based early childhood programs. Karen reflected on the extensive training she received as a pre-kindergarten teacher in a different state. Now that she is teaching prospective teachers in another state, she realizes that policies, procedures, practices, and standards vary. As a result, she finds her students a trustworthy resource to network with and retrieve information and updates on rules, regulations, and accepted/approved practices in the state.

> Often, what I get now, what my students know – what they are getting in their pre-k training. So, we trade off knowledge, especially in my evening classes. Because, they are

> in the field and they've been to that training. So, I ask about what they learned in training and for copies of their handouts. So, that was the best training.

Like Karen, Carol discussed asking her students who are currently family/group day care providers to share appropriate information and best practices. When asked how she approaches teaching a challenging topic, Carol reflected on how she learned about the health and nutritional requirements for children in preschool from her students. "I had a lot of access to information under previous administration and was given a lot of resources to just read. I also would ask my students who were already family day care providers about what they do."

Consulting the Internet

The internet emerged as another primary context of learning among ECE faculty. Whether preparing a syllabus for a newly assigned course, updating syllabi from previous courses or instructors, seeking accurate information on best practices, or confirming valid day care rules and regulations, each of the participants shared that they use the Internet as an ongoing resource for learning about preschool education. Wilma shared:

> I actually use the [state early learning] website a lot. I try to get my students to reference it, as well. The [state's early learning standards] are there. I find that they come in so many times thinking that if they like bumblebees, the children can just play with bumblebees all the time. But, I do try to address that they go there and reference the resources and materials they have there about early learning -- even the DOE [Department of Education] website for the kindergarten standards for school readiness – why Pre-K standards are important to get to the kindergarten level.

When asked what she has learned since her employment that has helped her to better prepare prospective teaches, Carol gave the credit to her personal research. Unlike any of the

other participants, Carol referenced herself as "a researcher" and shared what she learns when conducting research on the Internet.

> Because I am a researcher and I am always on the [state early learning] website, rules and regulations and requirements, qualifications are always changing. Agencies change, rules change and keeping students abreast of those changes. Also, encouraging them to move from one credential to the next. Once they have finished one credential to go back and complete another. Helping them understand the importance of early learning. More emphasis is being placed on finding qualified teachers, especially with all the articulation agreements in place. So, I really am always stressing that.

Each of the participants shared that they frequently consult their state department of early care and learning website to enhance their preschool knowledge. Eight of the nine participants also preferred the NAEYC website at www.naeyc.org as a major source of learning. One other source that was mentioned by nearly all of the participants is e-Newsletters – from NAEYC and other agencies. The primary e-newsletter mentioned was *Exchange Everyday* or *Child Care Exchange*. Some faculty use Exchange articles and/or articles in NAEYC's e-newsletter on a regular basis to prompt class discussions and others only when they need supplemental information to enhance a particular topic. Karen shared how she conducts research using the Internet to gain knowledge and enhance her courses.

> You Tube. You Tube has some of the coolest things. I use it to get people's attention. *Exchange* I go on looking for articles. I am on the [state faculty] list-serv we have. I ask 'what do you guys do for this, this, and this. Like, what do you do when someone has been asked to leave their internship site or have been fired.' The faculty list-serv has helped.

Referencing Print Materials and Documents

Seven of the nine participants considered print materials/documents a major source of learning about preschool education. Whether referring to course textbooks, consulting supplemental books/materials, perusing early learning standards, or seeking facts in newsletters or subscribed journals, most ECE faculty participants found print materials/documents a reputable source for on-going preschool education. Rachel shared, "Basically, I've learned everything I know regarding early care from textbooks, from my colleagues, from going to conferences. We have a large amount of books here in our program. I've yet to purchase a book. Plus, textbook publishers send us books all the time to look at." NAEYC's *Young Children* was the journal of choice among the participants. The ECE faculty participants unanimously consider NAEYC a trustworthy source for gaining accurate, research-based information. Ann confirmed that NAEYC materials are considered high-quality in the field. When asked what resources on preschool care and education she has found to be most useful in her work, Ann responded, "Anything that NAEYC puts out. The NAEYC group – anything they put out is very valuable." Print materials from NAEYC's state affiliates were also mentioned by more than one-third of the participants as highly regarded resources on preschool education. Brain stated,

> I refer back to NAEYC publications and I go looking for other methods such as Montessori and Reggio and do research in those areas, too. Another thing I do a lot is go back to where it all began in researching Froebel – where the original materials came from and the original purpose behind those materials and how they changed.

Wilma, having only two years of experience as full-time ECE faculty, no formal early care or preschool education, and no preschool work experience, shared how she learned more

about early care and preschool education during her quest to upgrade the quality of textbooks in her ECE program. She reflected:

> I actually changed a lot of the textbooks. Many of them were 10 years old and older that were left by the old instructor. We have, in the past, been pushed to bring in a lot of high schoolers. They put our program out in the high schools and we had a lot of them in our program. The textbooks were chosen so that those students could still work out of them. I understand that need, but there was this huge push, when I came, because we are COC-accredited, to get transferable to [the local university]. I just point-blank said that there is no way [the university] would see our program as being comparable to theirs if we are going to use these textbooks – this quality, this grade of textbook. So, I have actually pushed for college-level textbooks. Recently, I actually researched some of the textbooks [the local university] uses and tried to pull some resources from there. I feel like I chose some really good texts. There haven't been a lot of good ones out there, but I see that changing. Because, textbook companies see what we're doing and are tailoring books to our niche. I had to really sit down and look at the standards and see what the textbooks offered to help teach those standards. That's been the best way I've had to handle it, at this point.

In Wilma's search for quality college-level textbooks, she referred to her state college system's ECE course standards to discover what content was necessary and available to prepare preschool teachers. This process enabled Wilma to learn more about key concepts and appropriate practices in early care and preschool education. Since her 10 years of teaching experience were in second through fifth grades, referencing these print materials (ECE textbooks) and documents (ECE

course standards) filled the gaps in Wilma's knowledge about early care and preschool education.

Conducting Lab Observations

Six of the faculty participants shared the importance of lab observations in learning about their work. Whether exploring daily practices in their on-site CDDC or visiting community preschools to assess/evaluate students during field experiences, ECE faculty considered lab observations a major source of learning about early care and education.

Having an on-site child development demonstration center unpredictably emerged as a major context for faculty learning. The ECE faculty who have the benefit of working in a building with a CDDC down or across the hall from their offices and classrooms were clear that they would have much more difficulty learning about early care and education if they worked on a campus without an on-site CDDC. Of the nine faculty interviewed, four are employed by an institution with an on-site CDDC – Sonya, Brenda, Carol, and Ann. Brenda reflected, "I think just spending time in the actual classroom setting and in the CDDC – like more time in the baby lab has been my biggest resource, in addition to what I have shared from the textbook." In the same respect, Carol graciously shared, "The fact that the early learning center is here really helps. I have talked to other instructors who have not had the same opportunities I have had to go to training. They are more frustrated. I had the opportunity to go to training and having the center here helps."

Like Rachel and Karen, Laura's institution closed its CDDC due to low enrollment and funding. In the following statement, Laura shares how valuable the CDDC was in her professional learning and in her teaching:

> I was never in administration. I was always a teacher or floater or whatever. So, having the child care center here and learning the practicality of administering a child care center, helps me to let the students know, 'This is what you need for employment. This is what your director will be looking for. This is what your supervisor needs from you and WHY – why they want/need it.' I had to serve as the director at our center here for a while, so it helped me to see the other side of things.

Having the responsibility of teaching courses related to the management and financial operation of a child care program, an on-site CDDC is extremely valuable for ECE faculty. Karen shared that her institution once operated a pre-kindergarten program, but hired an administrator to operate it. Although, the minor experience she had as acting director qualified her to teach the administrative courses, she still felt inadequate. Karen reflected:

> Every now and then I get stuck with the three management classes. And, I only had three or four years as an administrator and did some hiring and some firing, but there's always been someone beside me. I always had the board or the principal or someone else supporting me. It's never been my whole deal. They said, 'Here is everything you need'. So, here I was qualified to teach the management classes, because I had been a manager on paper.

Although their educational credentials and work experience formally qualify them for the position, most of the ECE faculty participants revealed their feelings of inadequacy in preparing students to operate and administer *preschool* programs. The lack of an on-site CDDC makes it more difficult and time-consuming for ECE faculty to discover appropriate information and demonstrate best practices to students. Although Laura has found alternative sites for her students to conduct lab observations and field experiences, she clearly prefers the experiences

they gained in their previous on-site CDDC over the experiences they are acquiring at the local Head Start and community child care centers. Laura principally credits her informal ECE knowledge and skills to her work at a CDDC on the campus of a research university. A campus-based CDDC usually operates as a higher quality program than those in the local community, considering they are training prospective practitioners. For that reason, Laura feels that she could better prepare students for the ECE workforce with an operating CDDC on her campus. Each of the nine participants, some more than others, discussed the importance of seeing child development theory and early learning practices at work and how significant lab observations have been in their own learning.

