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PRESERVICE-TEACHERS’ BELIEFS ABOUT YOUNG CHILDREN, THEIR PARENTS, AND TEACHING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

A Thesis in
Curriculum and Instruction

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discover preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in early childhood education (ECE). Beliefs are the dispositions one decides to use when one encounters certain situations. Beliefs can originate from various sources (e.g., past experiences, family, societal views and values, etc.). One’s beliefs on a certain subject can be based on tacit assumptions, whereas one’s knowledge can be based on empirical evidence about that subject. Although beliefs and knowledge are two different entities, they may not be easily distinguished in one’s thought system. Specifically, one’s beliefs and knowledge merge with each other in time.

Teachers’ pedagogical constructions include their beliefs, which teachers may rely on to make decisions related to learning environment, learning, and learner. Also, teachers’ interactions with parents of young children can be affected by their beliefs about parent involvement. In the context of ECE teacher education, ECE preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching can affect how the preservice-teachers build their pedagogical knowledge. In some cases, preservice-teachers’ beliefs that are affected by the candidate’s own cultural values and past experiences may be a filter through the preservice-teachers adopt new information provided to them during their teacher education.

The investigator used a qualitative case study method to discover the phenomena. A survey questionnaire developed by the investigator, participants’ journal entries, and artifacts the participants created were employed to gather data. Fourteen attendees of the course the researcher taught at an Eastern State University participated in this study. Data
gathered were coded and analyzed by using constant comparative method and NVIVO qualitative research software.

Major findings included: (1) there was a relationship between the preservice teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE, (2) the participants’ memories of their childhood, school, teachers, and parents were found influential in the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and ECE teaching, (3) the participants identified similar characteristics for the qualities of parenting and an ECE teacher, and (4) the relation between the participants’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE affected the preservice-teachers’ philosophies of teaching.

The investigator made several implications based on the results. These implications aimed to guide ECE preservice-teacher education to address preservice-teachers’ beliefs that they formed prior to their entrance to colleges of education. Finally, the investigator suggested several directions for future research.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The most important components of an early childhood education program are the young children, parents, and ECE teachers. Because children are in the centre of these three, ECE teachers have the lead role in two major tasks: (a) working to create learning and teaching environments that are most conducive to the children’s learning, and (b) partnering with parents to provide a continuum between home and school. When ECE teachers perform their skills related to these areas, they rely not only on their formal education and training, but also on the beliefs that they have built from their previous life experiences, including their years in the teaching profession. They reflect their beliefs in their relations with students and their families. Specifically, the more teachers become experienced, the harder it is to change their preset beliefs. While teachers’ beliefs can help them solve some problems they might face in the classroom, sometimes their beliefs can contain unconscious, hidden stereotypes and attitudes about the populations they teach, which might limit the instructional methods they implement during their teaching practice. Hence, preservice-teacher education seems to be the right place for future teachers to learn about their preexisting conceptions of young children, their parents, and the profession of teaching young children. The purpose of this study was to discover preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in early childhood education (ECE).
Preservice-teachers’ beliefs have been an interest in teacher education research (Joram & Gabriele, 1998). From an interpretive research perspective, Stuart and Thurlow (2000) emphasize that “preparing teachers as change agents begins with an understanding of the beliefs that underlie teacher decision making” (p. 113). As is known from the constructivist discourses of learning and teaching, people build new knowledge on what they have already acquired (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Preservice-teachers come to the colleges of education with their previously established perceptions and images of students, family involvement, and teaching. Thus, the framework for the preservice-teachers’ previously existing beliefs is formed mostly from all their experiences, including their native ecological environment, religious beliefs, societal views, traditions, cultural values, and most importantly, educational experiences prior to entering a teacher education program.

Preservice-teachers’ preset perceptions of teaching are reflected in their pedagogical constructions, which are derived from their beliefs about children’s learning, parental involvement, and practice of teaching. Therefore, preservice-teachers’ beliefs are very important because people make meaning of their learning by connecting to their existing knowledge (Richardson, 2005).

**Pedagogical Triangle of ECE Teaching**

An ECE teacher’s attitudes about young children, their parents, and the ECE teaching profession are the three angles of the teacher’s pedagogical triangle. Richardson (2005) indicates that some clusters in one’s beliefs system are unrelated or inconsistent with each other; therefore, those belief clusters do not show up together in one’s
conscious level since doing so might create a conflict in one’s psychological state. On the other hand, some clusters interact with or dominate each other. In the case of early childhood teachers’ beliefs systems, their attitudes and beliefs about children, parent involvement, and ECE teaching affects their decisions related to children’s learning, curriculum design, and cooperation with parents about their children.

According to the research studies reviewed by Richardson (2005), preservice-teachers displayed little or limited knowledge about the differences children might bring to the classroom. Also, this Richardson found that prospective teachers had narrow perspectives about the families their students come from. For instance, the preservice-teachers thought that children who are immigrants and live in socio-economically disadvantages were at risk to fail in the school. In turn, these attitudes were reflected in the teacher candidates’ curriculum designs in which they did not offer any adaptation or special instruction for students with diverse backgrounds and needs (Richardson). Therefore, the present study considers beliefs about young children, their parents, and views about ECE teaching to be cooperating clusters in a teacher’s belief system.

**Young Children**

Preservice-teachers enter teacher education programs with perceptions of young children that they developed from their own “personal stories” (Knowles, & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). From those influences, preservice-teachers create images of how a young child must be raised and taught, and embed those images in their pedagogies. Perry and Gerard (2002) emphasize the fact that preservice-teachers come to teacher education programs with specific perspectives about young children, and that the teacher-
education programs lack the strategies to guide preservice-teachers to search and question their existing beliefs. Perry and Gerard further argue that values about young children in today’s society are not so different from historical views of childhood. The influence of those views are blended with the child development knowledge given in colleges of education. With this concern, Perry and Gerard designed an ECE course in which teacher-candidates could discuss child development theories from a critical perspective and write their childhood stories by reexamining the effects of historical child development perspectives on present-day child-raising and early childhood education practices. The following images of young children emerged as the teacher-candidates in the course analyzed their beliefs and dominant child development theories (e.g., maturationist, behaviorist, psycho-analytic, cognitive, and ecological systems): (1) “Child as an adult” – the respondents felt that pop culture (e.g., commercials, media) portrays children as little adults by dressing children like adults or having them speak adult-type words. Behaviorism, which advocates that children can be taught anything by using extrinsic motivations, is seen as the underlying historical child development theory in the image of a “child as an adult.” (2) “Child as property” – the preservice-teachers referred to as divorce or tax issues. This image points to the factors in a child’s ecological environment, such as the parents’ marital status or income level, that a child does not have any control over and which have indirect effects on them. (3) “Child as a blank slate” for the study participants refers to physical and sexual advantages adults have over children. This image emphasizes the importance of the child’s environment and being surrounded by immediate family members and a community who may claim complete control over and rights to the child while treating him/her as an object rather than as a
personality. (4) “Child as the future” meant the parents’ efforts to provide their children with the best education. The underlying idea of this image is similar to the third image (of the child as a blank slate) but in a positive way in which parents perceive children as future productive adults of society, which is why they assume complete responsibility to provide their children with opportunities for a good education.

The findings in Perry and Gerard’s study show that when opportunities are provided, teacher-candidates can discover that their beliefs are affected by historical views that have been influenced by various factors such as culture, societal values, law, politics, media, and the economy. In contrast, in the current study the preservice-teachers’ images and metaphors representing their beliefs about young children show their appreciation of diversity. Seifert (2000) explains the variation in teacher-candidates’ views of children. Preservice-teachers do not have the work experience yet that will socialize them into the commonly held, uniform beliefs of the teaching profession.

Although the teacher education programs emphasize a uniform pedagogy stressing the child’s unique nature, and childhood as separate developmental stages, prospective-teachers may not yet be able to internalize those views since they have not been exposed to different learning and teaching environments. Therefore, the majority of future ECE teachers depend on their pretraining beliefs about teaching children to guide their teaching.

In sum, to be able to design more effective ECE teacher education programs that help ECE teacher-candidates realize, challenge, and alter their preexisting beliefs and attitudes about young children, there is a need to discover how ECE preservice teachers
already perceive young children. Therefore, this study has attempted to discover the factors that helped to form teacher-candidates’ beliefs.

**Parents of Young Children**

Preservice-teachers enter teacher education programs with specific beliefs about parents and parenting, which are influenced by the teacher-candidates’ own parents and native society. Unfortunately, little research (e.g., Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004) exists as to what early childhood education preservice-teachers’ perceptions and images of parents are, and what influences these views.

Graue and Brown (2003) point out that “individuals come into their professional education with cultural scripts that shape interaction and meaning making” (p. 721). They further emphasize that preservice-teachers tend to have a very narrow perspective about working with parents of children that limits the behaviors that families should show during their involvement in their children’s education. Lack of understanding of the situation that might arise from one’s familial conditions is pointed out as one of the major problems in teacher-candidates’ perceptions. This point shows that without knowing the kind of beliefs about parents that teacher-candidates bring to programs, ECE teacher education programs cannot be expected to design successful instruction that guides future teachers to deconstruct their preconceived notions of parents and alter them to effectively work with families of young children (Graue & Brown, 2003; Morris & Taylor, 1998).

In sum, the results of the current study could provide insights for understanding the processes underlying preservice-teachers’ images of families and parents. The attempt
in this study was to gauge foundational images of families and parents that preservice-teachers bring to their teacher education program.

ECE Teaching

Preservice-teachers’ beliefs and images about ECE teaching are influenced by the memories of their own school experiences. Lin and Spodek (1994) investigated ECE teacher candidates’ teacher images and use of the term “teacher images” as referring to beliefs, values of teaching, and self-perception. By using the case study method, these researchers analyzed two ECE student teachers’ teacher images, using observations, interviews, video-recordings, and journal reflections. The selected study concludes that ECE student-teachers bring their preexisting teacher images with them when they enter the teacher education program. These images are mostly rooted in their personal experiences. For instance, one of the participants mentioned that her mother influenced her teacher image by providing hands-on activities, because the mother engaged her and her brother in a variety of activities when they were young. While Lin and Spodek show the effects of past learning experiences on teacher-candidates’ images of teachers and teaching modes, their study gave no evidence of whether those images changed throughout their college training. At the moment, one can ask whether or not teacher education programs are successful in changing and challenging preservice-teachers’ preexisting beliefs and perceptions of teaching and becoming teachers. Although some ECE programs, such as that of Reggio Emilia, emphasize certain teacher and teaching images, i.e., the teacher as partner, nurturer, guide, and researcher, Cadwell’s (1997) research shows that teacher education programs are not quite successful in challenging
teacher-candidates’ preexisting perceptions of ECE teaching. For example, Greene and Magliaro (2003) state that students who entered teacher education programs tend to leave the program with the same beliefs. Greene and Magliaro further indicate that teacher education programs may lack the ability to design instruction that can challenge students’ preexisting beliefs about teachers and teaching.

In sum, while teacher candidates are not yet teachers, they have rich memories that influence their perceptions of what kind of a teacher they want to be (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). Knowledge of preservice teachers’ past experiences are very helpful sources for teacher educators to understand teacher-candidates’ preexisting conceptions about children, their parents, and teaching in ECE. This point provides bountiful bases for discovering ECE preservice-teachers’ perceptions of what ECE teaching means.

**Need for the Study**

Research (Kagan, 1992) reports that preservice-teachers entering teacher education programs are less likely to change their preexisting beliefs about teaching and learning. Furthermore, these perceptions serve as a “filter” while they are being exposed to knowledge in university courses and practicum experiences. Therefore, there is a need to understand the belief systems that prospective teachers bring to their professional training in order to help future teachers construct a teaching philosophy in which they have an increased self-efficacy to work with a diverse student and parent population.
Another need for the study is the lack of information about ECE preservice-teachers’ beliefs. Although there is a body of research on preservice-teachers’ preexisting beliefs, many of these studies (e.g., Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Kagan, 1992; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000) focus on elementary- or upper-level preservice-teachers. Little is known about the situation among early childhood education teacher-candidates.

The final issue indicating the need for the current study is that recent studies have investigated only one aspect of preservice-teachers’ beliefs, such as teacher/teaching, or parent/parenting. For instance, Bullough and Stokes (1994) focused on only preservice-teachers’ beliefs and perceptions of teaching in relation to their professional development. However, teaching behavior cannot be isolated from other elements of the educational environment, such as the students and their families. Professional attitudes of preservice-teachers include their beliefs and perceptions about the student population that they will teach. At the moment, the ability to understand the connections between ECE preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and ECE teaching is lacking.

In sum, prior beliefs and preconceptions of preservice-teachers that are not addressed in teacher education programs may lead teacher-candidates to inappropriate teaching practices because “all new information and perspectives will be assimilated into existing knowledge structures” (Joram & Gabriele, 1998, p. 176). If it’s the case that beliefs have such a powerful influence on the practice of teaching, then knowing the kinds of beliefs and perceptions ECE preservice-teachers bring into their teacher education programs is imperative.
The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover new information about the following areas: (1) preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, (2) the factors influencing preservice-teachers’ perceptions about young children, (3) preservice-teachers’ beliefs about parents of young children, (4) the factors influencing prospective-teachers’ perceptions related to parent involvement in early childhood education, (5) preservice-teachers’ beliefs about ECE teaching, and (6) factors influencing preservice-teachers’ perceptions about the profession of ECE teaching.

Research Questions

In this study, the primary research question was:

What are the ECE preservice-teachers’ beliefs, perceptions, and images of young children, their parents, and ECE teaching?

The study attempted to answer the research question by examining several sub-questions:

1. What are ECE teachers’ beliefs about young children in relation to their memories, past experiences, and their existing knowledge? The following issues helped answer this sub-question: a) What are the images and metaphors the participants use to describe a young child? (b) What influences teacher-candidates’ beliefs, about young children? and (c) What categories emerged from the data collected from the participants to indicate the sources impacting the teacher-candidates’ beliefs about young children?
2. What are the ECE preservice-teachers’ beliefs about the parents of young children in relation to their memories, past experiences, and their existing knowledge? The following information helped answer this sub-question: (a) What are the images and metaphors the participants use to describe a parent of a young child? (b) What influences these beliefs about the parents of young children? and (c) What categories emerge from data collected from the participants as to the sources that impact these teacher-candidates’ beliefs about parents?

3. What are the ECE preservice-teachers’ beliefs about ECE teaching in relation to their memories, past experiences, and their existing knowledge? The following issues provided information for this sub-question: (a) What are the images and metaphors that the participants use to describe an ECE teacher? (b) What influences the teacher-candidates’ beliefs about an ECE teacher, and (c) What categories as the sources impacting the teacher-candidates’ beliefs about ECE teaching emerged from the data collected from the participants?
Definition of Terms

The following definition of terms is used in this thesis:

Beliefs

Beliefs are the dispositions one displays when situations arise (Quine & Ullian, 1978). Individuals have different kinds of beliefs that may be independent from each other as well as beliefs that are related to and affect one another. One’s knowledge about a certain subject can be different from one’s beliefs about the matter. One’s belief system is composed of one’s beliefs connected to each other. Preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, working with parents, and ECE teaching form an ECE preservice-teacher’s pedagogical belief system.

Images

Images are the memories of the past that help people interpret newly encountered situations. For instance, preservice-teachers are influenced by the images of their past school teachers when they build “a teacher image” of themselves (Lin & Spodek, 1994).

Metaphors

Metaphors are representations of one’s belief about various matters. They are valuable sources of information to understand how teachers form their teacher identities (Bullough & Stokes, 1994). Metaphors are concrete descriptions of abstract and sometimes vague issues such as the teacher as a guide (Strickland & Iran-Nejad, 1994).
Preservice-teachers

Preservice-teachers are teacher candidates who are trained to teach in various formal educational settings as part of their teacher education program. ECE preservice-teachers are trained to teach children from 0 to 8 years old in early childhood education programs.

Young Children

The period from birth to eight is called childhood (NAEYC). The children who are in this period of their life span are referred as young children.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to discover preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and ECE teaching. The chapter starts by defining the beliefs in general and continues with a literature review about beliefs and teaching. Next, the research on teachers’ and prospective teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in early childhood education are reviewed.

Beliefs

Beliefs are dispositions that people adopt from an early age without having a solid knowledge of them (Quine & Ullian, 1978). Richardson (2005) describes beliefs as “a subset of a group of constructs that name, define, and describe the structure and content of mental states that are thought to drive a person’s actions” (p. 102). In other words, persons’ beliefs cause them to react in certain ways when situations arise. In some cases, people choose solely to rely on their beliefs instead of truth based on fact or proof because such thinking is more comfortable and less confusing than questioning their existing beliefs.

In her study, Hamilton (1993) describes beliefs in three categories:

1. Private Beliefs: These beliefs are personal and one can easily reject others’ beliefs based on the argument that one’s beliefs are the true way of thinking.
2. **Declared Beliefs**: These beliefs are accepted by society as appropriate ways of thinking and behaving.

3. **Public Beliefs**: As they are not so different from declared beliefs, members of a culture accept certain beliefs as true. Eventually these beliefs are declared.

People form their beliefs by socially constructing ways of thinking that are reflected in their culture. When appropriate events occur, they display their beliefs as their dispositions. As central to this study, how teacher candidates form their belief systems about the way they perceive and teach young children is very crucial as their belief structures can be affected by numerous variables.

**Beliefs and Teaching**

Similar to other professions, teachers use their beliefs about teaching as a basis for making decisions about planning and interacting with children and their parents. A teacher’s beliefs are defined as "tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught" (Kagan, 1992, p. 65).

Richardson (2005) specifies three factors that help form teachers’ beliefs:

1. **Personal experiences**: Life history, familial and cultural influences, socioeconomic status (SES), gender can affect a person’s beliefs. The images that a teacher develops in relation to her personal experiences affect her teaching.
2. *Experience with schooling and instruction*: The findings of the studies on teachers’ beliefs and images of teaching and learning reveal that teachers form their image of teaching by recalling their early memories of their own elementary or secondary teachers.

3. *Experience with formal knowledge*: Teachers’ interactions with various resources (e.g., their own schooling, media, family, etc.) affect on their conceptions of how children should learn certain subjects. For instance, if ECE teachers think that early childhood education is all about “fun”, but that subjects such as math and science are very serious concepts to introduce to children early on, then they may lack understanding of the emergent skills children acquire in different subjects at very early ages.

Fang (1996) reports that “teachers’ theoretical knowledge and beliefs” (p. 49), which intertwine in their thought processes, are very influential on their general knowledge of people, and students. However, it is hard to define in one’s thought process which thought is based on theoretical knowledge and which is based on one’s belief system, because the two merge in time. Quine and Ullian (1978) suggest that one’s beliefs about a certain subject can be different than the theoretical knowledge one has about the matter. In that case, knowledge and beliefs should be considered as two different entities in one’s thought system. Nespor (1987) differentiates teachers’ beliefs about their profession from their knowledge of teaching. He proposes a set of properties that may help to distinguish beliefs from knowledge in teachers’ belief systems:

1. *Existential beliefs*. Teachers carry certain assumptions about students, teaching, and the community they are involved in, and base their practices on those
beliefs. For instance, a teacher can believe that young children are too active, making the teaching almost impossible. In this case, the teacher might believe that young children’s activeness is beyond the control.

2. **Alternativity.** This character is attributed to teachers’ almost utopic beliefs about children, the classroom environment, and teaching. A teacher might dream of a classroom full of fun, laughter, and happiness for young children. In reality, this picture is far from within the reach of the teacher since it disregards the fact that children have many stressors in their lives, and that they bring them to the classroom. Utopic beliefs about teaching are mostly rooted in the teachers’ past schooling experiences.

3. **Affective and evaluative aspect.** How teachers feel about certain subject matter or teaching practices affects their way of planning curriculum and instruction. Furthermore, it affects how they manage the classroom. For instance, two teachers can have the same kind of education and knowledge of a subject; however, the way they believe that children learn that particular subject makes a difference in their teaching practice.

4. **Episodic structure.** Beliefs systems are mainly formed by episodes of personal experience, whereas knowledge is based on concrete principles. A memory of a kindergarten teacher or a school activity can be very influential on a teacher’s beliefs about how a teacher should be. Such memory episodes may only be remembered in parts and recalled by the teachers to justify their teaching practices.

5. **Non-consensuality.** Beliefs, which are structured by one’s feelings, personal experiences, and memories, are not easy to change because there are no criteria to
evaluate them. On the contrary, knowledge can be evaluated and changed since it is ruled by certain principles that the majority agree.

In the properties defined by Nespor (1987), it appears that teachers’ beliefs can be very subjective as they are strongly related to teachers’ personal experiences. These beliefs can also be very hard to question since teachers can be very attached to their beliefs. The more years teachers add to their experiences in the profession, the less flexible their beliefs about teaching and learning become. The reason teachers still prefer to use their beliefs to make decisions is that beliefs function in two important ways (Nespor, 1987): “(a) Task definition and cognitive strategy selection; and (b) facilitation of retrieval and reconstruction in memory processes – while serving the overall function of allowing teachers to deal with ill-structured domains” (p. 321). That former helps teachers define which tasks they should choose in order to achieve their teaching goals. For instance, the fact that certain teaching strategies result in successful student outcomes can be a common knowledge in the field but teachers’ experiences in applying these strategies play a critical role in whether or not they would like to select them. The latter serves as a mechanism for recalling memory episodes in problem situations that the teacher does not know how to actually approach.

In sum, belief systems that teachers build through their personal experiences inform teachers’ practices. However, beliefs are not always reliable to apply to teaching situations since they are very subjective. In some cases, knowledge evolves into beliefs so that it is very hard to differentiate between two. Therefore, the colleges of education where preservice-teachers’ beliefs meet with the theoretical knowledge play a very
critical role in intervening with and altering preservice-teachers’ existing beliefs about teaching.

Beliefs and Preservice-Teacher Education

Students come to teacher education programs with their preset beliefs about teaching and children’s learning. The process of teacher education, as some studies (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Fang, 1996; Joram & Gabrielle, 1998) suggest, can be a critical period for preservice-teachers to learn and address their previously formed beliefs. Especially, the quality of the opportunities provided to preservice-teachers to reflect on their experiences during their college education is key to altering their beliefs. Perry and Gerard (2002) suggest that “as a field, we need to consider the social construction of teaching and learning that accompanies known research and include our students’ realities into teacher preparation programs” (p. 348).

However, changing preservice-teachers’ beliefs is not an easy process in their preparation because of the difficulties in identifying the kinds of preconceptions they bring to the program. Addressing this concern, Joram and Gabrielle (1998) list some of the beliefs that preservice-teachers carry throughout their college education, unless they are challenged:

1. Preservice-teachers may think that the theoretical knowledge provided in teacher education classrooms has little value for their teaching skills and that field experience and learning at job are the most effective ways to learn to teach. Such an
attitude can prevent the preservice-teachers from transferring theoretical knowledge into practice and understanding the rationale behind real teaching-learning situations.

2. Unlike the students of other colleges (e.g., engineering), students of teaching come to their program with set images of teaching and learning that they acquired from their years of experience as a student beginning kindergarten. Such experience is very influential on one’s professional sense of teaching and pedagogical understanding related to learning, learning environments, and the learner. These models and experiences of teaching; which are already part of preservice-teachers’ beliefs, are not easy to change.

3. The current research indicates that preservice-teachers can overestimate their students’ abilities to learn and may not be able to recognize the problematic situations that children encounter in their classrooms. Such perceptions can be s rooted in teacher-candidates’ memories that they perceived themselves as “prototype” students, which they want their students to become. Thus the teacher candidates may fail to realize the uniqueness and potential each child brings to the school.

4. Many preservice-teachers think that classroom management is the most important skill needed to become an effective teacher, while their knowledge of fundamental concepts to be taught can be less important for them. They may lack the understanding that classroom management skills must include a strong theoretical knowledge of planning curriculum and instruction.

Joram and Gabrielle (1998) challenged preservice-teachers’ prior beliefs through a set of instructions designed for a teacher-education course. The researchers tried to create a change in the teacher-candidates’ beliefs about teaching and learning, which are critical elements in forming teaching philosophy and pedagogy, by involving the
participants in classroom discussions, vignettes of teaching situations, and questionnaires with open-ended questions. The results of the study revealed that almost half of the participants felt a change in their beliefs about teaching (e.g., from teacher-directed to student-centered), learning (e.g., from absorbing information to constructing one’s own learning), and learner (e.g., from being a passive receiver to being an active learner). However, the study indicated that the reason that some preservice-teachers’ beliefs remained unchanged was that prior beliefs are very hard to change in a single course and that teacher education programs may lack organization and understanding of the “belief-package” that teacher-candidates bring into their programs. Supporting Joram and Gabrielle’s study (1998), Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) point out the trend of defining teaching as simply transferring a set of knowledge and skills, which may prevent teachers from comprehending the different contexts students bring to the school. These researchers emphasize that as well as certain competencies in teaching, teacher education should focus on analyzing, “the attitudes student teachers have towards children and towards the task of teaching, the nature of the relationships they establish in the classroom, how they fit into school as a community and function within it . . . ” (p. 193).

Although the target of the studies (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Joram & Gabrielle, 1998) reviewed here are elementary teacher-candidates, the heart of their findings about prior beliefs about teaching apply equally to the beliefs of preservice-teachers in early childhood education. An ECE teacher’s belief system, including his or her preconceptions about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE, influence how they perform their tasks and make decisions in the learning environment. Therefore,
in the following sections of this chapter, beliefs about young children, their parents, and ECE teaching are discussed, in this order.

Preservice-Teachers’ Beliefs About Young Children

For a long time, childhood was perceived as a social category, a deficit part of the life span in which the child should be controlled by a strict adult supervision (Polakow, 1989). During medieval times, young children were considered as, “young colts in need of breaking in or trees that need pruning and training” (Cunningham, 1996, p. 28). Also, children were thought of as little human beings who could be molded and shaped with adults’ knowledge. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century, child development studies assessing young children according to sets of predetermined developmental levels became very popular in early childhood education (Kessler and Swadener, 1992). About the same time, a number of theories about child development developed by non-traditional thinkers began to receive attention in teacher education institutions. It is very important to acknowledge some of those theorists who still influence the view of the child within teacher-education institutions today.

First, Dewey's and other progressive educators' social reform approach challenged developmental psychologists dominating elementary and upper education levels. Specifically, Dewey's kindergarten philosophy rejected traditional behavioral teaching methods that disregarded the socio-emotional development of young children. Dewey’s image of child was of an active learner. The teacher guides the young child with appropriate materials through developing "problem solving and independent thinking" (Peltzman, 1998). Erikson, another influential learning theorist, presented a positive image of the child in his developmental
stages (e.g., trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority) (Gestwicki, 2000). According to his theory, the young child is competent, secure, and autonomous as a result of supportive and consistent relations the child develops with the adults in the child’s environment. Ideally, a teacher who believes in Erikson’s image of the child can recognize the factors affecting the child’s socio-emotional development (Gestwicki).

The psychologist Jean Piaget’s cognitive development theory also influenced educators’ views about child learning (Gestwicki, 2000). The child according to Piaget’s theory is one who is constantly discovering new concepts and building new knowledge by using existing information. A teacher who believes in Piaget’s view of the child as inventor, discoverer, or active learner, can create learning environments that support the young child’s experience of the world in order to build on his/her knowledge. While Piaget’s views were very influential, another psychologist, Vygotsky, brought a new perspective to understanding child learning and development. Although Vygotsky’s socio-cultural learning theory is considered constructivist along with Piaget’s cognitive development theory, there are few points that Vygotsky’s theory differs in a few ways from Piaget’s (Gestwicki, 2000):

1. Learning follows development.
2. Learning occurs in a socially constructed context. Therefore, teachers, caregivers, and peers are active agents reinforcing the child’s learning and development.
3. Language is the key to convey “symbolic thoughts.”
4. Each child has an independent performance level and an assisted performance level. After receiving the assistance, the child is likely to move to another independent performance level.