Parenting

Seven of the nine participants shared that they are parents – three of preschool-age children and four of older children and/or adults. Each of the faculty who are parents revealed that, in their daily experiences of raising/rearing children of their own, they learn so much about what they should be doing, should have done, or wish they would have done with their own children.

Sonya is a mother of two – one preschooler and one college student. As an elementary school teacher for nearly 20 years, she was sure she knew how children learn best. Now that she has been hired to prepare preschool teachers, her perspective about early childhood education has changed. In regards to how children *should* learn appropriately, Sonya reflected accordingly:

> Like, center time, I hated it. I fought it, man, I fought it. But, now I see why it was important. They need to carry on, but, you know. We make those children move too fast. They need to play. I see it now, raising my own, my younger child and my older child. I see the difference. I really do.

On the opposite end, Karen has no children and, although she learned best practices for early learning during her years working in preschool, she had difficulty understanding how appropriate play looked. Karen explained:

> I had to learn by watching parents, 'cause I'm not a parent, that children don't break. Not being a parent, I don't know them and I don't have children of my own. So, A –learning that children don't break. And, learning that boy play is not bad, it just looks scary. Boy play is scary, because it looks like fighting. I would try to break up boy play early, because I thought they were fighting on the playground. I had to learn when to break it up and that they were still playing. I was only around, in the teaching years, for their fourth and fifth year. So, when you don't have them, I wonder, 'Are you sure they're still just playing'. So, my informal education comes from watching families and parents – the good and the bad. I had to learn to ignore some things and not to be on-edge.

Another unpredicted context of learning, parenting is instrumental in enhancing the knowledge ECE faculty have learned about early care and education. Whether ECE faculty are currently parenting preschool-age children or not, they are able to reflect on past and current ideologies about child development and early learning to enhance their preparation of child care providers and preschool teachers.

Informal Learning and ECE Content

The ECE faculty participants revealed a variety of content they learned during informal encounters. Of the content revealed, the key learning experiences discussed by at least one-third of the participants were theories of child development, best practices in early learning, and day care rules and regulations. Those three areas of content will be discussed in this section.

Theories of Child Development

The faculty participants, in their own way, shared that their informal learning experiences afforded them practical opportunities to learn and apply theories of child development and/or ages of stages of development. Rathus (2008) defines child development as "a field of study that tries to understand the processes that govern the appearance and growth of children's biological structures, psychological traits, behavior, understanding, and ways of adapting to the demands of life" (p. 5).

Regarding the importance of prospective teachers being appropriately prepared for the workforce, Laura stated, "They have to have practical knowledge of child development, which means not just being able to apply it in theory, but also in practice." Laura shared how difficult learning and teaching child development theory has been for her. Although she had six years of preschool experience, connecting the theory to practice has often been very challenging. Laura shared the following about teaching child development, "The one [topic] I had the most difficult time teaching is [child development] theory. Every time I teach it, I have to study it again." Laura's preschool teaching and administrative experiences enable her to effectively relay the practicalities of working in a preschool setting, however she lacks the ability to incorporate child development theory into daily practice. She feels that the on-site CDDC, which her institution recently closed, helped to shape her knowledge and understanding of child development theory in practice.

Like Laura, Sonya, Carol, Brenda, and Ann attribute much of their understanding about child development theory to being able to walk down or across the hall and see theory in practice in their institution's on-site CDDC. They unanimously stated that, if their institution did not have an on-site CDDC, they would have a difficult time learning and understanding best practices for

appropriate child development and early learning. Brian's institution has no CDDC, so through past experiences as a contracted aesthetics teacher and through maintaining networking relationships with preschools, he has been able to gain the necessary child development knowledge and skills and relay them to his students. Brian reflected on his informal learning experiences and what they have enabled him to learn in his faculty role and transfer to adult students.

> Knowledge – understanding how the child develops is the most essential thing. And, understanding that the child – it's their own model of the world and every child is different – to accept wherever the child is coming from with whatever abilities that child might have and be able to work with that particular child as an individual. I think the more I can get my students to come from that perspective, all the better. Skills – getting them to the point of being able to listen to the children and being able to follow the children whether or not they have pre-conceived ideas about where they want to take the child to. The notion of what does the child want to know and listen to that, rather than what *they* want the child to know. That's a very important thing. And, help the child get to a point where they can become more and more independent as they go along and be able to realize what things have the child learned that haven't served the child well, so they have to relearn.

Best Practices in Early Learning

Each of the participants explained how their informal learning experiences have enabled them to learn the most effective strategies for engaging young children in learning – at home, as well as in school. In the early childhood field, best practices in early learning are most often referred to as developmentally appropriate practice or DAP (NAEYC, 2009). In the most

appropriate early childhood programs, children are engaged in constructive play for a substantial portion of the day (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Cryer, Harms, & Riley, 2003; NAEYC, 2009). Brenda shared that, as an elementary school teacher, she and her colleagues were against children learning through play and preferred a more structured learning environment. Several of the female participants shared the same perspective as Brenda, in regards to how their informal learning experiences have affected their thoughts about the way they rear, or have reared, their own children. Those with teenagers and/or adult children wish they had learned the information earlier and often reflect on their past positive and negative parenting practices. Brenda shared the following about rearing her children and best practices she has learned as ECE faculty:

> Me and my husband have 5 children, well 6. I have been around the growth and development of three of them from birth. So, I do share that with my students when I get a chance. Now, in hindsight, I can sit back and reflect on the information and say, 'yes this is what happened.' I catch things that I did not do and still don't do, when it comes to my children. I really took them for granted, because, that wasn't my knowledge base. So, I really emphasize that to my students. We are really impacting their life – positively or negatively. We want it to be positive.

Like the other participants in this study, Wilma utilizes the state department's newly-developed early learning standards for children from birth to age 3, along with the state's pre-kindergarten standards, then networks with professionals with whom she has developed relationships to gain a better understanding of best practices. Wilma shared how such informal experiences have changed her perspective of best practices in the preschool classroom.

> I understand a lot more now what it is that takes place in those [preschool] classrooms and why some of the things are done the way they are. You hear a lot of the parent

> response that ‘they don’t teach anything and they’re just playing’ and things of that nature. And, having been the parent that was there and now being on the other side, I do understand what takes place and why those things take place. So, I guess the structure of educating young children and play being one of those formats. When you hear the term ‘play’, it puts an image in your mind, but play in preschool is different than play outside, or just playing in your house. It’s not the same. I do have a bigger perspective on educating preschoolers now, because of the information that I’ve gotten from here.

As a previous kindergarten teacher, Carol is conditioned to teaching preschoolers, however she was not aware that there are better practices than the ones she implemented in elementary school for the kindergartners. Like the other participants, she had to learn best practices for early learning and transfer such knowledge and skills to her adult students.

> I tell students that I wish I had known the importance of developmental goals and ages and stages, like DAP – developmentally appropriate practice. We really didn’t know a whole lot about it until entering this arena. Understanding developmentally appropriate practice for early learning, even secondary learners need to learn that to give them a better perspective of what children should learn. I had to do a lot of research on early learning and what it looked like. It looks like playing, but it’s really not.

As Rachel relayed in her interview, trends are always changing and we have to keep up. New methods and approaches emerge, requiring faculty to periodically update their knowledge and skills. Although Ann has 29 years of experience owning and operating a preschool, she admits that she continues to network with fellow colleagues to learn about new trends and approaches she did not use in her program. Such networking allows her to more effectively teach the information to her adult students. Linda shared:

> Emilia Reggio is something I wasn't very familiar with. It was something that I thought was another fad, but when the preschool center director for our child development center came in, that's the philosophy she brought with her and that's the philosophy of this center. So, as the instructor for the students that we were going to be molding to put over here, I needed to be top-game on Reggio Emilia. So, I have had a crash-course for the last eight months learning more and more about that and gone to some workshops, too – workshops and reading all kinds of books and just talking to other people that have been involved with that. And, observing and seeing whether it really works or not. I have seen with my own eyes that it works. Children are more relaxed in learning. They seem to progress at their own rate and speedily. It seems to be happening faster than I would have expected it to.

Reggio Emilia is an ECE approach that originated in Italy. The philosophy is named after a city in northern Italy and is being increasingly implemented in early childhood programs throughout the United States and abroad (Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren, 2007). Although Ann first said the term 'Reggio Emilia' in reverse – "Emilia Reggio", she corrected herself as she continued and praised what she has witnessed with children in their on-site CDDC. Ann's informal learning experience of seeing the Reggio Emilia philosophy in action enabled her to learn and subscribe to best practices of which, even in her 29 years of preschool experience, she had no formal exposure or education.

Day Care Rules and Regulations

Rules and regulations for child care centers vary from state to state. In order for ECE instructors to effectively prepare preschool teachers, they must remain aware of the legalities and operational requirements for preschool programs. Several of the participants shared that their

informal learning experiences have enlightened them on how to start and maintain appropriate operation of a family/group day care program and/or child care center on a daily basis, according to state licensing and national accreditation standards.

Wilma shared that many of her adult students consult with her to figure out where they can and want to go on the early childhood professional path, however she has often had to seek additional information and clarification before providing such direction. When asked what she wishes she would have learned before being hired as an ECE instructor, she stated, "The world of day care in itself, because I don't come from that background. Just knowing the protocol to have a day care, start a day care, and work in a day care. I really didn't realize it was so technical and so involved."

Karen discussed how she has had to learn the early learning standards, rules and regulations for the state where she works as faculty, because the state where she gained preschool experience is so different. Karen compares the state where she works with the state where she gained experience accordingly:

> [State where she works] pre-k standards are tough, tougher than everybody else… Licensing standards here are low for me. Six babies? Wow! [State where she works] only does state background checks. Everybody else does national. [State where she works] is the first place I have worked where I didn't have to get fingerprinted. [State where she works] is scary to me, because of the legalities and who we allow in the field. Just being pulled over for a DUI would get me in trouble in [state where she gained experience].

Most of the faculty participants discussed the importance of the networking/mentoring relationships they have developed in learning about their work. Whether calling, emailing, or having lunch with a preschool administrator, curriculum coordinator, or staff person from the

local child care resource and referral agency, networking with and mentoring from people emerged as an essential context for learning about day care rules and regulations. In addition to networking/mentoring, the Internet emerged as a key context for ECE faculty learning. All of the faculty participants credited the NAEYC website and their state department of early learning website as trustworthy resources for gaining information about day care rules and regulations. ECE faculty are tasked with training prospective ECE practitioners who may decided to work in one or more of many different early learning settings. As a result, ECE faculty must be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to accurately inform and effectively prepare prospective early childhood educators for the diverse ECE workforce. None of the faculty participants discussed even remotely learning about day care rules and regulations during their formal course of study. Each of them discussed informal means of attaining such knowledge and clarity on how day cares are expected to operate on both state and national levels.

Informal Learning and ECE Practice

In the interviews, participants shared how the content they learned during informal learning encounters has led to improved practice. Of the practices shared, at least one-third of the participants mentioned that they have gained knowledge, confidence in abilities, and practical application skills. The new and improved knowledge and skills were acquired through a cyclical process of experiential learning. Details about these improved practices and the process of learning will be discussed in this section.

Knowledge

During informal encounters, ECE faculty participants have been able to fill gaps in their learning about appropriately caring for and guiding young children and effectively operating various early childhood programs. Each of the participants felt that diverse experiences and

resources have increased their knowledge about child development and early learning. In response to how informal learning has improved her practice, Carol offered this perspective:

> It's actually given me a better foundation of knowledge, so that when I deliver courses that I am teaching I am able to have a more visual picture. Attending trainings for infants and toddlers and rating scales, like ITERS, and using that information gave a bigger picture of what child development and early learning is. My degree is a P-5 degree, so it [informal training] gave me a much more global view of why early learning is so important and what a quality early learning environment should look like. So, it's contributed a lot to that and in my instruction as it relates to my students and what type of skills and developmental goals should look like for young children.

Sonya shared what skills ECE students need to learn to increase their knowledge of child development and preschool education:

> First of all, they need to know that every child is different. Just because you have a room full of 1 year-olds, they are not all at the same developmental level. That's most important and you have to meet the needs of each child. You have your one lesson plan, but you decide, you know, 'how can I make it fit for this baby'. 'This baby, he can't learn the alphabet by singing them; he needs to see some flash cards.' There are different ways to meet the needs of each child. Like in the school system, you think they can learn it by singing it, but some children need more. So, meeting the needs of each child – developmental needs.

Brenda is one of the four faculty participants with no prior work experience in a preschool setting. She solely depends on her daily experiences at work to increase her knowledge

of preschool education. Brenda shared the following regarding how she learns about early learning and preschool education:

> The fact that we have our child demonstration development center here has been the greatest way that I have learned about sharing and teaching with the students I teach about early care and education. The textbooks have provided some direction, but the center has been the greatest experience up to this point.

Brenda further shares how her knowledge has increased as ECE faculty and compares what she has learned to her practices as a parent and former elementary school teacher.

> I brought my child to class and noticed the things I wasn't doing in the lab. I share with students what society says and what I did with my students. I try to get them to look at their experiences with their own families to see where they need to do better. I've come to realize that much of what's done in the school system is not developmentally appropriate for young children. We need to focus on what's important in early childhood and beyond. I would be a much better teacher now. But, the teachers don't have the supports they need to do the work. The focus is on test scores. They don't get the social studies, science, music and movement.

Like many of the faculty participants, Brenda, Wilma and Sonya deeply expressed how significantly their knowledge about early learning and best practices has both increased and changed, since they began training preschool teachers. In addition to ECE networking/mentoring, training/conferences, course textbooks/print materials, parenting, and Internet resources, these ECE faculty participants clearly value lab experiences in preschool classrooms as a primary source for increasing their knowledge. In her response about how informal learning experiences have improved her practice, Brenda recognized,

"We work directly with the teachers in the field, who help us with the students. I have asked the teachers in the CDDC questions, which I share with my students. I don't think I would have gotten that had I been somewhere else."

Confidence in Abilities

Each of the participants shared that they felt more confident in preparing ECE students to work in the diverse types of early childhood programs, due to their increased knowledge about child development theory and best practices in early learning. In response to how knowledge she has gained outside of formal education has shaped her understanding of preschool education, Carol offered this perspective:

> I have never worked inside of an early learning environment. Just actually seeing it in operation from day to day –just seeing it at work on a daily basis has been huge for me. I find as I go out in the field and visit students that there are so many day care centers – family day care homes, centers. When I go visit, I can actually share with students what I have seen outside of what we see here. What we have here is the ideal situation, but it's not what they will find outside of here. I don't want them to be in culture shock when they leave here, so I like to share what I see out there and help them to become agents of change bringing quality to the environment as they have been taught.

Carol's diverse informal experiences, on-site and off-site, have enabled her to gain confidence in her ability to appropriately prepare preschool teachers. Recognizing that solely engaging adult students in experiences in an on-site NAEYC-accredited CDDC can cause them to develop unrealistic expectations about the ECE field at-large, Carol has evolved to allowing her students to engage in field experiences in a variety of programs. Due to her informal experiences over the last five years, she feels confident in her abilities to compare and contrast all types of programs

and demonstrate to students what's appropriate and what's not, which will prevent their graduates from experiencing "culture shock" upon entering the workforce. Carol reflected on her informal learning and improved abilities accordingly, "I had a lot of opportunities for training that gave me a global view of what I was getting into as an early childhood teacher, which gave me the ability to give my students correct and accurate information."

Overall, each of the participants felt that their informal learning experiences have enabled them to improve their practices. In their own way, each of them shared how they are better teachers and gain increasing confidence in their abilities as they learn more. Although Ann has 29 years of preschool experience and still owns a preschool, she admitted that she continues to get better and feel better about preparing preschool teachers. When asked how the knowledge she has learned outside of the formal classroom has shaped her understanding of preschool care and education, Ann responded:

> I feel like I am a better teacher, better prepared. And, I still learn something new everyday – everyday. And, sometimes it's from the students. Some people work in child care centers. Some have never worked in one and say 'I like kids and that's why I enrolled'. Some of them say – 'I want to be a pediatrician', but say 'I need to learn the child development practices first'. So, it's just a variety.

Practical Application Skills

The informal learning encounters in which the ECE faculty participants engage enable them to effectively connect child development theory and early learning knowledge to practice when preparing preschool teachers. Laura was very open and honest about her challenges in learning child development theory and connecting theory to practice. Her responses made it clear that she did not learn about such theory when earning her formal education, nor did she identify

the significance of the research-based practices implemented in the on-site CDDC where she worked for six years. Regarding how her informal learning experiences have collectively shaped her knowledge of preschool care and education, Laura reflected:

> My experiences –both professional and personal experiences –having my own child –all of that has given me more insight into child development and having to teach that to my early childhood students. I wouldn't have had the same knowledge base – the same experiences to pull from. When I am teaching my students, I like to add in as much practical and personal experiences that I have had to give examples. When I can talk about a concept, then relate it to a personal experience that I have had, they can grasp it better. I would not have had that if I had not worked at [child care center].

Lab observations emerged as a major context in which ECE faculty learn informally. The faculty who work at institutions with an on-site CDDC recognized and shared how essential the program has been to their work. Although Laura's institution, like Rachel and Karen, no longer has an on-site CDDC, she discussed the value of a demonstration center and how such a grave resource improves ECE faculty practice.

> It was a lot easier when we had the child care center. But, our child care center was closed. I think that every program should have a child care center. I miss ours so much. I could just look through the window and apply information. The students could go and observe it. I could give them an assignment where they could go look for it. Now, we are having to send our students to the school system, which works very different. I also use the local Head Start, but it's different too.

Having assorted experiences in fine arts, NAEYC standards, and best practices, Brian is able to compose innovative teaching strategies to support his students in understanding

challenging early learning concepts. He discussed how he was able to devise and implement a practical application activity in his Math and Science ECE course.