The view of the child reflected in Vygotsky’s theory is one who is social, intellectual, and skilled. A teacher who believes in Vygotsky’s image of the child can support the child’s learning with verbal stimulation and create an environment rich with material, activity, and play opportunities.

Although the child development theories discussed here opened new perspectives in the education of young children, they are seen as insufficient to explain teachers’ beliefs about children (Droege, 1994; Stott & Bowman, 1996). Clandinin (1985) suggests that teachers’ past experiences and memories of themselves as a student are very influential in the way they perceive their students. He further stresses what makes teachers’ images lasting is their “emotional” aspect. When the situations arise, teachers tend to recall those episodic memories that they feel connected to because of their emotional values for the teachers. A teacher’s image “reaches into the past, gathering up experiential threads meaningfully connected to the present. And it reaches intentionally into the future and creates new meaningfully connected threads as situations are experienced . . . ” (Clandinin, 1985, p.379).

McMullen and Allat (2002) point out a need to know and understand the mechanisms that preservice and inservice ECE teachers adopt to teach young children. In an earlier study, Knowles and Holt-Reynolds (1991) took this matter into their hands and investigated preservice-teachers’ perceptions of children. These researchers observed the processes by which teacher-candidates adopt new knowledge, theory, or skills presented
in their teacher education classrooms while still preserving their existing conceptions of children and teaching. For instance, when learning about new teaching strategies, the participants’ memories about their teachers who had used similar strategies effectively or ineffectively guided the preservice-teachers through creating their own way to use new knowledge. Also, the teacher candidates tried to imagine how they, as the students in the past, would feel if their teachers would have used these new strategies in the ways the participants had just adopted. One of the participants’ responses in Knowles and Holt-Reynolds’ study is a clear indication how having had experience in a situation might strongly affects one’s teaching beliefs;

[Decisions about ideas are based] mostly on gut feeling and my experience with being the student. There are a lot of times when things are presented, and I just to say to myself, “that’s not going to work. I’ve been in the classroom where that’s been tried.” I know what class was like. (p. 91)

One of the results of Knowles’ and Holt-Reynold’s study (1991) was that the preservice-teachers had rather utopic, unrealistic or romantic views about children. For instance, the idea that creating a “fun” activity would enable students to learn frequently appeared in the participants’ reflections. The researchers stated that “those arguments are often problematic because they are based on scant personal experiences without regard to other reasoned evidence. Some arguments appear to be whimsical or fanciful . . . “ (p. 96). They assert that the roots of those beliefs are in societal and cultural views that perceive childhood as a leisure time. Such beliefs disregard the powerful potential of childhood when children can learn many fundamental skills in well structured
educational environments. Also these beliefs prevent future teachers from recognizing the stressful and disadvantaged living conditions that many children do not always have fun.

Supporting the findings of Knowles and Holt-Reynold’s study (1991), Cook and Young (2004) found out that in some cases, preservice-teachers’ unrealistic beliefs about young children clashed with the reality of everyday classrooms. For instance, in the current research, the preservice-teachers became very confused when they encountered demands by the children that required control and discipline. This need for discipline went against the teacher-candidates’ prior beliefs that, “children need teachers to be their friends.” The need to control and discipline children differed from the preservice-teachers’ ideal image that is fun, happy, and well-behaved. The critical point to seriously consider is the fact that preservice-teachers whose beliefs are not challenged during their college education enter their profession with rather unrealistic beliefs about children and children’s learning. In fact, teachers’ classroom practices, without such a change in beliefs, reflect “personal” beliefs and beliefs about children’s learning (Rim-Kaufman et al., 2006). Teachers’ personal beliefs reveal their limited images of children such as children are willing to learn, or children do not study enough, therefore need to be pushed. On the other hand, beliefs about children’s learning appear in the ways that the teachers plan their instructions for the children without regard for each child’s learning style.

Richardson (2005) reviewed the studies on entering preservice-teachers’ beliefs about children’s learning and found that preservice-teachers think that race, gender, and socio-economic class differences are not important factors in children’s learning, but rather that students’ personalities inform teachers’ teaching practice. Paine (1990)
reported that preservice-teachers’ attitudes toward and knowledge of student diversity were often limited. Although the teacher candidates verbalized politically correct ideas such as equality and fairness, they lacked the perspective to address these issues in teaching children with different needs. Supporting Paine’s conclusion, Tatro (1996) indicates that in some cases teachers perceive children’s learning in certain ways and cannot understand children’s sense-making of their learning through their own childhood experiences. In the long term, this lack of understanding by preservice-teachers might lead lower academic success in children who have diverse needs.

In summary, preservice-teachers’ beliefs about their students are influenced by several variables such as their own culture, familial background, and personal experiences, which are rooted in episodic memories from their past (Geoghegan et al., 2004; Nespor, 1987). Their beliefs about children are blended with the theoretical knowledge that the teachers receive during their preservice-education. Ultimately, because of their beliefs, these teachers develop images of children that may not respond to the needs of a growing population of diverse learners in the schools.

Preservice-Teachers’ Beliefs About Parents of Young Children

It is a known fact that parents’ involvement in their children’s education has positive effects on children’s school success and their social relations with peers and others in the school. Research (Jones, White, Aeby, & Benson, 1997) reports that the grade level is one of the factors influencing teachers’ parent-involvement efforts. For instance, early childhood teachers tend to communicate with parents of young children
more frequently than their teacher counterparts in elementary school. This is a sign of the strong emphasis on working with parents in early childhood years. While early childhood classrooms represent the highest levels of parental involvement in terms of quantities, the quality of these teacher-parent relations is still questionable because of several barriers. Hughes and Mac Naughton (2000) draw attention to the roots of beliefs hidden in the teachers’ attitudes toward families that limit parent involvement. The first attitude is that parents’ knowledge is not adequate to educate their children properly. Therefore the parents should follow the school’s program so that their children can succeed. The second attitude the researchers observed is that parents’ knowledge can supplement teachers’ professional knowledge. In reality, the teachers may not need this supplementary information, and they have the power to decide when parents should contribute their knowledge to their children’s school work. The third issue is that the parents’ opinions about their involvement are rarely a discussed in the research literature. Most of the work has been done from the teachers’ perspective of parental involvement. In many cases, the teachers appear to blame parents for not taking part in the education of their children.

Morris and Taylor (1998) specify three factors that limit parental involvement in their children’s education:

1. Lack of teacher skills and knowledge to involve parents and families. Many teachers are not aware of the various ways that they can communicate and work with parents of young children. The main reason is that the teachers receive little or no course work during their teacher education to prepare them to work with parents. In this case, many teachers rely on what they have learned from their life and work experiences in their efforts to involve parents.
2. Limitations in physical interaction between the school and the family. Because of the stressors in families’ lives (e.g., irregular work shifts, working in more than one job, overwhelming household responsibilities, etc.), many parents cannot visit the school during its operational hours.

3. Psychological barriers. The cultural background differences between parents and teachers seem to limit communication with parents. For instance, teachers’ prior beliefs and their lack of knowledge about families who are culturally, linguistically, economically, and racially diverse can limit the teacher-parent interaction and create a distance between the family and the school. Furthermore, some teachers may fear parents who might criticize their teaching practice.

In another study, Jones et al. (1997) explain similar problems regarding family and school community involvement. They indicate these barriers: the teachers perceive themselves to be “experts” of knowledge, the time and the energy the teachers must take to involve parents, teachers’ poor communication skills, teachers’ fear of criticism, teachers’ own cultural values that prevent them from understanding the structure of families with diverse backgrounds, and finally, lack of preservice-training that targets how to work with parents.

Several studies (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000; Jones et al., 1997; Morris & Taylor, 1997; Tichenor, 1997; 1998) suggest that teachers’ lack of skills and knowledge is a critical factor limiting their work with parents of young children. Specifically, the preservice training, which should be the means for preservice-teachers to change their existing teaching beliefs, seems inadequate to prepare future teachers to involve parents in the schools. In order to prepare preservice-teachers to work with families, there is a
need to know what kinds of beliefs and perceptions about parent involvement the teacher-candidates carry through their training (Tichenor, 1997). Unfortunately, little attention has been given to parent involvement and working with parents in teacher education programs. For this reason, many teacher-candidates feel insufficient in their knowledge to work with the parents of young children, and “without content knowledge focused on family school relationships, prospective teachers must rely on what they already know, which is likely to mirror their own experience” (Graue & Brown, 2003, p. 721). For instance, research (Tichenor) showed that in the absence of effective training, preservice-teachers referred to their pre-program training experiences in working with the families of children. These experiences included babysitting, camp counseling, teaching in Sunday school, assisting a teacher, etc.

According to the criteria for professional competence established by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2001), teachers who are teaching young children should have a strong knowledge of families with different backgrounds and needs, and the communities in which the families live as well as the skills to work with them. Specifically, standard 2, “building family and community relationships”, has three substandards teachers are required to possess (NAEYC Initial Licensure Rubric, 2001):

- Knowing about and understanding family and community characteristics,
- Supporting and empowering families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relations,
- Involving families and communities in their children’s development and learning.
Although NAEYC’s criteria reflect the ideal content for family involvement courses that can be taught in teacher education programs, the existing preservice-teacher training does not go beyond reinforcing teacher-candidates’ belief that parents serve in traditional roles such as parents are volunteers, aids, or assistants (Grossman, 1999). Broussard’s national survey of teacher education programs (2000) revealed that compared to elementary and secondary teacher education, ECE teacher education programs seemed to emphasize more the need for knowledge of family involvement in their mission statements and offered at least one course on this subject. However, some of these programs did not offer preservice-teachers a separate course specifically designed for working with families. Instead, this subject was taught as one of the content areas in different ECE courses. Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, and Lopez (1997) found out that among 60 teacher education programs, only 37% offered a required course on family involvement. The majority of the programs surveyed provide this knowledge as part of another required course.

With the absence of effective teacher training that would help teacher-candidates question their beliefs and attitudes about working with parents and families, preservice-teachers will likely graduate without adequate knowledge of the population that they will teach. A study by Graue and Brown (2003), exploring the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about parents, showed several themes that are common in teacher-candidates’ attitudes toward working with the families. For instance, teacher-candidates’ images of parents or how parents should be involved in the school were influenced by their own parents’ kind of involvement. The participants’ descriptions of their parents’ involvement stayed at level 2 which is communicating and level 3 which is volunteering, according to Epstein’s
parent involvement typology. The reason the participants did not perceive parents as partners with teachers as suggested in levels 5 and 6 in Epstein’s typology is that the preservice-teachers thought that parents can be knowledgeable about the conditions of their families but not about academics such as curriculum content, the ways to support their children’s learning.

Tichenor (1998) reported similar results indicating that beginning preservice-teachers’ attitudes toward parent involvement stayed at level 2. Graue and Brown (2003) further pointed out that teacher-candidates were mostly concerned about the parents’ criticisms of their teaching and their professional knowledge. The ideal parent for those preservice-teachers was, “someone who is attentive and differently responds to teacher requests. This is a parent who knows her place, who is supportive but recognizes that she does not have the professional knowledge held by the teacher” (p. 727). Preservice-teachers were also concerned about these parents who “do not care.” In a more recent study, Graue (2005) found that preservice-teachers’ preprogram experiences (e.g., camp counseling, coaching, or assisting in a child care facility) influenced their views about parents, that is, the preservice-teachers categorized the parents simply as “those who do not care” and “those who care too much.” The teacher-candidates in Graue’s study attributed a few characteristics to “do-not-care” parents: (1) are selfish, (2) do not want to accept the behavioral problems their children might display, and (3) focus on themselves rather than on their children. In contrast, the participants specified these characteristics for too-much-care families: (1) are aggressive, (2) question the teacher’s professional knowledge, (3) do not want to accept that their children might have behavioral problems, and (4) are disrespectful. Apparently, teacher-candidates expect parents to be in contact
with the school to follow their child’s progress but at the same time believe in leaving the
total power for decision making to the “experts” who are the teachers.

Graue and Brown (2003) reported preservice-teachers’ lack of understanding of
and misconceptions about diversity among families. For instance, their participants had
lower involvement expectations for parents who speak English as a second language
ESL) and who are economically disadvantaged. Consequently, those teacher-candidates
expected lower academic success from the children in these families. Similarly, Morris
and Taylor (1998) reported that preservice-teachers’ initial beliefs about parents living in
poverty was that they do not care about their children and are not involved in the school.
In a study, Blasi (2002) created a course on families in which preservice-teachers could
question their beliefs about children who are considered as “at risk.” She indicated that at
the beginning of the course, the preservice-teachers tended to describe the term ‘at risk’
from a deficit perspective, meaning that conditions such as living with a single parent,
living in poverty, speaking English as a second language, and being minority were risk
factors for children to develop social behavioral problems. One reason for this view
mentioned by Blasi might be the fact that many preservice-teachers grow up in middle-
class households in isolated communities where they do not have opportunities to meet
and know people who have different family structures or backgrounds from their
families. Blasi further indicated that as a result of this perspective, teacher candidates
make quick judgments of parents and children. The participants in the current study were
challenged to question their existing beliefs about the term ‘at risk’.

Some studies (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Graue, 2005) reported that
preservice-teachers believe that communication with parents is a key to a successful
home-school link. However, this communication appeared to be one way since it focuses on informing the parents about their children’s progress and general school matters. For instance, the participants in Graue’s study (2005) mentioned that conferences, newspapers and home visits are important strategies that prove to parents that teachers care about their children. However, none of the preservice-teachers in that study realized the gains the teachers can achieve from communicating with parents. Preservice-teachers are not clear about the role parents have in their children’s education (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Graue, 2005). For instance, as research (Graue, 2005) has shown teacher candidates acknowledged that parents are the ones who know their children best; however, they also mentioned that parents’ knowledge is limited to their own children. Also, the teacher candidates believe that parents’ school experiences do not comply with current school practices. Finally, according to the participants, parents think that their children are “perfect” and do not want to accept the problems their children might have. These attitudes place parents against teachers. In other words, teachers’ knowledge is objective, whereas the parents’ knowledge is considered subjective and unprofessional. For this reason, preservice-teachers tend to not perceive parents as true partners but merely as aids to the teachers.

In sum, the most important implication that can be drawn from the studies reviewed here is that teacher-education programs need to include content that helps future teachers question their existing beliefs and attitudes toward working with families. This realization should not confirm preservice-teachers’ existing beliefs but should create an awareness of how parents can be partners with teachers in the education of their young
children. In turn, this attitude change would likely change the teacher-candidates’ beliefs about children.

**Preservice-Teachers’ Beliefs About Teacher Role and Teaching**

Unlike the students in other colleges, preservice-teachers form their beliefs about teaching through an “apprenticeship of observation” of their previous teachers (Pajares, 1992; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000). When teacher-candidates come to the teacher education programs, their images of teaching have already been shaped and strengthened by 12 or more years of experience in the school system. As suggested by several studies (Bullough & Stokes, 1994; Doyle, 1997; Greene & Magliaro, 2003; Lin & Spodek, 1994; Raths, 2001), the beliefs about teaching and the role of the teacher that preservice-teachers developed previously influence how they learn to teach in teacher education programs. At this point, it is essential to emphasize that teachers’ images of teaching represent a connection between past, present, and future in their thought processes (Lin & Spodek, 1994).

Pajares (1992) indicates that beliefs in a person’s belief system are connected to each other, and that, specifically, one’s images and metaphors of teaching are very critical reflections of one’s beliefs. With the same concern, Fischer and Kiefer (2001) classified teachers’ images of teaching by three categories:

1. **Constructed Images**: Those images start being formed once the teacher enters a real educational environment and interacts with the students in real life teaching-learning situations. The teachers construct their teaching image with reflections from students.
Eventually the mutual understanding between the students and the teachers of the images reflected in the classroom organizes the relationships between the teacher and the students.

2. Ideal Images: In contrast to constructed images, ideal images are rooted in the teachers’ early school experiences, the teachers that they had in the school, and society’s image of a teacher. Usually the ideal image of a teacher is developed through what the teacher thinks that ideal teaching ought to be. These ideal images are altered once the teacher encounters the realities of teaching-learning situations.

3. Given Images: These images are mostly shaped by society, families, cultural views about teaching, and the school system itself. Teachers tend to accept their given roles because these roles are accepted by society and the school. This situation might limit what teachers can actually achieve by being creative and a researcher in the school. Teachers’ constructed, ideal, and given images often overlap in the teachers’ practice, and “when the images inform practice and are viewed as useful, the teachers include it in their repertoire” (p. 104). In fact, Clandinin (1985) investigated the relations between teachers’ classroom practices and their images of teaching. He found that “verbally expressed images allow teachers to generalize about their experience and to offer theoretical accounts of what they do (p. 382).” The participants in Clandinin’s study referred to their own schooling experiences when they were asked to describe their images of teachers related to their personal teaching practice. This result shows that these images are important reflections of what the teachers know about teaching and what they believe about teaching.
Using metaphors of teaching might represent more concretely how teachers’ beliefs find a form in their abstract belief systems. In fact, Strickland and Iran-Nejad (1994) assert that metaphors can help preservice-teachers discover what they believe about teaching. Furthermore, they mention that, “the choice of metaphors enables the teachers themselves to look at their own assumptions (some of which are naïve) and reorganize their learning through reflection on their choices” (p. 12). Along the same lines, Efron and Joseph (2001) searched the meanings underlying the metaphors public school teachers (experienced and novice) use to describe their beliefs, images, and philosophies of teaching. These researchers emphasized that knowledge of teaching is personal because teachers gather this knowledge from the images they have from their own schooling experiences. Efron and Joseph studied public school teachers’ metaphors of teaching in two categories: pedagogical roles and moral roles. The participants’ metaphors varied from teacher-controlled to student-centered pedagogy. While some of the metaphors (e.g., ring leader, engine, manager of the factory) reflected a high sense of teacher control over the teaching environment, content, curriculum, and students’ learning, other metaphors (e.g., stimulator, motivator, facilitator) reflected a more constructivist, student-centered pedagogy. In terms of moral roles, the participants used metaphors that were similar to parenting roles. For instance, the teacher who described himself as a “ring leader” displayed strong beliefs about disciplining children to create a better society. Some teachers used metaphors that reflected more nurturing and mother-like roles such as caring about emotional needs and being a good role model for children. Efron and Joseph concluded that although metaphors cannot be sufficient for understanding the real nature of teachers’ teaching philosophies, they “can be used by
teachers to become more aware of their beliefs and practice and the contrast between ideal self-definitions and realities of their classroom action . . .” (p. 87).

The issue of beliefs about teaching has directed researchers to teacher education where important changes can be achieved in preservice-teachers’ beliefs about teaching and their images of teaching. It is a known fact that preservice-teachers’ beliefs about the role of teacher and teaching might filter the new knowledge presented in the colleges of education (Kagan, 1992). For this reason, “knowing preservice-teachers’ perceptions of effective teachers and teaching is a necessary precondition for identifying program experiences that require candidates to confront their own beliefs in the context of research, promising practice, psychological theories, and philosophical beliefs that underpin professional goals and practice” (Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James, 2002, p. 117). Bullough and Stokes (1994) conducted a study to observe the changes in preservice-teachers’ metaphors of teaching. In their study, the preservice-teachers realized that their images and metaphors of teaching represented a rather romantic view of teaching. While the preservice-teachers’ images of teaching were highly influenced by emotional and affective factors such as love of children or nurturing of children, cognitive factors such as providing a comprehensive instruction or knowledge base remained less important. Bullough and Stokes mention that the metaphors preservice-teachers used did not fit the reality of the education system, including those for students and parents with diverse backgrounds and needs. When the teacher-candidates encountered the realities of the everyday classroom, they were disappointed and confused once their existing beliefs and images about teaching were challenged. The preservice-teachers’ initial optimistic metaphors (e.g., guide, bridge builder) changed as a result of
the classroom management issues they had during their field experience in secondary school classroom. The romantic view of the child (e.g., respectful, eager to learn, well-behaved, good listener) as it is related to preservice-teachers’ images of teacher in their beliefs systems might cause disappointment in teacher-candidates when they enter the classroom. The same reactions were observed in Cook and Young’s study (2004) when children demanded that teacher-candidates show more control and discipline in the classroom environment. The responses the preservice-teachers received from the children were surprising to the teacher-candidates because they assumed that being a good friend to the children would create an effective teaching-learning environment. It is unfortunate that many preservice-teachers think that only being kind and caring toward children will make them study hard and behave well (Anderson & Holt-Reynold, 1995). In Bullough and Stokes’ study (1994), the fact that the preservice-teachers gave more importance to caring than to teaching is another reason for dissatisfaction during their first encounter with children in school. The results of another research (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992) show same point and report that the entering level preservice-teachers value the nurturing side of teaching more than its academic goals because of the candidates’ pre-program experiences with children through, for example, babysitting, camp counseling, tutoring, or teaching in Sunday school.

In a study by Lin, Taylor, and Gorrell (1999), preservice-teachers’ perceptions of themselves as caretakers were associated with, “maintaining standards of behavior, enforcing regular schedules and providing a safe environment” (p. 21). The educator’s role was related to the participants’ appreciation of achieving goals, improving children’s skill, and knowledge base. Furthermore, regarding how preservice-teachers described the
role of the teacher, the candidates who were at the beginning of their education mentioned “didactic” teaching methods such as providing resources and helping children improve. Similarly, the beginner preservice-teachers in Doyle’s study (1997) presented beliefs statements about teaching in which the teacher is the deliverer of the information, one who “maintains order and disseminates facts and information.” Lin et al. (1999) reported that as opposed to beginner candidates, preservice-teachers who were at the end of their education held a constructivist teacher image (e.g., children are active in learning, parent involvement).

As well as developing images and metaphors of teaching, the characteristics teacher-candidates attribute to a “good” teacher play a critical role in their formation of a teaching philosophy and pedagogy. Greene and Magliaro (2003) found out that preservice-teachers use personal characteristics to describe their ideal image of a teacher. Being warm, always helpful, encouraging, and friendly are some of the adjectives teacher candidates used to describe the features of a “good” teacher. Minor et al. (2002) revealed similar results, showing that preservice-teachers rated interpersonal skills (e.g., student-centered) highly in their image of effective teaching. As for their educational beliefs, the preservice-teachers showed a lack of knowledge about diversity. In both studies (Greene & Magliaro; Minor et al.), the participants’ beliefs about the role of the teacher and teaching were highly influenced by their own teachers. The images of their past had deep emotional connections to the kind of teacher the preservice-teachers wanted to be. The participants in both studies rated interpersonal characteristics over those related to educational and academic qualifications. This point should be well recognized by teacher educators because “prospective teachers need to understand the theoretical underpinnings
of the practical, useful teaching strategies . . . Yet, prospective teachers are typically impatient with and intolerant of theory” (Holt-Reynolds, 2000, pp. 29-30).

Murphy, Delli, and Edwards (2004) found that beliefs about what makes a good teacher develop as early as second grade, and are carried through college. In their study, Murphy et al. asked three different subject groups (e.g., second graders, preservice-teachers, and school teachers) about their image of a good teacher. The results showed a similarity in beliefs between second graders and preservice-teachers, and preservice-teachers and school teachers. There was no relationship between second graders and school teachers in regard to teacher beliefs. Apparently, preservice-teachers bring their beliefs about teaching, which they formed through acculturation of their schooling (Salzillo & Van Fleet, 1977) to teacher education programs, yet those beliefs are not challenged.

There are various factors that might influence on preservice-teachers’ beliefs about teaching. Past school experience and images of their own teachers are strong influences on preservice-teachers’ beliefs about teaching. In fact, “teachers approach teaching with various ideas and images of what teachers’ work is like based on their own individual past experiences, including previous work experience, experiences as a parent or childhood experiences of school” (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997, p. 15). Britzman (2003) indicates that “schooling fashions the meanings, realities, and experiences constructed from actually being there. They (preservice-teachers) bring to teacher education their educational biography and some well-worn and common sensical images of the teachers’ work” (p. 27). In a study, Hollingsworth (1989) explained that in the absence of challenging teacher education programs and mentor teachers, many teacher
candidates develop teaching styles that are not different than those already existing in the school system. This researcher observed changes in the beliefs of a group of preservice-teachers by implementing constructivist teacher-education course work. The results of the study revealed that out of seven participants, only four were able to transform their preexisting beliefs about classroom management and student learning. Those four teacher-candidates were able to rethink and restructure their teaching methods and attitudes toward children when they faced challenging teaching situations during their field experiences. Hollingsworth pointed out that innovative and supportive mentor teachers were the critical agents in belief transformation. On the other hand, the remaining three participants, who were placed in similar classroom settings, may have had very little opportunity to challenge their preconceived views about teaching and children’s learning. They chose to adopt a stricter and more authoritarian teaching style, which was very similar to what their mentor teachers practiced. While those students could not grasp the real meaning of constructivist teaching, they did not propose any classroom management strategy or change in the lessons that they had planned. Their preexisting beliefs remained unchanged and followed a pattern similar to the teaching methods practiced by their mentor teachers. Hollingsworth relates little or no belief transformation in preservice-teachers’ beliefs to that the teaching styles of mentors resemble and support what preservice-teachers already believe about teaching. In the case of leaving preservice-teachers’ existing beliefs unchallenged, teacher-candidates will come to the classroom and “learn certain techniques at a superficial level without understanding the underlying instructional rationales that would guide their use” (Anderson & Holt-Reynolds, 1995, p. 9).
Culture is also a factor affecting teacher-candidates’ beliefs about what kind of a teacher they would like to be. Hamilton (1993) explains that “culture is the screen through which we view our lives and interpret the world around us. This knowledge is implicit, learned through advice, correction, and non-verbal interaction through others and can best be conceived of as a complex of ideas utilized according to peoples’ needs and motives” (p. 88). Regarding how gender roles are perceived by society, Green and Manke (2001) mention that professionalism, including a knowledge base, is associated with masculinity. On the contrary, dedication, service, and voluntary work are linked with females. For instance, none of the retired female school teachers in Green and Manke’s study thought that money was important in their job. On the contrary, their goals were “caring, dedication, and service rather than financial rewards” (p. 46). While these teachers praised the affective side of their profession, the academic part of their job seemed less important. Unfortunately, educational degree variations among early childhood education professionals, “regarding early childhood practitioners’ formal knowledge base range from no preservice requirements to a specialized 4 or 5 year degree accompanied by a state license” (Goffin, 1996, p. 125). These degree variations in ECE contribute to a vague ECE teacher image, whereby people perceive ECE teachers as “babysitters” rather than as professional teachers of very young children.

In sum, images and metaphors of teaching based on past experience can be important means for understanding preservice-teachers’ beliefs about teaching and the teacher’s role. Most often, these images favor the affective side of teaching that preservice-teachers feel most connected to. In some cases, beliefs about teaching and the teacher’s role appear too idealistic or utopic so that preservice-teachers are disappointed
with the realities of the everyday classroom. Meanwhile questions about teacher educators’ knowledge about teacher-candidates’ preexisting beliefs, how much teacher-education programs challenge students’ prior perspectives and images, and finally, whether or not teacher-education programs create a solid ground for teacher candidates to advocate for an innovative education that is different than traditional methods practiced in the schools remain unanswered.
Chapter 3

METHODS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to discover a number of preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and ECE teaching. The research question and related questions of the study were investigated through different modes of the qualitative case study method to achieve this purpose. In this chapter, the methodology of the study is presented in following order: (a) qualitative case study, (b) theoretical framework, (c) context of the study, (d) data collection methods, and (e) data analysis.