> One [topic] that was really difficult for them to understand was in a Math & Science class – the perspective of the child and how the child views the world in different stages. I was trying to create an activity that was very concrete and that they would be able to see that this is the way the child sees it – what's going on. And so, 'cause I felt like there needed to be something concrete, I came up with the notion of having a tube with the ball rolling through the tube. The child may first think the ball is disappearing, then what can they do to help the child get to the next level. I also created a chart to help them fill in/record all this information to imbed it more into their memory.

Whether teaching students general child development theory, best practices in early learning, day care rules and regulations, or specific academic subjects, the ECE faculty participants unanimously concur that it has been their experiences outside of the formal classroom that have best shaped their knowledge and skills about preschool care and education. As a result, they feel increasingly knowledgeable about preschool care and education, more confident in their abilities to transfer preschool knowledge and skills, and better equipped to devise practical application strategies to support student comprehension of appropriate preschool care and education practices.

Cyclical Process of Experiential Learning

Informal learning refers to activities initiated by people in work environments that result in the development of professional knowledge and skills (Lohman & Woolf, 1998; Watkins & Marsick, 1992). Studies on informal learning and workplace learning suggest that adults *can* and *do* learn from everyday experiences and that learning is often embedded in daily practices,

action, and conversation (Beckett & Hager, 2002; Fenwick, 2003, 2008; Garrick, 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 2001; Solomon et al., 2006). Marsick and Watkins (2001) categorize informal learning processes as either intentional or unintentional. Intentional informal learning processes are planned and/or structured. Unintentional or incidental informal learning processes are unplanned and/or unstructured (Garrick, 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

During the interviews, ECE faculty participants shared a variety of experiences that have caused them to gain knowledge about early care and preschool education, develop confidence in their abilities, and devise practical application strategies. Some of these experiences were intentional with learning and results in mind; others were incidental having resulted in learning in the midst of carrying out daily work obligations.

When asked what resources she consults often to learn about the early care aspect of early childhood education, Carol shared:

> I really like *Working with Young Children.* It's a book we use in many of our classes. I use that a lot. It has a lot of updated information. They just put out a new edition. I get *Teaching Young Children* magazine and *Teaching K-8,* which I modify. I actually still get a lot of *Child Craft*. I still get *Highlights.* It comes out quarterly and has a lot of good examples for me to share with my students. Teachers often reinvent ideas that are already out there and make the ideas a little different. So, I like that one. I also use a lot of educational websites, like abcteach.com, as well as Lesson Plans from A-Z website. I use those to kind of give myself ideas. We also have our list-serv now, where we can connect with other instructors in [our college system] and get ideas for assignments and that type of thing.

Although Carol has worked as a full-time ECE instructor for five years, she continues to adapt ideas she has used in the past as a seven-year kindergarten teacher in the public school system. She also uses a number of the same resources, such as *Teaching K-8*, but modifies the ideas to make them appropriate for children at age 5 and under. This process of learning is intentional and cyclical, as ECE faculty continuously seek to locate information to learn about particular topics and acquire ideas to prepare preschool teachers.

ECE faculty knowingly engage in intentional learning processes, but often do not realize when they are incidentally engaging in an experience that may lead to learning. Although, ECE faculty may realize *where* their learning takes place in-general, such as on the internet, in print materials and documents, during lab observations and parenting, they are not always aware of *what* they learned from specific experiences or incidences. Brenda discussed *where* she learned a great deal about early care and preschool.

> At this time, my opportunities have been pretty much hands-on. The fact that we have our child demonstration development center here has been the greatest way that I have learned about sharing and teaching with the students I teach about early care and education. The textbooks have provided some direction, but the center has been the greatest experience up to this point.

In her comments, Brenda discusses what she generally learned from their on-site CDDC. However, further discussion and reflective inquiry later revealed *what* she incidentally learned during lab observations that have filled gaps in knowledge about early care and preschool education. She reflected, “I’ve come to realize that much of what’s done in the school system is not developmentally appropriate for young children. We need to focus on what’s important in early childhood and beyond. I would be a much better teacher now.” Brenda did not intentionally

reach these conclusions about early childhood education, her collective experiences as a parent and during lab observations shaped her new theories about child development and best practices in early care and learning.

Brian offered an insightful quote to characterize learning about how to appropriately and effectively work with young children.

> I think part of it is to just look at each child as being individual and looking at each situation as being very different than anything else. There's so many gray areas in everything that nothing is going to be black and white. "The map is not the territory", is what I tell my students. You might have a map that tells you how to get there, but the map may not be what the real territory is like… Yep, we are given all these maps, but they are just ideas, not always the terrain.

As indicated in Brian's quote, there is no one answer for the same situation when working with young children. The 'cookie-cutter' approach does not work in early childhood education, especially in the early years before the age of 5. This same approach is true for faculty in preparing preschool teachers. Although faculty may intentionally seek and find useful information about early care and preschool education, the learned approaches may not work for every child, even when children are the same ages. As a result, ECE faculty must intentionally seek ideas for diverse situations, many of which they learn incidentally during their day-to-day routines at work.

According to Kolb's (1984) experiential learning process, adults go through a four-stage cycle of learning during which they engage in a concrete experience, reflect on that experience, develop a theory based on their reflections, then form strategies for new behaviors. The findings of this study suggest that ECE faculty go through a recurring process of experiential learning in

which they engage in a variety of informal experiences perhaps during lab observations or parenting, reflect on those experiences as they relate to current or previous beliefs and practices, develop new ideas about child development and best practices for early care and learning, and then adjust their behaviors and teaching strategies to mirror their newly-shaped theories.

Chapter Summary

Interviews with nine ECE faculty participants, each who earned formal credentials in Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education and/or areas other than child development, revealed how ECE faculty seek and attain knowledge about early care and education. Laura's explanation about why she has experienced challenges in preparing preschool teachers, even though she has six years of experience working in a NAEYC-accredited, research-based preschool and administered her institution's on-site CDDC prior to its closing, sums up the findings that emerged from each of the participants in this study. She explained, "There is such a big difference between school-age and early childhood. In college, we focused on school-age and didn't learn to apply the theories to school-age as much. So, I had to learn how to do that."

In summation, this qualitative study was based on three research questions regarding how ECE college faculty informally learn about early care and education. Nine full-time ECE community college faculty were interviewed on-site to discover: (1) the context in which they learn, (2) the content they learn during these informal encounters, and (3) how these experiences improve their practice. Five primary contexts emerged illustrating how ECE faculty learn informally – networking/mentoring, the internet, print materials/documents, lab observations, and parenting. During these informal learning encounters, the key content ECE faculty learn primarily relates to child development theory, best practices in early learning, and day care rules and regulations. These informal learning experiences enable ECE faculty to improve their

practices by increasing their knowledge about early care and education, confidence in abilities to offer accurate and appropriate early learning content, and practical application skills to connect child development theory to the realistic day-to-day operations of an early learning program through a cyclical four-stage process of experiential learning.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to identify the nature of informal learning among novice early childhood education (ECE) faculty. The analysis was guided by the following research questions:

1. What informal learning activities have novice ECE faculty participated in since their employment that have facilitated their learning about early care and education?
2. What key content are novice ECE faculty learning during these informal activities?
3. In what ways do these informal learning experiences lead to improved practice?

This chapter contains conclusions drawn from the findings of this study, implications of these findings for practice, and recommendations for further research that would add to the body of knowledge on informal learning.

Conclusions and Discussion

I embarked on this study to explore how practice-based informal workplace learning (Beckett & Hager, 2002) among ECE faculty is contextual, activity and experienced-based, if and/or how such learning arises in situations where learning is not the main aim and whether it is activated by individual learners. Using Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model with Beckett and Hager's (2002) theory on workplace learning, I investigated what key content ECE faculty learn about early care and education during informal learning experiences. The findings of this

study highlighted three aspects of informal learning among ECE faculty. First, ECE faculty engage in both intentional and incidental informal workplace learning activities that enhance their early care and education knowledge. Second, ECE faculty intentionally learn content on child development theory and day care rules and regulations, but incidentally learn content on best practices in early care and learning. Third, the nature of informal learning among novice ECE faculty can be characterized as intentional and incidental practice-based informal workplace learning (Beckett & Hager, 2002) occurring through a four-stage experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) that enables improved practice. Each of these three themes is outlined in Table 5.1 and will be discussed in this section.

Table 5.1

Conclusions

1. ECE Faculty and Informal Learning Activities
a. ECE faculty participate in intentional informal learning activities, primarily networking/mentoring, conducting internet research, and consulting print materials/documents, to enhance their early care/preschool education knowledge.
b. ECE faculty engage in incidental informal learning activities, particularly lab observations and parenting, that enhance their early care and education knowledge.
2. ECE Faculty and Informal Learning Content
a. ECE faculty intentionally learn child development theory and day care rules and regulations.
b. ECE faculty incidentally learn best practices in early care and learning.

3. Informal Learning and ECE Faculty Practice
    a. Intentional informal learning enables ECE faculty to develop confidence in their abilities to offer accurate and appropriate early learning content.
    b. Incidental informal learning equips ECE faculty with practical application skills to connect child development theory to the realistic day-to-day operations of an early learning program.
    c. The nature of informal learning among novice ECE faculty can be characterized as intentional and incidental practice-based informal workplace learning occurring through a four-stage experiential learning cycle that enables improved practice.

ECE Faculty and Informal Learning Activities

Early childhood educators, in general, are often responsible for their own professional development after they enter the field (Jalongo & Isenberg, 2004). During the participant interviews, each of the ECE faculty participants shared the various types of activities in which they engage to learn new information about early care and education. From those activities emerged five primary contexts in which ECE faculty learn informally – networking/mentoring, the internet, print materials/documents, lab observations, and parenting. As self-directed learners (Brockett, 1983), ECE faculty either intentionally or incidentally engage in each of these informal contexts (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Table 5.2 outlines both the intentional and incidental informal learning activities from which ECE faculty gain information about early care and education. Each of these activities is discussed.

Table 5.2

ECE Faculty Informal Learning Activities

Intentional Informal Learning Activities	**Incidental Informal Learning Activities**
1. Networking/Mentoring a. Professional Consultations b. Student Discussions c. Email Correspondence	1. Conducting Lab Observations a. Exploring Daily Practices b. Visiting Community Preschools
2. Consulting the Internet a. Surfing websites b. Examining e-publications	2. Parenting a. Rearing Children b. Reflecting on Prior Practices
3. Referencing Print Materials/Documents a. Reviewing textbooks b. Reading supplementary materials	

Intentional informal learning activities include, but are not limited to, networking, mentoring, working in teams, receiving feedback, and performance planning (Garrick, 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Of the five informal learning contexts discovered among ECE faculty in the findings of this study, three of them primarily consist of intentional informal learning activities -- networking/mentoring, conducting internet research, and consulting print materials/documents. As they prepare to teach specific content in each of their classes, ECE faculty find it necessary to enhance their early care and education knowledge, making learning the main aim of engaging in informal activities and individually activating them (Beckett & Hager, 2002).

Networking/mentoring emerged as a primary context in which ECE faculty informally learn about early care and education. Each of the nine participants shared responses that included specific strategies they employ to learn about early care and education. The strategies employed through networking/mentoring involve activities such as professional consultations, student discussions, and/or email correspondences. These three intentional informal learning activities will be discussed in this section.

Networking/mentoring through professional consultations may occur by phone, via email (individually, from a distribution list, or on their state's faculty list-serv), or face-to-face at a meeting or formal workshop/conference. These consultations often take place between ECE faculty and child care administrators, colleagues, or veteran ECE professionals and might last minutes, hours, or days, depending on the task at-hand and potential challenges. Whereas some faculty, similar to the experiences of Sonya and Laura, may attend monthly child care director association meetings or book weekly luncheons with current ECE practitioners to engage in professional consultations, others may only initiate contact with those they have build relationships when there is a 'need to know' (Knowles et al., 1998) situation regarding specific information.

Student discussions unpredictably emerged as informal learning activities among ECE faculty that take place as a result of networking/mentoring. Several study participants shared that they often learn the latest ECE trends and child care rules and regulations from discussions with their students who are already working in a child care program. These discussions, between ECE faculty and their adult students, may take place in class, during field experiences, or in the faculty member's office. In Karen's interview, she shared that her connection to current ECE policies and practices, especially those mandated for pre-kindergarten programs, is her students

who are employed as child care providers. Like Karen, Carol discussed that she often relies on the perspectives of her students who are practicing family/group day care providers, when attempting to distinguish the difference between practices in child care centers and those in family/group day care homes.

Email correspondence was revealed as an informal learning activity that ECE faculty utilize as a source of networking/mentoring. Email correspondence between an ECE faculty member and a veteran colleague or ECE professional was categorized as 'professional consultations' and were included with the other types of one-to-one networking/mentoring activities. In this section, I am referring to email correspondence as faculty reviewing the electronic mail exchanges between others, mainly on the ECE faculty list-serv, without electronically engaging in the discussion themselves. Interestingly, during the faculty interviews, the participants almost unanimously stated that they rarely, if ever, initiate emails on the faculty list-serv to gather information about early care and education. Instead, they often read the assortment of email correspondences between fellow ECE faculty to seek information that may assist them in their work.

The internet emerged as a primary context of intentional informal learning among ECE faculty. In these modern times, the internet is a principal resource for gathering information. ECE faculty shared that, on the internet, they conduct research to learn current information to share with their students in class or to illuminate appropriate practices during field experiences. Surfing websites and examining e-publications are the two primary activities in which the faculty intentionally engage in this context.

Surfing websites on the internet is an intentional informal learning activity in which ECE faculty engage to learn about early care and education on the internet. Data uploaded to websites

often provide the most current information, as opposed to dated information printed on paper. During the interviews, ECE faculty shared that they visit a variety of websites, especially the websites of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), NAEYC's state affiliates, and their state department of early care and learning, to locate specific information about their field.

Examining e-publications available on the internet emerged as an intentional informal learning activity, as well. Some ECE faculty participants mentioned that they regularly download e-publications form the internet, particularly journals, newsletters and articles published by NAEYC and/or its state affiliates. Several faculty participants subscribe to e-newsletters, such as *Exchange Everyday*, that are internet-based. These e-publications may be posted daily, weekly, monthly, or quarterly with frequency options for subscribers.

Consulting print materials/documents to learn specific information about early care and education emerged as a primary context of intentional informal learning among ECE faculty. The informal activities in which ECE faculty engage in this context primarily include reviewing textbooks and reading supplementary materials. These intentional informal activities will be discussed in this section.

The intentional informal activity of reviewing textbooks is often a routine practice for faculty in all disciplines, as they prepare for class instruction. ECE faculty engage in textbook review to teach a variety of topics in early care and education and must relate the information to a variety of child care settings, including family/group day care, child care centers, Head Start, pre-kindergarten, Montessori, Reggio Emilia and more. Several of the faculty shared that they commence this informal activity with the textbook(s) selected for the course, then make use of

websites and/or professional consultations as secondary resources for learning the requisite information.

Reading supplementary materials surfaced as another intentional informal learning activity among ECE faculty using print documents/materials. Textbook companies sometimes offer the perfect textbook covering all of the required course information, but they usually do not. So, the ECE faculty participants shared that, when the designated course textbooks do not include specific information they need to accomplish course goals/objectives, they consult supplementary reading materials. These supplements may comprise of related textbooks that are not currently in use, child care rules and regulations manuals, program handbooks, or topic-related guides. In Rachel's response about resources she consults to learn about early care and education, she relayed how impressed and fortunate she was to have such a wide selection of supplementary materials in their department, which she referred to as a "library".

Unintentional or incidental informal learning processes are referred to as incidental learning and include the hidden agenda of an organization's culture or a teacher's class, learning from mistakes, and the systematic process of trial and error (Garrick, 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 2001). As they attend to their diverse duties and responsibilities, ECE faculty regularly engage in incidental informal learning activities, particularly during lab observations and parenting. These routine practices subconsciously enhance their early care and education knowledge, which will be conferred in this section.

Six of the faculty participants discussed the importance of lab observations in learning about their work. Two incidental informal learning activities were revealed during lab observations –exploring daily practices in their on-site child development demonstration center (CDDC) and visiting community preschools to assess/evaluate students during field experiences.

Exploring daily practices in an on-site CDDC and visiting community preschools are discussed in this section.

Exploring daily practices in an on-site child development demonstration center unpredictably emerged as a major incidental informal learning activity among ECE faculty. Those faculty participants with the benefit of working in a building containing a CDDC clearly recognized the importance of being able to engage in early learning on a daily basis. Although Ann has 29 years of experience owning/directing child care centers, she has never been exposed to the Reggio Emilia approach to early learning and recognizes the importance of being able to daily observe the approach in action in their on-site CDDC. As a result of observing students in the CDDC on a daily basis, Ann incidentally learns about the Reggio Emilia approach and can distinguish between this approach and other early learning approaches she has observed, when teaching her students. Those faculty participants who do not have an on-site CDDC also recognized the worth of a CDDC and the effect of not being able to regularly explore quality early learning practices with adult students. Linda, whose CDDC was closed due to funding, expressed how valuable their on-site program was to applying concepts covered while preparing teachers. The participants' responses showed that, while they learn in a variety of contexts, exploring daily practices during lab observations illuminates the learning acquired in the other contexts.

Like lab observations in an on-site CDDC, visiting community preschools to observe and assess students' field experiences incidentally increases ECE faculty's knowledge about early care and education. These lab observation activities are task-oriented and practice-based (Beckett & Hager, 2002), but allow ECE faculty to absorb an abundance of information as they visit a variety of preschool settings in their communities. In order to complete a community college's

ECE program, adult students are usually required to complete a lab component, often referred to as practicum, internship, or simply field experiences. Students who are already working in a preschool may be observed by ECE faculty, while the working students are on the job, to meet this requirement, especially in cases where the institution has no lab school or on-site CDDC. These requirements place ECE faculty in a wide variety of child care programs/preschools resulting in a diverse amount of knowledge that is incidentally learned about early care and education practices.