Qualitative Case Study

Everything can be a case, but what makes the researcher study a particular subject lies in researcher’s interest and the focus of the case. The qualitative case study enables the investigator to understand the participants’ points of view and experiences (Stake, 1995). Creswell (1998) describes the qualitative case study as, “an exploration of a bounded system or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61).

The principal investigator of this study has worked with more than one case in order to investigate the phenomenon of pre-service-teachers’ beliefs. Stake (2005) calls this type of case study a “multiple case study” or “collective case study.” According Stake’s description of multiple or collective case studies, the researcher may or may not
know the cases prior to the study. The cases may be similar or different from each other.

What is unique about the multiple case study is that it helps the researcher better theorize and understand larger cases. The present case study fit Stake’s description of the collective case study method because the investigator worked with 14 preservice-teachers who might seem to have similar characteristics (e.g., all female, mostly, White American) but who had different life stories that formed their beliefs about young children, their parents, and ECE teaching.

The current research can also be considered an instrumental case study in which, “the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (Stake, 2005, p. 445). In an instrumental case study, the priority is to understand issues of interest by studying a case or cases (Stake, 1998). The preservice-teachers, who were the participants in this study, helped to understand what kinds of beliefs students of ECE teaching bring to teacher education programs and what factors impact their preexisting perceptions.

Stake (2005) describes the role of case study researcher as:

a. Bounding the case, conceptualizing the object of study;

b. Selecting phenomena, themes, or issues (i.e., the research questions to emphasize);

c. Seeking patterns of data to develop the issues;

d. Triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation;

e. Selecting alternative interpretations to pursue, and developing assertions or generalizations about the case. (page, 459-460)
Following the responsibilities of the case researcher set by Stake, the investigator of the present study specified the main concept of the study as the preservice-teachers’ beliefs. The principles of triangulation for a qualitative case study are framed in the data analysis section of this chapter. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, the researcher discusses the major data categories and themes that emerged from the data collected.

In sum, the qualitative case study method provided a strong methodological outline for the present study. Through working with multiple cases and using their experiences as an instrument, the researcher tried to uncover the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and ECE teaching that they might have formed prior to their college entrance.

**Theoretical Framework**

The qualitative researcher is interested in such as the participants’ perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and the meanings that they make in different contexts of life (Hoepfl, 1997). A constructivist qualitative study, “offers researchers an opportunity to examine in detail the labyrinth of human experience as people live and interact within their own social worlds” (Appleton & King, 2002, p. 642). However, the interpretations of the data can also be affected by the researcher’s own subjective experiences (Charmaz, 2005). In the present study, the phenomenon studied emerged from the researcher’s past experiences in which she had opportunities to observe the ECE preservice-teachers bringing their prior beliefs into the teacher education classroom and building their professional identity based on their existing beliefs. A constructivist qualitative study has
a number of principles (Appleton & King, 2002) from which to choose the theoretical framework for a study such as the present one. These were the principles that applied to this study:

1. *Reality and its elements.* Reality can be perceived differently as it depends on people’s perspectives. The constructivist researcher takes various related factors (e.g., culture, society, personal experiences, language, education, personality) into consideration in the research process. This study was very focused on discovering the factors that influenced preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and ECE teaching.

2. *The possibility of casual linkages.* Constructivism rejects the idea that emphasizes that certain causes produce certain effects. The constructivist researcher points out that causes and effects are influenced by how people give meanings to them. Therefore, in a qualitative research, the conditions observed may not occur another time to repeat the procedure. The investigator of this study was well aware of the fact that the findings of this research could only be generalized to the participants in her study, because neither the participants nor the investigator would have a chance to be involved in same context again (e.g., the course the participants were taking from the researcher, the organization of the course, and the level the preservice-teachers were at in their teacher education).

3. *Unique contexts result in the absence of generalization.* The representation of the reality is context bound. Constructivist qualitative research gives a “thick description” (Appleton & King) of the phenomenon so that the reader can make a connection between her own reality and the research findings. While the researcher presents the data related to the conditions in which they were collected, she does not claim to generalize the
findings to other contexts. The findings of the present study may only be generalized in the context of training early childhood teacher candidates. However, the results can have implications for other research efforts that focus on teacher education.

4. The relationship between the researcher and the phenomena under study.

According to the theory of constructivism, the qualitative research process is affected by the researcher’s own values related to the phenomenon being studied. The researcher is not expected to be neutral or strictly objective during the data collection process. Thinking otherwise is to ignore the interest engaging the researcher in the study in the first place. Therefore, the constructivist qualitative research approach urged the researcher in this study to show how her own perspective about how the phenomenon affected the way she communicated with the participants, built the data collection process, and finally interpreted the data. The investigator of the current study observed the preservice-teachers’ belief structures about young children, their parents, and the ECE profession for three years prior to this study. Also, the investigator’s role as a teacher educator affected her own values about how ECE teachers can approach young children, their parents, and their profession.

In sum, the constructivist perspective enabled the researcher to unfold the phenomenon of the preservice-teachers’ beliefs by helping the participants reveal the perspectives they had developed by interacting in many different contexts. Therefore, this study aimed to discover the preservice-teachers’ prior beliefs about teaching that might have been influenced by various factors.
The Context of the Study

In the selection of the cases, the researcher asked the following question suggested by Stake (1995): “Given our purpose, which cases are likely to lead us to understandings, to assertions, perhaps even to modifying of generalizations?” (p. 4). In the context of the present study, the attendees of the ECE teacher education program where the investigator was an instructor were the most appropriate population to discover and understand preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE. In addition, the processes such as “setting, events, people, and relationships” (Boyatzis, 1998, p.55) affecting selection of the cases were carefully considered, as described in the following.

Setting

The phenomenon studied took place in a specific teacher education context. In the case of this study, the university course (Instruction in Early Childhood Education Derived from Development Theories) taught by the investigator provided her an access to observe the ECE preservice-teachers’ beliefs, perceptions, and images of the child. There were fourteen students in the class. All the students in the class agreed to participate in the study. In weekly meetings, the researcher was able to use the class time to create opportunities for the preservice-teachers to focus on their teaching beliefs. Thus, in the context of the course taught, the researcher could create good communication with the participants during the study.
Events

The researcher of this study had been teaching preservice-teachers for nearly three years in both fall and spring semesters of the school year. During her teaching experience in the College of Education, she was able to observe the teacher candidates, and collect sufficient background information to collect data for her research interest, i.e., the ECE preservice-teachers’ beliefs, perceptions, and images of young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE. When she felt confident enough, the investigator chose to conduct her research with the attendees of her class in the fall 2005 semester. The class met once a week for three hours during the 14-week fall semester.

People

The sample should include the people who can help explain the phenomenon being studied. In the case of this study, the preservice-teachers who were pursuing their elementary/early childhood education major were the appropriate population to study the ECE teacher candidates’ beliefs. Attendees of the course taught by the investigator were asked if they would be willing to participate in the study. All the students in the class agreed to participate in the study. Each participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix A) approved by the Office for Research Protection. To keep from revealing any personal information, a pseudonym was used for each participant throughout the data analysis and report of the findings.

All the participants were female whose ages ranged from eighteen to twenty three. Out of fourteen participants, only one was pursuing her study in a different program that
is human development and family studies (HDFS). Majority of the preservice-teachers participating in the present study were in the fifth semester of their education. The participants described their ethnicity as African American, European American, white, and Caucasian. The demographic information about the preservice-teachers participating in the study was gathered using the questionnaire shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1.

*Participants’ Background Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Semester Standing</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Degree sought</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Elem/K</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Elem/K</td>
<td>African American</td>
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<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>Elem/K</td>
<td>European American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HDFS minor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>5 Junior</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>Elem/K</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>5 Junior</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>Elem/K</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>5 Junior</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>HDFS</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
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<td>21-23</td>
<td>Elem/K</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>21-23</td>
<td>Elem/K</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection Methods

To build a comprehensive picture of the issues investigated, this study used multiple data sources that are recommended by Creswell (1997), Stake (1995), and Yin (1989). The researcher/instructor collected the data through a demographic questionnaire, journals, and artifacts.

Questionnaire

The participants answered a demographic questionnaire that requested general information (e.g., degree, courses taken, job experience) and background (e.g., memories of childhood, parents, and school life). One example of a question from this questionnaire is “What inspired you to choose teaching as a profession?” (see Appendix B).

All the questions included in the questionnaire were open-ended in nature. The answers given to the first section of the questionnaire were put in a table which provides an overview of the participants’ academic and job-related experiences. The answers given in the second section were reviewed and put into categories which were related to the participants’ personal views about young children, their parents, and ECE teaching.

Journal Entries

The participants wrote reflection journals on how they perceive and imagine young children, their parents, and ECE teaching (see Appendix C). They wrote three
reflective journals. In these journals, the preservice-teachers referred to their lived experiences, their own parents, childhood, teachers that they remembered, academic courses, etc. that helped or influenced formation of those images. The reason for using the journal entry method in this study was that the preservice-teachers’ narratives about their beliefs and perspectives could be powerful resources to help them rediscover, deconstruct, and reform their own thinking (Olson, 2000). In addition, Fang (1996) indicates the need to use alternative narrative methods in teachers’ beliefs studies. Narrative methods focus on the participants’ verbal expressions and, “. . . are a good basis to reflect on and envision the intricate interrelationships between personal experiences and intentions for preservice and inservice classroom teachers” (Fang, p. 60).

The data collected from the participants’ journals helped the researcher discover what might have influenced their beliefs, perceptions, and images of young children, their parents, and ECE teaching.

**Artifacts**

Following each week that the participants wrote a journal about their image of the child, or image of the parent, or image of the ECE teacher, a classroom discussion took place. During these discussions, the students created artifacts related to their perceptions of young children, their parents, and ECE teaching. These artifacts included the participants’ drawings of their images of young children, their parents, and ECE teachers.
Data Analysis

The data collected from the participants’ questionnaires, journal entries, the instructor’s diary, and artifacts were transcribed, coded, and put into categories to permit understanding of the major concepts emerging from these various data sources.

Coding

As one of data analysis methods suggested by Stake (1995), codes, “focus on defining action, explicating implicit assumptions, and seeing processes” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 517). The coding provides the researcher with an opportunity to always go between multiple data resources, and make reinterpretations. Erickson (1986) suggests seeing a set of the data resources as a large box and thinking that this box is filled with many small papers that are thought of as items of data. By highlighting the key instances in the data set, the researcher can draw attention to major categories.

Constant Comparative Method

This study also utilized a constant comparative method to analyze the data collected. Through this method, the researcher was able to see the categories of themes across the cases. The constant comparative method consists of four stages (Glaser & Strauss, 1999):
1. **Comparing incidents applicable to each category.** The researcher begins to code each piece of data into categories by looking at the similarities between incidents. This method allows the researcher to compare new incidents with the previous ones she has already coded. During the categorization of data, the properties and attributes of each category emerge from the data pieces.

2. **Integrating categories and their properties.** As coding proceeds and new categories emerge, the researcher adds to or changes those properties. The researcher starts to compare the incidents with the properties of the categories instead of previous incidents. Properties are also integrated with the other categories of the data which in turn become the theory.

3. **Delimiting the theory.** The researcher has to set the limits of comparing incidents to incidents or to properties. As the categories emerge, the researcher begins to recognize the patterns that can be generalized to major issues. Once similar incidents appear over and over for the same category, the researcher can decide whether a category is saturated. This perspective saves time and energy that might be wasted in reviewing the same type of data bits. Finally, the researcher eliminates some categories and uses those that are more important to address major issues in the field the study targets.

4. **Writing the theory.** In this stage, the researcher gathers all the categories and memos kept during the analysis of the data, and writes the final report to be presented or published.
**NVIVO Qualitative Research Software**

NVIVO qualitative research software allows a researcher who conducts a qualitative research to code relevant data more quickly. The program helps the researcher create initial categories of data through “open coding” (Pandit, 1996). As the coding of the data proceeds, the researcher starts building connections between the categories and their subcategories through “axial coding” (Pandit). The researcher can visually see all the categories and subcategories at the same time, and easily retrieve the data coded. The program saves the researcher valuable time that might be lost with hand-coding.

The investigator of the present study imported the data gathered from the questionnaire and the participants’ journals to NVIVO. First, the investigator went through each document in order to code the data relevant to the research questions. As the coding proceeded, the investigator specified major themes, categories, and subcategories emerged from the data. Second, the researcher constantly checked the relations between previously coded data and the ones recently coded, as suggested in constant comparative method. This feature of NVIVO helped the researcher keep the validity of the findings. Finally, based on the categories represented in the trees and the sub-trees, the investigator created models describing the relations between the findings.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is described as the process that, “involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 1997, p. 202). There are four important stages in the triangulation process (Stake, 1995):
1. **Data Triangulation**: The researcher checks if the phenomenon or the case investigated appears consistent across varied data sources. In this study, the researcher used multiple data sources such as the questionnaire, journal entries, and artifacts. As the study progressed, the researcher checked to see if what was emerging from one source carried the same meaning found in another source.

2. **Investigator Triangulation**: This is the protocol that includes another researcher to study the data collected. The primary investigator of this study discussed the data with a faculty member who was familiar with the issue being investigated. His interpretations of the data provided additional insights.

3. **Theory Triangulation**: Using diverse perspectives or disciplines, the researcher tried to prove that different investigators from various theoretical orientations gave the same meaning to the phenomenon investigated. To make a theory triangulation, the researcher of this study looked at the literature of ECE preservice-teacher education. Also, the research studies done in other teacher education areas, especially at the elementary level, provided rich insights on how others interpreted the meanings rooted in the preservice-teachers beliefs, perceptions, and images of young children, their parents, and teaching.
Summary

In this chapter, the methodology employed for the study was discussed. First, the researcher explained the qualitative case study method, which helps to give a thick description of the phenomena being studied. Next, the theoretical framework of the study, which was based on the constructivist philosophy, was described. During the discussion of the context, the details about the setting, events, and participants were stated. The participants’ demographic backgrounds were presented in a table. In addition, the data collection methods, which included a questionnaire, journal entries, and the participants’ artifacts, were explained. Finally, the data analysis, which included coding, the constant comparative method, and triangulation for determining the validity and reliability of the study, were discussed.
Chapter 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON BELIEFS ABOUT YOUNG CHILDREN

This chapter presents the results from the analysis of data collected through a survey questionnaire, and the participants’ journal entries, and artifacts, which were completed during an ECE course with the researcher. Fourteen preservice-teachers attending agreed to participate in the study. The information collected from the questionnaires provided background information about the participants. The demographics of the participants were shown in Chapter 3 of this study. To keep from revealing any personal information, a pseudonym was used for each participant throughout the data analysis and report of the findings. The author as the course instructor was able to integrate the data collection methods into the course assignments. The information collected was coded into categories representing major themes by using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The categories of the themes representing the participants’ beliefs about young children mostly emerged from the preservice-teachers’ first journal entry in which they described their images of children as well as the artifacts the teacher-candidates created during the classroom discussions. The participants’ responses to questions 7, 8, and 15 in questionnaire (see Appendix B) were used to validate the emerging categories of data. During the analysis process, another faculty member who is also familiar with the author’s research interest, and who supervised her throughout her college teaching provided additional insights in order to improve the validity and reliability of the results.
The analysis of the participants’ responses to the questionnaire, their journal entries, and the artifacts that they drew during the classroom discussions revealed the three main dynamics that helped the preservice-teachers form their beliefs about young children: (a) their image of the child, (b) factors affecting their image of the child and, (c) their perceptions of children’s learning.

**The Preservice-Teachers’ Images of the Child**

Following the week that the participants wrote their first journal entry, “image of the young child”, the investigator as the course instructor showed different child images (e.g., soldier children, prostitute children, children working, children living in poverty) from the different parts of the world while a classroom discussion was held. Afterward the preservice-teachers drew their artifacts in which they reflected their image of the child.

The preservice-teachers participating in the present study used various metaphors to reflect their images of young children in their journal entries. The artifacts that they created during the classroom discussions provided visual support to better understand the teacher-candidates’ beliefs about young children.

The author observed that the preservice-teachers used many different metaphors to represent their images of the child. While those metaphors sometimes reflected a developmental perspective in which they described the young child according to the fixed developmental domains (e.g., cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical), in some cases their descriptions reflected utopic ideas about children. In the end, these metaphors
contained the properties of ‘image of the child’ category which emerged as the participants’ statements were analyzed and compared.

**Childhood as a Separate Stage**

The majority of the participants in their study attributed maturational characteristics to childhood, and reflected the perspective that this stage of life is an independent period rather than part of a continuum in the life span. The features of child described by the preservice-teachers in their journals appeared to contrast adulthood and childhood. For instance, Fiona used the following description as her image of a young child, “I see a child as someone who is young, playful, carefree, immature, an easily influenced individual and trying to understand the world around them.”

Diane defined the child as a “gift” in which childhood is represented as an innocent and pure period, including all the genuine elements one can have in one’s life. In contrast to her image of childhood, she identified adulthood as a stage in which grown-ups have to manage many responsibilities and experience possible unhappiness. She cited humor as a feature of childhood:

Another important lesson that children can bestow upon us is laughter. Their novel outlook on their environment and relations offer many intuitive but humorous questions and statements that allow adults to understand that humor is essential in life and that it is okay to laugh out loud. How often do we really laugh out loud or enjoy a beautiful day?
While humor appears to be a quality young children have in general, adulthood is associated with having less humor.

Nina also described childhood as a separate and important stage:

Childhood is a precious and crucial time, and every child has a right to it. No one should be rushed through childhood; they are not little adults. Children need to be able to play and have a chance to explore the world.

Lauren expressed a similar idea of childhood:

I believe if we stress too much that children are young adults, they will grow up too quick. Children, in my opinion, are God's greatest gift. With that said, why would educators want them to change so fast?

Nina and Lauren idealized the childhood as a worry-free period and were opposed to forcing children to meet the expectations of the adult world.

The Romanticized Child

The definite contrast between childhood and adulthood that was observed in the participants’ metaphors indicated that the preservice-teachers tend to romanticize their image of the young child. The characteristics the preservice-teachers associated with the children seemed rooted in their romantic view of them. For instance, Ally correlated ‘innocence, simplicity, and pureness’ with being a young child. She mentioned, “The best thing I can say about my image of a child is that I wish more adults looked at things through the eyes of a child.” In Figure 4.1, Ally’s artifact reflects her image of the idealized young child; “the young child is active; loving and caring; always talkative, and singing; artistic and creative; friendly and funny; intelligent and curious.”
Another participant, Nina, stated that

... innocence knows no harm, youth holds boundless energy, and when combined in a child, the positive effect they have on the outside world is pure magic. For all this, a child is one of the most valuable life aids the world has to offer us.

According to Nina’s image, the child has the power to change his/her surrounding with a magic touch, which refers to young children’s active and energetic nature. In fact, a child’s birth is considered a miracle and is celebrated as such in many cultures. However, a child’s life is not always free and easy as in the case of parents’ painful custody battles or other family personal crises. In these cases, a romanticized image of the child such as this the ‘child changing his/her surrounding with a magic touch’ can
blind teachers to realizing the conditions that some of their children live in and be impractical when teaching them.

The romantic image of the child is also represented with Nina’s metaphor for the child as a flower (Figure 4.2). Nina stated that, “a flower should be seen as developing and in need of nurture. Just as a flower bud needs sunlight and water to blossom into a beautiful flower, a child needs love, care, and nurture among other things to develop into an independent, intellectual individual with a sense of righteousness, justice, and kindness.”

*Figure 4.2. The child as a flower.*
Nina’s flower metaphor represents the child as being fragile, in need of constant care and protection, and love because of its beauty. In her artifact, a drawing of a flower, Nina represented nurture and love of the child, its growth and what contributes to its ‘blossoming.’ This flower image embodies some of Rousseau’s ideas on educating young children (Iheoma, 1997). Rousseau placed his famous child character, Emil, in an ideal world where he was not exposed to any of the harmful thoughts of society. Therefore, the child preserved his childhood innocence and pureness of his mind. In this imaginary world, Emil was not forced to learn things beyond his capabilities, rather he had the freedom to learn things by using his senses. He built on his curiosity. He was nurtured and protected by his tutor so that he can live his childhood which, according to Rousseau, should be seen as a separate stage in the life span. According to his philosophy of child development, the child should be allowed to grow and bloom at its own natural pace so that the child discovers his skills, and likes and dislikes when the time is appropriate.

The Child as Powerless

Some of the participants’ journal descriptions and artifacts represented the child as powerless to be responsible for his/her learning. For instance, Lilian stated the following:

I believe that the best way to describe a child, from a future educator's perspective, is through a traveling sailboat . . . . The child is definitely going to encounter difficulties while on their sail. Rough waters (social problems,
educational problems, physical problems, etc.) and obstacles will occasionally make the child feel that they are lost or in the midst of something that they cannot do by themselves. The sail on a sailboat is there for guidance, it can be used when needed and can serve as a director through stormy winds. (Figure 4.3)

Figure 4.3. The child as a sailboat.

In Lilian’s description, childhood is a stage in which the young child is as a helpless sailboat does not know how to navigate itself. The child has to wrestle with the strong tides of life, which are the obstacles of growing up. Adults are the captains, guides, or rescuers helping the child to find his/her way. Without this help, the child is lost. If this metaphor represents the education of young children, it can be mistakenly assumed that many children who come from homes where they receive little guidance or care might be considered lost forever.
Preservice-teachers’ familial backgrounds (e.g., being from a middle class household surrounded by adults who help the child) can influence the image of young child that teacher-candidates adopt (Blasi, 2002). An example of this can be seen in May’s metaphor of the “child as a blank book”:

I compared the child to an unwritten book, where they come into the classroom with some background information but for the most part the pages of their story are blank. It takes the influence of everything in the child's environment - family, teachers, peers, school, church, as well as community - to write the story of each individual child's life, and that story never ends as long as the child continues to learn from and interact with their environment. (Figure 4.4)

Figure 4.4. The child as a blank book.
May divided the book into chapters that follow the life pattern based on middle class values: growing up in a nuclear family, going to school, having friends, going to college, finding a job and, getting married. Specifically, although she mentioned that chapter 4, the future, is not written yet in the child’s life, she listed some of their prospects (e.g., college, occupation, marriage, parenting), which reflect her preexisting beliefs about her future. Although the academic, social, and future expectations May listed in her artifact present the image of a person who is culturally valued, her book illustrates that adults have the sole power to determine the direction of the child’s life. May’s image of the child as a blank book suggests John Locke’s “tabula rasa” whereby he perceives children’s minds as blank slates that can be filled in order for them to become noble and respectful adults. In his book, Some Thoughts Concerning Education, he emphasizes that the adults’ role is to improve young children’s minds through goodness, virtue, knowledge, and good temper by carefully forming the children’s undesired wishes, thoughts, and behaviors in desirable ways. Locke points out certain behavioral and content goals in the education of young children: Educating children’s minds contributes to their behavioral well-being. Obeying rules, respecting and listening to parents and tutors, and self-control aim to educate the mind. An effective education at early ages turns children into adults who are good citizens in society and who are obedient to what is expected from them (Locke). In May’s blank book image, the content of the chapters resemble Locke’s philosophy of education. It is interesting to observe that the doctrines of the seventeenth century still influence how preservice-teachers might imagine young children today.
Another participant, Cindy compared her childhood to that of today’s children who are overwhelmed with the standards and the expectations the adult world puts on them: “My image of a child in today's society is one who is growing up too quickly, and missing out on so many opportunities that I can fondly remember from my childhood.” Cindy further noted that, “it may seem like what's being done is an attempt to help our children succeed in the future, but we are ultimately depriving them of a normal childhood. We are forcing them into the adult world at an early age and depriving them of their youth.” She referred to the control held by adults to decide what and how children should learn in order for them to become productive citizens of society.

In terms of power issues, Nina pointed out that

When children are born they come into the world unaware of its dilemmas and are open to many ideas. I think a child represents innocence and acceptance of others through their willingness to acknowledge one another no matter what race, religion, gender, or disability.

To interpret Nina’s statement, as children grow older are vulnerable to the prejudice, bias, and stereotyping that adults have.

**The Child as a Sponge**

Some participants used a “sponge” metaphor to illustrate their image of the young children. First, May indicated that children can be, “compared to a sponge [as to] how absorbent they are of new knowledge . . .” Glen also perceives children as being “absorbent of information.” In Melody’s artifact, sponge was one of the images
representing her image of the young child (Figure 5.5.) The idea that children’s brains are like sponges that absorb all the information they receive identifies young children as passive receivers in the learning process and disregards their ability to think critically, sort knowledge, question, and uncover knowledge (McKenzie, 2004).

Figure 5.5. The child as a sponge.

The sponge metaphor also assumes childhood to be a period in which children can learn and be taught anything. In this role, the child is the passive receiver and the teacher is the active deliverer of the information. Although in their journal entries, both May and Glen noted that they believe in each child’s uniqueness, the image of the child
as a sponge who absorbs information conflicts with the fact that each child has different abilities and ways of learning.

The Child as Multidimensional

A few participants described the young child’s developmental dimensions. For those preservice-teachers, the child had emotional, social, cognitive, language, and physical dimensions. For instance, Ally used the metaphor of a spider’s web to explain these multiple dimensions:

My image of the child being a spider's web means I view the child as being multidimensional . . . I feel the child is a construction of many dimensions. Some of the dimensions that I feel are in the make-up of the child include: cognitive, social, language, activeness, academic, and emotional . . . These dimensions vary depending on the child, just like spider webs vary depending on the spider. As the spider grows, its web needs to grow and change with it. Similar to the spider, as the child grows, he/she will learn along the way. This gain of information will add and/or change the child's dimensions, therefore, improving, increasing, and enhancing his/her image. This adding and changing of dimensions is a never-ending process that changes the way people view the child.

The terms, cognitive, social, language, activeness, academic, and emotional, that Ally used are parallel to those taught in her teacher education program. The concept of developmental domains is frequently stressed in developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), which forms the framework of many ECE teacher education institutions. Ally
tried to adapt herself to the professional language of teaching through her course work. Also, through her metaphor, she attempted to make sense of the educational concepts she was introduced to. For instance, Ally referred to one of the principles of DAP, that is, “Early experiences may have cumulative and delayed effects on development” (NAEYC, 1996).

**Factors Affecting the Images of the Child**

The participants’ reflections revealed several factors that strongly influence in the preservice-teachers’ image of young children and how they perceive children.