Seven of the nine participants in this study shared that they are parents. Three are parents of preschool-age children and four of older children and/or adults. Each of the faculty who are parents revealed that, in their daily experiences of raising/rearing children of their own, they learn so much about what they should be doing, should have done, or wish they would have done with their own children. As a result, the informal learning activities of rearing children and reflecting on prior practices surfaced as incidental informal learning activities among ECE faculty. The activities will be discussed in this section.

Rearing children surfaced as an incidental informal learning activity among ECE faculty, due to the skills ECE faculty who are parents learn during daily interactions with their children. The faculty participants will seek out information intentionally to prepare for instruction, but parenting is a daily activity that allows them to subconsciously put their knowledge into action. As they go about their daily family routines, ECE faculty experience spontaneous realizations about children without seeking the learning at all. Even though Karen is not a parent, she discussed how she learned a lot about young children by regularly observing parents as they fulfilled the customary responsibilities of parenting.

Reflecting on prior practices is another informal learning activity that incidentally occurs among ECE faculty within the context of parenting. After assessing their conventional beliefs and practices against those they were exposed to through research and observation, novice ECE faculty are able to reflect on past and current ideologies about child development and early learning, which further enhances their knowledge about early care and education. Many scholars believe that reflection is necessary for adults to develop professionally and learn from experience (Boud et al., 1985; Dewey, 1933; Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983, 1987; Warhurst, 2008). Reflection enables one to "gain deeper insights that lead to action" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 173). According Kolb (1984), learning occurs through a repetitive four-stage process whereby learners go through experience (concrete experience), reflect on that experience (reflective observation), develop theory based on their reflection (abstract conceptualization), and then form strategies for new behaviors (active experimentation), which becomes a foundation for further experience. The interview responses made it evident that reflecting on prior parenting practices is a viable informal learning activity that occurs incidentally.

ECE Faculty and Informal Learning Content

The contexts in which ECE faculty engage to enhance their knowledge of early care and education enable them to learn content, such as child development theory, best practices in early learning, and day care rules and regulations. I concluded from the findings of this study that, within informal learning contexts, ECE faculty intentionally seek content on child development theory and day care rules and regulations, but incidentally learn best practices in early care and learning. This content is outlined in Table 5.3 followed by discussion.

Table 5.3

Informal Learning and ECE Content

Intentional Informal Learning Content	Incidental Informal Learning Content
1. Child Development Theory a. Principles of Child Development b. Ages and Stages of Development 2. Day Care Rules and Regulations a. State Licensing Policies b. National Accreditation Standards	1. Best Practices in Early Care and Learning a. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) b. Early Learning Environments

The findings of this study led me to conclude that ECE faculty intentionally engage in informal contexts to learn child development theory and day care rules and regulations, in preparation for instruction, field experiences or administration of the institution's CDDC. The specific content learned about child development theory and day care rules and regulations will be discussed in this section.

Defined as "a field of study that tries to understand the processes that govern the appearance and growth of children's biological structures, psychological traits, behavior, understanding, and ways of adapting to the demands of life" (Rathus, 2008, p. 5), child development was found to be one of the areas of content that ECE faculty learn informally. Each of the study participants, in their own way, shared that their informal learning experiences afforded them practical opportunities to learn and apply theories of child development and/or ages of stages of development. These learning opportunities were often intentionally sought as faculty prepared for instruction.

Principles of child development detail the growth of children from the prenatal period through the childhood years (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Rathus, 2008). The ECE faculty participants deemed these principles to be the most important content to learn when working with children and often found themselves seeking the latest information on trends in child development to facilitate instruction. Although each of the faculty had at least one credential in ECE or related field, some have only had experience working with children in elementary school. As ECE faculty in a community college, they prepare students to teach infants through elementary-age children. Having little or no framework for working with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, the ECE faculty lacking preschool experience had to informally learn about child development from the prenatal period through the childhood years. Through the use of the internet and print document/materials, ECE faculty are able to learn accurate content to relay to their students regarding how young children develop and learn.

As a component of child development theory, ages and stages of child development outline the behaviors and skills children should exhibit intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally from one period to another and/or year to year (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Rathus, 2008). The ECE faculty participants felt that before students could begin planning activities for young children, they first needed to determine and understand the child's current level of development. With little or no preschool work experience, many of the faculty felt the need to learn this content as well, especially since many of them were conditioned to working with children who were over the age of 5 in elementary schools. In addition to the designated course textbooks, the faculty stated that they seek supplementary information and charts on ages and stages from the internet and other print materials/documents.

The rules and regulations for child care programs offer essential content to include in early care and education teacher preparation programs. These policies vary according to whether a child care program is licensed by a specific state department or accredited by a national agency. Each of the faculty participants discussed their challenges in learning about day care rules and regulations and how they had to be resourceful in acquiring information about state child care licensing policies and national accreditation standards.

State child care licensing policies are specific rules and regulations for child care programs that vary by state. One agency or department within the state usually governs these policies and organizes monitoring systems to manage consistent implementation among child care programs (NACCRRA, 2009). In attempt to learn state licensing policies, ECE faculty visit the corresponding state's website. The faculty found these websites to be the most accurate and current sources of state licensing information, more so than print materials or documents. In an effort to prepare students for their desired career path, ECE faculty intentionally learn the child care licensing policies for the state(s) in which their students may work.

Similar to child care licensing policies, national accreditation standards are specific rules and regulations for child care programs. The differences between the two are that national accreditation standards comprehensively consist of higher standards and are considered utmost in quality throughout America (NAEYC, 2005). Also, instead of one state agency, there are a variety of national organizations that offer national accreditation as a stamp of approval for high-quality child care programs (NACCRRA, 2009). The ECE faculty participants found these standards an additional challenge in preparing child care providers/preschool teachers and consulted a variety of internet resources and print materials/documents to learn them. Each of the faculty participants mentioned NAEYC as a "reputable" source of information for learning such

content, along with a wide variety of concepts on early care and education. Of the nine faculty participants, Brian was the only participant who shared his voluntary experiences as a NAEYC Validator and how useful evaluating programs based on these standards has contributed to his knowledge about early care and education.

Each of the participants explained how their informal learning experiences have enabled them to learn the most effective strategies for engaging young children in learning – at home and in school. ECE faculty incidentally learn content related to best practices in early care and learning as they engage in the contexts of lab observations and parenting. The content learned within those contexts is discussed in this section.

In the early childhood field, best practices in early learning are most often referred to as developmentally appropriate practice or DAP (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2009). In the most appropriate early childhood programs, children are engaged in constructive play for a substantial portion of the day (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Cryer, Harms, & Riley, 2003; NAEYC, 2009). As ECE faculty assess their students by conducting lab observations and through parenting their own children, they incidentally learn best practices in early learning from the observed early learning environments and DAP. They then reflect on their experiences and develop new beliefs, ideas, and behaviors (Kolb, 1984; Warhurst, 2008).

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), as defined by NAEYC, is "a framework of principles and guidelines for best practice in the care and education of young children, birth through age 8. It is grounded both in the research on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about education effectiveness. The principles and guidelines outline practice that promotes young children's *optimal* learning and development" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2009). Although ECE faculty intentionally seek information on child development

theory, they often learn DAP incidentally during lab observations. Practices that are developmentally appropriate for children can be taught, but they are primarily learned as they are being modeled and/or implemented. The participants in this study attributed their learning DAP to lab observations in their on-site CDDC, visitations to quality child care programs in the community, and even their parental reflections.

The findings of this study led me to conclude that content related to physical early learning environments is incidentally learned while ECE faculty are engrossed in informal activities. Standards of quality vary significantly between child care programs that are licensed by their state and those that are nationally accredited. Likewise, the physical features of licensed programs are very different from those of nationally accredited programs. With little or no work experience in preschools, novice ECE faculty may lack knowledge on how each of these programs should physically look. The interviewed faculty shared their experiences observing in lab schools, on campus and off campus, and revealed the considerable differences they noticed between state licensed and nationally accredited programs. The content ECE faculty learn about what is considered 'quality' among early childhood settings often occurs incidentally.

Informal Learning and ECE Faculty Practice

Informal learning experiences enable novice ECE faculty to improve practices by increasing their knowledge about early care and education, confidence in their abilities to offer accurate and appropriate early learning content, and practical application skills to connect child development theory to the realistic day-to-day operations of an early learning program. The nature of informal learning among novice ECE faculty can be characterized as intentional and incidental practice-based informal workplace learning occurring through a four-stage experiential learning cycle that enables improved practice.

Intentional informal learning enables ECE faculty to develop confidence in their abilities to offer accurate and appropriate early learning content. The constant availability of information on the internet, such as ages and stages of development, current child care rules and regulations, and national accreditation standards increases the likelihood that ECE faculty are offering accurate and appropriate early learning content. Although textbooks and other print materials/documents usually provide appropriate information, ECE faculty seem to develop confidence in their abilities when they have checked the printed information against the latest details on the internet or through professional consultation with a colleague.

During the interviews, it was clear that many of the informal activities in which the faculty had engaged primarily helped them to understand the fundamentals of early care and education. However, diversity among programs and frequent changes within the ECE field have made it necessary for ECE faculty to stay updated on current trends and practices to remain competent. The content ECE faculty learn during these intentional informal activities is often their primary, and sometimes initial, exposure to early care and education. Unfortunately, their learning is often fundamental in nature, since practices vary by program type and geographical location. When Carol discussed her reliance on her students who are practicing family/group day care providers to distinguish the difference between practices in child care centers and those in family/group day care homes, she made it evident how even working in a program with a NAEYC-accredited CDDC can be limiting when faculty have no experience working in any other types of early learning settings.

From state to state, program to program, and generally over time, child care policies and procedures change, which obligates ECE faculty to learn information all over again or at least seek updates to previously learned information. Therefore, although informal learning may lead

to improved practice, such as confidence in abilities to offer accurate and appropriate early learning content, it is my conclusion that these improvements are temporary due to the diversity among programs and the ever-changing trends in education.

Incidental informal learning equips ECE faculty with practical application skills to connect child development theory to the realistic day-to-day operations of an early learning program. The participants in this study, after conducting regular lab observations in their on-site CDDC, visiting a child care program in the community to evaluate field experiences, or reflecting on their own parenting practices, were able to incidentally gain insight on how best practices in early learning looked in action. Although learning was not necessarily the aim of these informal learning activities, ECE faculty, in the midst of conducting business as usual, realized connections between theory and practice.

As ECE faculty go about their daily business at home and work, they incidentally learn some aspects of early care and education as concepts relate to principles and/or standards they have learned intentionally. ECE faculty in community colleges engage in a wide variety of daily activities to adequately fulfill their many instructional and administrative responsibilities. These responsibilities may include, but are not limited to, administering/chairing the ECE department, facilitating traditional/online/hybrid courses, supervising and evaluating field experiences, managing the institution's child development demonstration center(s), providing academic/career advisement, engaging in community activities, and supporting job placement. ECE faculty are often left on their own to learn how to execute these duties. As a result, ECE faculty incidentally learn how to practically apply many concepts and ideas to child development theory.

The nature of informal learning among novice ECE faculty can be characterized as intentional and incidental practice-based informal workplace learning (Beckett & Hager, 2002)

occurring through a four-stage experiential learning cycle that enables improved practice. According to Beckett and Hager (2002), practice-based informal workplace learning is contextual, activity and experience-based arising in situations where learning is not the main aim. Activated by individual learners, rather than formal teachers or trainers, practice-based informal workplace learning is often collaborative and collegial, which suggests that ECE faculty essentially trigger their own learning and seek collaboration when needed. The ECE faculty participants shared that they often worked alone or in collaboration with the ECE faculty on their campus or with ECE professionals in their community.

Coinciding with Kolb's (1984) research on the experiential learning process, I conclude that each of the improved practices emerged from my findings may occur as a result of a repetitive four-stage experiential process: (1) novice ECE faculty go through an experience (concrete experience), (2) reflect on that experience (reflective observation), (3) develop theory based on their reflection (abstract conceptualization), and then (4) form strategies for new behaviors (active experimentation). More specifically, the concrete experience among ECE faculty may be conducting lab observations, which may lead to reflection on what they saw in the child development lab. The faculty member may develop new ideas based on what was witnessed in the lab, after which he or she may commence new behaviors or change previous behaviors based on those lab observations. According to Kolb (1984), this process, whether the learning occurs intentionally or incidentally, becomes a foundation for further experience. The improved practices that result from the diverse experiences of ECE faculty will be discussed in this section.

The nine ECE faculty participants learned about early care and preschool education through both intentional and incidental experiences. These diverse experiences facilitated their

learning about early care and preschool education and enabled them to improve practices. This process of experiencing intentional and incidental learning seems to occur as a cyclical process supporting their ability to prepare preschool teachers, even though they may lack formal education in early care and prior preschool work experience. According to Kolb's work (1984), learning occurs through a repetitive four-stage process that becomes a foundation for further experience. Having little or no prior preschool work experience, many of the ECE faculty participants were forced to intentionally learn some early care and preschool knowledge by searching the internet and referencing print materials and documents. They all mentioned that they have engaged in networking/mentoring to intentionally gain information about early care and preschool education from fellow ECE professionals or students who are already employed as child care workers.

In addition to the practices the ECE faculty participants were able to improve intentionally, some practices were improved incidentally. This incidental learning emerged as a by-product of their daily work experiences. Kolb's (1984) four-stage experiential learning cycle best depicts the process by which ECE faculty were able to improve their early care and preschool practices.

1. Concrete experience is being involved in a new experience. The ECE faculty participants incidentally engaged in a variety of concrete experiences during lab observations and parenting.
2. Reflective observation is watching others or developing observations about one's own experience. The ECE faculty participants often reflected on their previous ideologies about early childhood education and compared them to the new information they learned

about child development and best practices in early care and learning through observation.

3. Abstract conceptualization is creating theories to explain observations. The ECE faculty participants developed new ideologies about child development and best practices in early care and learning based on their observations, reflections and experiences during informal activities, such as lab observations and parenting.
4. Active experimentation is using theories to solve problems and make decisions. The ECE faculty participants formed new beliefs and strategies about how education for young children should be appropriately organized and implemented, based on their observations, reflections, and experiences during diverse intentional and incidental informal workplace encounters.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study led me to conclude that the nature of informal learning among novice ECE faculty is both intentional and incidental. This learning is significant to their jobs. Their constant engagement in intentional and incidental informal workplace learning activities enables ECE faculty to go through a continual cycle of learning, whereby they repetitively experience new phenomena, reflect on those experiences, learn new ideas or change previous perspectives based on those experiences, and then develop new behaviors in their practice (Kolb, 1984). The ‘big idea’ for the ECE field is that both intentional and incidental informal workplace learning are essential to improve practice among novice ECE faculty. More specifically, intentional and incidental informal workplace learning cooperatively: (1) smooth the transition of novice ECE faculty with little or no preschool work experience from elementary education to early care and education and (2) enable novice faculty who have preschool work experience to

learn the ‘why’ behind the ‘how’ of early care and education. Details concerning these implications follow.

Informal Workplace Learning Smoothes the Transition to Early Care and Education

The position of ECE Instructor in a community college involves extensive instructional and administrative responsibilities. The fact that the field of Early Childhood Education covers the spectrum of child development from birth to age 8 (NAEYC, 2009) only intensifies the nature of the position. Accrediting agencies continue to count on the one baccalaureate credential in Early Childhood Education or related field to qualify all ECE practitioners in all occupations associated with young children (File, 2001). Meeting accreditation standards for faculty credentialing by seek candidates with baccalaureate and/or master’s degrees in Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Child Development, Child and Family Development, or Family and Consumer Sciences with related work experience (Commission on Colleges, 2006; University System of Georgia, 2008) sends a message that education or work experience with children from birth to age 5 is not necessary to prepare birth to 5 teachers for the workforce. In an effort to attain, apply, and convey evolving knowledge and skills related to children in those critical first five years of life, ECE faculty, especially those who graduated from a program of study focusing on elementary education, must rely on additional learning that takes place outside of the classroom to better understand how children from birth to age 5 develop and learn, as opposed to children in elementary school. During the participant interviews, it was clear that the informal workplace learning activities in which the faculty had engaged primarily helped them to understand the fundamentals of early care and education. In several cases, these informal activities were their only exposure to the early care end of the early childhood spectrum.

Carol: My degree is a P-5 degree, so it [informal training] gave me a much more global view of why early learning is so important and what a quality early learning environment should look like.

Rachel: Basically, I've learned everything I know regarding early care from textbooks, from my colleagues, from going to conferences.
It's basically been the only early childhood I've had. So, my colleagues have been very instrumental. They have *been* my source of education.

The above responses are only a couple of examples from the ECE faculty interviews that illuminated their significant lack of knowledge about early care and education. In order for novice ECE faculty to make the transition from elementary education to early care and learning, they not only need to acquire fundamental knowledge on child development theory and day care rules and regulations, but also to understand how to apply child development theory in the daily lives of children from birth to age 5 and recognize appropriate practices.

Informal Workplace Learning Reveals the 'Why' of Early Care and Education

In their quest to acquire knowledge about early care and education, novice ECE faculty engage in a variety of informal learning activities. With reduced funding for travel and professional development, ECE faculty are essentially required to learn where and how they can. As the ECE faculty participants discussed the conditions of their informal learning processes, it was revealed that their motivation to learn is not only centered on their 'need to know' (Knowles, et al., 1998; Marsick & Watkins, 2001) to deliver accurate and appropriate information to their students, but on their interests concerning the dynamics of child development and best practices in early care and learning. Some aspects of these concepts are

learned intentionally and are initiated by ECE faculty, while others are learned unintentionally through their daily execution of instructional and administrative responsibilities.