**Teaching Experiences with Children**

Research (Graue, 2005) shows that preservice-teachers, prior to or upon entering teacher education programs, are likely to have formal or informal pre-program teaching experiences with young children. In this study, the teacher-candidates’ teaching experiences associated with an educational program such as pre-K to 12, daycare, or a summer school enrichment were considered formal. On the other hand, their experiences not related to a school system but linked to summer camp, a summer recreational program, Sunday school teaching, gymnastics, or a special needs home were thought of as informal. The teacher-candidates participating in this study listed their teaching experiences with young children that they had had or were performing at the time this research was conducted. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show the participants’ formal and informal teaching experiences, as indicated by their questionnaire responses.
Table 4.1

*Participants’ Formal Teaching Experiences with Young Children*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Substituting</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;, 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; graders</td>
<td>Elementary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>Teacher assistant</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Summer school enrichment prog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Elementary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Teaching dance and Spanish</td>
<td>(Not specified)</td>
<td>(Not specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>a) Teacher aide</td>
<td>a) Preschool</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Teacher and</td>
<td>b) Daycare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>counselor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; graders</td>
<td>Elementary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>Daycare teacher</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Hometown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(During breaks)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaylee</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loren</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilian</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>(Not specified)</td>
<td>Child care/summer discovery prog</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2

*Participants’ Informal Teaching Experiences With Young Children*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>Lead teacher</td>
<td>3-4 year-olds</td>
<td>Summer camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>a) Camp counselor</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Not specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Tutor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Babysitting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>a) Tutoring</td>
<td>a) 1st graders</td>
<td>a) Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Babysitting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>a) Babysitting</td>
<td>a) Siblings</td>
<td>a) Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Physical ed assistant</td>
<td>b) Preschool</td>
<td>b) Gymnastic center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>a) Tutoring</td>
<td>a) One 1st grader and one 3rd grader</td>
<td>b) Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Sunday school teacher</td>
<td>b) 1st graders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaylee</td>
<td>a) Supervisor</td>
<td>a) Ages 4 to 15</td>
<td>a) Summer rec prog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Babysitting</td>
<td>b) One 2 and one 5 year-old</td>
<td>(Not specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>(Not specified)</td>
<td>Summer day camp in campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loren</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>(Not specified)</td>
<td>Special needs home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(only for Christmas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilian</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Melody mentioned that her informal teaching experience as a leader in a summer camp for preschoolers had helped her form her image of the child. Another participant, Abby, remembered how her formal preprogram teaching experience had changed her perspective on young children:

Experiences I have had have also influenced my perception of the young child. When I began volunteering at an elementary school in a first grade classroom, I thought that I would have to explain everything in great detail to the 5 and 6 year olds in order for them to complete a simple task. Little did I know that they were more in tune to what was going on in the classroom than I had originally thought. Although the children needed some minimal amount of assistance, they were independent and able to complete tasks that were asked of them. This experience made me realize that children are not completely helpless. They are learning and adjusting to society every day.

Abby’s formal teaching experience in a kindergarten classroom changed her image of young children. She was able to observe children in real teaching situations and found that children have a will to learn and control their environments. Diane, who was working at a daycare as part-time teacher’s assistant, mentioned,

Each day that I go to work no matter what is going on, or how I feel it all leaves my conscious at that point in time because I see the children. They are ready without any inhibitions and are prepared to try anything that comes their way or feel any emotion that arises. It is quite remarkable to see this gift.
Similar to Abby’s observations, Diane’s formal teaching experience helped her realize children’s intuitive nature. Also, her experience with children enhanced her image of ‘child as a gift’, instead of altering it.

**Feelings Associated With Childhood**

Although none of the participants made direct references to their childhood memories when describing their image of the young child, some preservice-teachers briefly mentioned, in their journal entries, these early days of their own lives. For instance, Fiona talked longingly about her ‘carefree’ childhood as opposed to her adulthood in which she had to deal with various responsibilities: “I remember having to keep my bedroom cleaned and keeping the majority of my toys in my room as opposed to the living room. Other than those things, there were no bills or agendas while growing up unlike now.” Cindy expressed similar feelings about her childhood:

I can remember coming home from a "long, hard" day of school, grabbing a quick snack and running right outside to spend the rest of the afternoon playing with the neighborhood kids. It was a carefree time that as a kid I looked forward to all day in school. I thoroughly enjoyed being able to play and hang out with my friends in a non-structured way. Now looking back, it was also a time I realize I took for granted.

Another participant stated, “I consider myself extremely lucky to have had the childhood I had. The warmth, comfort, security and happiness I experienced are feelings I associate with my childhood.” The preservice-teachers who referred to their childhoods
come from middle class homes. According to their responses, fewer responsibilities, and living in a secure, comfortable and warm environment appear to be as important characteristics of childhood that they remembered. As well as positive feelings about the past, some participants such as Nina had rather sad feelings about her childhood, which affected her image of the “child as a support agent.” Nina stated,

In my experiences, in school and at home, I feel as if the adults in my life did not create an intensely structured and conformed environment with specific methods for my learning to take place in . . . . I have, many times, seen my younger sisters come and sit with me and hug me in some of my most trying moments. As a young child, I remember trying to cheer my mom up when my great grandmother died. Without knowing why she was upset, I climbed up into her lap and gave her a big hug and a smile. Children know that in return for the energy that the adult world puts into their development, it is then their responsibility to be an emotional support, always comforting in a time of need.

Nina’s experience as a young child in her family, whose members went through some rough times, affected her image of the child. She perceived herself as a responsible child who took on the burden of comforting the others in the family. As the eldest child taking care of her younger siblings, her role changed from “being cared for” to “being the caretaker.”

Responses From Others and Self Image

The preservice-teachers participating in the present study talked in their journals about people whose caring behaviors have influenced on how they perceived themselves
as a young child, and in turn, how they formed their image of a child today. A few participants mentioned their parents’ responses to their development. For instance, Melody stated in her journal that, “when I was younger my parents allowed me to experience anything and everything, which only further fueled my curiosity.” She further explained,

When I was young my parents would teach me ideas and concepts, and I would want to know more and more about them. I would take a concept as simple as friendship and want to know all the aspects of it. What makes a good friend, what makes a bad friend, how do people become friends, how long are you friends, can you have more than one, and how do you meet friends are all questions that I was determined to find the answer to.

Diane mentioned that not only her parents’ but her siblings’ responses to her growth were an influential input:

As a young child, I remember my family interacting with me and my younger siblings, interested in everything we said and accomplished. Perhaps this was because we were the three youngest out of eight children. Our older brothers and sister were embarking on young adulthood, entering college, starting new jobs, and getting married. Yet, they made time to come visit us, play with us, and act silly with us. I can remember my older sister sitting down with me and asking questions about what I thought about particular events. She was truly interested. Maybe she learned this important concept from my parents, who oddly had a family of eight and absolutely understand that children are our gifts of learning and life.
Young children’s self-images mainly develop through the responses they receive from the people in their lives. In the case of the preservice-teachers involved in this study, they as children, they were curious and impatient to learn. Their parents, siblings, and extended family members fostered their curiosity and helped them develop a positive self-image.

In addition to parents and siblings, some preservice-teachers referred to their teachers’ ways of responding their students. May states that, “The best teachers I had when I was younger were those who treated and responded to the class as a group of individuals rather than grouping us all together as one.” May’s early memories about her teacher’s way of setting the instruction affected her image of the ‘child as a blank book’. In her image, teachers were one of the agencies helping to write the child’s book. Also, her teacher’s pedagogical approach, which seems closer to the child-centered teaching, influenced May’s ideas about the kind of instruction she could build on when teaching young children.

**College Education and Beliefs About Children**

The majority of the participants explained the effects of their college education in relation to their beliefs about child learning, which is the next theme discussed under the category of beliefs about young children. However, few preservice-teachers expressed their opinions as to how they changed their images about children once they enrolled in the college. For instance, Abby referred to one of her college courses: “The human development class taught me about the physical, mental, social, and emotional growth of
young children. I learned that children are somewhat helpless at birth, but learn quickly how to get their needs met efficiently.” Another preservice-teacher, Glen, thought that the college course she had taken widened her perspective on young children,

Before coming to college, my view of children, and the world for that matter, was much narrower. While I have maintained some of the views I had on children, because of my education and experiences, I am able to see through them to the individual child and his/her specific needs.

Comparing her entrance the college and her current state, as at her senior year, she can see the transformation in her beliefs.

Beliefs About Child Learning

Teachers’ preexisting conceptions about children also affect what they believe about children’s learning. In the present study, the preservice-teachers’ responses to the questionnaire and journal entries revealed that the teacher-candidates’ descriptions of child image reflected certain attributes about child learning.

Curious Nature of Children

In her journal about a child image, Fiona stated that “Children are constantly trying to make sense of the world around them. I feel this is where they think up unusual ideas and theories that sometimes make you chuckle.” Children’s curious nature, which was discussed under the image of the child category as a characteristic attributed to
young children by the participants in this study, appears to be as a reason for her to think that children are constantly seeking answers to their questions. Another participant, Melody, referred to her curiosity when she was a child, “When I was younger I was known for continually asking the infamous "Why?" question. If I had a question, I would be determined to find an answer to it and test my proposed hypothesis.” As a young child, Melody tested her answers in order to have a concrete understanding and to make sense of her learning. From her perspective, learning through questioning and hypothesis testing seem to be the primary strategies children use to build their knowledge. Agreeing with these points, Melody, like Lilian, mentioned children’s experiences in their environment as ways to test their new ideas. The participants in this study reflected aspects of constructivist learning theory that they have been exposed to in their program when explaining their views about young children’s learning. However, discussion of the preservice-teachers’ level of maturity to apply constructivism in their teaching practices is beyond the outlines of the present study. This matter could be investigated in another research.

**Children’s Play**

Some participants talked about children’s play either by referring to their own childhood memories or to their observations of young children. For instance, Kaylee stated, “Until we were each in kindergarten my mother was the single, best, most influential teacher in my life. She appreciated childhood very much as she greatly encouraged play and imagination. She was always playing with us.” Aside from her
mother’s influence on her image of a teacher, Kaylee realized that giving children play opportunities enables them to use their imagination. Another preservice-teacher, Cindy, explained that,

My parents provided me with many fun and educational toys and experiences. For example, a swing set, frequent trips to the park, and they read to me every night. I played with Barbie dolls and other trivial games. I feel that these games actually did teach me something. For example, they helped with my socialization and learning how to deal with other individuals without my mommy or daddy being by my side.

Although Cindy seemed to understand the value of play in children’s learning, she described the function of games and toys being not just tools or vehicles for learning but as being a teacher.

Liz used the terms exploration and play together when describing her image of child:

As they learn to do things they keep exploring, recreating, and perfecting their actions in order to sharpen their abilities to complete tasks. One of the main areas which children explore in is play. Sometimes children completely create or understand how they wish to play but other times they need direction. Children are explorers who need a penciled path to follow.

In her expression, repetition of acts, exploring the facts, and rediscovering concepts are some of the characteristics of children’s play. She gave credit to children for their ability to make independent choices during their play. Also she indicated that
children need direction; however, she was not clear at what point children need help from others.

**Guided Learning**

The majority of the participants agreed with the point that children need some level of guidance during their learning. For example, Lilian suggests a balance between freedom and guidance for child:

Children learn best through their own experiences and relationships in life.

Relating this to the quote I cited by Rachel Carson . . . ("If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.”) I feel that there is extreme importance in letting a child be free and discover, yet to help them and guide them when needed. I feel the child should have a support system that they can call on; someone who has been through the experience and who can rediscover the beauty and awe in the unknown.

Another participant, Abby, stated that,

The roots are the foundation of children's beginnings. They are taught general ideas by parents and loved ones, which help guide them on their exploration of life. The sunshine that nourishes the seed represents the experiences that contribute to whom the child has become as an individual . . . . From all of my family I have learned to be creative and be my own person. This is why I believe children are creative individuals who need some guidance throughout their life.
Abby’s metaphor represented parents and other family members as guides who help the child explore and experience the world. Her beliefs about children’s learning seemed to be influenced by her family’s child-raising practices. Like Abby, Glen feels strong about a child’s need for guidance in the learning process,

I view children as needing guidance. Though I view children as intelligent, I think without a teacher and guide, learning would be near impossible. Every experience I have had leads me to this conclusion. In school I was guided by teachers, and at home by my parents. Our entire culture illustrates to us that children are the learners that must be taught by the more experienced adult.

From Glen’s perspective, adults are the sole authority for teaching young children.

Besides parents, family members, and teachers, peers also appeared to be effective influences on the learning process of young children. Lauren mentioned that

A child will bring pre-knowledge to the classroom which we, as educators, need to build upon. A prime example would be teaching children morals. Parents teach their children the difference between right and wrong but it is actually demonstrated in the classroom between interacting classmates.

Although Lauren sees parents as the agents who are mainly responsible for teaching social morals to children, she indicated that peers are another social mediator that children learn from and that they practice newly learned skills together. Lauren’s early memories of the learning opportunities that her kindergarten teacher gave her and her peers influenced her belief in peers as a guides for other children’s learning,

I remember when I was in Mrs. Howard's kindergarten class. After story time, she would ask us as a class how we felt about the story or how much we liked it.
It wasn't about if we fully understood it on our own, but she believed that interacting with your peers was one of the greatest traits a child could possess.

In contrast to Lauren’s memory about learning from her peers, Kaylee’s early school memories were about her experience of predominantly guided learning:

Looking back now, I see that they all had a very similar style of teaching, which was the very traditional way of a lot of listening, writing, and reading type activities. They never gave us a very good chance to show off our talents or to use a variety of Gardner's intelligences so that some people could excel for once. Also, they never gave very many opportunities for active learning.

It can be concluded that preservice-teachers believe that young children need guidance from others to be able to learn, whether from adults or peers. However, the author believes that such a belief can be problematic at times because teachers also need to consider internal factors such as motivation and cognition, which are psychological mechanisms one uses to learn. Learning consists of complex dynamics (e.g., social, psychological, cognitive) which cannot be explained by solely relying on external social factors. Also, preservice-teachers need to consider that social relations are not in one direction, from adults to children, but are bidirectional in which individuals influence each other.

**The Child as a Teacher**

Some preservice-teachers acknowledged that the learning process works bidirectional in which the child teaches as well as learns from others. For instance, Abby who used seed metaphor to describe her child image, stated, “I see children as learners,
but at the same time as teachers. They are learning new things everyday, while also teaching or re-teaching others what they have learned.” Diane also mentioned that “It may seem intimidating that these children usually no more than a few months to a few years old can teach us so much about a life we have been living for many years.” Diane and Abby recognized young children’s power to influence others. Peer interaction is a good example.

Summary

The participants in the present study reflected their beliefs about young children by responding to a questionnaire, writing journal entries about their images of children, and drawing artifacts that represented their images of the young child. The coded categories of the data produced three themes, revealing the preservice-teachers’ belief structures about young children. The image of a child was the first category. This category was expressed through various metaphors the preservice-teachers used. The participants’ images gave important clues about how they perceived the young child as an individual who lives in different contexts. The second theme, factors affecting beliefs about young children, provided the reasons for the ways the preservice-teachers imagined young children. Specifically, their memories of their own childhood, parents, teachers, and peers were critical agents influencing the teacher-candidates’ beliefs about children. The final theme was the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about children’s learning. The analysis of the data showed a relationship between the participants’ beliefs about young children and how the preservice-teachers perceived student learning.
The themes that emerged from the participants’ responses have important implications for ECE teacher education. First, in this study there is a strong relationship between the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children and their beliefs about children’s learning. The preservice-teachers’ beliefs can be a motive for deciding what kind of learning environments they will create for young children. Second, the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children and their learning originated from the teacher-candidates’ prior schooling experiences, their parents’ and teachers’ attitudes toward children and children’s learning, and the preservice-teachers’ demographic backgrounds. By taking these themes into consideration, ECE teacher-education programs could integrate content areas focusing on discussion of teacher-candidates’ personal thoughts and opinions about teaching young children living in different contexts.
Chapter 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON BELIEFS ABOUT PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

The study participants’ responses to the questionnaire, their journal entries reflecting the preservice-teachers’ images of parents, and artifacts that the teacher-candidates created during the classroom discussions revealed the major themes underlying their beliefs about the parents of young children. The information collected from the participants was coded into categories. The themes emerging from those categories were: (1) the images of a parent, (2) quality of parenting, (3) the parents’ role in educating children, and (4) factors affecting preservice-teachers’ beliefs about parents of young children.

The Images of a Parent

The preservice-teachers used various metaphors to identify their images of the parent. As those images appeared to originate mainly from the preservice-teachers’ own memories, the metaphors that they employed formed the properties of this category.

The Parent as a Guide

Similar to the beliefs about guided learning discussed under in the findings in Chapter 4 of this study, the participants tended to use terms that portrayed the parent of
the young child as guide who is authoritative, firm but loving, not forcing the child to learn but encouraging, providing learning opportunities, setting limits, reinforcing the rules for discipline, and finally more experienced and knowledgeable. Therefore, the author treated each term as sub category for the image of the parent as a guide, as described below.

**Parents as Observers and Mentors.**

Melody described her image of parent:

Parents should always watch over their children, even into adulthood, and see how their children are progressing and living life. Through observation parents can find out and determine many things about their child that they may have never even known, which is why I partially see the parent as an observer . . . . I also see the parent as a mentor because I believe they should be there and available for the child to talk to when they need it. As a mentor, it is the parent's job to guide the child because, in most cases, a child does not need to be led, but they do need to know that you are there to support them.

Figure 5.1 is a copy of Melody’s drawing that illustrates her image of a parent.
According to Melody’s description, the parent as an observer is aware of what is happening in the child’s life. This parent utilizes his/her observations to make decisions about the child. While the parent as an observer adds new information to what s/he knows about the child, the parent as a mentor is one who is already knowledgeable in various subjects and ready to guide the child. Mentoring also refers to sharing one's own expertise with a novice. This mentor knows the possible problems the novice may face. Therefore, the mentor provides a support system that enables the novice to achieve specific learning goals.
Parent as a Light.

Lilian used a metaphor that matched her image of the child as a lost boat to illustrate her image of the parent:

My image of a parent is a very positive one. Though there have been things that have made me become upset with parents, or that I have not really seen eye-to-eye on with them, I know that parents are there to help guide you and to help you make right decisions. I would never be where I am today if it would not have been for the support and guidance of my family, especially my parents. I believe the best metaphor that I could use for parents is that they are "a light inside of a tunnel."

Her image of parent is as a light saves the young child from being lost and guides the child through a tunnel to the exit, which can be interpreted as a problem or challenge the child faces. The young child needs guidance from an adult to make proper decisions. Although Lilian viewed the parent as a light, according to her journal entry, she drew a different image of the parent in her artifact (Figure 5.2), as presented by a sail.
Figure 5.2. The parent as a sail.

The parent who is like a sail gives directions to the young child, who is like a lost boat, navigating through and coping with difficult waters.

The Parents as a Support System

Liz identified the parents as “supportive, loving individuals who promoted independent learning, play and growth.” Another participant, Ally, related her personal success to her parents’ support: “My parents were loving and caring, always providing the affection that I needed. Not to mention the fact that my parents were constantly giving me encouragement that I needed in order to succeed.”

In her image, Lilian specifically focused on socio-emotional support:
Parents are there to lift their children up when life is not going as planned. I remember crying over huge amounts of homework after getting home from soccer practice, and my mom taking me and sitting me down on the couch and just letting me vent and hearing what I have to say. Parents are also there to protect and support. There is little that I have done in my life that my parents have not been there to support. They always let me know that I am doing my best, and that they know that I am trying as hard as I can. The parent of the child should be constantly reassuring their children when the going gets tough just as my parents did when they were separated.

Lilian believes that parents’ positive interactions and responses when children struggle with various matters provide emotional support for children. Also, encouragement coming from the parents helps a child build a positive concept. During her parents’ separation as she mentioned in her journal, Lilian was able to feel both her parents’ support and motivation.

_The Pastoral Parent_

Some preservice-teachers identified their image of the parent with metaphors from nature. For instance, Nina used the “gardener of life” metaphor, which originated from her memories of her parents:

A large aspect of the child's development is attributed to the efforts of parents. I believe that the role of parents is to act as a gardener in the life of a child by sowing seeds of knowledge, watering for growth, and weeding and pruning the
environment to make it conducive to the child's optimum growth . . . As a gardener, the parent becomes engaged in their child's life and excites them to the world around them. By doing this, the parents lay the groundwork for later social learning in the child.

In Nina’s image, parents have the knowledge to arrange an environment in accordance with the child’s individual needs, just as a gardener cares for a plant by considering the plant’s specific needs such as the amount of the water, sun or shade. When the gardener cares for the plant, the plant starts to flourish. The quality of care the gardener provides decides how the plant will bloom. Nina further explained her image with an example from her childhood:

My mother frequently "watered" us. She allowed us to play outside with other children and we would make her mud pies in the dirt as well as climb trees and pick flowers. My mom brought us to the zoo, the aquarium, and other places to learn through observation. She frequently read us many books and encouraged our participation in activities like Girl Scouts, swim lessons, and dance classes. My mother watered us as much as she was able to and this attention and encouragement to engage in the world shaped me into what I am today.

The watering by a gardener refers to giving or delivering information to children. There is a one-way delivery from parent to child. The water represents the parents’ knowledge and values, and the skills the parents see as necessary for children to learn or possess.

Another participant, Kaylee, presented her image of the parent by also using a metaphor from nature, i.e., a “root” (Figure 5.3):
Parents are like the roots to a plant which represents the child. The plant begins with its roots. Everything has to come from the roots. It is through the roots the plant is nourished. The parents provide their children with all their needs—physical, emotional, and intellectual.

![Figure 5.3. The parent as a root](image)

In Figure 5.3, each branch of the root represents an area of knowledge that parents teach to their children, as Kaylee showed. The metaphor, parent as a root, was also used by Abby in her journal about her image of the young child (Figure 5.5.)
The nurturing images of parents that Nina and Kaylee identified were similar to their images of the child as a flower. Also Abby’s image of the parent was parallel to her image of the child as a seed. Both participants value the knowledge parents contribute to young children’s development.
Parents as Socialization Agents

In the preservice-teachers’ reflections, they indicated that one of the parental responsibilities is in teaching the young child the social norms, rules, and moral values of society and culture. In this context, Fiona identified the parents’ role as follows:

They [parents] would teach behaviors such as, how to act in certain situations, and how to pursue areas of interest. Work ethic is another big behavior. My parents taught me not to give up. These behaviors that are taught are not typically discussed between parent and child, but the child observes them through actions of the parent.

Tina, another participant, pointed to the parents’ role of teaching problem solving and self-efficacy skills with which children can think critically and make decisions:

Despite all the great experiences I had, along with the good usually come some bad experiences as well. Fortunately, my parents always taught me to learn from my mistakes and grow strong from certain situations. In turn my parents have embedded this image of a parent, which I will carry with me when I become a parent some day.

Tina is the only participant who came from a large city and had stressful experiences in her school. Therefore, she believes in the importance of encouraging children to learn from their mistakes. Another participant’s response confirmed Tina’s belief, “A parent should not just allow the school and their child's teacher to teach their children. A parent is responsible for teaching their child morals; what is right from wrong, respecting their peers, and kindness.”
In addition to the parents’ role in teaching their children morals, they need to model gender roles, according to Nina:

When I was young I used to play "house" with my neighbor. I was always the mom and he the dad, and we performed traditional sex-typical chores. I would pretend to make dinner while David pretended to cut the grass. My mom would always encourage us to continue this type of play and then prompted us further to engage in different sex-typical activities. The way that my mother and other parents reinforced our behaviors sent us information about what it meant to be a female or male in society.

Nina’s mother helped her learn the typical female roles that are promoted by culture and society. Also this guidance led Nina to form her beliefs about typical female behaviors. It is a well known fact that the majority of the work force in early childhood education is comprised of females. As a result, it should not be surprising to see ECE teachers promoting their own beliefs about gender roles in their classrooms.

As related to the parents’ role of teaching and modeling acceptable social behaviors, the participants’ responses in their journal entry 2 revealed their images of their father and mother. For instance, Tina described her father as an authoritarian figure who put limits on her for her benefit: “My dad taught me that there will be consequences if I don't listen, which, in turn taught me how to look into the future for long-term results of good and bad decisions.”

In addition, the fathers of the participants appeared to involve their sons more in active sports, whereas they engaged their daughters in table games. As Ally stated, “Many little boys when coming to play baseball already knew how to throw and catch
and bat because their fathers had taught them.” Cindy recalled that “one father down the street would be the one who all the kids went to when a fort needed to be built, and another father was helpful for organizing a game of softball or hockey”. She also remembered how her father involved her in games: “My dad was like a brother to me. He always used to play board games and super Nintendo with me. We would watch TV and practice softball.” On the contrary to masculine father image, Liz’s father involved her in every physical activity:

Neighbor children would come down and we would all play run-down, tag and other games in the yard. During this time my father would keep an eye on us and make sure we were all playing nicely. My dad was also comfortable allowing a neighbor to supervise us in our play, take us to the pool or park, or go for a bike ride around town. Likewise, he would take me, my brother, and other neighborhood children to the ground, pool or park and play games with us. I feel as if my father was very supportive of me and my brother to make our own decisions in what we liked to play.

As well as their fathers, the preservice-teachers in the present study also remembered how their mothers performed their gender roles. For instance Cindy stated that:

The mothers who didn't work would always have delicious snacks for us, especially in the winter time when it would be snowing. I fondly recall always going to the neighborhood mother's home every time there was a snow day. After playing in the snow for many hours, we would be provided with steamy hot
chocolate, marshmallows, whipped cream, cookies, and macaroni and cheese. It became a tradition. She seemed to enjoy it almost as much as all the kids did. Also, Cindy’s mother involved her in activities that contributed to her perception of female roles: “She [her mother] would always take me to the beach, the library, out to lunch and shopping, just to name a few of our everyday activities.”

The Parent as the First Teacher

Another image that emerged from the participants’ responses was the “parent as the first teacher.” The preservice-teachers had different perceptions about the kinds of knowledge parents teach their children. For instance, Fiona mentioned both practical and academic knowledge taught by the parent first teacher:

I would have to say that many parents are the first educators for their children. Many parents have different occupations, but they all teach their children basic skills when they are younger, such as the ABC's and numbers and tying their shoes.

Kaylee’s memories of being taught by her parents supported the idea that many parents teach children academic knowledge:

The first teachers in my life were my parents who taught me how to read, write, and count and a very early age. Books were read to us often, and we enjoyed listening to them. One of my favorite memories was dancing with my parents in the living room.
Other forms of parental knowledge identified by the teacher-candidates focused on teaching children values and appropriate social behaviors. At the same time, these practices support the image of the “parent as a socialization agent.” Again, Kaylee said: 

From my personal experiences, I have come to see the parents as supportive and nurturing first teachers. Everything we first come to know is from our parents. They are our first models who we strive to imitate. Our values, our beliefs, our behaviors (at least in the first few years of life) come from them.

Kaylee values parents’ information about their children and emphasized that teachers can learn from the parents as well: “As the first teacher, they [parents] have the most insight and knowledge of their child which should be communicated to teachers.”

The Parents as a Combination of Images

Some of the participants used multiple descriptions to identify their images of the parent. Those images appeared to be based in the ways they were raised by their own parents. As Cindy explained:

My image of a parent is a combination of many things: a friend, a disciplinarian, a nurse, a teacher, the list could go on. I think that a parent is someone who plays with you when you're bored, helps you when you need assistance, takes care of you when you are sick, and who also knows how to be stern in the appropriate situation. In summation, the image of a parent I think of, and even aspire to be someday, would be that of my parents.

Glen’s image of the parent was also a combination of different roles: “My image of the parent is that of a caregiver, a support system, a role model, communicator,
disciplinarian, counselor, and friend. I was lucky to be given parents who were skilled in all of these things.”

These participants were fortunate to have parents who were talented and who had resources in various subjects related to child-raising. However, teacher education programs should raise candidates’ awareness of the increasing poverty among young children and the limitations that poverty imposes on the desirable performance of parental roles. Otherwise, preservice-teachers’ ideal images of how parents should treat and raise their children can be obstacles to involving parents in school according to Epstein’s first level of parental involvement, which is for the teacher to help parents with their parenting skills.

The Quality of Parenting

The participants described their own parents’ child-raising practices by responding to Q16 in the questionnaire, which is “How would you describe your parents’ or your family’s way of raising their child/ren? Explain briefly” (see Appendix B). The dominant parenting style revealed by the participants’ descriptions is authoritative, which has been attributed to the parenting styles of white middle-class families (Baumrind, 1966). The authoritative parent approaches the child with a kind, warm, loving but firm attitude. While this type of parenting encourages the child to explore and learn through trial and error, it also communicates certain rules that the child must be. Baumrind describes authoritative parenting as follows:
The authoritative parent attempts to direct the child's activities but in a rational, issue-oriented manner. She encourages verbal give and take, shares with the child the reasoning behind her policy, and solicits his objections when he refuses to conform. Both autonomous self-will and disciplined conformity are valued . . . . Therefore, she exerts firm control at points of parent-child divergence, but does not hem the child in with restrictions. She enforces her own perspective as an adult, but recognizes the child's individual interests and special ways. The authoritative parent affirms the child's present qualities, but also sets standards for future conduct. She uses reason, power, and shaping by regime and reinforcement to achieve her objectives, and does not base her decisions on group consensus or the individual child's desires. (p. 891)

Table 5.1 shows the parenting styles practiced by the participants’ parents as indicated in their responses to the questionnaire.

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How the Participants’ Parents Raised Them</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
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</table>
**How the Participants’ Parents Raised Them**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Their parents’ child-raising method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>My parents raised us very authoritatively. They allowed us to experience many facets of childhood yet they were protective as well. I know that they only had my best interest in mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>My parents don’t believe in violence as a way of disciplining their children and I think that’s so important. Also, I can remember even as a young child they’ve always supported my brothers and I [sic] in whatever we wanted to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>My parents incorporated discipline and enjoyment. I was never denied things I needed and I was definitely spoiled. My parents are my best friends. They taught me so much and continue to teach me things. They knew when to be the parent and when to be my friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>My parents focused live and attention on each of us individually and were wonderful caring parents. They also placed an emphasis on play, especially outdoor activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>Guiding –but allowing freedom to explore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>They didn’t push me. They let me acquire knowledge on my own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>My parents were always understanding and supportive. My dad was more strict than my mom, but she could also be that way at times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>My parents raised my brother and I like [sic] they were raised. We were raised with morals and values in a Christian home. We had chores to do, told to go to school/college, do well, become successful, and get a great job that we enjoy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaylee</td>
<td>My mom believed it was important to stay home with us. She played a lot with us, and we didn’t watch a lot of TV. She is very funloving and caring. She encouraged our imaginations. If we were punished it would be by a timeout.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**How the Participants’ Parents Raised Them**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Their parents’ child-raising method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>My parents were very open and allowed us to explore. We had some roles for things we weren’t allowed to do but, as long as we followed the rules and were safe then we could play as we wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loren</td>
<td>I believe my parents’ style is authoritative. They have rules but they make me feel like I can talk to them about anything. I believe their parenting style is the best.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilian</td>
<td>My parents were very nurturing and very affectionate. My parents were very loving as well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants’ responses to question 17 in the questionnaire, which is “List the qualities that you think a parent of young child should have, show and use with young children” and their reflections in their journal entries identified the qualities that they attributed to parenting young children. Specifically, certain terms that the teacher-candidates used were associated with idealized and utopic beliefs about parenting. For instance, eight preservice teachers identified quality of parenting with these characteristics and behaviors: loving, caring/kind, patient, energetic, cheerful, affectionate, sympathetic, firm, caring, understanding, playful, open, positive, interested, loving, comforting, disciplining, affectionate, creative, letting a child experience anything and everything, having knowledge of child care and issues, having consideration for others/manners, generosity, love, happiness, kindness/sympathy/empathy/compassion, pride/self confidence, a sense of humor, ability to forgive, childish, and fun. The fact that these preservice-teachers omitted or barely mentioned discipline can be associated with their own romantic images of the child as fun, playful, social, and well-behaved. The
preservice-teachers may think that a parenting style consisting of all the qualities listed above will result in positive child behavior. The only participant who mentioned discipline as a quality of parenting was Ally: “The parent's role is to be the disciplinarian and at the same time their children's friend . . . . My parents were the disciplinarians in my family. They were always there for me, guiding me in to the right direction.”

Across the participants’ responses to question 16 in the questionnaire (Table 5.1), characteristics of an authoritative parenting appeared to be the quality of parenting. The preservice-teachers’ journals also supported this finding. For instance, as expressed in Lilian’s response, a parent “has always been someone who has an unconditional amount of love. This love can be shown through letting you have experiences and do things, as well as not letting you do certain things.” Liz also stated, “The parent also talks to the child, asking what their wishes are, and what they desire to do and participate in.”

The remaining participant responses to question 17 in the questionnaire revealed what quality parenting should be. Ally believes that parents should be a model for what is appropriate behavior. In addition to passing morals to their children, the parents’ role is to acculturate the children, according to Ally:

I think a parent should act the way they would want their child to grow up acting, because children copy . . . their role models and values. They should push their kids to success (but not too hard). . . . I think it is the parent's responsibility to represent their family’s culture and tradition in order to pass it onto future generations.

Another quality that the participants thought that parents should possess is the ability to provide children with a secure environment. Nina stated,
Parents should act as a primer of the child's environment. As a parent, it is your duty to shelter the child from harm and act as a screen through which the world may be screened before reaching the impressionable child.

Similarly Ally valued such security: “I feel that it is the parent's duty to find a neighborhood that possesses all the good qualities I just mentioned, especially the security and trustfulness.”

Many families have to live in city and suburban neighborhoods where the level of crime and violence is often very high because they are unable to afford a home in more "secure" areas. Does this situation put those children in danger? Yes. Does that make those children less successful than their peers who live in secure neighborhoods? No. If parents cannot live in secure neighborhoods, this should not limit the ways the teacher can communicate with the parents, and help their children reach their potential.

Parents’ Role in Educating Their Children

The participants in the present study reflected their ideas about how parents teach their children, or are involved in their children’s education.

Home Versus. School

Fiona stated that:

Learning from my parents wasn't as structured as learning in a school setting.

They taught me things when situations or "teachable moments" presented
themselves. There wasn't pressure to learn something and have to repeat it again when the need arose, but they would explain things to me again.

Fiona perceives that learning at home is somewhat less influential than learning in the school environment. Many parents prepare themselves to teach and provide their children within the best environment they can prepare. They buy "how to books", ask professionals, and get advice from other parents in order to teach their children at home. An effective teacher-education program should emphasize that instead of comparing home and school a continuum between the school and home environment should be created in order to provide a mutual understanding of children’s learning between parents and teachers.

*Appropriate Responses to Children’s Learning*

The preservice-teachers described how their parents responded to the participants’ learning when they were young children. Their parents’ practices influenced the participants’ beliefs about how parents should react to children’s attempts to explore and discover. Melody described her parents’ response to her learning:

My parents were always willing to listen to what I had to say and see a situation or idea from my point of view before even considering passing judgment. I learned a lot from them just through their actions and I believe their parenting has helped shape me into the individual I am today which I am indeed proud of. Her parents’ responses to her actions made Melody think that, “A child's sense of self mostly develops through the responses they receive from the people surrounding them.”
Fiona, another participant, also thought that young children tend to seek adult approval for their behaviors: “Children often relate back to their parents reactions when they are younger. If their parents give them the sense that it is okay to pursue and explore something, then that child will more likely explore without any fear.”

In both of these participants’ reflections, the authoritative mode of parenting appeared to be important in terms of teaching and learning. Listening to children’s points of view and supporting their self-confidence to initiate actions are behaviors that authoritative parents use to respond to children’s learning.

**Involvement in School**

Through their journal writing, the preservice-teachers expressed their ideas about parent involvement in the education of young children. Specifically, their own parents’ involvement in their education influenced their beliefs about how parents should be involved in the schools in general. For example, Tina explained, “. . . my parents were always involved in the activities I participated in (basketball coach) and involved in my school (parent teacher conferences, back to school night).” Another participant, Kaylee, mentioned that:

Not only were parents of my friends and siblings' friends involved with them in sports and activities, but also in school. In the very young grades, we had mother helpers who would come in once every so often and help out in our classroom. It was always exciting to see a parent in school helping out your teacher.

May described her parents’ involvement in her education as follows:
Starting in elementary school, my homework had to be done at the kitchen table each night so that my parents could observe what I was doing, and this rule applied to my brothers as they got older as well. At the end of each night, one parent (usually my mom) would check everything that I had done, and then initial it as was required by the teacher.

Helping in school-related activities, being a classroom aid, helping with homework assignments, and being a volunteer in school events are ways the participants’ parents were involved in their children’s education. Therefore, the teacher-candidates’ beliefs about how parents should contribute to their children’s education are confirmed by their memories related to their parents’ involvement. In fact, May stated that,

Because of how involved my parents have always been in my education, I think it will probably lead me to having high expectations of the parents of the students I will eventually teach, which I don't necessarily see as a problem.

While looking back on her parents' degree of involvement, May set her standards for how much her future students’ families should be involved in the school. She explained her vision of parent involvement in detail:

One of the most common practices in education today is also something that bothers me the most, and that is the problem of parent involvement. Many parents today are afraid to step in and offer opinions and suggestion to their child's teacher. Whether this is because they don't want to step into an area where they feel they are not welcome, or even worse, that the teacher has made it clear that they don't want parental involvement, this is detrimental to all parties involved-the teachers, the parents and most importantly the student. A child's parent is the
most important resource when trying to learn about and understand them because they are the people who have known that child the longest and have spent the most time with them. For this reason, they should be welcomed into the classroom, not excluded from it. This is both the responsibility of the parent and the teacher, and so neither should be blamed if it doesn’t occur. In my own classroom, I know that parent and family involvement will be one of the areas that I stress the most. I grew up with unconditional support from my parents, time to be involved; I want to help the ones that do have the time foster their desire to. Teaching thirty some children each year, it is hard especially at the beginning to learn what their strengths and weaknesses are, and this is something a parent can help with. I also think it is important both to the parent and the child that each parent spends some time in the classroom, preferably volunteering if they have the time. This shows the child that school and home do not have to be separate things, as well as gives the parent the chance to be more involved and watch their child learn. However, as long as parents make an effort to be involved at conferences with teachers and keep the lines of communication open, the child can only see a benefit from this.

Although May is an inexperienced preservice-teacher, she is aware of the lack of family involvement in the schools. She mentioned negative teacher attitudes toward families as a main reason for this situation. She imagined that her future classroom teaching will always involve the parents. She suggested participating in conferences, communicating, and volunteering as parent involvement strategies, which are the first three levels of Epstein’s parental involvement typology. May believes in the importance of involving
parents in the education of their children, however she lacked the perspective that sees parents as full partners who can contribute their knowledge and experiences to the classroom instead of only being an extra help in the activities directed by the teacher. She perceived teachers as the authority in the parent involvement process.

Loren suggested ways that parents can deal with their children’s failure in school subjects:

I believe as long as a parent remains active in their child's intellectual growth, in school and out, that is the best quality a parent can possess. A parent also must have patience as well. If a child brings home a bad letter grade that they received on a school assignment, help them figure out where they went wrong when doing the assignment and how he or she can fix it . . . . A parent should be prepared for the worst when dealing with their child. Even if he or she is the best student, grade wise in the classroom, no one is perfect and everyone is bound to make mistakes.

Loren’s reflection about being prepared for the worst can be interpreted that parents may have unrealistic expectations for their children. As a result, parents are disappointed their children’s failures. There is a critical point in this matter, which is for the parents to understand the difference between having high expectations and unrealistic expectations. The former aims to advance the child another step in his/her skills. The latter points to setting limits that do not regard the child’s needs, interest, and capabilities. A teacher education course focusing on working with parents and families should emphasize building a mutual understanding between parents and teachers to set goals in accordance with the child’s interest, needs, and capabilities.
Factors Affecting Beliefs About Parents of Young Children

When reflecting on their teaching beliefs, the participants in the present study also referred to other factors that influenced their beliefs about parents of young children.

Community

From an ecological system perspective, communities where families live have immediate influences on people. The preservice-teachers in this study stated their past experiences related to their communities. The participants’ descriptions of their communities also revealed the preservice-teachers’ background they came from. For instance, Lilian mentioned that,

I grew up in a middle to upper class community where children were always around. I remember walking around the community, and I can recall children always being heard. I attended a private Catholic school where the majority of children had very involved parents.

Ally described her close-knit community:

My community also played a part in my childhood. The community I live in is a small town with lots of farmland. There is a fire station, gas station, and baseball field, and many churches interact, and have a fun time. For instance, the fire station offers security to a family in case a fire would arise or they would need assistance. The whole community holds a yard sale in the summer that everyone can participate in. Plus, there is a carnival held every summer at the baseball field that pulls people from the community together. Then at Halloween the community
promotes a trick or treating night. On Christmas Eve Night the community hosts "Santa" on the square. The churches in the community hold summer Vacation Bible School programs, Lenten services available to the community, plus other events throughout the year. My community's events show me that it is important to have an involved community in a child's life.

The communities that the majority of the participants came from were small towns, with predominantly White middle-class residents. Church had a big influence on the way their communities were involved in the lives of the children, as depicted by Ally.

The teacher-candidates also identified the community’s roles and responsibilities in child raising. For instance, Loren pointed to the community’s function of passing values to the children: “A community is looked at as a large group who respect each individual for what they are. Whether the community is that child's neighborhood or classroom, moral responsibility will be taught.” Another role of the community mentioned by Loren was the socialization of the child:

Although a parent is a huge factor when guiding a child through the schooling process, social interaction through his or her community is another great way to achieve success in school. Socialization will help the student answer difficult questions, solve major problems, and develop better communication skills for gaining success in the future.

Abby stated her thoughts about how a community is involved in child-raising practices:

The community, in my opinion, has many influences on how a family develops and helps a sculpt couple's beliefs in child development. The neighborhood
community influences the child in how to respect and help one another, while it also influences the parents’ ideas about family situations.

Along with the responsibilities of communities, the participants mentioned their definitions of a community. Liz said,

As I look back now, I see my neighborhood is very community based. A lot of times today people do not know their neighbors: neighbors do not talk to one another, and their children play indoors or play at preschool and school but do not hang out in the neighborhood at home. In this type of modern "community", the word community does not really mean that people interact and have communal goals together. The word only refers to the fact that they live in a general proximity to each other. My neighborhood was not like this. My neighborhood was a real community which helped each other, looked after the neighbor's children, and interacted and cared for each other on a daily basis.

Liz is aware of the reality that people living in today’s communities do not know each other. As a result, the concept of raising the children as a community has disappeared.

Abby commented that,

The community, which includes teachers, peers, neighbors, other family members, and society in general, teaches young children the proper way to behave and respect one another. I believe that the community views children as one of their important future members, and therefore, wants to encourage them to become like the members of the current community. These factors may carry on with a child until their adulthood, or may fade away due to other influences that have affected their personal ideas.
While Abby indicated that the community’s role is to pass values and morals to children, she also mentioned the community as an interactive system that survives itself by influencing the younger members of the community, who are the children.

**Observing Others’ Parenting**

The participants’ observations of different parenting styles influenced their beliefs about parenting. For instance, Melody remembered her peers’ parents:

I saw several instances in which parents viciously attacked their child when they did something wrong by screaming at them or even to go so far as calling them names. I also observed parents who continuously pushed their children to be nothing but the best and not to make mistakes. One of my friends had a parent who had no involvement in their life and did not seem to make an effort to try and do so. My friend was free to do what she wanted and her mother did not show the least bit of interest in any of her activities whether it was positive or negative.

The preservice-teachers all had educational and employment experiences related to working with parents of young children. Table 5.2 presents the participants’ previous educational experiences and employment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Educational Experience</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Substitute teacher-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Communicated with</td>
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<td>parents</td>
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<td>Melody</td>
<td>Kindergarten teacher</td>
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<td>Nina</td>
<td>TA for special class</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>(Not specified)</td>
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<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Camp counselor</td>
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<td>Diane</td>
<td>Teacher assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
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<td>None</td>
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<td>Communicated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Employed in</td>
<td>Informed parents</td>
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<td>day care</td>
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</table>
Participants’ Experiences Working With the Parents of Young Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Educational Experience</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kaylee</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Employed in recreational program</td>
<td>Interacted with children’s parents and grand parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loren</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Aid</td>
<td>Worked with families and parents of children who have special needs. Did home visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilian</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Babysitting autistic boy</td>
<td>Learned from his parents and him how to deal with this disease</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The preservice-teachers in the present study had some educational experiences, in which they observed parents with young children that were related to their course work. Additionally, they worked as daycare employees and interacted with parents. However, it is interesting to see that none of the participants related their beliefs about parents to their work experiences. On the other hand, this situation should not be disregarded in teacher education programs when addressing teacher-candidates’ preconceptions about working with parents of young children.

The participants’ observations of their parents’ parenting practices were models of appropriate child raising. For instance, May remembered how her parents disciplined her and her siblings:

My parents don’t believe in violence as a way of disciplining their children and I think that’s so important. Also, I can remember even as a young child they’ve always supported my brothers and I [sic] in whatever we wanted to do.
In her view, Ally’s parents’ parenting practices were a model for how “good parents” should be:

As a child my family played a key role in my life, unconsciously modeling how to be a good parent and what family means. When I was young, we did traditional family thing together. For instance, we ate all our meals together, we went places together (vacations, dinner, baseball games), we played games (card games, kickball, ping pong), plus much more.

Ally’s definition of good parenting may be very different from parenting in non-traditional family structures that she might encounter in her professional teaching life. Preservice-teachers have to understand that the concept of “good” parenting can vary across people, cultures, and societies. Students of teaching also have to realize the stressors that might limit the ways that parents are involved in the education of their children.

**Summary**

The participants’ responses to the questionnaire, the reflections in their journal entries, and the artifacts that they drew as their images of parents helped revealed three major themes that enabled the author to understand the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about parents of young children. The first theme that emerged from the coded data was the image of the parent. The preservice-teachers used various metaphors and descriptors to identify how they imagined the parents of young children. The analysis showed that the teacher-candidates had positive images of parents, whom they described as guides,
support systems, and first teachers. The second theme was quality of parenting. The overall quality of parenting style across the participants’ responses was authoritative. In the third theme, the participants’ thoughts about the parents’ role in education was discussed. The analysis revealed that the preservice-teachers acknowledged the importance of parent involvement in their children’s education. However, their beliefs did not go beyond perceiving the parents as volunteers or helpers in school-related activities. The final theme was factors affecting the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about parents. The participants’ community experiences and observation of others’ parenting styles appeared to be the most influential on how the participants formed their images of the parent, beliefs about parenting, and parent involvement.

The themes that emerged from the data have important implications for ECE teacher education. First, there was a strong relationship between the participants’ image of the child and image of the parent. Second, the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about how parents should raise and teach their children originated from memories of their own parents’ parenting styles, their communities, and their primarily white middle-class backgrounds. ECE teacher education programs have to understand the context that preservice-teachers are coming from. Then the programs must challenge these future teachers to experience their beliefs about working with the families of young children. The programs should also emphasize perceiving parents as full partners in the education of their children.
Chapter 6

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING IN ECE

The participants’ responses to the questionnaire, journal entries reflecting the preservice-teachers’ images of a teacher, and the artifacts that the teacher-candidates created during the classroom discussions helped reveal the major themes underlying the participants’ beliefs about early childhood education teaching. The information collected from the participants was coded into the categories. The themes emerging from those categories were: (1) image of an ECE teacher, (2) qualities of an ECE teacher, (3) factors affecting beliefs about qualities of an ECE teacher, (4) inspiration to choose teaching as a profession, and (5) teaching philosophy.

Images of an ECE Teacher

The preservice-teachers in the present study used various metaphors to express their images of an ECE teacher. While those metaphors mainly focused on the caring side of teaching, they originated from the teacher-candidates’ experiences related to their own schooling or their previous teachers.

Images of the Teacher From Nature

Some preservice-teachers used images from nature to describe an ECE teacher as they did in representing parents, as reported in Chapter 5 of this study. Kaylee stated that,
As the student is like a flower, the ECE teacher is like the sunshine and water that nourishes and guides the child. Just like a plant needs water . . . to flourish, a child needs his/her teacher to provide encouragement, guided learning, positive interactions, opportunity to explore, modeling, and opportunity to play and interact with others so that the child can learn and develop the best of their ability. A flower also needs sunshine to grow as well. A child cannot develop properly if they are not cared for properly.

Sunshine and water represent the inputs and feedback coming from the teacher. The child can develop through the responses that s/he receives from the teacher. In this image, water and sunshine contain necessary minerals that stand for “encouragement, guided learning, positive interaction, opportunity to explore, modeling, and opportunity to play and interact with others,” as Kaylee explained. Watering the flower symbolizes the delivery of the necessary skills and the knowledge to the young child so that s/he can reach optimum development.

Nina used a gardening metaphor for her image of a teacher. She explained that the teacher as a gardener, “must be enthusiastic and hopeful that their work cultivates better school readiness and life skills in children. Like a gardener, a teacher must create an optimal environment for learning and growth.” Nina pointed to preparing and setting high expectations for young children.
The Teacher as a Sail

The teacher as a sail was the metaphor used by Lilian who also used the image of the child as a “boat” as her metaphor.

My metaphor for a child directly correlates with my metaphor for the early childhood educator. As said before, a child is a sailboat braving open waters and continuing a journey that we lead them to adulthood. They are constantly experiencing new things and entering new "waters", while learning and discovering life and the world around them. The teacher, to me, is the sail . . . The teacher, just as the parents are, are there to guide the child, foster imagination in the child lead them to see the right and wrong in situations and to lead them the right way on the path of discovery.

As shown in Figure 6.1, Lilian drew her image of her metaphor of the teacher as a sail. Since she described her image of the parent and image of the teacher with same metaphor, she created one artifact for both images. The teacher serving as a sail helps the young child smoothly transition to and explore rough waters. The teacher guides the child to learn not only concepts related to academics but also values, beliefs, decision making, and problem-solving skills.
Another participant, Diane, used the ocean as a metaphor to describe her image of the teacher:

I believe that the early childhood education teacher can be described as an ocean. The ocean is an inviting place; it can be calm and warm to those who visit it. It is also a world of discovery. It provides laughter and is enjoyable to young children who revel in its sand and water. As children play in the sand, the ocean splashes against the sand giving them a sense of security. The ocean can even be thought of as playful, as it rushes upon the shore, teasing the toes of children and inviting them into its currents, and then receding back into itself. Again, it will rush upon
the sand, sometimes erasing the castles children have built themselves.

Consequently, the children will be entranced by the liveliness of the ocean, but at the same time they learn and discover. An early childhood education teacher is reminiscent of the ocean because the early childhood education teacher like the ocean is also is diverse, engaging, peaceful.

On the contrary, Lilian illustrated the ocean as rough waters that the child as a sailboat has to navigate through. The ocean as Diane explained represents an image of the teacher as a source of knowledge, who provides play opportunities and has an exciting personality. The teacher as an ocean represents the vast unknown to be explored like an ocean.

**The Teacher as a Friend**

Loren identified the teacher as a friend to young children. “My years in school were amazing because the teachers I had were not just teachers but they acted as a friend as well.” Similarly, Cindy explained, “I remember my teacher that looked like a Barbie Doll—she was always warm and friendly.” Cindy’s definition of teacher as a friend originated from her memories of her high school Spanish teacher whom Cindy described as “helpful, kind and patient and who just made learning fun.”

Research (Clandinin, 1985) indicates that persons are inclined to remember positive aspects of their memories, certain persons and then idealize them. Both Loren and Cindy idealized their teachers as friends. This perspective, although one can claim it creates a drive to choose teaching as a profession, can be problematic in real teaching
situations. For instance, the student-teachers said they were puzzled with children’s uncontrollable behaviors when they tried to be the children’s friend (Cook & Young, 2004). The idea of being a friend to children can also be a product of popular culture reflecting the good teacher concept, with the image of the teacher as physically very good looking, smiling, and always creating positive behaviors in children. This is not always true. In *Matilda* by Roald Dahl (1988), while Miss Honey who is blond and slim treats the children with a warm and sweet approach, Miss Trunchball whose appearance is very unattractive is portrayed as cruel to the children. In fact, Cindy associated her teachers’ friendly personality with her Barbie doll appearance. The preservice-teachers tended to idealize the teachers they had as a child.

*The Teacher as a Bridge*

May described her image of a teacher by using the metaphor of a “bridge”: “ECE teachers are serving as the bridge between their [children’s] lives at home to this point, and their lives in their full-time students.” May also explained why she described the ECE teacher as a bridge: “Often this is the first experience these children have had with an adult who is not their parent, and so besides the academic lessons they are also learning classroom behavior and what is expected of them by society.” This teacher-candidate is aware that there is a strong relation between children’s attitudes toward school and the interaction between teachers and children. At this point, there is a need to clarify the nature of the support coming from teachers. Hamre and Pianta (2005) analyzed studies researching the factors that help students adapt to school and mentioned two types
of support: (a) academic support and (b) socio-emotional support. Their recent study indicates that the learning environment and the instructional qualities the teacher builds into the classroom can be strong predictors for easier adaptation to the school and academic success. In addition, the socio-emotional atmosphere of the classroom and positive relations the teacher forms with the children increase the social competency skills in children. The teacher as a bridge builds a connection between home and school, and helps the child make a smooth transition to schooling which is a new concept entering the young child’s life.

**The Maternal Teacher**

Glen remembered her early childhood teachers displaying “maternal teaching methods.” Furthermore, Glen explained that:

All of my ECE teachers were women, and all of them were around thirty years of age. They all allowed for a certain amount of exploration and freedom in the classroom, while gently guiding and keeping a watchful eye. I do not remember all that much about my ECE teachers, but I do remember very caring adult women who stressed friendship and cooperative behaviors in the classroom. Glen’s image of a teacher revealed the fact that teacher-candidates bring to their teaching their images of their past teachers the majority of whom were female and who demonstrated mother-like behaviors in the classroom.
Qualities of the ECE Teacher

When describing their images of the teacher, the preservice-teachers participating in this study also identified the qualities that they attributed to an ECE teacher. The participants’ responses to question 14 in the questionnaire asking them to list the qualities of an ECE teacher matched the quality indicators that emerged from the reflections that they wrote in their journal entries. Table 6.1 shows the participants’ responses to question 14.

Table 6.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>I think you must have <strong>patience</strong> and think <strong>creatively</strong>, You have to really want to be an ECE teacher and not just do it because you think it will be easy and fun. You must be able to assess students and communicate well w/them. You must acquire various strategies and tech’s [techniques] to work w/ECE children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>An ECE teacher should be knowledgeable about children’s issues and child care, <strong>caring</strong>, loving, <strong>creative</strong>, observational, and should give children the space to learn from their own experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td><strong>Patience</strong>, enthusiasm, and <strong>warmth/caring</strong> personalities should all be qualities of an ECE teacher. I believe that ECE professionals have a large impact on the rearing of children . . . especially in a regular daycare or afterschool program where the teachers act as a primary care giver.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Because the students you have as an ECE teacher are so young and this is often their first experience with someone who isn’t a parent, I think it is important to make them comfortable more than discipline them. ECE teachers should be approachable, <strong>patient</strong>, <strong>kind</strong> and <strong>caring</strong>. They are an extension of a parent who should be just as nurturing. It is important to be able to laugh, both with others and at yourself to know that there is also a time for seriousness even with young children.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Qualities of the ECE Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td><strong>Patience</strong>, the ability to speak and teach on a level the children understand, a sense of humor, a <strong>kind</strong> personality—little children are impressionable and scare easily—it’s necessary to approach and deal with them cautiously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>I think an ECE teacher should be <strong>caring</strong> and <strong>warm</strong>. An ECE teacher should also be full of life, <strong>energetic</strong>, and have <strong>fun</strong>. Another quality would be the ability to <strong>play</strong> and interact with children easily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
<td><strong>Patient-caring-creative, playful</strong>-knowledgeable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td><strong>Patience</strong>, the ability to be flexible and <strong>fun</strong>. The need to know when to be serious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>An ECE teacher should have many qualities. They should be <strong>kind</strong>, fair, gentle, understanding, <strong>patient</strong>, willing to learn, etc. They should also be <strong>creative</strong> in a way that all young children could learn from even with a variety of learning abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>They should be <strong>caring</strong> most of all because they are teaching small children. They should be helpful and able to stoop down to a child’s level to help them understand. They should also be <strong>patient</strong> because it may take a while for a child to grasp an idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaylee</td>
<td><strong>Patient, caring/kind, energetic</strong>, cheerful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td><strong>Warm</strong>, encouraging, positive, constructive, explanatory, and <strong>patient</strong> w/children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loren</td>
<td>I think any teacher needs a tremendous amount of <strong>patience</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilian</td>
<td>An ECE teacher should be <strong>patient</strong>, comforting, <strong>energetic, fun</strong>, and responsible. To me, these are ideal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants mentioned several qualities frequently, which the author highlighted with boldface and underlining in the table. While some of the qualities such as being patient, caring, warm, kind, energetic, fun, and playful were related to an ECE
teacher’s personality, some (e.g., creativity) appeared to be correlated with the instructional aspect of teaching young children. Across all responses, only a few of the participants mentioned ability in behavior management and guidance (e.g., knowing when to be serious and make children comfortable). In the following section, the categories of an ECE teacher’s qualities are discussed, as indicated by the preservice-teachers.

**Personality**

The preservice-teachers participating in the present study stated that various personality traits are needed for teaching young children. These traits were grouped as interpersonal, intrapersonal, and physical. According to Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences Theory (Shearer, 2004), interpersonal and intrapersonal skills are two dimensions of the personal intelligence category. Intrapersonal skills focus on knowing the self and include, “accurate self-appraisal, goal setting, self-monitoring/correction, and emotional self-management . . . . A core function of this intelligence is guiding a person’s life-course decisions” (p. 6). Interpersonal skills enable one to understand other people. Interpersonal skills are “the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals and the ability to recognize the emotions, moods, perspectives, and motivations of people” (p. 6). Teaching is among the professions using both intelligences on the job. The preservice-teachers described quality teaching by suggesting the ECE teacher have several personality traits, including interpersonal, intrapersonal, and physical in cooperation.
Therefore, when giving examples of specific traits, instead of eliminating other traits in the participants’ reflections, the target trait is boldfaced and underlined in the sentence.

**Intrapersonal Personality Traits.**

Intrapersonal personality characteristics, identified by the participants, appeared to determine the kind of impression the teachers make on children and other people. Flexibility was mentioned as one of the personality traits of an ECE teacher by Melody: “I see an early-childhood educator as a guide and as a person who should be observant, flexible, and continuously creative in order to teach children in early childhood.” Liz thought that being enthusiastic about one’s job motivates one to perform better at job-related tasks. Therefore, a teacher has to ask herself if s/he feels enthusiasm to teach young children:

**Enthusiasm** is a key component when dealing with young children. If you are not enthusiastic about something, they [children] will not find it as interesting or be as engaged when you talk about it. Enthusiasm shows children that the things going on in class are important. I feel as if enthusiasm is also a sign that the teacher cares about something because she is enthusiastic about it.

A teacher’s socio-emotional characteristics were defined as important characteristics to teach young children. Kaylee thought that being kind and caring toward children was a key to building successful relations with them: “An ECE teacher needs characteristics such as [being] energetic, nurturing, firm, patient, kind, caring, involved,
confident, knowledgeable, and observant.” Along with being kind and caring, being warm and loving was mentioned by Cindy as a trait an ECE teacher should possess:

Another important trait that I feel is necessary for ECE teachers to have is a **warm**, caring, **loving** personality. Hopefully the individuals who go into the field of early childhood education are doing so because of their love for children and desire to contribute and help them with their initial learning experience.

Patience, also mentioned by 12 participants in Table 6.1, appeared to be the most important personality trait of the teacher. Fiona stated, “I view an early childhood education teacher as someone, who is patient with children, fun.” Loren explained that “Patience is a huge characteristic that all teachers must possess and each teacher needs to have a great deal of it. If a child is struggling, a teacher's patience comes into play.” The preservice-teachers’ focus on “being patient” as an important intrapersonal skill in teaching can be associated with the age group of the children. Teacher-candidates may think that children who are in the early childhood education period have more behavioral problems, and therefore that the teachers have to be very patient when dealing with such a young age group.

According to Multiple Intelligence Theory (Shearer, 2004), people who are intelligent in intrapersonal skills know their strengths as well as their weaknesses. They do not hesitate to accept the challenge of furthering their professional knowledge. Some of the participants mentioned the professional attitude that the ECE teacher should have. For instance, Fiona explained,

I also see the early childhood teacher as someone who is able to continually develop in their professions. They need to be willing to attend classes about the
development of children, observe others and themselves to identify what they need to develop more in their teaching careers.

Kaylee thought that, “ECE teachers need to be willing and wanting to hear input of how they are teaching and suggestions of how to improve. They must always be questioning their own teaching.” Regarding personality traits, Fiona and Kaylee identified high self-efficacy as a desirable characteristic of a teacher. They indicated that a teacher with high self-efficacy is not afraid of the challenges and always willing to receive criticisms from others.

**Interpersonal Personality Traits.**

The traits directly affecting how teachers perform the tasks related to the teaching act and how they communicate with children were grouped as interpersonal personality characteristics. Kaylee and Melody mentioned “being observant” as a key trait for the teacher to gain accurate information about children. During a practicum experience, Abby realized that being compassionate was very important when working with young children: “I have noticed how compassionate the teachers [mentors] are towards the children, and how patient they are when the children are learning something for the first time.”

Another interpersonal trait for teaching children is to be willing to sacrifice personal time to provide a better learning environment. Loren stated that a teacher needs to be able to make sacrifices in gaining a student's full understanding of the lesson that he or she is presenting. If these sacrifices take a
bite out of their personal time, so be it. A student is more important than a teacher's leisure time. My teachers were always willing to stay after school to help me go over a quiz or help me with a project if necessary.

In the study of Green and Manke (2001), retired teachers mentioned the word “dedication” in relation to sacrificing after school hours to prepare lessons or grade papers. Love for children was the leading reason for these former teachers to dedicate extra time to work hard. The author of the current study asked if contemporary teachers share the same feelings. Loren’s reflections about sacrificing extra time for children can be a sign that teachers of the present day still preserve the values of teaching that were promoted several decades ago.

**Physical Traits.**

Appearing energetic, smiling, and laughing were mentioned as the qualities of an ECE teacher. Since those signs could be recognized in initial interactions with teachers, they were considered physical signs of quality. For instance, Diane stated that “The early childhood education teacher smiles and laughs easily, in turn allowing children to see the classroom as a friendly and inviting place.” An ECE teacher should be patient, comforting, energetic, fun, and responsible. To me, these are ideal.” These initial physical signs were considered catalysts for creating a positive atmosphere in the early childhood education classroom.


**Instructional Knowledge**

The participants’ reflections revealed the instructional qualities the teacher-candidates thought an ECE teacher should possess. One of the students made a clear distinction between teaching in ECE and other levels of teaching by pointing to the particulars of an ECE teacher’s role in the classroom setting:

It is also important for teachers in a preschool classroom to be playful kind. They should have no reservations about getting on their hands and knees to play with blocks, or with play dough, and even get their fingers dirty with finger-paint. Fiona thought that a teacher should possess the ability to observe children and have a knowledge of learning theories, and use this information to build activities:

They [teachers] need to observe what children are interested in and use that knowledge to create and adapt lessons to meet the child's needs. They also need to be very informed of the learning theories which help children learn. They need to keep up-to-date with the latest theories being researched. Not only do they need to be knowledgeable about this, but they need to be able to apply this knowledge to their lessons.

Ally identified how to write appropriate activity plans for young children:

An early childhood teacher should know how to correctly write lesson plans, with objectives that fit with the PA Standards. The early childhood teacher should be able to write an interesting, attention grabbing introduction and conclusion. Additionally, the early childhood teacher should be able to adapt their lessons to fit children with disabilities, ESL, etc. Moreover, the early childhood teacher
should incorporate the usage of transitions into the activities in order to have a smooth shift from one activity to the next. Additionally, the early childhood teacher should know proper ways to assess her students.

Ally’s ideas about creating ideal lesson plans were influenced by her college course; its content included developing activity plans for pre-k classrooms. Also, she was the only participant who mentioned planning for children with special needs, and children who speak English as a second language. Her teacher education program’s emphasis on inclusion appeared to be influential on her beliefs about instructional skills.

Creativity was mentioned as an important quality to plan and teach. Melody stated that:

Creativity is also an applicable ability for a teacher to possess. Constant creativity keeps lesson plans and curriculums fun and exciting for students as well as for the teacher. It also helps when thinking of the types of experiences you as a teacher would like to expose children to. Children learn best through lessons that keep their attention and interest for a majority of the time, and creativity allows a teacher to develop lessons such as these.

Loren also thought that, “The early childhood teacher should be creative. All the lessons should be fun and interesting, implementing hands-on activities for a better understanding.” According to Melody and Loren, creativity enables the teacher to create fun activities, and helps children keep their focus on their tasks. If there is no fun and excitement, then children are likely to get bored. In fact, Nina’s statement reinforced this point:
I think that it would be a shame to start children off on their school career on the wrong foot by creating a monotone and overly disciplined classroom. I think that this stifles the creative play opportunities and natural optimism of a child's disposition.

Liz addressed specific subject matter knowledge that an ECE teacher should know:

An ECE teacher must have expressiveness and activeness . . . . Expressiveness is important because as the teacher talks and engages the children, they will learn new vocabulary and improve their word understanding and speaking skills . . . . Activeness is important because as the teacher does this, they are actively engaging the students in physical, motor activities. These types of activities will improve the child's small and large motor ability while also making the classroom activities more fun. If the teacher is active and participates in the activity, it also engages the students because he/she would be acting as a model for the students.

According to Liz, an ECE teacher should possess the knowledge to support children’s language and literacy development. Also the teacher should be aware of the physical energy young children bring to the classroom. Therefore, the teacher should develop activities that contribute to children’s fine and gross motor growth.

In addition to specific teaching skills, the types of instructional knowledge the participants attributed to an ECE teacher varied from theories of child development to teaching morals and beliefs to young children, which are described in the following section.
**Knowledge of Theories.**

The participants in this study learned various theories and theoretical perspectives related to working with young children. Table 6.2 shows the theories of child development and learning that the participants had learned previously.

Table 6.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Theories or Theoretical Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>None listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>Dewey (progressive education), Piaget, Erikson, Vygotsky, &amp; Montessori</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Nina         | Piaget’s cognitive learning theory  
|              | Freud’s psychosexual development    
|              | Erik Erickson’s psychosocial development  
|              | Bronfenbrunner’s ecological systems theory |
| May          | Social learning theory               
|              | Freudian and Erikson’s psychoanalytic theories |
| Cindy        | No child left behind                |
| Diane        | Systems theory                      |
| Glen         | Bronfenbrunner and Vygotsky         |
| Fiona        | Attachment theory                   
|              | Vygotsky’s social learning theory   
|              | Behaviorist theories                |
| Abby         | Theories of Piaget, Erickson, and Vygotsky |
### Theories or Theoretical Perspectives Participants Had Learned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Theories or Theoretical Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ally         | Watson-rewards, punishment & extinction  
Piaget-Cognitive developmental theory  
Gardner-Multiple intelligences  
Vygotsky-Zone of proximal development  
Erikson-Psychosocial development  
Kohlberg-Moral development |
| Kaylee       | Bronferbrunner’ ecological theory  
Piaget-theory of development and play  
Erik Erikson-theory of development  
Montessori  
Freud |
| Liz          | Piaget, Bronfenbrunner, Erickson, Vygotsky |
| Loren        | One of my favorite theories would be if there is one single model that is appropriate for all sexes or students of ethnic backgrounds. Also child-centered curriculums are a big part of education that I stand behind. |
| Lilian       | Behaviorist, constructivist, social learning theories |

Across the participants’ responses in Table 6.2, Vygotsky, Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Bronfenbrunner appeared most frequently. While the majority of the participants had learned about these theorists and their theories in different courses throughout their college education, there were great variations in their responses in terms of the knowledge that they had learned. The reason specifically as to why the theories of constructivism (e.g., Piaget and Vygotsky) were frequently mentioned could be that the teacher education program the participants attended emphasizes a constructivist teaching philosophy. In fact, when the participants asked which theory or theories they felt most
knowledgeable about, Piaget and Vygotsky were mentioned by the same frequency (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3

*Theories and Perspectives Participants Feel Most Knowledgeable About*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Theory/Theories or Theoretical Perspectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>None listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>I feel most knowledgeable about Dewey because he has been the most reinforced throughout my classes. His ideas about a child should learn from their own experiences, and that ECE teachers should meet certain criteria she agrees with that. His ideas were considered radical in his time; however, I find it unique that he thought outside of the box when it comes to education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>I feel like many of my prior courses have touched on all of these theories [Table 6.2] equally &amp; briefly. I don’t believe I am much more knowledgeable about one over another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>I feel the most comfortable with my understanding of Social learning theory because it has been covered in so many of my classes. Also it is one the easiest to comprehend and apply to a situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>I only feel somewhat knowledgeable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>I am most knowledgeable about the Systems theory and hierarchy of needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>None listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>I know about a lot of them because I’ve worked with them so much in the past semesters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>I feel most knowledgeable about Piaget. He used schemas to represent the development of young children in learning how to complete tasks on their own through the help of others. He also explained the four developmental stages as being sensori-motor, preoperational, concrete, formal operations. Each of these areas listed specific requirements that every person would go through in development and growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Theories and Perspectives They Feel Most Knowledgeable About

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Theory/Theories or Theoretical Perspectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>I had many classes that discussed these theories, so I’ve heard them over and over again. But I feel I understand Kohlberg &amp; Erikson best. Also, I feel I understand Watson very well too because I used it while working at the daycare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaylee</td>
<td>Piaget’s theories of development and play:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-4 stages of development: Sensorimotor 0-2 (discover world through senses), preoperational 2-7 (begin to think logically), concrete operational 7-11 (Understand conversation and reversibility), formal operational 11-15 (Can solve abstract problems).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>Piaget: children are little explorers, they learn through what they do and exploring their environment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loren</td>
<td>Child-centered schools because I feel it is important for the teacher to build upon and work with the knowledge that the child has already brought into the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilian</td>
<td>Vygotsky-Last semester, I had to design a school and do a presentation to a mock school district. We wrapped our curriculum around hands-on learning, zone of proximal development and much more.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The focus on the theories of child development and learning during their college education influenced the participants’ beliefs about an ECE teacher’s qualities. Fiona mentioned that an ECE teacher is one who is “knowledgeable about theories and is able to adapt them to meet the children’s needs.” This knowledge, according to Fiona’s beliefs, helps ECE teachers “understand that children learn at different paces and that children have different learning styles.” Melody believed that “through observations a teacher can determine how well a child is conquering their developmental milestones.
cognitively, socially and emotionally.” Melody’s past experience with young children impacted her beliefs about the kind of knowledge the teachers should possess:

I observed in a pre-kindergarten classroom in high school that one particular child did not know his counting numbers in sequential order and as it seemed the other children did. The teacher had observed that the child learned most effectively through visual lessons. The teacher, Mrs. Smith, then adapted a math lesson to include visual counting using objects that related to the theme of the week which was household animals. She provided several repetitious opportunities for the child to practice his counting and by the end of the day he was able to count successfully in order up to seven. Through the teacher's observations she was able to identify a learning problem and work towards correcting it, which is an ability an early childhood educator should have.

Participants in the present study made attempts to make meaning of the theories they had been learning by relating them to practice as shown in Melody’s example. However, it is questionable whether the teacher education programs provide preservice-teachers with adequate opportunities to see how theory finds itself in practice.

*Classroom Management Skills.*

The participants emphasized a teacher’s quality of being able to manage children’s problem behaviors and reinforce a healthy socio-emotional growth. Ally described aspects of effective classroom management by referring to her own teacher’s classroom management style:
My teachers had good classroom management. They were fair when it came to the classroom rules; always consistent and did not show favorites. Additionally, my teachers rarely yelled at their students. Instead, they reinforced good behavior. For instance, one of my teachers had a jar and every time someone exhibited good behavior, answer, etc., a marble was put in the jar; the opposite was done if someone broke one of the classroom rules.

Being fair and consistent, showing no favoritism, and giving rewards for desired behaviors appeared as important aspects of a “good” classroom management in Ally’s description. May was in favor of stating rules and being firm with the children: “They [children] are expected to learn discipline, when it’s ok to talk and when quiet is necessary, where to sit and when, classroom routines and what is expected.”

In contrast to Ally and May, Cindy believed in the power of a teacher’s positive appearance,

A teacher should use a positive and exciting tone when leading an activity or just when simply speaking to the young children. This will help to motivate and excite the children, as well as contribute to a positive and enjoyable learning experience. It will provide them with an enjoyable learning environment and a teacher who not only cares about their students’ learning, but who also wants their students to have fun in the process.

According to Cindy, a learning environment filled with fun and excitement can deliver the message of care and nurturance to the children. The teacher’s positive physical appearance becomes reinforcement for that. However, not everything in an ECE
classroom goes as smoothly as idealized. For instance, Loren addressed the skill of helping children cope with painful experiences:

When dealing with students, a teacher needs to be ready to face it all; whether that is school work or personal problems. I remember when I was in second grade and my grandfather died. I was devastated and very emotional, but I was glad that my teacher took the time out of her day to talk to me about my grandpop’s death. My teacher allowed me extra time to complete my assignments and told me that if I ever needed anything, I could always count on her.

While welcoming children’s different feelings in the classroom, a teacher’s ability to model and teach prosocial skills to children was emphasized by Glen: “Most of the teachers I have seen in action incorporate social skills into the curriculum. Through modeling and instruction, they teach about communication, turn taking, expressing feelings, relationships, and manners.” When children learn skills to improve their social and emotional skills, teachers help them practice their new knowledge. Abby mentioned this situation as follows:

When children become discouraged, just like a coach, the early childhood teacher gives the students a pep-talk, and reminds them that they do not have to be perfect as long as they try their hardest. An example of this idea would be when a young child is learning to tie his/her shoe. If the child becomes frustrated, the teacher would encourage him/her to keep trying. When the student finally learns the task, the teacher would then praise the child just saying, “Great Job!” Giving the children positive reinforcement lets them know that their teacher is someone they can trust and encourages both the teacher and students to try their best.
Teaching Values.

Some preservice-teachers emphasized an ECE teacher’s responsibility to teach values to young children. Lilian suggested that

Though I know I may never teach in a private school, I still feel it is an important component of an early childhood educator to instill a sense of right judgment in children early in life. Just as Mrs. Brown said, I think it is important for the teacher to show children how they should treat others as they want to be treated—something I feel my definition stated above entails.

In her journal entry, Lilian mentioned that she attended a private Catholic elementary school. Consequently, the values she believes need to be taught to children were influenced by her education which was based on Christian values. Specifically, teachers must, according to Lilian, teach young children to make decisions by calculating the results of their actions.

Abby mentioned that a teacher should be role model for teaching manners:

Role modeling is important for students of any age, but is significantly important for young children in preschool. Early childhood educators are the best types of role models that any child could have. They act appropriately in all situations and demonstrate how the children should behave also. These teachers are able to show children how to perform specific tasks and behaviors by doing the activity and having the children repeat them. An example would be the teacher showing the children how to eat lunch and use their manners properly. The teacher would set the table and ask the children to do the same with their own dishes. Also, the
teacher would use his/her napkin, utensils, and manners, while having the children repeat these actions.

In Ally’s description, the teacher is a model for the desired social behaviors in children since young children learn through imitating others surrounding them.

**Parent Involvement.**

Although involving parents was mentioned by only one participant as a quality, it is worth treating this topic as a subcategory since it is very important to increase the awareness among teacher-candidates to partner with parents of young children in their professional lives. Kaylee described this relationship: “It is also important for me as an ECE teacher that I maintain a close relationship with parents and families because at such a young age, parents obviously have a vital role in their children's lives.”

Unfortunately, except for Kaylee, the teacher candidates participating in this study seemed to skip an important quality of an ECE teacher, which is the skill needed to involve the parents in their child’s education. There can be two reasons for this. First, the preservice-teachers might not have received sufficient course content focusing on working with parents and families. Therefore, they lack background and information to propose any kind of quality indicator for working with the parents of young children. Table 6.4 shows the courses on working with families and parents that the participants had taken.
Table 6.4

*Courses on Working with Parents That Participants Had Taken*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>a) EDTHP115</td>
<td>a) Involved dealing w/ some situations and how you would approach them as a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Other classes</td>
<td>b) Other classes would just hint at knowing your role as a teacher and not to get too involved w/ helping students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>ECE 453</td>
<td>Family communication and involvement: how to involve parents, having open communication with them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>[She does not know if there are courses dealing with parents. She would be interested in them.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaylee</td>
<td>ECE 452</td>
<td>Some of the home visiting programs dealt w/working with parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loren</td>
<td>Enrolled in Ed Theory 440</td>
<td>[She expects] to talk about parents expectations for the classroom and different philosophies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilian</td>
<td>Ed Psych-014</td>
<td>Briefly went over contacting parents of behavior difficulty and how to approach it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 6.4, only a few students had taken courses about working with parents and families. This should be considered a gap in the professional preparation of future teachers. The second reason that the participants did not mention parent involvement as a teacher quality is that the preservice-teachers might not consider parent involvement a priority in their teaching practices. In fact, the preservice-teachers in the present study could not propose parent involvement strategies beyond volunteering or aiding. This type of perspective prevents them from seeing the parents as true and equal partners in the education of children.

**Factors Affecting Beliefs About ECE Teaching**

The participants reflected on the factors that were influential in their beliefs about ECE teaching. Specifically, their early memories of their teacher, educational experience in working with the parents of young children, college education, and mentor teachers were important elements affecting the teacher-candidates’ beliefs about the qualities of an ECE teacher and ECE teaching.

**Memories of Their ECE Teachers**

As the participants remembered the ways their ECE teachers communicated and taught them, their descriptions seemed to affect their quality indicators for teaching in ECE.
Some participants’ memories were about their teachers’ personality traits. For example, Kaylee’s shared that her preschool teachers displayed intrapersonal traits: “They were very patient, gentle, and kind. I had two preschool teachers. I remember I loved the way they read to us at story time. They were older, soft spoken. They did a lot of coloring with us.” However, Kaylee did not have the same positive feelings for her first grade teacher:

It is very important for teachers to be nurturing and caring when kids are so young. I remember walking in scared many days in first grade because my teacher had a temper and she could sometimes get very loud and angry. Because of these negative experiences, I know what kind of a teacher I want to be. If children, even at such a young age, don’t like the teacher and don’t have respect for him/her, they are less likely to learn. This coincides with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. I didn’t learn much that year because I needed to feel, safe and secure, and loved before I could learn.

Kaylee thought that being nurturing, caring, and patient with children were important intrapersonal traits an ECE teacher should possess.

Nina’s teachers seemed to have had appropriate personality traits:

I always admired them and tried to be on my best behavior for them . . . Some of the earliest memories of my teachers were their warm and caring nature. I often remember them scolding other students for inappropriate behavior of on task students.

Loren remembered that her teachers had effective interpersonal personality traits, “My educators were not just teachers but also guides, helpers, and friends.”
Especially, one of her teachers, Mrs. Green stood as a model for her:

I remember when I was in Mrs. Howard's kindergarten class. After story time, she would ask us as a class how we felt about the story or how much we liked it. It wasn’t about if we fully understood it on our own, but she believed that interacting with your peers was one of the greatest traits a child could possess. Ally identified her teachers as “good teachers”:

I think I had really good teachers because they were very creative and knew what the best way to teach was. They were always caring which is good for young children to feel. My teachers were always willing to help, explain it different, offer more explanations.

In addition to personality traits, some participants reflected on their teachers’ instructional strategies. Lilian described her preschool teacher’s strategies as “fun”:

I can recall my own experience of being a child in an early education environment. Though the situation is somewhat hazy, I remember my first preschool teacher at a small church run preschool. Her name was Mrs. Paul and the moment I entered the classroom, I can remember being welcomed by her and feeling a sense of comfort. Mrs. Paul was always planning fun activities, joining in on play time if wanted and was always finding ways to make learning fun. Melody’s teacher did not force the students to learn but paved the way leading children toward discovery and exploration, which in turn helped Melody form her child image, “explorer”:

When I was in kindergarten my teacher, Mrs. Butler, arranged for us to go on a field trip to a nearby zoo. Mrs. Butler did not organize a schedule for us to follow
or tell us exactly what we should focus on at the zoo. She set up the field trip so that we could merely look at the different types of animals that exist in our world. If we recognized an animal, Mrs. Butler would then step in and teach us about it, citing types of things the animal ate, did, and its name. As a guide Mrs. Butler gave us the opportunity to do our own learning, but was there to provide supplemental information.

**Mentor Teachers**

The participants pursuing their education in the elementary/early childhood education major were required to do 21 hours of practicum for the course they were taking. Therefore, the preservice-teachers’ observations of their mentor teachers became very influential in their beliefs about their own teaching of young children. Fiona specifically identified her mentor teacher’s personality traits:

Miss [X] is always positive towards her students, their parents, and other staff in the room. She is patient towards all of these people as well. She always takes time to explain things to you and does so in a manner that you can understand them. She doesn’t use her knowledge about children to undermine parents, children, and staff. Many times when you talk to a professional they may talk to you using terminology within the field that you are not familiar with, but Miss [X] does not. If she does, she is sure to catch your confusion and quickly explains information further and uses more common language. She makes sure you understand what she’s saying. Because she has all of these factors, she is very easy to approach to
talk to. Any time you have some confusion about something, or even just a question, you always feel comfortable approaching her. Even if she is in the middle of a busy day she will not dismiss you. She will always take time to talk to you. I feel this quality is necessary so she knows that all staff and parents are on the same page about what’s going on in their child's classroom.

Fiona’s mentor teacher has effective intrapersonal and interpersonal personality skills, such as being patient, constructive, helpful, and cooperative. Fiona further mentioned her definition of the qualities of an ECE teacher by referring to her mentor teacher:

Early childhood education teachers need to have many qualities in order to create an environment capable of learning. Positive attitude, patience, having up-to-date education, having the ability to apply this education to practice, having opportunities to develop professionally are just some of the key qualities I feel an early childhood teacher should have. I have witnessed many of these qualities in my mentor teachers within my field experience course, as well as during other observations of centers.

The lead teacher of the classroom in which Diane worked had similar intrapersonal and interpersonal qualities:

I see teachers who embrace and possess the qualities that are essential to being a fantastic early childhood education teacher. There is one particular teacher who is kind, careful, and loving in each conversation and exchange she has with a child. She will sit down or kneel down to see eye level with the young child and will make a point of understanding their concerns and feelings. Sometimes you can see teachers who treat children as though they are merely small persons, to be
regulated and educated. However, this particular teacher wants to know who the child is, what the child wants, and how the child interacts with their peers, family, and other teachers. She is truly an example that I would love and take great pleasure in living up to.

Lilian’s mentor teacher was a model for her to foster children’s socio-emotional development and guide children:

Though it has not had an extremely huge impact on my definition of an early childhood teacher, it has reinforced it in many ways. I have seen the importance of guidance from the practicum teachers as well as the importance of fostering social, emotional and cognitive development in them. Through the activities and games I have witness, I have seen this all and have seen each child benefit from it. Melody observed some instructional qualities in her mentor teacher’s way of teaching:

The most successful learning taking place in an early childhood classroom that I have observed is through the assistance of a teacher who possesses these attributes. During my practicum at the [X] center I observed that the teachers provide a variety of experiences and opportunities for their pre-kindergarten students. As a teacher I hope to provide this to my students as well. I have seen children and know that I as a child learned best through participation in an experience and doing things without assistance.

The participants in the present study were assigned to the mentor teachers who had a good reputation about developmentally appropriate practice. The mentor teachers that the preservice-teachers worked with during their practicum experiences were models of good interpersonal and intrapersonal qualities, instructional methods, and classroom
management strategies. In addition, the mentor teachers became an agent for a change in the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about teaching in early childhood education.

**Teaching Experience**

The preservice-teachers’ teaching experiences prior to or during their college education appeared to be an influential factor in their beliefs about teaching in ECE. In fact, Glen mentioned,

> Once I graduated from high school and became more aware of my interest in young children. I began volunteering, working, and observing in early childhood centers. This experience has allowed me to come into contact with a plethora of various ECE teachers and has forced me to extend my image of the ECE teacher.

Some participants also discussed their experiences in relation to their observations of teaching practices in different early childhood classrooms that they had worked in.

Liz’s rather disturbing observation of a teacher in her classroom made her aware of the qualities an ECE teacher should have:

> I feel that many of my views about ECE teachers and about myself as an ECE teacher are based on past experiences I had as an assistant teacher in a three-year-old classroom. Based on what I observed and experienced from the head teacher, I formed what I feel ECE teachers should do. When I was present in this classroom the teacher was degrading, domineering, impatient, careless, and very inattentive to the children. It was very upsetting for me to work in this room day after day. To see a teacher repeatedly yell at children who were only three, when the
children could not fully understand what they were doing wrong, was very unnerving. Because of the teacher's inability to appropriately respond to the children, and everything that was going wrong in this classroom, I felt it was my responsibility to take on a more active role in this class so that the children would not have to endure such a negative environment. As the summer went on, I began interacting with the children a lot more than the head teacher; and in a way I became a mediator between the children and the head teacher. The head teacher would almost immediately become angry at anything the children did wrong that she did not like. By her overreacting, the students would become more upset, then the class would get even more out of hand. I began intervening in the classroom so that these situations would not occur anymore. In doing this, I developed the view that an ECE teacher should be enthusiastic, caring, expressive, assertive and active in the class, among other qualities. Through this I believe that I did or am building these qualities and my ability to interact within an early childhood classroom.

Kaylee’s work experience helped her understand the important qualities of an ECE teacher: “After working with children of all ages (birth to15) in various settings, it’s vital to provide them with support, guidance, and care for their maximum development.”

Another participant, Diane, mentioned her experience very positively:

I know that I am there [preschool classroom that she works in] to teach, but what I learned rather suddenly was that I was there as a student as well. I found out that although every day I was enrolled in academic courses shaping my future career, I could come to the preschool and learn that play is essential, a smile is a Band-Aid,
and no matter how many spills or accidents there are, we can still recover and have fun.

Although Diane took courses related to working with children, she did not realize that play is a very critical component in young children’s learning until she observed that in the preschool classroom where she worked. Diane was the only participant studying non ELEM/ECE major. Since she wanted to work in the ECE field, she enrolled in the course but did not have to take a course on children’s play which is a core subject required for ELEM/ECE majors.

**College Education**

The participants listed the courses on young children that they had taken previously or were taking at the time the study was being conducted. Table 6.5 shows the courses and the course contents the preservice-teachers took.

Table 6.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>KINES 380</td>
<td>Teaching lesson plans, how to make lesson plans, how to implement fun activities, discussing health issues and signs with varied age groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KINES 126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>HDFS 229</td>
<td>Developmental stages of young children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Courses on Young Children the Participants Had Taken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>a) HDFS 129</td>
<td>a) Intro to human development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) HDFS 229</td>
<td>b) Childhood development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) HDFS 428</td>
<td>c) Advanced early childhood development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) HDFS 429</td>
<td>d) Advanced child development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e) KINES 126</td>
<td>e) Teaching health &amp; safety to children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f) CI 295</td>
<td>f) Observing classrooms &amp; exploring personal beliefs about teaching/childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>a) HDFS-429</td>
<td>a) Discussed gender roles and the effect they have on individuals from birth through adulthood, but focusing on school age children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) HDFS-229</td>
<td>b) Focused on child development from infancy to the beginning of school-age years. Discussed firsts (steps, words) and when they should occur as well as proper emotional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>HDFS-239</td>
<td>Child Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>a) HDFS 229</td>
<td>a) and b) are overview of the development of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) HDFS 428</td>
<td>HDFS 428 is a specific look at the development of infants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) 10 Hours of PA pathways</td>
<td>c) Classes ranged in subjects. One was on infants and toddlers. Another one was on math skills about teaching preschoolers problem solving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>a) ECE 452</td>
<td>a) Community involvement programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) HDFS 229</td>
<td>b) Early child development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>a) ECE 452</td>
<td>a) Focused on programs offered that pertained to younger children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) ECE 479</td>
<td>b) Dealt with child’s play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>a) HDFS 229</td>
<td>a) Learned about physical, mental, and social development of young children from birth/conception-age 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) HDFS 297 A</td>
<td>b) Learned strategies of how to help children mentally &amp; socially through a story hour program. Activities included art, snack, dance, games, songs, and reading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Courses on Young Children the Participants Had Taken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td>a) CI 295</td>
<td>a) Observed in an elementary &amp; secondary school and writing a paper (paper content is not specified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) HDFS 239</td>
<td>b) Learned about the development of adolescents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) EDPSY14</td>
<td>c) Observed an urban elementary classroom for 10 hours and wrote an observation report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaylee</td>
<td>a) ECE 497A</td>
<td>a) Learned about child’s play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) ECE 452</td>
<td>b) and c) Learned about programs for young children (i.e., project approach, Piaget, Montessori, home visiting, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) ECE 453</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>a) ECE 452</td>
<td>a) Covered ECE programs to benefit children either through family involvement or school involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) ECE 497 A</td>
<td>b) Taught about how children learn through play. Discussed the different types of play that children partake in and they learn from these experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loren</td>
<td>PSY 213</td>
<td>The course looked at the mind of infants and children up to the age of 16-20.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilian</td>
<td>HDFS 229</td>
<td>The learning theories of Vygotsky, Piaget, Erickson, development of infants, young children’s learning environments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One can expect to see a similar pattern of courses across the participants who had studied the ELEM/ECE major, except for Diane who was a Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) major. Nevertheless, there appear variations in the courses the participant had taken previously. It’s possible that the participants may not have listed the courses they had been taking during the study or that they may have planned to take some of the courses in the future.

Only two participants mentioned how their college education affected their views about teaching in early childhood education. Kaylee could understand the value of play
through her course work: “After many quality professors and classes, I have come to realize through more of a scientific approach to why things such as play are so essential in a child's life.” Kaylee further explained the effects of the theories and the theorists on her understanding young children:

Throughout my college experience thus far, I have learned about many theorists and theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and many others. The PSU education and development classes have had a great impact on my views now as well. Through Dewey, I have been reinforced with how important experience is in learning. Modeling, positive interactions, exploratory learning, and guided learning, which is emphasized with Vygotsky's ZPD, are all concepts that I believe are important. Erikson and Piaget have taught me how vital it is to know where children are developmentally in order to cater to their needs.

Nina also mentioned, “I have read literature on what a childhood educator should say and do in the classroom which has also altered my opinion.”

Kaylee and Nina were able to create a change in their views as a result of their formal teacher education. Therefore, it is very crucial for ECE teacher-education programs to introduce various perspectives on teaching young children to teacher-candidates so that they can critically analyze different points of view and compare them with their existing beliefs about teaching. The course sequence in an ECE teacher education program should be organized in a way that the teacher-candidates can increase their knowledge to work with young children and their parents, and recognize the intricate relation between different knowledge areas related teaching in ECE.
Inspiration to Choose Teaching as a Profession

This category emerged from the responses the participants gave to Q10 in the questionnaire. The responses and the inspiration points were put into a table (Table 6.6) to visually identify the major factors affecting the preservice-teachers’ decision to choose teaching as a profession.

Table 6.6
Inspiration to Choose Teaching As a Profession

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Inspiration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Both of my parents are teachers, however I have always wanted to be a teacher in the city of Phila. since I was little. I love children and have always thought that I would be able to have a strong impact on their lives.</td>
<td>• Teacher parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Love for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>I had the opportunity to internship a kindergarten class, and by the end of the year I knew I wanted to teach. I had always loved kids and working with them, so it seemed like the perfect profession to pursue</td>
<td>• Teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Love for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>I believe that to change the world, you need to lead by example. I would like to be a positive role model for our youth in America and instill morals and values as well as prepare students for their future goals. The children of this country will care for us in our world age and I’d like to think that I had something to do with our country’s future success.</td>
<td>• Moral and patriotic responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inspiration to Choose Teaching As a Profession

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Inspiration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>When I was in kindergarten, I loved my teacher so much I decided I wanted to be just like her, and that desire has been with me ever since. I’ve always been drawn to children especially very young ones, and it is very easy for me to make a connection with them. I feel most comfortable around children and have babysat, volunteered in a classroom, and worked at a children’s amusement park because these things are enjoyable to me as well. I want to make a difference as a teacher to have my students enjoy my class but walk away having learned something as well and maybe to someone else what my teachers were to me.</td>
<td>• Past kindergarten teacher&lt;br&gt;• Experiences in working with children&lt;br&gt;• Ideals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>I come from a family of educators—both my mom and aunt are retired NYC teachers, my father is an administrative assistant on Long Island. I think that my grandfather taught at the college level. In addition, I’ve always loved working with children. I feel really good about myself when I’m able to help them or teach them something new.</td>
<td>• Teacher parents and relatives&lt;br&gt;• Love for children&lt;br&gt;• Love for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>I have not chosen teaching as a profession but I do enjoy it very much. My career path changed somewhat after I worked at a preschool and I enjoyed it greatly.</td>
<td>• In transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>In my senior year—taught Kindergarten Sunday school class. Realized it was the only way I would like going to work everyday.</td>
<td>• Teaching experience&lt;br&gt;• Love for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>I love to work with children and I have always wanted to teach.</td>
<td>• Love for children&lt;br&gt;• Love for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>Honestly I don’t know exactly what drew me to teaching. I have enjoyed being around children, love to watch them grow and learn. It wasn’t until my high school years that I decided that I wanted to teach young children. During my senior year of high school, I volunteered in four year class and I wanted to become a teacher . . . so here I am!</td>
<td>• Teaching experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Inspiration to Choose Teaching As a Profession

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Inspiration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ally         | A lady in my church is a teacher & she is very creative, she always would let me come into her classroom and set it up. When I entered high school I volunteered to help her. Also, I always had really good and fun teachers through elementary school, therefore inspiring me as well. | • Good teacher models  
• Teaching experience                                                                                       |
| Kaylee       | I have a lot of experience with kids, and I was always complimented on how good I am with kids and that I should really consider being a teacher. Unlike most people, I never had that one teacher that stood out as excellent or my favorite. So, I am inspired to be that excellent teacher at least for some. | • Positive feedback about their teaching  
• Teaching experience                                                                                   |
| Liz          | I had a few very bad teachers in elementary school. When I began realizing the vast difference in teacher quality, it made me want to contribute in a positive way to help kids in need. | • Bad teacher models                                                                                           |
| Loren        | I always loved playing with dolls and my little cousins. I always wanted to be a teacher ever since I was a little girl.                                                                                                                                                                | • Childhood dream                                                                                           |
| Lilian       | I chose teaching because I love being active with children. I have always had a gift with them. I felt it was an extremely important profession.                                                                                                                                     | • Love for children  
• Respect for teaching profession                                                                                   |

Across the participants’ responses, teaching experiences and working with young children appear to be the most influential factors in the preservice-teachers’ decision to become a teacher. Also, love for children, observing their past teachers and their parents who were teachers guided the participants to the teaching profession. Other reasons such as love for teaching, personal and patriotic ideals, respect for teaching, and positive
feedback about their teaching were the inspirations for the teacher candidates of the present study to choose teaching as a profession.

**Teaching Philosophy**

The participants explained their teaching philosophies by envisioning themselves in their future classrooms. For instance, Lilian stated her overall purpose to teach:

As an early childhood educator, I realize that I have them at a pivotal time in their development. To inhibit their growth at this time will only inhibit the growth of the future of our world. I know too well of the lasting impressions that people in your childhood have on you. I hope to be exactly what Rachael Carson stated above, "[an] adult who can share it, rediscovering with him [the child] the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in." If I do this, I know I will have succeeded.

Lilian imagined herself as a change agent and built her teaching philosophy around this belief. Another teacher-candidate who saw her self as a change agent was May: “I want to make a difference as a teacher to have my students enjoy my class but walk away having learned something as well and maybe to someone else what my teachers were to me.” However, May’s image of the child conflicted with her role as a change agent:

The best part about children this young is that they are like little sponges so willing to learn everything that is thrown at them, and they absorb lot of it without even realizing it. As a teacher, I think it's important to remember not to get bogged down with the specifics of what a child is supposed to be learning, and to
instead enjoy the opportunities placed in front of you. Teachers are lucky in that
ey get to play with their class and see the world through a child's eyes each and
every day, and I personally think this is the biggest advantage of teaching.

As discussed in the Chapter 4, perceiving young children as sponges that soak
everything up ignores the fact that children can be selective in what they want to learn.
This idea also disregards the teacher’s skills in creating a learning environment according
to the children’ interests and needs. Furthermore, the child as a sponge will soak up
whatever knowledge the teachers present to the children. Therefore, the teachers should
not worry much about learning, but have fun and play with the children. If the teachers
assume that children soak up knowledge, then they should also consider that just as a
sponge leaks the water it soaked up, young children will forget whatever they learn
unless they are challenged to use their new knowledge.

Nina used the gardening metaphor to describe her image of the parent and the
teacher, and to illustrate her philosophy of teaching. In Nina’s philosophy, building a
safe, trusting, and loving environment for children is a priority:

I hope to create a classroom environment similar to the environment a gardener
provides for their plants. I hope that the children are happy to enter my classroom
and feel safe and loved in the surroundings. My goal is to encourage in them an
enthusiasm for learning and a desire to explore the world around them. If I can
accomplish a little of this, then I have become a gardener for the plantlike
children in my classroom.

Glen chose to employ an eclectic teaching philosophy for her future teaching:
I do not think my teaching style or approach is exactly like any one I have seen. It is more of a combination and modification of many of the styles I have seen. As an ECE teacher, I will foster creativity and explorations, allow time for individual decision making, but also have children work in groups to solve problems and learn from their peers. I will wholeheartedly care for children's well-being when at school, but also when they are at home by involving parents in the education process and offering parent workshops in needed areas. I believe that all children are capable of learning. I will use a variety of teaching techniques that are geared toward different children and learning styles.

Glen was very close to her graduation by the time this study was conducted. Her college education and her work experience with young children guided her to believe that there is no one perfect way of teaching but that a variety of teaching styles can benefit young children. She also gave importance to involving parents and working with them, although the parenting strategy she offered stayed in the second stage, volunteering, of Epstein’s parenting typology.

Diane portrayed rather a romantic vision of herself in her future classroom. This vision was parallel to her romantic child image, the child as a gift:

- I envision myself moving, singing, and dancing with the children in my classroom on a daily basis. I want to experience and discover along with the children so I can understand their sense of wonder and exploration. I want to be playful and exciting in my planning and implementation of lesson plans. I hope to introduce new concepts that engage the children and allow them to be individuals and also be a part of a group . . . . I would like myself to be welcoming and vibrant in my
enthusiasm for meeting and teaching the children . . . . I hope to make them feel safe and nurtured so that they are not nervous or scared to open up to the novelty of school.

The teaching philosophies of the preservice-teachers represented the candidates’ beliefs about all three areas that the present study had focused on: beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE.

Summary

The participants in the present study used different metaphors to represent their images of an ECE teacher. Those images were found to be parallel to the participants’ images of children and parents. The images they reflected originated from the preservice-teachers’ memories of their past teachers. The teacher as a friend and the teacher as caring as a mother are examples of the preservice-teachers’ images of a teacher based on their personal memories of their teachers.

The preservice-teachers’ images of a teacher also revealed the qualities they attributed to an ECE teacher. Certain personality traits such as patience, love for children, flexibility, enthusiasm, and dedication were among the characteristics of an ideal ECE teacher. As well as personality, the participants mentioned instructional qualities an ECE teacher should possess. The knowledge to observe, knowledge of child development and learning theories, planning activities, creativity, knowledge of subject matter, and classroom management skills were important instructional qualities of an ECE teacher that the preservice-teachers cited.
The participants reflected on the factors that affected their beliefs about teaching in ECE. The mentor teachers the preservice-teachers were assigned to during their practicum were models of best practices. The participants’ formal and informal teaching experiences and their college education also seemed to influence their beliefs about teaching.

The preservice-teachers’ decisions to choose teaching as a profession were inspired by their teaching experiences with young children and their past teachers. Love of children and teaching, parents who were teachers, and teaching ideals were among the reasons the participants were inspired to enter the profession of teaching.

Finally, the preservice-teachers depicted themselves in their future classrooms. Their descriptions revealing their philosophies of teaching included their beliefs about children, their parents, and teaching.
The findings that emerged from the coded data in this study are discussed in this chapter in terms of the relations between beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE. Furthermore, in regard to this discussion of the findings, the implications for the field of ECE teacher education are given.

**Images**

The preservice-teachers depicted their images of young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE by using various metaphors.

1. *Images of the Child*: According to the participants’ images, the preservice-teachers were inclined to perceive childhood as a separate stage of development in which young children are worry free and have few responsibilities. This perspective may have led the teacher-candidates to romanticize childhood by using all positive adjectives (e.g., fun, active, energetic). However, the preservice-teachers should consider the reality that many children who are close to school age have to share responsibilities with adults such as taking care of the household and their siblings, and dealing with affective and personal issues in the family. In some cases, children severely lack adult support where they feel neglected, insecure, and unconfident.
Some of the participants’ images of the child (e.g., as boat or blank book) placed him or her in a position where the adults had the sole power for the child’s learning. This belief could prevent future teachers from creating educational environments where young children growing up with minimal adult supervision can reach their optimum development and acquire skills that will enable them to be resilient. Since some participants mentioned the vulnerability of young children to be exposed to the prejudices and biases of the adult world, they seemed to suggest that the power in an adult-child relationship works in favor of adults since they have the power to impose dominant discourses of society on the child. Thus, in order to effectively alter teacher-candidates’ beliefs about young children, an ECE teacher education program must include a content that focuses on analyzing adult-child relations in terms of power issues.

One of the important findings of the present study was that the preservice-teachers chose to preserve their existing images of the child even after seeing the disturbing images of the children (e.g., soldier children, prostitute children, children working, children living in poverty) shown by the investigator during the classroom discussions. Growing up in secluded communities without being aware of such children could explain this outcome in participants’ beliefs. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, change in beliefs is not an easy process (Pajares, 1992; Quine & Ullian, 1978). Therefore, a single course in a teacher education program alone is not enough to create a significant change in the preservice-teachers’ beliefs. Discussions of different images of children and how those images differ from preservice-teachers’ own images as a young child should be consistent throughout entire teacher education program. Movies and documentaries about the realities and the contemporary issues today’s children have to face should be
considered to be a part of the teacher education courses. Preservice-teachers can analyze and discuss those movies from a perspective in which they imagine themselves as teachers who have students with similar issues in their future classrooms. For instance, the 2004 movie “Born into Brothels: Calcuta’s Red Light Kids” by Ross Kauffman and Zana Briski is one of the good examples for such in class discussion. The movie is about a group of children in India whose mothers are prostitute, and who live in impoverishment. In this movie, the children are given opportunities to express themselves through photographing and eventually to go a boarding school.

Additionally, preservice-teachers can be required to complete part of the practicum and field experience in school districts or ECE programs where they can observe the challenges and stresses young children encounter every day. And finally a follow up in class discussion about preservice-teachers’ experiences and changes in their existing images of the young child would be very useful.

2. Images of the Parent: The participants tended to illustrate the role of the parent as a guide, mentor, and a support system that helps the young child reach optimum development. Specifically, the socio-emotional support coming from both father and mother was perceived as a key to a child’s healthy growth. Nevertheless, unlike the participants in the present study, many children in today’s schools come from single parent households. This situation can be perceived as a risk for children in terms of not being able to receive enough socio-emotional support. However, research (Simons, Simons, Brody, & Cutrona, 2004) has indicated that although children with single parents had a lower school adjustment scores than their counterparts with a traditional family structure (e.g., married biologic parents), other agencies such as relatives and extended
family members serve as support systems in the lives of young children. This is a critical point that should be addressed in the content of the teacher education courses in regard to teachers working with parents and families.

Images from nature such as a gardener or roots were also used to represent the parent. While watering the plant and supplying minerals from the roots referred to the knowledge parents teach their children, a critical point that needs to be addressed is that parents have different knowledge and experiences that they contribute to their children’s learning. Therefore, each parent deserves appreciation for the level of his/her contributions to their child’s development and learning. Furthermore, since not every child comes from a traditional family structure, other adults can serve as the roots to sustain the child’s growth by teaching him or her how to be resilient, strong, self-confident, and successful.

The participants’ images of the parent touched on the roles that parents model and teach their children. Modeling for traditional gender roles, teaching the child how to communicate and interact with others, and using prosocial behaviors were among the parents’ responsibilities discussed by the participants.

Parents were perceived by the participants as the first teachers of the child. Their ideas about what the parent as the first teacher teaches to the young child varied, from academic knowledge to social behaviors and values. Although the preservice-teachers expressed this popular notion, which was also frequently emphasized in their teacher education classes, their proposed parent involvement strategies (e.g., volunteering and aiding in the class) did not support the philosophy of ‘parents as first teachers.’ Apparently the preservice-teachers did not perceive the parents as equal partners in the
education of young children since they did not indicate they would give them an active role at school. Hughes and MacNaughten (2000) criticize the attitude in the parenting studies that the knowledge of parents is inadequate for being involved in their children’s education. These researchers stress that this attitude of ignoring the knowledge that families bring to their children’s education can cause the “othering” (or marginalization) of parents. As well as acknowledging the parents’ knowledge, there is a need to understand that some parents have their own needs (e.g., socio-emotional, low self-confidence, sense of failure, etc.) that prevent them from helping their children.

Therefore, preservice-teacher education is a place where teacher candidates learn how to involve parents as partners and appreciate different contexts influencing families’ knowledge backgrounds. ECE teacher education content could emphasize the importance of family input and how to work with the families throughout entire program. Strategies such as analyzing cases of different family situations (e.g., poverty, dysfunction in the family, incarcerated parents, etc.), interviewing families whose family structures do not fit in traditional nuclear family (e.g., biological parents and children live together), and discussion of preservice-teachers’ existing beliefs about parents of young children can be ways to create an awareness and change in teacher candidates’ attitudes toward working with parents. As a matter of fact, the investigator of the present study frequently engages the preservice-teachers in analyzing the family cases published by Harward Family Research Project provided as access free at http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/index.html. During classroom discussions, her students could find an opportunity to reflect their own opinions about those cases as well as listening and making comments about their classmates’ statements.
3. *Images of the ECE teacher*: When describing their images of the ECE teacher, the preservice-teachers in the present study used metaphors similar to those they used to for their images of the parent. For instance, some students used metaphors from nature, such watering, gardening, and sunshine, to represent their image of the ECE teacher as nurturing and encouraging of the child’s growth.

A participant’s description of a teacher as gardener who teaches the children necessary skills to better prepare them for school raises the issue of school readiness. With an increasing focus on specifying standards in pre-kindergarten, teacher education programs must help teacher-candidates become aware of the expectations of school readiness in the early childhood context. School readiness in the early childhood context is described as follows:

Children are ready for school when, for a period of several years, they have been exposed to consistent, stable adults who are emotionally invested in them; to a physical environment that is safe and predictable; to regular routines and rhythms of activity; to competent peers; and to materials that stimulate their exploration and enjoyment of the world and from which they derive a sense of mastery.

(Pianta & La-Paro, 2003, p. 25)

Teacher education programs must have preservice-teachers complete their practicum, field experience, or student teaching in ECE programs that provide high quality education and best practices for young children (Edwards, 1999). In those programs, teacher-candidates should be able to observe how teachers improve and assess children’s school readiness.
Some participants described their images of the teacher as a friend based on memories of their own teachers. Being a friend to children, in terms of effective classroom management, can be confused, however, with creating a friendly classroom atmosphere. As stated by Cook and Young (2004), children are more respectful and receptive to the teachers who guide children’s problem behaviors by demonstrating firm and consistent responses. Therefore, ECE teacher education programs must have preservice-teachers discuss images and experiences of their past teachers to create awareness of effective classroom management. Along with imaging the teacher as a friend, one of the participants identified an ECE teacher as having maternal characteristics. Hobson (2001) found, in his interviews with retired female school teachers, that there is a relationship between the mothering role and female teachers’ perceptions of their profession. He further explains:

There was the classic image of mothering: kindly, nurturing, offering a sense of acceptance, approval, and belonging . . . . Conceivably, the image of the teacher as mother reflects the influences of images of schoolteachers in American culture upon individuals, even on those who taught. (p. 60)

It should not be surprising to see that preservice-teachers integrate into their philosophy of teaching the elements of the mothering image of the teacher that they observed and experienced during their years in schools. The poststructuralist view argues that people live in a world where social roles, identities, and gender-related behaviors have predetermined structures. As a result, children learn to behave in ways that are available to them (Davies, 2003). While the strong belief that “women are better teachers because of their nurturing natures” continues to keep ECE teacher education programs
female dominant, this should be seen as an advantage, rather than as a deficit perspective, to raise an awareness among female teachers of their “nurturing role” by integrating readings, discussions on gender-biased teaching practices, and ECE preservice-teachers’ beliefs about gender roles. Teacher education programs can have teacher-candidates discuss, analyze, and critique the history of the early childhood teaching profession in terms of gender and gender roles to create awareness of how teachers transfer those perceived roles to their own teaching practice. The investigator of the present study as the course instructor benefited from research literature related to gender issues in her teaching. Articles such as “Research in Review. It's More Than Child Development: Critical Theories, Research, and Teaching Young Children” by Ryan and Grieshaber (2004) is a good example of such research addressing issues of gender and identity in early childhood education. In addition, children’s literature that aims to deemphasize traditional gender roles can be introduced to ECE teacher candidates. For instance, “Paper Bag Princes” by Robert Munch describes a princess saving her prince from a dragon as opposed to traditional fairy tales in which female characters are always weak and wait to be saved by male hero. Another story, “Sissy the Duckling” by Harvey Fierstein, is about a male duckling who does not fit in the traditional male profile because he is not interested in sports but rather likes to organize things around him.

In sum, among all the images the participants used, there appeared to be a bidirectional relation between their images of the parent and their images of the ECE teacher. It seems that the images of the two became a lens through which the preservice-teachers in this study perceived their teaching of young children. Their images are reflections of their beliefs about teaching. It can be inferred that those images will inform
teacher educators about how the teacher-candidates structure their relations with young children and their parents in their ECE classrooms.

**Factors Affecting Beliefs**

There were various factors affecting the participants’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE as the study found.

Formal and informal teaching experiences the preservice-teachers had prior to or during their college education greatly influenced their beliefs about children and ECE teaching. However, the participants did not make any strong connection between their prior contacts with children’s parents and their beliefs about parent involvement in ECE. Camp counseling, babysitting, being a teacher’s aid, volunteering, tutoring, and coaching were among the teaching and working experiences the preservice-teachers had with children and their parents. While it is very common that many preservice-teachers have worked with young children prior to or during their teacher education, programs of teaching expect teacher-candidates to transfer the knowledge that they have gained in their formal education to their practice. However, in cases like that of Diane who realized the importance of play through her work experience with children, teacher-candidates might rely only on teaching practices that they observe in their work places. Therefore, it is vital that teacher education programs assess their candidates’ work and teaching backgrounds. By allowing preservice-teachers to discuss their experiences and help them understand the importance of the knowledge they gain in their college education, teacher preparation programs can eliminate the barriers of past work and teaching experiences
that prevent teacher-candidates from transferring their new knowledge to their teaching practice.

The only participant whose major of study was not ELEM/ECE was Diane. Although she expressed her wish to teach in ECE, she had not been required to take the core courses required for the ELEM/ECE major. This point raises the critical issue of various educational backgrounds of early childhood education professionals. ECE teacher education programs should advocate certain standards for preparing professionals to teach ECE. Also, the ECE teacher education content should consider the needs of non-education students who take courses from ECE teacher education programs in order to teach young children.

Memories of the past such as childhood, schooling, teachers, and parents appeared to be greatly influential on the teacher-candidates’ beliefs about young children, parents, and teaching in ECE. Specifically, the positive responses the participants received from the adults surrounding them and their relatively “carefree” childhoods in middle-class households made them perceive childhood as a separate “idealized” stage instead of part of the continuum of the life span. The communities the participants came from influenced their beliefs about how families raise their children. Those communities were mostly middle class, small, and religious. Now, as the communities where children live become diverse, so does the student population. In fact, one of the limitations of the present study was the inability to include preservice-teachers who were diverse in class, race, and language. Since Melody was the only African-American participant of this study, the author felt it unethical to treat her as the “token” black person in the participant group. However, her description of the community where she grew up—although she never
referred directly to her racial background in her responses—motivated the author to raise the issue of ECE teacher-candidates needing to understand family involvement in the school as demonstrated by African-American communities and other diverse groups. As Melody stated,

My parents saw to it that I was actively involved within our community and that I understood the importance of family. Having the influence of my community, my parents, and through the observation of others, I have been able to develop my own image of the parent of a child.

Melody came from a middle-class African American family with two parents, although only 30% of Black families live in the traditional family model (Simons, Simons, Brody, & Cutrona, 2006). The majority of African American children are born to households with single parents (mostly mothers) or live with extended family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts, etc.). In spite of the existing research claiming that non-traditional family structures are risk factors for young children, Simons et al. (2006) found that there is no difference in terms of school adjustment between children who come from married and unmarried families. Diamond and Gomez (2004) indicated that additional risk factors such as socio-economic class discrepancy create negative cumulative effects along with other risk factors on how families are involved in their children’s education. The current research reveals that White working class and African American working class families make less conscious school choices for their children probably because of negative past experiences related to their own schooling. The researchers indicate the facts that historically African American families’ low access to community resources and that working class African-American families live in neighborhoods with more stress double
the obstacles for those parents to be involved in their children’s education. Therefore, based on the findings of the present study, the author suggests that teacher education programs include content introducing the historical and contemporary issues of family involvement. Discussions of beliefs about ethnicity, language, culture, class, and gender, analyzing real life cases, and interviewing families from non-mainstream backgrounds can be ways to prepare future teachers to work with families that have different family structures.

The memories the participants had of their ECE teachers included positive and negative experiences, though mainly positive. The important point that needs to be taken into consideration here by teacher educators is that preservice-teachers’ recollections of their own teachers and their teaching practices may block the teacher-candidates from being open to emerging new trends and strategies on the education of young children. Also, it is likely that preservice-teachers will use their personal memories to validate their observations of existing practices in today’s early childhood education classrooms. Consequently, certain teaching patterns and practices remain unchanged from generation to generation. Therefore, teacher education programs should help preservice-teachers question and analyze their memories of their teachers in relation to the different contexts of education today, such as student diversity, and pedagogical and instructional changes.

The participants also mentioned that their education in college partly affected their images and beliefs about young children and teaching in ECE. Specifically, constructivist theories influenced their teaching philosophies. However, it is hard to find a relation between the participants’ beliefs about parents and what they had learned from their teacher education courses about working with parents. Only a few of the preservice-
teachers had taken a course focusing on working with the parents of young children. Furthermore, although some participants explained the importance of parental involvement, the strategies they proposed did not go beyond having parents serve as volunteers in the classroom. Why participants did not make many referrals to their college education can be explained with how preservice-teachers perceive their plan of study. It is often considered as taking different courses from such and such programs instead of seeing the teacher education as a unified program that has goals. This emphasizes that an ECE teacher education program must help preservice-teachers who choose ECE as their profession understand program goals and how these goals are achieved throughout the courses provided in the teacher education program.

The mentor teachers whom the participants observed during their field practicum in different ECE settings helped them alter their beliefs about “good” teaching in ECE. This point implies that teacher-candidates of ECE deserve to complete their practicum in environments that reflect best practices that help preservice-teachers develop a professional identity based on a solid knowledge of current teaching practices instead of relying mainly on their memories of their previous teachers and their personal qualities and teaching styles as influences on their own.

In sum, factors such as memories of childhood, teachers, work and teaching experiences with children seemed to have affected the participants’ beliefs about young children, parents, and ECE teaching. These factors can be addressed and discussed in ECE teacher-education programs in relation to diverse student populations in order to positively modify the beliefs of future teachers so that they are better prepared for the ECE environment today.
Quality Parenting and Teaching

The reflections of the participants in this study revealed the qualities that they attribute to “good” parents and “good” teachers.

Authoritative parenting appeared to be their most accepted form of parenting style. Darling (1999) indicates that the authoritative parenting style is more common among White middle-class families and is correlated with higher academic achievement regardless of children’s racial backgrounds. Chao (1994) questions the compatibility of Baumrind’s parenting styles (e.g., authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and unengaged) with Asian parenting styles. Baumrind (1966) explains the authoritarian style as follows:

[The] authoritarian parenting style attempts to shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set standard of conduct, usually an absolute standard, theologically motivated and formulated by a higher authority. She [the parent] values obedience as a virtue and favors punitive, forceful measures to curb self-will at points where the child's actions or beliefs conflict with what she thinks is right conduct. She believes in keeping the child in his place, in restricting his autonomy, and in assigning household responsibilities in order to inculcate respect for work. She regards the preservation of order and traditional structure as a highly valued end in itself. She does not encourage verbal give and take, believing that the child should accept her word for what is right. (p. 890)
One who grew up in a Western society might think authoritative parenting would be preferred to the authoritarian style. However, Chao (1994) points out that different parenting styles can be interpreted and practiced in other ways by diverse cultures. For example, the authoritarian style that many Asian parents practice is rooted in the context of Confucian philosophy which emphasizes respect for the elderly, following and obeying adults’ rules, and working hard, whereas the authoritarian parenting style in the Western context originated from “evangelistic Christian values . . . [which] stresses ‘domination’ of the child, or the ‘breaking of the child’s will’, because of the idea of ‘original sin’ (i.e., the concept of guilt attached to the infant by reason of deprivation of his original nature)” (Chao, p. 1113). Considering the increasing numbers of immigrants in the United States, it should not be surprising to see that many parents’ parenting styles conflict with those of the teachers, many of whom are mainstream. At this point, preservice teacher education programs have a great responsibility to introduce teacher-candidates to child-raising practices in different cultures. One example to achieve this purpose could be to show images of different family structures and family rituals in different cultures. Books and articles on child raising practices could be introduced to preservice-teachers. “World of Babies: Imagined Childcare Guides for Seven Societies” by Judy S. DeLoache is a good example of such books describing child raising practices in different cultures. In addition, a discussion about how their beliefs about parents and parenting differ from those who are culturally different could benefit the preservice-teachers to transform their preexisting beliefs about parents of young children.

The participants’ descriptions of the authoritative parenting style were found to be parallel with the personality traits of an ECE teacher that the participants identified.
Mainly, being patient, loving, caring, kind, energetic, and creative were some of the common adjectives the participants used to describe their ideal parenting and teaching traits. One participant’s reflection illustrates how preservice-teachers of ECE can confuse the role of parent and teacher, “While children are so young, I believe teachers must be supporters, caregivers, nurturers, teachers, and the child's parents away from home.”

When very young students are considered, there is a tendency to confuse the teacher’s role with the parent’s role. The ECE teacher-education program should allow teacher-candidates to discuss what distinguishes the professional roles of a teacher from the teacher’s role as a parent. Teachers care for and teach young children in the school environment where certain criteria, standards, regulations, and theoretical knowledge instruct them to plan and program according to the children’s individual needs and interests. On the contrary, there are no set standards of parenting or how to raise children. The handbooks and guides on parenting and child-raising cannot go beyond making suggestions to people.

Further qualities of an ECE teacher described by the participants included having instructional knowledge such as familiarity with theories of child development and learning, classroom management skills, and teaching values. Stott and Bowman (1996) explain how theories can be used in teaching:

Theories can serve as a template for empathy—they help us hypothesize about the child’s point of view. Frequently, in order to be personally helpful to a child, teachers need to understand something of the child’s subjective experiences, of his or her motives, affect and the meaning of his or her experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations. One use of theory is to work deductively from general
principles of a theory to the details of a particular child . . . a teacher can be helped to follow the child’s particular developmental path in a way that focuses on search strategies rather than on answers or speculations about the timing of clinical origin. (p. 184)

To help teacher candidates benefit from the theories of child development and learning requires an effective teacher education content that builds a connection between theory and macro-level structures (e.g., cultural beliefs, values, language, gender roles, politics, economical structure, historical events, and class), which impact young children’s lives.

The participants had variations in their responses regarding classroom management skills. While some relied on the memories of how their teachers guided their behaviors, some had rather romantic views about behavior guidance, thinking that having a positive appearance and creating a fun classroom will make children behave well. Also, modeling prosocial skills, being firm and consistent, and praising children were among the classroom management skills the participants proposed. Part of an ECE teacher education program should allow preservice-teachers to observe best practices of classroom management in early childhood education classrooms. The teacher-candidates should be able to integrate methods of behavior guidance into the lesson plans they prepare for their practicum experiences. Otherwise, there will be no end to the stories of ECE preservice-teachers who did not know how to handle children’s behavior problems while trying to perform their “perfect” activity plans in their practicum.

An important finding of the present study was that the preservice-teachers’ descriptions of the qualities of an ECE teacher reflected a strong focus on personality traits while showing a weak focus on academic skills. This finding supports the research
indicating similar findings in the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about teaching. The important implication of this finding for ECE teacher education is to involve preservice-teachers in discussions about what makes an effective ECE teacher. For instance, the article, “Research in Review. Beliefs: The Heart of Teaching” by Vartuli (2005), explains how teachers’ self efficacy affects children’s learning and teaching practice. The investigator of the present study includes a discussion about teachers’ self efficacy in the courses that she teaches. Her students discuss the characteristics of teachers with high self-efficacy versus low self-efficacy. During those discussions, the teacher candidates recognize that teachers who have high self-efficacy display strong academic knowledge and that they do not hesitate to seek knowledge when they feel inadequate in a particular subject.

Another finding of the present study was that although the majority of the participants pursued their education degree in ELEM/ECE major, the courses on child development that they took previously varied. Mainly they seemed to prefer to take those courses from another college since the courses with similar content were not available in their teacher education programs. At this point, this study implies that the perception about teaching young children may vary between the ECE teacher education programs and the programs of different colleges that the preservice-teachers take courses from. As this situation may create a confusion in preservice-teachers, a change in preservice-teachers’ beliefs about teaching may not be a success. All parties that are responsible in education of teacher candidates need to cooperate and form a shared understanding in their goals to educate future teachers.
In sum, an authoritative parenting style was favored by the participants of the present study. This finding raises the need for an ECE teacher education program to address the issues that might rise from preservice-teachers’ different understandings of child-raising and parenting practices. Also, such a teacher-education program should allow preservice-teachers to discuss the professional roles that distinguish them from other roles they might perform in their teaching. On the other hand, the use of ECE theories should consider diverse issues in young children’s lives. Finally, teacher-candidates should be able to practice their knowledge of behavior guidance during their practicum or field experiences.

**Relations in Beliefs**

As discussed in the previous section, similar patterns appear across the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE. Figure 7.1 presents these relations in the participants’ beliefs about young children. Different factors have contributed to the participants’ images of the young child: the preservice-teachers’ previous teaching experiences with young children in formal and informal settings, their own childhood memories and the household they lived in; how their teachers, parents, and peers responded to their actions as a young child, how they perceived their own images of teachers and parents, and finally the knowledge they gained during their college education. The preservice-teachers’ images helped them reveal what they believed about young children’s learning. If there can be a comparison between these factors, however, their childhood memories and how others responded to their actions
outweighed their college education. This is an important implication, suggesting that the ECE teacher education program give preservice-teachers an opportunity to analyze their childhood images and see how those memories have a place in the preservice-teachers’ interpretations of children’s learning. This is especially important because of the likelihood that these future teachers will use their knowledge of children’s learning in creating learning environments for young children in early childhood settings.
Figure 7.1. Relations in beliefs about young children
Figure 7.2 explains the relations among the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about parents. The factors affecting their beliefs about parents were the preservice-teachers’ experiences in working with the parents of young children during their teaching experiences and the communities where the participants grew up and observed their own parents’ and others’ child-raising methods. Those factors helped preservice-teachers build their images of the child’s parent. As they explained their images, the participants stated the ways they think parents should be involved in their children’s education. The participants also described the attributes of quality parenting. All these elements
contributed to the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about involving parents in their child’s education.

This study revealed that only a few participants took courses focusing on working with the parents. Therefore, it is likely that most of these preservice-teachers can only rely on their beliefs about parents as shaped by their experiences when making decisions about parent involvement. The participants remembered how their parents and communities were involved in the education of their children. The type of parental involvement the preservice-teachers suggested was limited to aiding or volunteering in the classroom. As is the case in many teacher education programs (Shartrand et al., 1997), preservice-teachers do not receive even a single, full, required course that focuses on working with the parents of the children. Thus, this study implies that an effective ECE teacher education program should offer courses consisting of content on working with families with backgrounds that are different from those of the preservice-teachers.

Figure 7.3 shows the relations among the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about teaching in ECE. The findings of the present study showed that various factors such as the teaching styles of their own ECE teachers, teaching experiences with young children in formal and informal settings, and their college education affected the preservice-teachers’ images of the ECE teacher. Once the teacher-candidates discovered their images, it led them to describe the qualities of their ideal image of an ECE teacher. Intrapersonal and interpersonal personality traits, instructional knowledge, classroom management skills, and mostly importantly, love for children were among the qualities that the participants attributed to an ECE teacher. Finally, all those elements along with
their inspiration to choose teaching as a profession contributed to the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about how they would like to teach in their future classrooms.

This study suggests that there is a relation between preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, the parents, and teaching in ECE. Figure 7.4 shows how the preservice-teachers’ belief structures affect their philosophies of teaching young children.
Figure 7.4. Effects of teachers’ beliefs on children.

Various factors such as parents, past teachers, memories of childhood, teaching and working experience with children and their families, and their college education have had an impact on the preservice-teachers’ beliefs. Their ideas about parent involvement and their decisions to create a teaching and learning environment are informed by their beliefs. Therefore, the findings from this study provide bountiful evidence for including a discussion of the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about the child, the parent, and ECE teaching in the teacher education curriculum. Discussing their personal beliefs also
allows teacher candidates to understand where the beliefs and the theoretical knowledge they have gained separate and merge.

In conclusion, the school is the first and foremost place to deliver the values of a culture (McLaren, 2003). In the school system, there is a more critical element: the teacher. The teacher is the one who delivers those values to students through his/her teaching practices. Therefore, it is very important for teacher education programs to create an environment that enables ECE preservice-teachers to discuss, question, and analyze their beliefs about children, their parents, and the teaching profession. Brookhart and Freeman (1992) suggest that teacher education programs tend to reinforce preexisting beliefs rather than challenge or help the teacher-candidates to change their beliefs, conceptions, and perceptions.

The program designers of ECE teacher preparation can create more effective instruction that can help education students challenge and alter any stereotypic thinking that they might have brought to their teacher education program. With such instruction, students can see the potential connections between their existing beliefs and their teaching practices. Also, the preservice-teachers can realize that teachers are decision makers who are also responsible for children who come from different cultural backgrounds. Unless the preservice-teachers are made aware of their preexisting conceptions, it is likely that teacher education programs will continue to produce teachers who lack the skills to understand and respond to the needs of a diverse student population.
Suggestions for Teacher Education

The present study, based on its findings, suggests the following points for ECE teacher education:

1. The present study found that the preservice-teachers’ existing images of the young children influenced the ways that they perceived teaching young children. Therefore, this study implies that an effective ECE teacher education program considers teacher candidates’ beliefs about young children that they formed through their past experiences.

2. To create a change in beliefs, ECE teacher education programs can have preservice-teachers discuss their existing perceptions of young children through watching movies and documentaries, analyzing photographs and real life cases.

3. The participants of the present study came from middle-class households where they had adults who were consistent in responding to their growth. Their familial backgrounds affected the ways that they expected the parents of the young children should be involved in the education of their children. This study suggests that in the absence of effective goals set throughout an ECE teacher education program to train teacher candidates to acknowledge all the parents with different backgrounds as full partners, the preservice-teachers will continue to rely on the images and the models of parenting and parent involvement that they observed in their families and communities. Therefore, the importance of working with
parents should be emphasized in every course content in a teacher education program as well as designating a course focusing only on working with parents.

4. Preservice-teachers should be given opportunities to discuss how their images of the parent and parenting differ from those observed in different family structures in today’s schools. The teacher-candidates should be made aware of the different needs the parents might bring with them.

5. Interviewing with families that have nontraditional structure, analyzing real life cases, discussing movies and documentaries focusing on various challenging issues (e.g., abuse, violence, lack of health support, poverty, homelessness, death, disability, etc.) that can be observed in the lives of families and young children could be some strategies to broaden preservice-teachers’ perceptions of parents, and create a change in preservice-teachers’ beliefs about parents of young children.

6. The findings of the present study showed that preservice-teachers tended to mix an ECE teacher’s role with mothering. This may be because the teaching profession has always been a female’s job as attributed by society. An effective teacher education program can address this issue affecting how ECE preservice-teachers who are mainly female perceive practice of teaching. Involving preservice-teachers in discussions about their perceived gender roles and how ECE teachers reflect those perceived gender roles in their teaching practice, assigning articles, and having them observe recent practices in ECE programs can be strategies to create a professional teaching identity in teacher candidates.
7. In the present study, participants’ memories of their ECE teachers were influential in the way they described the qualities of an ECE teacher. ECE teacher education programs should consider the powerful effect of those memories in preservice-teachers’ perceptions of teaching. Highlighting the goals of the teacher education program, integrating discussions about the similarities and differences between their past teachers’ practices and the teaching models reflected in their teacher education program, observing existing teaching practices, and reflecting on them can be some ways to start a change in preservice-teachers’ beliefs about teaching in ECE. Also assigning preservice-teachers to mentor teachers who are innovative, open, and supportive of teacher-candidates’ ideas can help preservice-teachers alter their images and beliefs about the ECE teacher and teaching.

8. The participants of the present study stressed more on the personality traits in the qualities of an ECE teacher than the instructional and academic knowledge. This finding suggests that the ECE teacher education programs should emphasize that an ECE teacher’s good personality will not be sufficient to help young children reach to their optimal development unless the teacher has a strong academic knowledge. Assigning articles about effective ECE teaching and working on activity plans in which preservice-teachers can use what they learned about planning, instruction and classroom management can be ways to help teacher candidates understand the importance of having a strong academic knowledge as one of the qualities of effective teaching.
Suggestions for Further Research

The investigator of the present study suggests five different directions for future research on preservice-teachers’ beliefs. In the following paragraphs, these directions for future research are discussed.

The findings of the present study contributed to help eliminate the gap in the research literature about ECE preservice-teachers’ beliefs. However, one of the limitations of this study was the inability to include participants who were racially, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse. Therefore, the investigator suggests a future study with preservice-teachers from racially, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse backgrounds. Also, the fact that the majority of the preservice-teachers pursuing their degrees in ECE were female limited any effort to find male ECE teacher candidates to participate in the study. Hence, such a study should also include male preservice-teachers who plan to teach early childhood, but who are not necessarily majoring in ECE.

The present study focused on discovering ECE preservice-teachers’ existing beliefs, which they formed previously. The study also showed implications about how existing beliefs may affect preservice-teachers’ professional attitude once they start their career in the school system. A future study can discover and observe ECE preservice-teachers’ beliefs from their entrance to teacher education program until their graduation. Such a study could provide important insights about whether there are any changes in beliefs over time, and the effects of college education in changing and altering preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE.
This research, which can be conducted as longitudinal study, can show what aspects of the teacher education work or do not work in changing preservice-teachers’ beliefs. Field of teacher education can benefit from such study to review their programs’ features in order to have preservice-teachers change their previously formed beliefs.

The present study perceived the preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE as a pedagogical triangle. The research findings of the study suggested a relation between preservice-teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE. What is not known is if there are any relations between experienced ECE teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE. A future study could compare both groups by focusing on the same elements of their pedagogical triangle (e.g., children, their parents, and teaching in ECE) in their beliefs. Such study could provide important insights about if there are differences in the factors affecting experienced and preservice teachers’ beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE.

The findings of the present study showed that preservice-teachers did not directly refer to their college education as a factor affecting their beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE. The investigator suggests that teacher-education programs are unaware whether they are able to change teacher-candidates’ belief systems that they formed previously. A future research study could investigate what “creating a change in preservice-teachers’ beliefs” mean for ECE teacher educators. Also such research could be conducted to learn how ECE teacher-educators’ beliefs affect their teaching practices in college classrooms. Furthermore, this future research could be
conducted across different types of ECE teacher education institutions (e.g., two-year, four-year).

The research findings of the present study can only be generalized to the teacher candidate population in United States of America. However, the investigator of this study suggests that beliefs are universal characteristics of a human being, and that the teacher candidates in other countries bring their own beliefs that they formed through their culture and past experiences into their teacher education programs. Therefore, it is worthy to conduct a study comparing different populations of preservice-teachers from other countries to those living in United States of America in terms of their beliefs about young children, their parents, and teaching in ECE. Such a study would help understand the commonalities and differences in beliefs about teaching throughout different cultures. When the increasing immigrant population in the United States is considered, learning about how different cultures perceive teaching young children and involving parents become important information to share in teacher education programs so that teacher candidates can become aware of the expectations of families with diverse background from teachers and schools in terms of teaching their children as well as involving parents in education of their children.
REFERENCES


http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v1n2/edwards.html


http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v3n1/raths.html


http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/pubs/onlinepubs/skills/index.html


Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: ECE preservice teachers’ beliefs, perceptions, and images of young children, their parents, and ECE teaching

Principal Investigator: Jale Aldemir
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Co-investigator: Eugenio Longario Saenz
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1. Purpose of the Study:
   This investigation will examine following points:
   a) The factors (e.g., lived experiences, education, culture, family) influencing ECE preservice teachers’ beliefs, perceptions, images of young children, their parents, and ECE teaching,
   b) Metaphors that ECE preservice teachers use to describe young children, their parents, and ECE teacher,
   c) Effectiveness of one of the introductory courses of ECE teacher education program in discovering preservice teachers’ preexisting beliefs, perceptions, and images of young children, their parents, and ECE teaching.

2. Procedures to be followed: If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to answer a questionnaire and complete ECE 451 course assignments (e.g., writing reflection journals, participating in class activities, and preparing observation reports). Regarding ECE 451 course assignments, this study will not bring any extra work load to you. If you do not agree to take part in this study, you will still complete ECE 451 course assignments. None-participation will not cause any reduction in your grades.

3. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

4. Duration: The class time- three hours per week, 15 weeks per semester.
5. **Statement of Confidentiality:** To provide your confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used instead of your real name. Questionnaires, journals, artifacts, observation reports will be kept in a lockable cabinet, in a locked office, and will be accessible only to the principal investigator of the research team. In the event of publication of this research or presentation at a conference or in any educational setting, no personally-identifying information will be disclosed.

The Office for Research Protections and the Social Science Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review records related to this project.

6. **Right to Ask Questions:** Further questions should be directed to Eugenio Longario Saenz or Dr. Thomas D. Yawkey until the end of the semester. After that, all questions should be directed to Jale Aldemir or Dr. Thomas D. Yawkey. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact The Pennsylvania State University’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

7. **Compensation:** None

8. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to participate in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study, and the guidelines outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent for your records.

______________________________________________
Participant Signature       Date

______________________________________________
Person Obtaining Consent       Date
Appendix B

ECE 451 Fall 2005
Student Questionnaire

Name: ___________________ Current Semester standing: ___________________
Email: ___________________

Gender: M  F (circle)     Age Range:  18- 20, 21-23, 24- 30

Degree Sought:_______________

Ethnic Background:   ________________

Section A: General Information

1. Are you currently employed?  yes ___ no ____ (check)
   If so, briefly describe your job, i.e., duties and responsibilities.

2. Please describe your most recent educational experiences or employment related to education of young children.

3. List any course on young children that you have taken previously and briefly describe content of the course/s.
4. Please describe your most recent educational experiences or employment related to working with the families and/or parents of young children.

5. List any course on working with parents that you have taken previously and briefly describe content of the course/s.

6. List your learning expectations in this course?

7. List any theory/theories or theoretical perspectives that you have learned previously in other courses

8. About which of the theories and perspectives listed in 7 above do you feel most knowledgeable? Explain briefly.
9. Which one or ones of the theories and perspectives listed in 7 above to you belief is closer to your teaching philosophy in terms of teaching young children? Explain briefly.

Section B. Background Information:

10. What inspired you to choose teaching as a profession? Explain briefly.

11. Did you attend any daycare or preschool when you were a young child?

12. What is the earliest memory or memories that you can recall that is/are related to your early education such as in daycare, preschool, kindergarten or first grade?

13. What is the earliest memory or memories that you can recall about your teachers? How would describe your teacher’s way of teaching and working with you and young children?
14. List the qualities that you think an ECE teacher should have.
   Explain briefly.

15. Do you have any concern or concerns about teaching young children?
   Explain it/them briefly.

16. How would you describe your parents’ or your family’s way of raising their child/ren? Explain briefly.

17. List the qualities that you think a parent of young child should have, show and use with young children.

18. Do you have any concern or concerns about working with the parents of young children? Explain it/them.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Jale Aldemir
Appendix C

Contents of Journal Entries

1. “Image of the Young Child”

Describe the image of young child that you want to teach in the future. As a future ECE teacher, explain what might be influential in forming this image (e.g., people, family, beliefs, cultural and social factors, your childhood, peers, siblings, teachers, etc.).

2. “Image of the Parent of the Young Child”

Describe the image of parent of young child that you think you might be dealing with in your teaching profession. Explain what might be influential in forming this image (e.g., people, community, family, beliefs, cultural and social factors, etc.) Reflect on your childhood memories.

3. “Image of the ECE Teacher”

Describe the image of ECE teacher that you want to be in the future. As a future ECE teacher, explain what might be influential in forming this image (e.g., people, family, beliefs, cultural and social factors, teachers, etc.). Think this as a self discovery.
VITA

Jale Aldemir

EDUCATION
Ph.D. 2007  The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA  
Curriculum and Instruction, Emphasis in Early Childhood Education

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B.S 1994  Inonu University, Malatya, Turkey  
Psychological Counseling and Guidance

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
01/2007-Present  Instructor of ECE, Mount Olive College, Mount Olive, NC

08/2003-05/2006  Teaching Assistant of ECE, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

PUBLICATIONS

PRESENTATIONS