One significant difference I noticed between novice ECE faculty with preschool experience and those with no preschool experience is that the faculty with preschool experience knew more about best practices in early care and learning, as well as day care rules and regulations, but less about child development theory. Conversely, the faculty with no preschool experience knew more about child development theory, but less about how to apply the theories and how it looked in an early learning environment. These observations are noteworthy for ECE practice, in that they provide further evidence that theoretical knowledge alone does not lead to improved practice among ECE faculty, nor does practical application without theoretical knowledge.

In summation, this study provides evidence that informal learning, whether intentional or incidental, enables ECE faculty to make a smooth transition from elementary education to early care and education and is a valuable facet of ECE faculty development. Consequently, more informal learning experiences should be facilitated by community colleges and ECE resource organizations. In my findings, I discovered the important role experience plays in informal learning among ECE faculty, the incidental content that emerges from those experiences, and how those experiences improve practice. It is my hope that these findings will inform ECE practice and inspire change.

Recommendations for Further Research

Research on informal learning provides a framework for understanding how ECE faculty intentionally and incidentally learn about early care and education in the workplace. The literature suggests that research on informal learning has recently increased (Merriam et al.,

2007) with more studies emerging on informal workplace learning. Fenwick's (2008) examination of emerging trends and perspectives of workplace learning is just one example of the research emerging on the topic.

By looking specifically at how novice ECE faculty learn informally, this study offers strategies for ECE professionals as they independently approach learning information about early care and education in the workplace. An understanding of what new ECE faculty do to get further acclimated to their discipline encourages faculty from all disciplines to employ informal processes in upgrading their own knowledge and proficiency. Further research may be conducted on concepts that relate to this study, but were not the focus, including informal learning among community college faculty in other disciplines, gender differences in informal workplace learning, and informal learning among expert ECE faculty with comparisons to informal learning among novice ECE faculty.

This study adds to the body of research on informal learning offering specific data on how faculty learn in the workplace (Fenwick, 2008) and revealed the nature of informal learning among novice ECE faculty in community colleges, but also may be an impetus for examining workplace learning among community college faculty in a variety of disciplines. The requisite skills among faculty in community colleges range from repairing automotives to saving lives. It would be interesting to find out what processes these diverse professionals employ to connect theory/concepts to practice in their fields of study.

Examining gender differences in informal workplace learning would be an interesting study to add to the body of research on informal workplace learning. Also adding to the body of research on women and learning (Bierema, 2001; Hayes, 2001), this proposed study on gender

differences and informal workplace learning might inform adult educators how to improve classroom instruction, professional development, and educational practice.

The final study I suggested that may add to the body of research on informal workplace learning is exploring informal learning among expert ECE faculty, then comparing it to informal learning among novice ECE faculty. The same study would add to the body of research on professional practice. Daley (2001) examined learning and professional practice among nurses. This proposed study would draw from Daley's research on nurses relating the theoretical framework to novice and expert learning and professional practices among ECE faculty.

Chapter Summary

The findings of this study yielded three conclusive themes about informal learning among ECE faculty: (1) ECE faculty engage in both intentional and incidental informal learning activities that enhance their early care and education knowledge, (2) ECE faculty intentionally learn child development theory and day care rules and regulations, but incidentally learn best practices in early care and learning, and (3) the nature of informal learning among novice ECE faculty can be characterized as intentional and incidental practice-based informal workplace learning (Beckett & Hager, 2002) occurring through a four-stage experiential learning cycle that enables improved practice. The constant intentional and incidental informal workplace learning activities of ECE faculty develop a foundation for further experience and allow them to go through a repetitive experiential cycle of learning, followed by changes in practice (Kolb, 1984).

The implications of this study suggest that both intentional and incidental informal workplace learning cooperatively smooth the transition of novice ECE faculty, who may have little or no preschool work experience, from elementary education to early care and education. Through informal workplace learning, novice ECE faculty with preschool work experience are

able to learn the ‘why’ behind daily practices in early learning settings. Faculty engage in intentional informal workplace learning to increase knowledge and understanding of early care and education concepts, while incidental informal workplace learning manifests as a by-product of the extensive roles and responsibilities of ECE faculty in community colleges. The ECE profession can proactively fill gaps in early care knowledge among novice ECE faculty by creating conditions to encourage learning, such as increasing and diversifying opportunities for networking/mentoring, devising a one-stop website that includes a systematic list of early care resources organized according to each state’s structure, and by supporting the construction and maintenance of on-site child development demonstration centers on college campuses that offer postsecondary credentials in early care and preschool education.

This study adds to the body of research on informal learning offering specific data on how faculty learn in the workplace (Fenwick, 2008). This study revealed the nature of informal learning among ECE faculty, but also may be an impetus for examining workplace learning in all disciplines. It is my recommendation that future research include informal learning among community college faculty in diverse disciplines, gender differences in informal workplace learning (Bierema, 2001; Hayes, 2001) and informal learning among expert ECE faculty with comparisons to informal learning among novice ECE faculty. Studies describing the cycles of learning among diverse professionals will definitely add to the bodies of research on workplace learning and professional practice.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

In an effort to acquire information on how ECE faculty develop informally, the listed questions regarding the context and content of non-traditional learning activities were asked during the interviews. Prior to beginning each interview, the participants were asked to discuss their formal education in ECE, work experience in ECE, and number of years as ECE faculty.

Research Question 1: What informal learning activities have novice ECE faculty participated in since their employment that have facilitated their learning about early care and education?

1. What are some ways or opportunities you seek to learn more about best practices in early care and education?
2. What resources on early care and education have you found most useful in learning more about your work?
    a. Do you have any child development books, journals, magazines, newsletters, and/or notes you read on a regular basis? Websites you consult? List-servs?
    b. Tell me about how these resources have contributed to your work.
3. When it's your first time being assigned a particular early care course, how do you approach preparing for it?
4. Tell me about a time when you had to teach a challenging early care or preschool topic. What did you do to prepare?

Research Question 2: What key content are novice ECE faculty learning during these informal activities?

5. What knowledge about early care and education did you gain after your employment that you wish you had known prior to or at the beginning of your faculty appointment?
6. What knowledge/skills/practices do you feel are essential for job placement in the field?

Research Question 3: In what ways do these informal learning experiences lead to improved practice?

7. What key information do you feel you have learned, since your employment as an ECE instructor that has helped you to better prepare current and prospective preschool teachers?
8. In what ways do you feel the knowledge you have learned outside of the formal classroom has shaped your understanding of early care and education?

APPENDIX B

EMAIL TO ECE FACULTY LIST-SERV

"Greetings, I am Bisa Batten Lewis, a doctoral candidate at the University of Georgia seeking participants for my study entitled, "Informal Learning and Early Childhood Faculty". The purpose of my study is to identify the nature of informal learning among novice early childhood education faculty. I am seeking participants who (a) are employed full-time as an ECE instructor, (b) are employed at a college awarding the associate degree as its highest credential, (c) earned the baccalaureate and/or master's degree in Early Childhood Education from an accredited college or university, (d) have been employed at the same community college for three years or less. By looking specifically at how novice ECE faculty learn through experience and self-direction, this study will offer strategies for ECE professionals as they independently approach learning information about preschool care and education. An understanding of what new ECE faculty do to get further acclimated to the field might inform ECE community college faculty and assist them to employ informal processes to upgrade their own knowledge and proficiency. Consequently, having knowledge of the content ECE faculty learn during informal encounters and the context in which such learning is acquired could lead to improved practice. Please reply at bisalws@uga.edu if you are interested and eligible to participate. Thank you."

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled "INFORMAL LEARNING AND EARLY CHILDHOOD FACULTY" conducted by the Bisa Batten Lewis, investigator from the Adult Education Department at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Desna Wallin. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I refuse to take part or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to identify the nature of informal learning among early childhood faculty and how such experiences lead to improved practice.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following:

1) **Answer questions about my learning experiences as an ECE instructor.**
2) **Commit to a 1-2-hour one-on-one interview, which will be recorded on tape and later transcribed with no evidence of my identity.**
3) **Discuss informal learning situations and encounters with regards to the early care and education discipline.**
4) **Commit to answer any follow-up questions about the topic and/or my interview, for the duration of the study – approximately three months.**

I will receive no compensation or immediate benefits from participating in this study. No risk or discomfort is expected from participating in this study. I may refuse answering any questions to which I am uncomfortable responding.

No information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project. Follow-up sessions are not necessary at this time unless warranted by further research. If additional clarification or discussion is necessary, I may be contacted by the researcher for further questioning.

This authorization may be revoked by me in writing at any time before the release of the above information. This authorization will expire one year from date signed unless another date is specified here _____. This information is limited to the person or organization named above and further release is prohibited without specific additional written consent.

Bisa Batten Lewis	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	**Signature**	**Date**

Telephone: 229-869-2655
Email: bisalws@uga.edu

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	**Signature**	**Date**

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu