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# Perspectives of Mentor Teachers for Early Childhood Teacher Preparation

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College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Shannon J. Rivera

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

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by

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MA, New Mexico State University, 2009

BS, Western New Mexico University, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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October 2020

## Abstract

Early childhood (EC) teacher education programs and public-school partnerships have broadened preparation of preservice teachers by providing more learning opportunities during preservice field experiences. These experiences require mentoring from highly qualified supervising teachers. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore mentors' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor EC preservice teachers in a 4-year university laboratory school. Ambrosetti's theory of mentor preparation guided this study. The research question addressed mentor teachers' perspectives of their mentoring qualifications for EC preservice teachers. A snowball sample of 8 mentor teachers, with at least 4 years' experience mentoring EC preservice teachers, volunteered to participate in this study. Semistructured interview data were analyzed thematically using open and axial coding strategies to develop themes. Participants stated that building relationships with and creating a secure learning climate for preservice teachers, plus possessing mentoring knowledge are necessary in the mentoring role. All participants agreed that building communication skills with preservice teachers was an area they needed support from school administrators and professors in EC teacher preparation programs. It is recommended that administrators and professors offer training to develop EC mentors' knowledge, dispositions, and skills of mentoring and these components are delineated in the qualifications for the role of mentor teacher. This endeavor could contribute to positive social change if stakeholders provide mentor teachers with opportunities to develop their knowledge, dispositions, and skills that enhances their mentoring qualifications to prepare effective EC teachers.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to the loving memory of my dad, Richard L. Jones "Grandad" (1947-2014). He taught me to put God first, to always have a playful spirit, to have compassion, and "treasures" in life can be found in the most unexpected places. His creativity in story writing, poetry, music, painting and drawing has inspired me to pursue creating and enjoying beauty in the world. His unspoken elevated expectations encouraged me to challenge myself to the unthought of outcomes. He gave me the courage to trust, have faith, and to close my eyes, spread my arms, and fly.

*Life is not measured by the breaths we take but by the moments that take our breath away* ~ Maya Angelou

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First and foremost, I owe all the glory, honor, and praise to God. **PSALMS 28:7**

*The Lord is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him, and I am greatly helped;*

*Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, And my song will praise Him.*

I am blessed to be surrounded by the love and encouragement of my family.

Thank you to my husband, Steve, for his sacrifices to provide me with this opportunity

and continuously learning and growing together. Thank you to our children: Isaiah, for

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, now known as Every Student Succeeds Act (Department of Education [DOE], 2017), transformed education law to include learning beginning in preschool. The Obama administration's goal with the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge was to increase access to high-quality preschools. Although the Every Student Succeeds Act recognizes that access is important, it emphasized that high-quality learning experiences should be consistent from birth through third grade. The DOE's goal for this continuum of learning is to improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for children (DOE, 2017). This new focus of including preschool requires a transformation of early childhood teacher preparation programs to prepare effective educators (Institute of Medicine [IOM] & National Research Council [NRC], 2015; Kupila, Ukkonen-Mikkola, & Rantala, 2017). This necessary transition requires professional learning, policies, and practices related to the development of high-quality early childhood educators (IOM & NRC, 2015; LiBetti, 2018; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2015). Teacher preparation programs and public-school partnerships are broadening the preparation of preservice teachers by providing more powerful learning opportunities through mentoring during clinical field experiences (NCATE, 2015; Nolan & Molla, 2018).

In Chapter 1, I identify a problem with qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. A need for further research regarding mentor teachers' perspectives of qualifications to mentor was determined. I used a basic qualitative research design to study this issue. Data collection and analysis plan were conceptualized to include

interview data that were thematically analyzed using open and axial coding strategies. Findings from this study may provide information about qualifications for mentoring preservice teachers and may support decision making for early childhood teacher preparation programs.

## Background

Mentoring is a critical component of clinical field experiences (Chipato, 2017; Henning, Gut, & Beam, 2015; Muhling, 2015; Vumilia & Semali, 2016). Efforts to improve teacher education have focused on the importance of well-supervised clinical field experience through mentoring (Henning et al., 2015; Muhling, 2015; National Council on Teacher Quality [NCTQ], 2018; Vumilia & Semali, 2016). Mentoring is an essential feature for providing guidance and support to preservice teachers (Childre & Van Rie, 2015; Muhling, 2015). However, mentoring is complex (Arshavskaya, 2016; Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; Tomlinson, 2019) and requires multifaceted roles (dos Reis & Braund, 2019) and specific knowledge, skills, dispositions (Schachter, 2015), and attitudes (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). Preservice teachers require mentoring by highly qualified mentor teachers who have been prepared to function in this role (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015; NCATE, 2015; Ronfeldt, Brockman, & Campbell, 2018).

To be highly qualified, mentor teachers must have specialized mentoring skills (dos Reis & Braund, 2019) along with the foundational abilities of building trust, establishing rapport, communicating effectively, and providing critical feedback through reflective practices to early childhood student teachers (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; NCATE, 2015; Savage, Cannon, & Sutters, 2015). According to Ronfeldt et al. (2018),

mentor teachers, who are instructionally effective with students, are more effective mentors of preservice teachers. In contrast, findings in Arshavskaya's (2016) study indicated mentor's teaching experience alone does not translate to professional growth in preservice teachers. Mentors should be certified teachers (NCATE, 2015), selected based on experience, tenure, and instructional effectiveness, and furthermore be skilled in mentoring (Ronfeldt et al., 2018). Mentor teachers should model effective teaching (Muhling, 2015) and instructional support (Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel, 2019) through sharing knowledge and experience (Kahraman & Kuzu, 2016). Mentor teachers need to have skills for providing constructive criticism and feedback (McGraw & Davis, 2017). Kahraman and Kuzu (2016) indicated that mentor teachers need to understand how to support preservice teachers to develop self-confidence and communication skills. Providing emotional support is also a major component of mentoring (Vumilia & Semali, 2016). Research by Jean-Sigur, Bell, and Kim (2016) and Chipato (2017) supported the need for mentor teachers to meet diverse cultural challenges. The complexity of the requirements to fulfil a mentor teacher's role should not be taken lightly (dos Reis & Braund, 2019). Findings from a study conducted by dos Reis and Braund (2019) recommended investing in mentor training and developing a system of support to train and allow mentor teachers time to practice for their role.

## Problem Statement

Mentor teachers are often unsure of how to mentor, they lack systematic training, and they are unprepared for the interactions they need to engage in to support early childhood teacher preparation (Arshavskaya, 2016; Chipato, 2017; Henning et al., 2015; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015). Researchers agreed that teachers are expected to mentor

preservice teachers with little or no training (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015; Muñoz, Boulton, Johnson, & Unal, 2015; NCATE, 2015). Members of NCATE (2015) and the NCTQ (2018) have agreed there is a need for mentor teachers to understand how to mentor for preparation of early childhood preservice teachers.

There is minimal research on mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers (Hobbs & Stovall, 2015). Gandhi and Johnson (2016) and dos Reis and Braund (2019) agreed there is a need for more extensive research highlighting mentor teachers' perspectives on the mentoring process to improve preservice teacher preparation. Nielsen et al. (2017) researched mentor teachers' motivations and challenges when working with preservice teachers and indicated further research is necessary for understanding mentors' individual needs to support growth in their mentoring abilities. Lafferty (2018) acknowledged that the lack of preparation for mentor teachers is a long-standing problem in teacher education and recommended further research targeted at assessing the influence and effectiveness of varying types of preparation for work with preservice teachers. The changes in teacher education with increased emphasis on the quality of clinical field experiences (NCATE, 2015; Nolan & Molla, 2018) has led to a broadening of the mentor teacher role. The expansion of this role calls for decision makers to have a deeper understanding of the mentor teacher's experience (Fives, Mills, & Dacey, 2016; IOM & NRC, 2015).

Teacher preparation programs are dependent on mentor teachers, who support early childhood teacher development (NCTQ, 2018) in classroom settings. Preservice teachers require mentoring by highly qualified mentor teachers who have been prepared to function in this role (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015; NCATE, 2015;

Ronfeldt et al., 2018). There is a need for preparation of mentor teachers for this role (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015; NCATE, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2018). In this study, I explored mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to effectively mentor to prepare early childhood preservice teachers.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers in a 4-year university laboratory school. Mentoring is used as an approach in clinical field experiences of early childhood teacher preparation to assist in the practical development (Ambrosetti, 2014; LiBetti & Bellwether, 2018). A basic qualitative approach was used to explore participants' perceptions and experiences in connection to a practical problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I examined perspectives of mentor teachers who supervise and support the development of early childhood preservice teachers completing their clinical field experiences in the context of a 4-year early childhood teacher preparation program. Preservice teachers complete clinical field experiences to complete a 4-year early childhood degree in the university laboratory site classrooms. Each classroom of the study site was structured with a lead teacher, teacher assistant, and instructional assistant.

Data were collected through semistructured interviews with mentor teachers. I used a basic qualitative approach when examining the mentoring phenomenon in the context of the preservice teacher preparation program. In this study, I explored mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. The findings may be used to expand understanding of qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers.

**Research Question**

I explored mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. The following research question was the focus of this study:

What are mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers in a 4-year university laboratory school?

**Conceptual Framework**

The three components from Ambrosetti's (2012) theory for preparation for mentor teachers were used to guide this study. Mentor teachers' perspectives need further investigation to develop knowledge of their qualification to mentor early childhood preservice teachers (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Gandhi & Johnson, 2016; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015; Lafferty, 2018; Nielsen et al., 2017).

Ambrosetti's (2012) theory for preparation of mentor teachers is defined by three components of mentoring that are interconnected to develop a holistic mentoring relationship. The three components of mentoring defined by Ambrosetti are contextual, developmental, and relational components (2012). Mentor teachers construct knowledge based on their developmental and individual experiences using these components (Ambrosetti, 2012). The contextual component concentrates on the circumstances of where and how the mentoring relationship occurs. The contextual component of mentoring preservice teachers focuses on the skills and functioning within the school (Ambrosetti, 2012). The developmental component focuses on the specific roles the mentor teacher takes on to assist the preservice teacher in the development of knowledge and dispositions to be an effective teacher. The learning needs of the preservice teachers

should shape the interactions that occur within the relationship (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010). The relational component of mentoring focuses on the nature of the relationship between the mentor teacher and preservice teacher (Ambrosetti, 2012). This experience allows both participants to share, contribute to, and receive benefits. The mentor teacher takes on specific roles within the relationship, which include supporting the preservice teacher, being a colleague and/or friend, and guiding the preservice teacher within the learning context (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010).

Mentor teachers use all three components during the process of mentoring preservice teachers. The components are interconnected and create a holistic approach to mentoring (Ambrosetti, 2012). The mentoring components described by Ambrosetti (2012) and Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) support research that suggests roles and approaches that take place in the context of mentoring. Research supports theory that mentoring is a critical component of clinical field experiences (Chipato, 2017; Henning et al., 2015; Muhling, 2015; Vumilia & Semali, 2016). The mentoring components frame the process of the mentor teacher's implementation of knowledge and skills that contribute to the preservice teachers' experience (Ambrosetti, 2012; Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010).

I used this conceptual framework to explore the perspectives of mentor teachers regarding their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers in a 4-year university laboratory school because Ambrosetti (2012) identified components of mentoring interconnect to develop a holistic mentoring relationship. I used the mentoring components identified by Ambrosetti to design the research question to focus on qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. I used the framework of

Ambrosetti's theory of mentor teacher preparation during data collection to develop a detailed view of mentor teachers' perspectives. The framework constructs were used in data analysis to support or refute the findings. A thematic analysis of the data was completed using open and axial coding to identify the core codes, themes, and subcategories. I documented mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers by using the social constructivist approach. Thus, Ambrosetti's theory of mentor teacher preparation helped me frame this study as well as analyze the findings.

## Nature of the Study

A basic qualitative research design was used to explore participants' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Qualitative research is based on the methodological pursuit of understanding the ways people see, view, approach, experience, and make meaning of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research methods are used when general or probability information is sought on opinions, attitudes, views, beliefs, or preferences (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016). Researchers use a basic qualitative research design to answer questions about experience, meaning and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the participant (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The goal of a qualitative research study is to uncover and understand the experience of the phenomenon (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The phenomenon of this study is qualifications to mentor preservice teachers from the participants' perspectives. A qualitative design was appropriate for helping to identify the nature of mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood

preservice teachers (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) in a 4-year university laboratory setting.

There are many different methods used to collect data in qualitative research. Interviews are a qualitative research data collection method used by the researcher to identify how people understand their world and their lives (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). A qualitative interview provides the opportunity for communication of others' experiences, feelings, and hopes about the world they live in (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). I conducted semistructured interviews to collect data on similarities and differences among participants.

Participants included teachers who mentor early childhood preservice teachers at a 4-year university laboratory school. I interviewed mentor teachers with a list of predetermined questions. The interviews were conducted via phone and the questions were semistructured to allow participants to elaborate on the phenomenon.

I analyzed participants' responses and used Quirkos 2.3.1 software to store and create a visual representation of patterns to help develop themes from the data. The software provided a visualization of the interviews in a manageable way to code, analyze, and explore unstructured text data. Thematic analysis using open and axial coding strategies was used to develop themes.

**Definitions**

Key terms relevant to this qualitative study are early childhood education, field experience, mentor, mentoring, preservice teachers.

*Early Childhood Education:* Early childhood education is a highly diverse field that serves children from birth to age eight (Bredekamp, 2020).

*Field Experience:* Terms such as field experience, fieldwork, practicum, internship, and student teaching have been used interchangeably to identify a student's learning experience prior to teaching. The process usually begins with an observation and then gradually leads the student to take over the classroom responsibilities (Baeten & Simons, 2016).

*Mentor teacher:* This designation is intended to encompass teachers who serve to support preservice teacher development during early clinical field experiences and practice teaching. A mentor is a classroom teacher who holds a degree in early childhood education and agrees to support a preservice teacher to the practical and intellectual work of teaching by providing consistent and frequent critical feedback (Henning et al., 2015) The term mentor teacher is often used interchangeably with terms such as counselors, role models, monitors (Vumilia & Semali, 2016), supervisors (Hobbs & Stovall, 2015), advisors (dos Reis & Braund, 2019), coach, guide, and reflective practitioner (dos Reis & Braund, 2019).

*Mentoring:* Mentoring is a relationship-based adult learning strategy intended to promote and support teachers' awareness and refinement of their professional learning process and teaching practices (Vumilia & Semali, 2016).

*Preservice Teacher:* A person who is still enrolled in a teacher preparation program, seeking a teaching degree and license, and is not yet a qualified teacher (Vumilia & Semali, 2016).

## Assumptions

In development of a study, the assumptions must be acknowledged. The first assumption of this study was that the mentor teachers would participate willingly and

respond honestly to the interview questions (see Appendix A). I assumed mentor teacher participants would give honest responses. I emailed a letter of invitation and a consent form to each mentor teacher participant and asked each to reply "I consent" to authenticate his or her integrity. I assumed the participants' responses reflected true perspectives concerning their qualifications and mentoring abilities. Willingness and honesty were important to the validity of the findings. The second assumption was that participants had an interest in participating in this study. It was assumed they did not have any other motives, such as impressing their supervisor or university contact person, by agreeing to take part in the study. I assumed this to be true because there was no incentive offered for participating in the study. The third assumption was that the participants would answer interview questions based on their own experiences. To discover each mentor teacher's perspective, I assumed mentor teachers would discuss their own knowledge, understanding, and experiences of their own mentoring qualifications and experiences.

## Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this research was early childhood mentor teachers from a rural city in a southwestern state. This study was delimited to mentor teachers in a lead teacher role at a university laboratory site utilized for early childhood teacher preparation. Mentor teachers participating in this study were teachers who mentor preservice teachers of an undergraduate early childhood completing early clinical field experiences in the teacher preparation program. Early childhood education was chosen for this study because there is limited research focused on mentoring preservice teachers at this level (Ambrosetti, 2014; Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013).

Administrators, early childhood teacher assistants, and early childhood instructional assistants from this school did not participate in this study. Only early childhood lead teachers with experience mentoring preservice teachers participated in this study. The research sample consisted of only lead teachers because they are the ones who had experience mentoring and were knowledgeable of qualifications and experiences for mentoring preservice teachers. The study focused on their perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Individuals who have worked as a lead teacher but had no experience with mentoring early childhood preservice teachers did not participate.

To ensure transferability, I included detailed descriptions of the data so that readers can make comparisons to other contexts based on as much information as possible. This allows the audiences of the research (e.g., readers, other researchers, stakeholders, participants) to transfer aspects of a study design and findings by taking into consideration different contextual factors instead of attempting to replicate the design and findings (see Creswell, 2012).

Other research designs were considered before choosing this basic qualitative design. A mixed-methods design involves initial quantitative data collection followed by qualitative data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, the quantitative approach was rejected because my research would not explain how one variable affects another using measurable or observable data. Thus, both mixed methods and using only the quantitative method were not chosen for this study. Using a basic qualitative research approach allowed me to analyze the experiences through the perspectives of mentor teachers (see Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

## Limitations

The first limitation of this basic qualitative study was that data collection and analysis of qualitative studies were considered time consuming (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). To address this limitation, I set aside ample time for collecting and analyzing data. A second limitation was that the participants were a convenience sample of mentor teachers who were lead teachers with experience mentoring early childhood preservice teachers in a 4-year institution in a southwestern state in the United States. The sample size needed to be large enough to sufficiently describe the phenomenon of interest and address the research question by attaining saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The third limitation was the possibility of participants' reluctance to participate in the study. Since the study was approved during summer vacation and/or startup of the new school year and a global pandemic limited face-to-face contact, mentor teachers may have been reluctant to participate in the interviews. I provided potential participants the time needed to conduct the interviews so they could decide whether to volunteer for the study.

A final limitation was that my personal biases, if left unexamined, could have affected the outcome of this study. Reflexivity requires the researcher to be keenly aware and to constantly check his or her position and subjectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I did not allow my thoughts and perspectives to interfere in this study. One way I controlled my bias was by ensuring that I was aware and took notes of any bias I experienced toward a participant's response. I used reflexivity when reviewing the interview transcriptions to check for biases.

**Significance**

The qualifications of mentor teachers impacted the quality of early childhood workforce preparation (Kupila et al., 2017; Nolan & Molla, 2018). One result of quality mentoring is early childhood preservice teachers who are more instructionally effective (Ronfeldt et al., 2018; Vumilia & Semali, 2016) when high quality mentoring is provided (Childre & Van Rie, 2015; NCATE, 2015). Teachers who are better prepared improve student learning outcomes (LiBetti & Bellwether, 2018). Another result of successful mentoring included teachers who are prepared to focus on academic learning with an ability to respond to each student's cognitive and social-emotional developmental needs (NCATE, 2015; NCTQ, 2018). Mentor teachers' perspectives needed to be explored to understand the qualifications for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers.

The NCATE (2015) report recommended mentor teachers be rigorously selected and prepared to lead the next generation of teachers through their teacher preparation. My review of literature indicated there is a lack of literature on mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Gandhi & Johnson, 2016; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015; Lafferty, 2018; Nielsen et al., 2017). Mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers needed to be explored (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Gandhi & Johnson, 2016; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015). Teacher preparation programs are dependent on the practices of mentor teachers (Ambrosetti, 2014; LiBetti & Bellwether, 2018). The implication for positive social change was understanding mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to better understand mentoring.

This study was significant because it allowed mentor teachers to voice their perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Participants in this study had the opportunity to reflect on their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. The information gained from this study could be used in planning and implementation of mentoring strategies, staff development, and mentor training. The mentor teachers' perspectives provided new insight into preparation for mentoring and preparing early childhood preservice teachers. Voicing and reflecting on mentor teachers' qualifications to mentor preservice teachers influences preparation of future early childhood teachers and outcomes for young children.

## Summary

In Chapter 1, I identified the problem with mentor teachers' qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. The problem statement addressed a need for further research focusing on what mentor teachers believe about their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. I described that a basic qualitative study was used to collect data from lead early childhood mentor teachers using semistructured interviews and that interview data were thematically analyzed using open and axial coding strategies. The study may be important to practitioners, researchers, and educators for the purpose of providing knowledge that is beneficial in the efforts to understand mentor teachers' perspectives of qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers.

In Chapter 2, I address the nature of the problem in early childhood education to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. I describe how past research was conducted on qualifications for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. I describe the

conceptual framework for this study: Ambrosetti's (2012) theory for preparation of mentoring. This framework was based on specific constructs to understand mentor teachers' perspectives of qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers (Ambrosetti, 2012; Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010). I also include an explanation of past research related to this study that includes studies with a similar conceptual framework and seminal works. In the literature review, the following topics are described: mentoring qualifications, mentoring knowledge, skills, and dispositions, mentoring strategies, mentoring relationships, early childhood teacher preparation, mentors' perspectives, and mentoring training.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this Chapter, I describe the literature pertinent to my research focus of mentors' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Preservice teachers require mentoring by highly qualified mentor teachers who have been prepared to function in this role (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015; NCATE, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2018). To be highly qualified, mentor teachers must have specialized mentoring skills (dos Reis & Braund, 2019) and the foundational abilities of building trust, establishing rapport, communicating effectively, and providing critical feedback through reflective practices to early childhood preservice teachers (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; NCATE, 2015; Savage et al., 2015).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Past research indicates mentors feel unprepared to meet the needs of preservice teachers (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015) and are unsupported in their mentoring role (Ambrosetti, 2014). Research indicates mentors do not understand their role and lack training to support preservice teachers completing clinical experience requirements in early childhood teacher preparation programs (Ambrosetti, 2014; Lemon & Garvis, 2014; Muñoz et al., 2015; Sahin, Sen, & Dincer, 2019). Researchers have focused on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for high quality mentoring of preservice teachers but have failed to explore the perspectives of mentors (Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel, 2019) regarding their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. In this study, to help fill the gap in practice identified in the existing research and answer my research question which explored mentors' perspectives of their

qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers in a 4-year university

laboratory school.

Chapter 2 includes a review of literature based on qualifications to effectively

mentor early childhood preservice teachers. After describing the search strategies used to

conduct the literature review, I explained the conceptual framework to provide the basis

for the proposed study using Ambrosetti's theory of mentor preparation. Following the

conceptual framework, I identify the qualifications of mentors, including their

knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes. Chapter 2 concludes with a summary.

## Literature Search Strategy

The process of finding and researching topics for this study involved examining

themes, procedures, and meanings of sources located in a comprehensive review of the

literature. Sources I considered included scholarly and peer-reviewed journals, the

Internet, books, meeting minutes, electronic books, dissertations, and mentoring resource

websites administered by the government, departments of education, and practitioner

organizations. The search strategy included database searches of ProQuest, EBSCOhost,

SAGE Journals Online, Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis Online, and SAGE

Reference Online. I used the Walden University's ProQuest Dissertations site to access

dissertations and used their reference lists as a guide to find further articles. I searched

each database using a variety of terms and key phrases related to the topic. I read the

articles, keeping the research question in mind to gather information that would be

relevant to the study. I collected both primary and secondary sources from books,

websites, and journals through search engines and online databases from Walden

University Library. The initial review included mentoring qualifications, which included

knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The first strand I investigated was knowledge with a goal of understanding the content and pedagogical knowledge necessary for mentoring preservice teachers. The next strand examined was the literature on mentoring skills. This involved an examination of the aspects of the complex and specific skills necessary for effective mentoring.

The focus of this study was narrowed to explore mentors' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. I searched each database using the following terms and key phrases related to the topic: *qualifications of mentors, preservice early childhood preparation, perspectives of mentors,* and *mentor training and programs*. I gathered information relevant to the research question for this study.

I began the literature review for this study by researching the importance of mentoring preservice early childhood teachers and the theory of mentoring including the contextual, developmental, and relational components. I also investigated adult learning theory, professional development and training, and the theories of social constructivism and mentoring. After researching mentoring, I determined Ambrosetti's (2012) theory of mentor preparation was the appropriate theory to help me understand mentors' qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers.

## Conceptual Framework

**Theory of Mentor Preparation**

I used Ambrosetti's (2012) theory of mentor preparation for the conceptual framework of this study. Research has identified mentoring as a holistic process including context, developmental needs, and relational elements (Ambrosetti, 2012; Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Ambrosetti, Knight, & Dekkers, 2014).

**Contextual component**. The contextual dimension extends beyond the setting, focusing on the cultural and situational features of the job or profession, and how they are communicated to the mentee (Ambrosetti, 2014; Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). Contextual factors necessary for mentoring preservice teachers include collegiality and critical reflection (Nolan & Molla, 2018). Partnerships between teacher preparation programs and schools are essential in providing contextual experiences for preservice teachers (Hands & Rong, 2014; Smith Sodey, 2016). Like children, most adults learn best by having practical, job-related, hands-on opportunities to apply new ideas and information to real-life situations (Dewey, 1910). The mentoring process provides a context for practicing and using new skills and for receiving guidance in teaching and caregiving practice (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). Ambrosetti (2012) indicated that the contextual component of mentoring is not well addressed in preservice teacher education because it often occurs implicitly rather than being an explicit part of mentoring.

**Developmental component**. The developmental component of the holistic mentoring process focuses on working toward developmental goals for both the mentor and mentee (Hairon, Loh, & Lim et al., 2020; Whitebook & Bellm, 2014). Researchers have agreed that preservice teachers benefit from opportunities to learn about teaching with the support of a mentor (Kupila et al., 2017; Sumrall, Scott-Little, LaParo, & Pianta et al., 2017; Zeichner, 2010, 2014, 2016). Mentors scaffold preservice teachers by facilitating learning and development to a higher level of competence and performance (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). Ambrosetti, Dekkers, and Knight (2014) examined the interactions that occurred between mentors and preservice

teachers and determined the findings for the developmental component of mentoring to include guidance, critical feedback, confidence, role model, learner, opportunity for practice, experience, and collaboration.

  **Relational component**. The relational component between the mentor and mentee is reciprocal (Izadinia, 2016a, 2016b; Kupila et al., 2017) and is key to effective mentoring (Henning et al., 2015). Although mentoring is often viewed as hierarchical (Ambrosetti, 2014), it should be an opportunity to co-construct growth and development of both supervising teacher and student (Russell & Russell, 2011; Wexler, 2019). Although to avoid interference with a trusting relationship, mentors should not function as supervisors, nor should they conduct formal evaluations (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). Relationships between mentors and mentees can be personal or professional, if both are willing to engage in the mentoring relationship (Baum & Korth, 2013; La Paro, Van Schagen, King, & Lippard, 2018). Researchers agreed that the foundation of the mentoring relationship includes a commitment to the role of mentoring, building trust, establishing rapport, the establishment of interpersonal relationships, effectively communicating, and providing critical feedback to scaffold prospective teachers (Baum & Korth, 2013; Chu, 2014; Graves, 2010; La Paro et al., 2018; Richardson, Yost, Conway, Magagnosc, & Mellor, 2019; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012).

  A respectful relationship is vital for effective learning (Nolan & Molla, 2018). Ambrosetti's (2012) results indicated that mentors can link the support they provide to preservice teachers and the relationship developed with them to a shared understanding of the expectations and standards needed for preservice preparation. Researchers have categorized mentor relationships as evolving through three stages: formal, cordial, and

friendship (Henning et al., 2015). Mentors in a collegial relationship are more direct, formal, and informative when giving feedback. In contrast, mentors in personal relationships tend to have open dialogue that encourages preservice teachers to assertively ask questions and directly express their concerns (Henning et al., 2015). The goal in effective mentoring is to develop a personal relationship to encourage respectful dialogue by preservice teachers feeling comfortable to speak freely (Nolan & Molla, 2018).

Mentoring relationships are an essential step in developing preservice teachers into effective practitioners (Kupila et al., 2017; Russell & Russell, 2011; Wexler, 2019). Hall and Simeral's (2015) findings support the relationship between a university's teacher education program and the mentor as a major component of successful mentoring programs (Hands & Rong, 2014; Smith Sodey, 2016). Lees and Kennedy (2017) agreed that teacher preparation programs and community partnership relationships are key to responsive mentoring to meet the ever-changing needs of schools, communities, and families. Banks, Jackson, and Harper (2014) identified early childhood teacher preparation programs' lack of relational support for induction of new teachers into the workforce. Banks et al.'s (2014) findings suggest that coteaching partnerships between schools and universities strengthen preservice teachers' connection of theory and practice during clinical experiences. Lees and Kennedy (2017) called for innovative teaching practices that include radically different relationships among stakeholders. Hands and Rong (2014) recognized relationships in field experiences as a possible key to systematic reform in public schools. Burns and Mutton (2015) identified a need to examine relationships between research and practice of teacher preparation programs through

research-informed clinical practice as an opportunity to strengthen new teacher

preparation. Preservice teachers found their relationship with their mentor pivotal to their

success (Beers, 2016).

Contextual, developmental, and relational components support a holistic approach

to mentoring (Ambrosetti, 2012). Mentoring requires use of all three components to

effectively mentor preservice teachers. The mentoring components are a framework for

the process of the mentors' implementation of knowledge and skills that contribute to the

preservice teacher's preparation (Ambrosetti, 2012; Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010). The

contextual, developmental, and relational components presented in the study by

Ambrosetti (2012) were used to analyze the data collected to understand mentor teachers'

perspectives of their qualifications to effectively mentor to prepare early childhood

preservice teachers. These components have important implications for preparation and

support of training for mentoring preservice teachers. I used Ambrosetti's theory for

mentor preparation to explore perspectives of mentor teachers' qualifications to mentor

early childhood preservice teachers.

**Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

**Mentoring**

Teacher preparation programs should focus on the best, most efficient practices,

and experiences to prepare preservice teachers. Strengthening teachers' clinical

preparation by focusing on the importance of well-supervised clinical practice as a

critical element of effective preparation (Hairon et al*.,* 2020; IOM & NRC, 2015;

Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009). Clinical field experiences are the

practice of combining instruction of pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge to

increase effectiveness of teacher preparation (Beers, 2016). Mentoring during clinical

field experiences is an opportunity for strengthening early childhood educator preparation

(Chu, 2014).

Mentoring preservice teachers was the focus of this study. According to the

literature, here was a gap in practice in understanding mentor teachers' perspectives of

their qualification to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Multiple approaches to

mentoring make it difficult to come to a consensus on a single definition (Ambrosetti et

al., 2014). Mentors are referred to as counselors, role models, monitors (Vumilia &

Semali, 2016), supervisors (Hobbs & Stovall, 2015), and advisors (dos Reis & Braund,

2019). They serve as coach, expert, guide, and reflective practitioner (dos Reis & Braund,

2019). Mentoring is a professional guidance relationship in which an experienced,

intellectually, and socially valued mentors serves as mentor for preservice teachers

(Kupila et al., 2017). Consideration needs to be made to the interconnectedness between

the multiple roles to the holistic mentoring process (Ambrosetti et al., 2014).

Depending on the circumstances, views on mentoring in the literature are quite

diverse (Ambrosetti et al., 2014). One perspective is effective mentoring focuses on the

ability to teach and help others understand how to teach. Other perspectives involve

understanding the various roles incorporated in mentoring (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010;

Dropkin, 2013; Leshem, 2014). According to Whitebook and Bellm (2014), mentoring is

a relationship-based learning strategy intended to promote and support a teacher's

awareness and refinement of her professional learning process and teaching practices.

Chu (2014) defined mentoring as a strategy designed to bridge the gap between

professional vision and actual practices. While the terms "mentoring" and "coaching" are

often used interchangeably, mentors tend to focus on development of an individual

teacher, and goals for the mentoring process are typically agreed upon between the

mentor and student (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013).

**Knowledge**

Specific knowledge is necessary for effective mentoring (Germeroth & Sarama,

2017; Schachter, 2015; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). Professional knowledge is the

information, understanding, or skill that you get from experience or education (Hairon et

al., 2020; Whitebook & Bellm, 2014). Research by Whitebook and Bellm (2013)

suggested that mentors have significant knowledge from their experience in teaching

young children. Mentoring knowledge consists of subject matter (content) knowledge,

pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of learners and learning (Beers, 2016). Success

in teacher preparation is understanding or having knowledge of the components that

together build a high-quality early childhood teacher preparation program (Beers, 2016).

The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ, 2018) recommended mentors

should be effective teachers as evident by student learning outcomes. Ronfeldt et al.'s

(2018) research findings are supportive of requiring selection of mentors to have

demonstrated effective teaching according to state evaluation measures. Effective

teachers are defined by NCATE (2015) as being skilled in differentiated instruction,

proficiency in assessment of learning, providing feedback, persistence to modifying

practice based on research. Mentors should be familiar with their state's early learning

standards, theories, and research behind different approaches to teaching young children,

and include adult learning, teacher development, and reflective practices (Germeroth &

Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). Mentors should have knowledge of teacher

preparation programs requirements and expectations (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). Mentor knowledge of planning, feedback, and effective practices play an influential role in shaping future teachers (Richardson et al., 2019; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012). Many researchers agree that mentors should qualify as an effective classroom teacher on annual evaluations (NCATE, 2015; NCTQ, 2018). Although teachers may be effective in the classroom, they do not naturally acquire the knowledge to mentor preservice teachers (Ambrosetti, 2012).

Twenty-first century skills are required for students to be prepared for a global society (IOM & NRC, 2015). Teacher education in the United States has been criticized for not preparing the workforce to meet the demands of modern schools (Banks et al., 2014; Hands & Rong, 2014; Quesenberry, Hamann, Sanden, Bates, & Hartle, 2018; Smith Sodey, 2016). One reason is a lack of cohesion or relevance of content throughout programs (Abas, 2016; Banks et al., 2014; Burns & Mutton, 2015; Edeiken-Cooperman, 2013; Lees & Kennedy, 2017; Quesenberry et al., 2018; Stipek, Clements, Coburn, Franke, & Farran, 2017). Expectations and requirements for teacher preparation programs have not kept the pace with recent research on child development (IOM & NRC, 2015). Research by Muñoz et al. (2015) called for decision makers for teacher preparation programs to think critically, solve problems, and address the needs of diverse, rural, and underrepresented student populations. Higher expectations exist for what teachers of young children should know and implement (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012; IOM & NRC, 2015). Institutions of higher education need to address the changing landscape of educational policy (Lees & Kennedy, 2017).

Knowledge necessary to address the changing educational landscape include a foundation for critical reflection, and thoughtful, adaptive, and culturally relevant practices to reduce attrition in support of promoting equity and social justice (Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel, 2019). Jean-Sigur et al. (2016) determined self-reflection and self-awareness are essential for fostering understanding of diversity and global education for preservice teachers. Mentors need knowledge of how to address equality and social justice which are concerns that impact learning for all students (Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel, 2019). Early childhood mentors need to be prepared with awareness for global issues such as human rights, social justice, environmental protection, and war and conflict (Jean-Sigur et al., 2016). Beers (2016) called for teachers to be culturally and linguistically diverse to be able to consider various perspectives. To produce conscientious and creative global citizens, Jean-Sigur et al. determined it necessary to incorporate a framework to prepare teachers with global awareness in teacher preparation programs.

**Skills**

The ability to do something that comes from observation, training, experience, or practice is defined as having 'skills' (Egert, Fukkink, & Eckhardt, 2018; Schachter, 2015; Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009). In education, this includes the skills to demonstrate effective practices; creatively problem-solve; provide individualized support; reflectivity and promote reflection; scaffold learning; share resources; observe, nurture, encourage, advise, and guide (Ambrosetti, 2014; Baum & Korth, 2013; Childre & Van Rie, 2015; Dropkin, 2013; Hairon et al., 2020; La Paro et al., 2018; Texas Early Learning Council [TELC], 2013; Whitebook & Bellm, 2014). Mentors need skills to

transfer knowledge to others (Dunst, 2015), including the ability to communicate clearly, creatively problem-solve, and take risks (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013).

Schatz-Oppenheimer (2017) indicated mentoring is comprised of teaching and guidance fields which entail an essential process of socialization through multiple skills. Schatz-Oppenheimer recommended mentors have the skill to choose whether to focus supporting preservice teachers in understanding teaching of the content of the lesson (how to teach) or on the hidden process of the situation (what the novice teacher feels). Bandura (2012) suggested learning new responses occurs through observational learning, modeling, and vicarious reinforcement by observing others. Therefore, skills of teaching content matter, skill of delivering lessons and activities, and skill of addressing the individual and specific needs of preservice teachers is needed to be an effective mentor (Bandura, 2012; Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017).

Developing and strengthening mentoring skills requires ongoing reflection of one's practice (TELC, 2013). In Leshem's (2014) study, teachers self-identified necessary skills, such as tools for observation, feedback skills, and new ways of teaching, for supporting effective mentoring. The ability to analyze and reflect on practice (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013) and to engage in collaborative discussions of teaching and learning are necessary skills for working with others (Santagata & Guarino, 2012; Shagir, 2017). Ambrosetti (2012) indicated mentor training positively influences the growth of both knowledge and skills of the preservice teachers, and the mentoring process involves evaluating beliefs and practices through interpersonal development. The mentoring process involved evaluating beliefs and practices through

interpersonal development that included reflective practices (Ambrosetti, 2012).

Continuous quality improvement process is built as the ongoing reflection of one's work

and one's skill development (TELC, 2013). According to Hall and Simeral (2015), the

Continuum of Self-Reflection is composed of four stages: unaware, conscious, action,

and refinement. The reflective cycle is a conceptual framework designed to develop the

continuum of reflective practices which can be used by mentors to support preservice

teacher development. Self-reflection can bridge the doing-thinking gap, knowing-doing

gap, and any other gap that might otherwise impede progress (Hall & Simeral, 2015).

Mentors need training and time for reflection to support their skills development to be

effective (Ambrosetti, 2012; Santagata & Guarino, 2012; Shagir, 2017).

   Reflection is an important process for moving to more developmentally

appropriate practices (Bates, Ramirez, & Drits, 2009; Beers, 2016; Burns, Jacobs, &

Yendol-Hoppey, 2016) whether in one's own teaching or supporting the learning of

teaching in others (dos Reis & Braund, 2019). Reflection on practice allows preservice

teachers to adjust and adapt their skills with support of a skilled mentor (Beers, 2016).

Reflection on teaching practice is supported by critiquing video recordings to analyze and

study pedagogical practices (Beers, 2016; dos Reis & Braund, 2019). Muhling (2015)

stated learning is both doing and the analysis of what was done during clinical field

experiences. Through trial and error, preservice teachers try new practices and then alter

what was done based on observation and collaborative reflection with their mentor

(Muhling, 2015). Izadinia's (2016a) review of literature determined reflection on

feedback to be an important recurring theme for preservice teacher preparation.

Schatz-Oppenheimer (2017) stated mentors need the skills for developing a trusting relationship. Trust encourages preservice teachers' willingness to open with confidence (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). Trust supports open communication which is crucial for a successful mentoring relationship (Izadinia, 2016a, 2016b). Responsibility plays a role in creating an atmosphere of professional security that enables preservice teachers to develop (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). Mentors require the skill to determine compatibility of fundamental beliefs with preservice teachers since this impacts willingness to be open to change and learning (Howe & Jacobs, 2013). Preservice teachers need feedback that is open and honest, valid, constant, verbal and written, and provided in appropriate ways (Izadinia, 2016a). Preservice teachers are dependent on supportive relationships skills of mentors for providing them with critical feedback (Beers, 2016).

Preservice teacher learning is achieved by supporting the connection of content knowledge to the actual activities of teaching in the classroom (Arshavskaya, 2016). Nolan and Molla's (2018) research indicated preservice teacher learning occurs through mentoring by examination of assumptions underpinning regularities in dispositions and actions including values, understandings, and goals through critical reflection in a safe environment. Nolan and Molla (2018) identified two essential elements of critical reflection: comfort and dilemma. They defined comfort as a condition and outcome for openness. The condition of comfort assists preservice teachers to freely and reflectively express and confront their dilemmas. Connection of theory to practice occurs when preservice teachers are exposed to actual activities of teaching with adequate support from a mentor (Arshavskaya, 2016). Arshavskaya indicated support for connecting theory

to practice requires "in the moment" mentoring and feedback to challenge preservice teachers to articulate their practices. Aspfors and Fransson (2015) indicated a challenge to supporting the connection of theory to practice is not due to mentors' lack of confidence about theoretical knowledge of mentoring but rather due to mentors feeling less confident about using the knowledge in practice. Mentoring connects psychological and emotional support enhances preservice teachers' self-esteem, confidence, and feelings of effectiveness (Izadinia 2016b). Mentors require skills for gauging the amount of emotional support is necessary for preservice teachers to connect theory during their practice (Arshavskaya, 2016).

Effective mentoring consumes time and energy on top of an already worn thin teacher workforce (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; Tomlinson, 2019). Mentors require the skill of managing time for their regular job of teaching as well as time for intentional observation, reflection, and feedback to preservice teachers (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; Tomlinson, 2019). Skills for using technology could support time management when mentoring through use of video recordings, video conferencing, emails, and electronic submission of lessons, documents, assessments, and time sheets (dos Reis & Braund, 2019). For optimal outcomes, teacher preparation programs must ensure mentors are skilled in both mentoring preservice teachers and in modeling practices that are paramount to preservice teacher preparation (Childre & Van Rie, 2015).

**Dispositions**

Disposition is the tendency to act or think a particular way; a pattern of behavior that is frequent, conscious, and voluntary (Egert, et al., 2018; Sheridan et al., 2009). Researchers have extended that definition to include patience, positive attitude,

sensitivity to other perspectives, and varying levels of skills and dispositions (Baum & Korth, 2013; Childre & Van Rie, 2015; Dropkin, 2013; La Paro et al., 2018). According to Schatz-Oppenheimer (2017), mentors should possess certain qualities and dispositions to support success. The qualities and dispositions conducive to mentoring included integrity, concern, assertiveness and leadership, flexibility, tolerance, teamwork capabilities, facility in forming and maintaining interpersonal relations, and the ability to motivate trainees and enrich their professional skills. Mentors should have positive dispositions toward learning, growing, and appreciation of others' perspectives (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013).

Mentoring requires the disposition for building strong interpersonal relationships (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). Schatz-Oppenheimer suggested that interpersonal relationships in mentoring foster autonomy and professional responsibility. Emotional support is the very core of mentoring based on interpersonal relationships that are a personal quality that is not easy to acquire through learning and takes time (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). Kupila et al. (2017) stated effective mentoring occurs between the mentor and preservice teacher when characterized by coequal and reciprocal relationships. Additional dispositions necessary for building relationships in mentoring include: a positive attitude, vulnerability, integrity, concern, assertiveness, leadership, tolerance, teamwork, self-efficacy, and motivation (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017).

Abas (2016) defined challenges and barriers of mentoring to include varied opinions, beliefs, and conceptions of teaching and learning. These challenges create a disconnect between theory and practice. Mentors are role models of indispensable characteristics which include discipline, patience, passion, commitment, diligence,

readiness, creativity, flexibility, self-confidence, responsibility, culture sensitivity, resourcefulness, teamwork, perseverance, and reflective skills (Muñoz et al., 2015). Muñoz et al. indicated early childhood education leaders need to take knowledge of best practices coupled with self-confidence to serve as a catalyst for change in practices. Nolan and Molla (2018) indicated mentors need the disposition to question taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs underpinning one's practice.

Weber-Mayrer, Piasta, and Yeager Pelatti (2015) suggested beliefs concerning self-efficacy, attitude (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017), and openness to change as essential considerations for incorporating new practices. Motivation is a disposition required to be an effective mentor (Kupila et al., 2017; Vumilia & Semali, 2016). A motivated and engaged mentor plays a significant role in structuring and mediating the pedagogy of best practices (Kupila et al., 2017). Vumilia and Semali's (2016) study revealed mentors need motivation to set and work toward goals and to seek alternative strategies toward achieving them. The acquisition of these specific dispositions for effective mentoring are essential (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Schachter, 2015; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013).

**Mentor Teachers' Perspectives**

Mentor teachers' perspectives identify their understanding of mentoring. Although many researchers have investigated mentoring preservice teachers, few have focused on mentors' knowledge and beliefs about their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Gandhi & Johnson, 2016; Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel, 2019; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015). Schriever and Grainger (2019) agreed the role of the mentor has been overlooked in research. Their study determined subjective outcomes based on mentors' perspectives which included: a

feeling of self-efficacy, and confirmation of worth from recognition of experiences and achievements (Gordon, Jiang, & University of Chicago Consortium on School Research et al., 2018). Heirdsfield, Walker, Walsh, and Wilss (2008) study echoed finding that mentors' experiences support strong self-efficacy in mentors. Leshem (2014) illuminated mentor's self-efficacy could be enhanced with implementation of a mentoring program. Further benefits included improved self-esteem and confidence (Gunn, Lee, & Steed, 2017; Heirdsfield et al., 2008).

A study conducted by Russell and Russell (2011) explored the perceptions of nine mentors and the factors that impacted their mentoring relationships. The factors of their study included: (a) role of the mentor, (b) expectations for the mentoring relationship, and (c) mentors' motivation for serving as a mentor. After participating in a mentor teacher support program mentors reported a raised awareness of the importance of mentoring relationships and enhanced mentoring skills (Gordon et al., 2018). Mentors reported mentoring workshops, professional development, and ongoing training are necessary to support their role and relationship in mentoring preservice teachers. Russell and Russell recommended further research is necessary to ensure that mentor teachers are adequately prepared to model effective strategies to facilitate the mentorship experience.

Mentor teachers' perspectives often indicate positive outcomes of mentoring (Tygret, 2017). McCorkel-Clinard and Ariav (1998) explored mentors' perspectives on the benefits gained from mentoring. McCorkel-Clinard and Ariav determined mentors could benefit from mentoring when they had access to mentoring training and opportunities for on-going support. Themes emerged from their study to better help understand the mentoring process. They stated that it is not enough to simply "do"

mentoring to internalize and be aware of its potential and impact (Holland, 2018; McCorkel-Clinard & Ariav, 1998). McCorkel-Clinard and Ariav indicated just talking about mentoring does not develop awareness and understanding, mentoring takes time to develop, and trainings play a critical role in development of mentors. Schriever and Grainger's (2019) findings agreed that mentors could find value in engaging in a facilitated mentoring program. Extrinsically focused benefits were determined in Schriever and Grainger's study which included: reinvigorated and renewed focus on setting career objectives, sharing in research efforts and expansion of research networks, and development of mentoring skills.

Mentoring supports and promotes a teacher's awareness and refinement of professional learning process and teaching practices (Hairon et al*.,* 2020; Whitebook & Bellm, 2014) through socialization practices that not only prepares them for instruction but enhances their self-efficacy and provides emotional support (He, 2009; Langa, 2017). Vumilia and Semali (2016) examined perspectives on mentoring and socialization practices of preservice teachers to determine whether ongoing collaborative professional field experiences between institution teacher educators, mentor teachers, and preservice teachers improve the quality of teacher education. The findings of their study revealed the perceived benefits of mentoring and professional socialization promote satisfaction between all parties (Vumilia & Semali, 2016). Vumilia and Semali recognized a need for further exploration of strength-based mentoring and reciprocal educative mentoring (2016) to uncover socio-cultural and contextual factors that need to be taken into consideration (He, 2009; Langa, 2017).

Student population is increasingly diverse culturally and linguistically (Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel, 2019). This furthers the complexity of mentoring when preservice teachers are English as a Second Language (ESL) students (Arshavskaya, 2016). Arshavskaya explored mentoring from the perspective of four mentor-preservice teacher pairs. In a case study approach, Arshavskaya focused on mentoring sessions that included activities such as co-planning, co-teaching, and co-reflecting on teaching. Results of the study implied mentoring can help teachers gain confidence and share teaching strategies (Arshavskaya, 2016). Arshavskaya made a case for including mentoring sessions during clinical field experiences to provide space for mentoring relationships to develop and assistance can be sought and offered. Hayden and Gratteau-Zinnel (2019) determined high levels of personal support are necessary for negotiating new learning and preparing preservice teachers to address equity and social justice concerns that accompany learning for all students. Training and expertise to support these concerns are necessary for mentoring this population (Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel, 2019). Findings from the perspectives in these studies could be used to strengthen mentor training and education (Arshavskaya, 2016; Hayden & Gratteau-Zinnel, 2019).

Mentor teachers perceived training as imperative to building a comprehensive approach to teacher preparation that optimizes preservice clinical field experiences (Childre & Van Rie, 2015). Gandhi and Johnson (2016) studied the implications of a mentoring training program that reviewed competency skills in six domains of mentoring including effective communication, aligning expectations, assessing understanding, fostering independence, addressing diversity and promoting development. Their study determined participation in a mentoring training can improve mentoring skills and

outcomes for effectively mentored mentees (Gandhi & Johnson, 2016). Childre and Van

Rie (2015) concluded that teacher preparation programs must recognize that mentor

preparation is ongoing and cannot be accomplished through a one-time training.

Mentoring preparedness is supported when teacher preparation programs work in

collaboration with public school partners to have shared goals and structures to promote

sustainability for long term impact (Childre & Van Rie, 2015; Lees & Kennedy, 2017).

Gandhi and Johnson recommended a longitudinal study that includes documenting

whether changes in perceived mentoring competency results in improved quality of

mentoring and improved outcomes for both mentors and mentees. My extensive review

of the literature on mentors' perspectives strengthened the case for my study to further

understand their complex role for supporting early childhood preservice teachers (Hobbs

& Stovall, 2015).

**Mentor Requirements**

Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, and Kipnis (2009) and Meier (2017) stated

early childhood teacher preparation programs are only as good as the mentor teachers

supporting the preservice teachers. Methodology of mentoring is critically important to

the developmental process of preservice early childhood teachers (Biggers, Miller,

Zangori, & Whitworth, 2019). Teacher preparation programs' requirements of mentors

lack systematic processes and consistency (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; Tomlinson, 2019).

State policy makers and educational leaders are increasingly establishing minimum

requirements for mentors of preservice teachers (Ronfeldt et al., 2018). Many teacher

preparation programs require mentors be certified licensed teachers (NCATE, 2015), with

at least 3 years of teaching experience, who are effective in their teaching practice, and

participate in some type of mentor training (Magaya & Crawley, 2011; Ronfeldt et al., 2018; Roofe, & Cook, 2017). A carefully designed mentoring program can increase the effectiveness of mentors (Henning et al., 2015).

Whitebook et al. (2009) recommended mentor teachers be required to have a solid, current, and accurate background of early childhood education knowledge, have recent teaching experience in an early learning classroom, are a good teacher of adults, and understand the population and culture they are working with. A survey conducted in Chicago public schools determined a correlation between preservice teachers' preparedness to mentor and determined to be instructionally effective on annual evaluations (Gordon, et al., 2018). According to Ronfeldt et al. (2018), mentor teachers who have proven to be instructionally effective with students are more effective mentors. Although LiBetti's (2018) study cautioned the temptation of creating systemwide requirements when the research is unclear. Arshavskaya's (2016) and dos Reis and Braund's (2019) studies agreed teaching experience alone does not translate to preservice teachers' professional growth. Instructional effectiveness is only one key element to support effective mentoring. The complexity of the role of mentoring requires interactive professional development that focuses specifically on supporting preservice teachers (Hobbs & Stovall, 2015).

Professional development for mentors is almost non-existent as a requirement for this role (Clarke & Elfert, 2015). Mentor teacher training is an important element of a comprehensive approach to optimize outcomes (Gandhi & Johnson, 2016). Professional learning which increases educator effectiveness applies research on change and sustains support for the implementation of professional learning for long-term change (Hall &

Hord, 2011; Muñoz et al., 2015; Schachter, 2015). Teacher preparation programs must recognize that mentor teacher preparation needs to be ongoing and cannot be accomplished through a one-time training (Childre & Van Rie, 2015).

How adults learn affect any approach to a teaching-learning relationship (Chu, 2014). Mentoring involves a collaborative partnership in which adult learning strategies are used to transfer the knowledge and skills of the mentor teacher to the early childhood preservice teacher (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; IOM & NRC, 2015; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). Mentor teachers need to understand the theories of adult learning and the stages of development teachers go through to individualize and adjust the levels of support provided (Manning-Ouellette & Black, 2017; Turesky & Gallagher, 2011). Stages of teacher development are based on acquisition of new knowledge (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013) and experiences over time (Hall & Simeral, 2015). Teachers go from the unaware stage (survival mode) to mastery through refining their skills, taking on new challenges, and reflecting on their practices (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Hall & Hord, 2011; Hall & Simeral, 2015; Kasemsap, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). Reflection on one's work is supportive of understanding how adults learn (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). With emphasis on reflection, preparation for mentor teachers made a difference in contributing to a high-quality field experience (Lafferty, 2018).

Research on the states of preschool teacher development indicated the level of experience required for mentor teachers (Dağ & Sari, 2017; Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). Whitebook and Bellm (2013) described preschool teacher development beginning with *survival*, which is mainly concerned with surviving the day-

to-day events. The *consolidation* stage usually occurs in the second and third years of

teaching. Teachers consolidate their gains from the first stage, begin to focus on

individual children, and differentiate specific skills and tasks to be mastered next. A

teacher may feel inadequate and unprepared in this stage. The 3rd and 4th years of

teaching is designated as the *renewal* stage. At this stage teachers may tire of doing the

same thing and want to look for innovations. The last stage is referred to is the *maturity*

stage. Teachers begin to ask deeper and more abstract questions after three or more years

of experience (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). This research is

supportive of the need for a requirement of mentor teachers to be at the maturity stage of

development and have at least three years of teaching experience to mentor early

childhood preservice teachers (Magaya & Crawley, 2011; Ronfeldt et al., 2018; Roofe, &

Cook, 2017).

Understanding teacher stages of professional development and learning styles is

vital to effective mentoring (Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013).

Adults, like children, do not approach problem solving and learning in the same way

(Germeroth & Sarama, 2017; Whitebook & Bellm, 2013). Preservice teachers require

varied learning approaches based on their individual styles (Manning-Ouellette & Black,

2017; Turesky & Gallagher, 2011). How a learner approaches a task and how that learner

makes meaning of it constitutes the person's learning style (Reinhardt, 2017). Studies on

adult learning theories indicated that reflection on practice with guidance from a skilled

mentor teacher promotes growth and development (IOM & NRC, 2015). Learning styles

of teachers should be taken into consideration when pairing supervising teachers with

students. Teaching requires adjusting one's style and approach to meet the needs of each

individual teacher (Chu, 2014; Hall & Hord, 2011; Manning-Ouellette & Black, 2017;

Turesky & Gallagher, 2011).

Partnerships between schools and institutions could strengthen clinical field

experience requirements by providing a more systematic process for identifying mentor

teachers and placing preservice teachers to practice (Gordon et al., 2018; IOM & NRC,

2015). Selection of mentor teachers should be based on experience, tenure, instructional

effectiveness, and skills in mentoring (Ronfeldt et al., 2018). Magaya and Crawley (2011)

examined selection criteria used by school districts for selecting mentor teachers for

preservice teachers. Data revealed there was no written criteria or process for selecting

mentor teachers and universities have no practical influence over the selection of mentor

teachers for their students (Magaya & Crawley, 2011; Roofe, & Cook, 2017). Most often

placements for preservice teachers is based on word of mouth (Biggers et al., 2019).

Schools assume the responsibility of the mentor teacher selection process (Magaya &

Crawley, 2011; Roofe, & Cook, 2017). Clarke and Elfert (2015) determined when mentor

teachers self-select or volunteer for the role of supporting preservice teachers' they have

an increased motivation for the responsibilities. When mentor teachers have higher levels

of collective responsibility, working together to improve education, they are more likely

to invest their time and resources into preparing preservice teachers (Lees & Kennedy,

2017). District policies can influence the mentor teacher and preservice teacher's

relationship (Flämig, König, & Spiekermann, 2015). Establishing a framework of

collaborative and communicative practices between teacher preparation programs and

field placement sites for a more systematic process would be supportive of more

streamlined mentor teacher requirements (Baum & Korth, 2013; Flämig et al., 2015; La Paro et al., 2018).

Incentives and compensation have been determined another inconsistent factor for mentor teachers (Flämig et al., 2015). Flämig et al. (2015) conducted a study on whether mentor teachers are provided any type of compensation for taking on the additional workload of mentoring preservice teachers. Findings indicated the quality of preservice teacher preparation could benefit from requiring compensation as an incentive to mentor teachers (Flämig et al., 2015). Fives et al. (2016) conducted a comparative investigation of compensation requirements of teacher preparation programs and determined in many instances mentor teacher requirements have increased and while programs offer less compensation, if any, to mentor teachers. Incentivizing mentor teachers is minimal and generally includes a small stipend, continuing education credit, or the ability to use university facilities such as the gym and pool (Biggers et al., 2019). Clinical field experiences are too important to be left to chance by teacher preparation programs (NCTQ, 2018). Given the findings on the complexity (Arshavskaya, 2016; Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Tomlinson, 2019) and valuable process (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Childre & Van Rie, 2015; Muhling, 2015) of mentoring, it is critical to turn our attention to systemizing the requirements for quality mentoring (IOM & NRC, 2015).

### Summary and Conclusions

I reviewed existing literature directly associated with qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Researchers noted that early childhood teacher preparation is dependent on highly qualified mentor teachers to be prepared for this role

(dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015; NCATE, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2018).

Mentor teachers must have specialized mentoring skills (dos Reis & Braund, 2019)

including abilities of building trust, establishing rapport, communicating effectively, and

providing critical feedback through reflective practices to early childhood preservice

teachers (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; NCATE, 2015; Savage et al., 2015). Mentor teachers

are unprepared to meet the needs of preservice teachers (dos Reis & Braund, 2019;

Hobbs & Stovall, 2015) and unsupported in their mentoring role (Ambrosetti, 2014).

Clinical field experience during early childhood teacher preparation has continued

to cause concern among school officials, stakeholders, and policy makers (DOE, 2017;

IOM & NRC, 2015; NCATE, 2015; NCTQ, 2018). Various internal and external factors

have contributed to this problem, including mentor teachers' perspectives and lack of

systematic preparation for mentoring preservice teachers. The issues that mentor teachers

have associated with preparation of early childhood preservice teachers could be resolved

by understanding mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications for mentoring. My

review of existing literature indicated that few investigators have conducted qualitative

research in this area. I identified a gap in practice in existing literature regarding mentor

teachers' qualifications for mentoring from the perspective of mentor teachers who

support preparation of early childhood teachers. I designed this study to uncover new

knowledge and explore mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor

early childhood preservice teachers using semistructured interviews. Chapter 3 includes a

description of how the gap in practice, according to the literature on practice, was

investigated using basic qualitative research, designed to explore qualifications by

interviewing mentor teachers who mentor to prepare early childhood preservice teachers.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. I explored mentor teachers' perspectives of their understandings, feelings, and concerns regarding qualifications to mentor preservice teachers during clinical field experiences of their teacher preparation program. In this chapter, I describe the research method for the study, including the details of the research design and its rationale, the role of the researcher, the methodology used, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

**Research Design and Rationale**

The research question used to guide this study was:

What are mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers in a 4-year university laboratory school?

A basic qualitative research design was appropriate for this study because I wanted to explore the phenomenon of qualifications for mentoring from the mentor teachers' perspectives (see Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Qualitative research is conducted when a problem or issue needs to be explored and a theory to address gaps in understanding developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research begins with the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks made by the researcher that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Similarly, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The goal of a qualitative research study is to uncover

and understand the experience of the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The phenomenon explored in this study was mentor teachers' qualifications for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. Conducting a basic qualitative study allowed the researcher to focus on (a) how to interpret experiences, (b) how to construct worlds, and (c) what meaning is attributed to experiences (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A basic qualitative design was appropriate for this study because determining mentor teachers' perspectives allowed me to understand their interpretation, construction, and meaning of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers.

Other qualitative research methods were considered for this study prior to selecting a basic qualitative method. A grounded theory approach was not chosen for this study because this research was not intended to generate a new theory (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). In a case study, the researcher conducts in-depth exploration by asking "how" or "why" questions (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). A case study was rejected because the review of data collected requires more than one source to ensure validity (see Merriam & Grenier, 2019) and interviews will be the only data source collected for this study. Semistructured interviews were conducted to understand mentor teachers' perspectives on qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Phenomenology emphasizes experience and interpretation based on understanding the essence (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Phenomenological research was not used in my study because it is used to understand structure of an experience rather than to examine processes.

**Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, my role in this study was to design and implement the study, collect and analyze data, evaluate, write up, and present the findings. My experience in early childhood education includes teaching kindergarten, managing a home-based childcare program, working as an early interventionist, and instructing college-level courses. I have served on state level taskforces to inform and provide guidance on initiatives focusing on early childhood higher education and workforce development. I have undergraduate degrees in early childhood education and elementary education and a graduate degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in early childhood education. My knowledge and experience in working with these programs provided me insight in understanding the importance of clinical experiences as a part of teacher preparation programs and prompted my interest in developing this study. The background I have was supportive to the trustworthiness of this study.

My background knowledge and experiences in early childhood mentoring involve teacher preparation at both local and state levels of the institution of study. My former role as executive director and assistant professor included over 10 years of teaching and developing early childhood courses online, in person, and via video conferencing. As a clinical faculty member and mentor teacher, I have served in a triad for observing, assessing, and mentoring preservice teachers. My service on state level advisory boards for early childhood higher education included focus on early childhood teacher preparation, workforce development, and to develop a statewide mentoring certification program in partnership with other institutions. The goal of the mentoring certification program is to build a network of mentor teachers trained to support early childhood

preservice teachers. In addition to work in higher education, I actively advocated legislatively and participated in the development of a state level early childhood department. My advocacy for this department was based on my knowledge and experiences to recommend streamlining of funding, policies, and initiatives involving early learning and early childhood teacher preparation.

Due to my former role in the Early Childhood Programs at a 4-year institution, I may have had relationships with some of the study participants. I have not directly supervised any of the potential participants of this study. Potential participants who are students in the courses I teach were excluded from participating in the study. To ensure confidentiality of the participants, codes were assigned to each participant to protect their identity. It was my role to protect the confidentiality of the participants in this study.

I recognized that some biases may have formed through my experiences with mentoring and preparation of the early childhood workforce. As a professor at the institution of study, a conscious effort was made to disregard my experiences and thoroughly examined and understood the perspectives of the study participants. To minimize and manage biases, I minimized wording bias by transcribing participants' words verbatim. I kept a reflexive journal to remain cognizant of any bias or subjectivity. Member checking was conducted to help improve the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of a study review. Participants indicated whether my interpretations were representative of their beliefs.

**Methodology**

**Participant Selection**

Participants selected for the study were mentor teachers of early childhood preservice teachers from a university laboratory site in a southwestern state in the United States. The educational requirements for childcare teachers in the university laboratory site include degrees in or relating to the field of early childhood education. Only lead teachers have the responsibility of mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. Only lead teachers who mentor early childhood preservice teachers were asked to participate in this study. Snowball sampling was used to select the participants for this study. Snowball sampling is used to identify and select information-rich participants who are knowledgeable of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection of participants included lead teachers who mentor preservice teachers at a 4-year university laboratory school.

**Sampling**

Sampling is central to the practice of qualitative methods (Robinson, 2014). When employing a snowball sampling strategy, the researcher gradually seeks out participants (Robinson, 2014). I sought out an initial potential primary data source then relied on them to nominate additional potential primary data sources. I continued this sampling process until data saturation had been reached (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I recruited potential participants after I received approval to collect data, and formally requested permission to conduct my study. Potential participants received a detailed letter of invitation, consent form, and sample of interview questions (see Appendix A) via email to understand the study before deciding to participate. Participants acknowledged they agreed to be

interviewed for 45-60 minutes by replying "I consent" to the email. All interviews were

conducted at a mutually agreed upon time via phone.

**Instrumentation**

The interview protocol was the instrumentation for data collection (see Appendix

A). The interview protocol consisted of semistructured interview questions.

Semistructured interviews allowed the researcher flexibility to respond to the participants

to glean relevant data from the participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The primary

data were recorded responses of the participants to the interview questions via phone. I

created the interview questions and asked two nonparticipant clinical faculty mentors of

preservice teachers to review them. The reviewers provided suggestions for the study and

provided assistance with wording to make all questions clearly stated. I used the

interview protocol form to gather demographic data, record minor details, inform

participants of expectations, and to ask interview questions (see Appendix A). Interview

questions were asked in the same sequential order for each participant. Consistency in the

interviews promoted the reliability of the study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Recording

the responses allowed me to analyze participants' responses for accuracy (see Brinkmann

& Kvale, 2018).

The interview questions were created for this study based on the conceptual

framework and related literature. The interview questions were developed to learn about

mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice

teachers. I researched studies using interview questions to elicit perspectives to guide my

development of each question. The responses to the interview questions helped me

answer my research question. The results of my research might provide other 4-year

university laboratory teacher preparation programs with an understanding of qualifications for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers.

**Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The study sample consisted of mentor teachers of early childhood preservice teachers. I recruited initial participants based on their role as a lead teacher. The population for this study included mentor teachers of a 4-year institution providing mentoring to early childhood preservice teachers.

**Recruitment.** I sought out potential participants that met the qualifications to participate in this study. Identified potential participants were emailed the letter of invitation and consent form. The letter of invitation and consent form to the participants included background information about the study, the procedures, risks and benefits, contact information for questions, and instructions for providing consent. Each mentor teacher replied "I consent" to agree to participate before interviews were scheduled.

**Participation.** Once I received participants' email replies, I emailed the participants options for specific days and times to schedule interviews via phone. Interviews were not scheduled during instructional time. Participants could be interviewed during planning time, before/after school, or weekends. Mentor teachers needed to have access to a phone to participate in the interview.

When I met with each participant via phone, I used the interview protocol form (see Appendix A) to gather demographic data, record minor details, inform participants of expectations, and to ask interview questions (see Appendix A). I scheduled, conducted, and recorded individual interviews with each mentor participant.

**Data collection.** Qualitative interviews are a data collection method used by the researcher to seek a deeper understanding of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection for this study was conducted using qualitative semistructured interviews. Interviews provide researchers a mode to uncover how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

If necessary, I sent a courtesy email reminding the participants of the upcoming scheduled interview two days prior to scheduled interviews. To be prepared on the day of the interview, I reviewed the interview protocol and interview. Interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon date and time via phone. I reminded and orally asked the participants permission to record the interview sessions. Recording the interviews allowed me to go back to review the responses to the interview questions. I asked each participant if they had any questions prior to beginning the interview. After questions were answered or if there were no questions, I stated that the recording would begin.

To achieve the objectives of the study, I conducted semistructured interviews with mentor teachers of early childhood preservice teachers. Their responses provided detailed descriptions of their perspectives of qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. During the interview, the interview questions were asked one question at a time. Probing or follow-up questions were asked if more information or elaboration was necessary (see Appendix A). I used an open-ended stance which allowed the phenomenon of study to emerge (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant was interviewed one time. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes. Any notes that were relevant

were documented in my reflexive journal during the interviews. I used the responses to the interviews to clarify and bring more depth and understanding of the participants' perceptions of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers.

At the end of the interview, I immediately debriefed each participant. I reminded the participant that the interview responses would remain confidential. I asked the participant whether he or she had any questions regarding the interview process. I answered any questions the participant had. I asked for their support in recruiting additional mentor teacher participants to interview for this study. I requested they provide me with the contact information of additional potential participants or to contact the additional potential participants and give them my contact information. I thanked them for their time and participation. I documented each step of the data collection process in detail in case there was a need to verify the data with the participants and to monitor and maintain the thoroughness and quality of data collection. After completion of each interview, I submitted the audio recordings to Rev Software (2019), an online transcription service.

**Data Analysis Plan**

A thematic analysis was completed as a part of the data analysis plan. I closely examined the data to identify emerging themes, topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that came up repeatedly. Qualitative data analysis is the review of non-numerical information such as interview transcriptions, notes, video and/or audio recordings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since the data collected for this study were interviews, I conducted qualitative data analysis to confirm or refute ideas with a detailed examination of the interview responses. Data analysis included organizing and preparing data, reading

and reflecting on overall meaning, conducting a thematic analysis, representing data, and interpreting the larger meaning of data (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative data analysis was essential as an inductive strategy that began with a unit of data, such as meaningful word or phrase, that was compared to another unit of data. This step continued while looking for common patterns across the data (see Merriam & Grenier, 2019). It was important to confirm that the data analysis was conducted thoroughly to understand and explore mentor teachers' perspectives of qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers.

The qualitative data analysis for this study began with the interviews. When the interviews were complete, I uploaded the recordings of the interviews to an online transcription service (Rev Software, 2019). The transcriptions of the interviews were produced electronically. Documented reports of the transcriptions were available to me in a password protected online account. Interview transcriptions were read at least three times. Reading through all of the transcripts multiple times allowed me to identify codes that emerged from similar key words and phrases (see Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Similarities in key words and phrases across the interviews were highlighted on the interview transcriptions. Open coding is an attempt to find meaning within qualitative data by reading through data several times to create tentative labels for chunks of data that summarize examples of participants' words (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Open coding was used to determine initial codes drawn from the conceptual framework, interview questions, and information gathered during the literature review (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Codes provided words or phrases that symbolically represented data (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

When the initial open coding process was complete, I used a qualitative program, Quirkos 2.3.1, to store and to create visual representations of patterns in the data. Qualitative computer programs, such as Quirkos 2.3.1, do not analyze data for you but facilitate the process of storing and visualizing the data (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The open coded data were analyzed using axial coding. Axial coding is a two-part process: (a) finding a relationship among open codes and review of the transcripts to form categories, and (b) searching the categories for patterns to form themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Coded responses were reread to determine whether the excerpts fit the chosen codes and determined whether the data justified the created codes. The continuous assessment of interview transcripts allowed a comprehensive, systematic search to determine patterns in mentor teachers' perspectives of qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Once I had themes, I reviewed the RQ, transcripts, and themes to define and determine the themes.

I gave special consideration to possible discrepant cases. When writing an analysis, dealing with discrepant cases helps to form a more thorough argument (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) by providing a perspective that is not in support of, but does not refute the study. Discrepant cases can enrich the data by strengthening the theory with other perspectives.

## Trustworthiness

The accuracy and credibility of the findings for my study were validated by member checking. Member checking is the process of asking one or more participants of the study to check the findings for accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checks were conducted to clarify any possible disparities of the summary of my findings.

Adequate time was allowed for data collection and review of the content (see Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). I sought clarification of the findings from the participating mentor

teachers and recorded no discrepant findings. I asked the mentor teachers to read the

summary and decide if the data were complete and realistic, if the themes were accurate,

and if the interpretations were fair and representative of their responses (see Creswell &

Poth, 2018) by emailing the summary for their review. Participants were instructed they

had five business days to respond by email to any discrepancies. Member checking

contributed to dependability of my study.

I completed notes and transcriptions of interviews then organized and categorized

them for later access and to establish confirmability of my study (see Creswell & Poth,

2018). I utilized an annotated bibliography to index sources and for facilitating document

storage and retrieval. I kept a reflective journal for documenting thoughts and possible

bias. Descriptive notes were kept in the reflective journal as well as reflective notes.

Dependability in qualitative research is important to trustworthiness because it

establishes if the research findings are consistent and replicable (Merriam & Grenier,

2019). Providing clear, detailed steps for this study supported the dependability of the

findings. I kept an audit trail to track all steps taken during the data collection and

analysis periods. Keeping an audit trail supported the transparency and reliability of the

study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Transferability in qualitative research is synonymous with generalizability and is

established by providing readers with evidence that the research study findings could be

applied to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I

provided thick descriptions and complete details of setting, participants, culture, and

resources, so other researchers and readers can make connections from my study's findings to their own personal experiences (see Creswell, 2012).

## Ethical Procedures

To ensure the study included only ethical procedures, approval of this study was sought and ethical requirements followed according to the Walden University IRB. Ethical concerns related to recruitment materials and processes were put into place. A letter of invitation and consent form was emailed to potential participants. The email described the procedures for data collection, confidentiality protection, and time required for the interview. Participants replied "I consent" to indicate their consent to participate in the study. A follow-up email was sent after one week if there was no response to the initial request to interview. A third and final request was sent by email for response to interview requests after five business days of no response to initial request.

Ethical concerns related to data collection and possible intervention activities were established. Participants reserved the right to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice or penalty. Interviews could be ended by participant if at any time they refused to answer questions, had a desire to discontinue the interview, or if the interview was interrupted. Data from any discontinued interviews were used in the study unless the participant requested it not be included. Participants had the option to take breaks or to reschedule the interview if they became anxious or had the need to reschedule. Participants' information and data shared between each participant and me remained confidential. I used coded identifiers for all participants to protect their identity. All personal identifiers were removed and replaced with words, letters, or numbers to protect the identity of the individual. The identifiers were used in describing the findings. I was

the only person with access to the data. The data from the semistructured interviews were

stored in my home office on a password-protected computer. All data will be erased after

5 years beyond the completion of the study.

## Summary

Chapter 3 included an overview of the methodology of the study with justification

for why I chose to conduct a basic qualitative study. I explained my role as the primary

researcher and how I controlled potential researcher bias. The chapter also included a

description of recruitment, participation, instrumentation, data collection, and data

analysis. I discussed issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

In Chapter 4, I present the results, describe the setting, participants, data

collection, analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and findings. The setting and data

collection are described thoroughly. All data analysis and results are reported and

presented to support and address the research question. In Chapter 5, all key findings are

interpreted and recommendations for further research are suggested.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. I used snowball sampling to solicit participants of this study. I emailed potential participants and attached a copy of the letter of invitation and consent form to inform them about the study. Those who wished to participate replied, "I consent." When I received consent, I sent another email to each participant to set a day and time for the participant's interview. I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to conduct semistructured phone interviews. I recorded the interviews, uploaded the audio interviews to Rev Software (2019) to be transcribed, and then I analyzed the transcripts to extract patterns and thematic structures. I used Quirkos 2.3.1 software to store codes and to create a visual representation of the data.

In Chapter 4, I present the results divided into four sections:  (a) the data collection process, (b) participant demographic information, (c) data analysis, and (d) findings of the analysis. The research question that guided the study was as follows:

What are mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers in a 4-year university laboratory school?

**Review of the Data Collection Process**

I ensured that data collection procedures corresponded with the research question and data collection plan, as detailed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). The participants were eight mentor teachers from one university laboratory site in a rural community in a southwestern state of the United States. No unplanned occurrences affected the interpretation of the study results. The data collection process commenced once approval

was obtained from Walden University's IRB (approval number 07-14-20-0406104). Data collection included a series of semistructured phone interviews with eight mentor teachers to collect personal narratives related to individual perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers and transcription of the interviews followed by thematic analysis using open and axial coding.

**Demographics**

The eight study participants were early childhood lead teachers with experience mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. I assigned participants codes A–H to protect their identities. Five of the eight participants had an early childhood Associate of Arts (AA) or Bachelor of Science (BS) degree. Five participants were taking courses in pursuit of higher education. Participants A and C were seeking Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degrees. Participant A was seeking a MAT with AA and BS degrees in early childhood education. Participant C was pursuing a MAT with a specialization in reading. All but one participant had previously been or were current students at the institution of study's early childhood teacher preparation program.

Six of the eight mentor teachers had five or more years of teaching experience. Two participants had 10 or more years of teaching experience. The least amount of teaching experience was 4 years. Six of the participants' entire teaching experience was at the institution of study. All but two participants had over 5 years of mentoring experience. One mentor teacher had been in the position of lead teacher for a year and had experience mentoring only one preservice teacher. One participant had 11 years of mentoring experience. Table 1 contains a summary of the participants' alphabetical

identifiers, highest degree obtained and field of study, years of teaching experience, and

years of mentoring experience.

Table 1

*Research Participants.*

| Participant | Degree | Years of Teaching Experience | Years at 4-year Lab Site | Years of Mentoring Experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | BA - Fine Arts Pursuing MAT - ECED | 12 | 12 | 11 |
| B | BS - ELEM & Pursuing BS - Interdisciplinary Studies | 6 | 3 | 6 |
| C | AA – ECED BS – ECED Pursuing MAT – Reading | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| D | BA – Fine Arts Pursuing BS-ECED | 4 | 4 | 1.5 |
| E | AA – ECED BS – ECED | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| F | AA – ECED Pursuing BS – ECED | 5 | 5 | <1 |
| G | BS - ECED | 10 | 10 | 8 |
| H | AA - ECED Pursuing BS – ECED | 8 | 3 | 8 |

**Semistructured Interview Process**

The data I collected through semistructured interviews addressed the research

question developed for the study. During the semistructured interviews, I probed

individual attitudes, concerns, and opinions held by participants, who mentored early childhood preservice teachers during their clinical field experiences. Data collection occurred over 2 weeks, with an average of four interviews each week. Participants suggested a day and time that best fit with their schedules. The length of each interview varied based on the amount of information shared by the participant and lasted 45–60 minutes. I conducted each interview in a single session over the phone in a semistructured format. I asked each interviewee the same questions to guarantee that the same general information was collected from each interviewee. A reflective journal was used for reflexivity and to document my thoughts and insights. The transcripts and notes I took made up a dense collection of information related to mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. I conducted a post-interview protocol including the following steps: (a) thanked the interviewee for participating, (b) reminded interviewee of confidentiality and treatment of data, (c) informed interviewee to contact me if they had any questions, and (d) disclosed that interviewees will be contacted electronically to review a summary of study findings for accuracy.

**Interview questions.** There were 13 open-ended interview questions designed to engage participants in a dialog focused on discovering their perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. I began each interview by asking the participant to give verbal consent for the call to be recorded. I informed the participant I was the only person privy to the recordings of the interviews, which I would eventually destroy after transcribing them. I asked general questions about the length of the participant's service in education and mentoring early childhood preservice teachers,

as well as any professional background or experiences they wanted to share. I recorded

the audio of each interview, uploaded the audio recording to Rev Software (2019) for

transcription, and took notes in a reflective journal.

## Data Analysis

I used a four step process to analyze the data thematically: (a) Step 1 included

organizing and preparing the data, (b) Step 2 involved thematic analysis comprised of

open and axial coding, (c) Step 3 included searching for emergent themes, and (d) Step 4

the themes were defined.

### Step 1: Organized and Prepared the Data

For the first step of the analysis process, I prepared and organized the data. I

accomplished this by collecting all of the audio recordings and notes taken during the

interview process. I uploaded the audio recordings of each interview to Rev Software

(2019) for transcription. I reviewed each transcription with the audio recording for

accuracy. I saved electronic copies of the interview transcriptions on a password

protected computer. Alphabetical identifiers were assigned to the interview transcriptions

to protect the identity of the participants. After listening to the audio recordings twice, I

read through the transcripts multiple times to identify codes that emerged from similar

key words and phrases (see Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Data were stored in Quirkos

2.3.1.

### Step 2: Thematically Analyzed Data

To commence thematic analysis, I applied open coding to help find meaning

within qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I began open coding the interview data

to identify codes related to mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor

early childhood preservice teachers. Open coding was used to determine initial codes

drawn from the conceptual framework, interview questions, and information gathered

during the literature review (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I reviewed the transcripts

line-by-line identifying repetitive words, phrases, and concepts and providing labels

(codes) to give meaning to each grouped repetition. As I read each transcript, I made

handwritten notes in the margins to help identify key concepts or repeated phrases

located in the text. I reread the transcripts to reduce the data and identify more codes.

Thirty-nine open codes emerged from the data (see Appendix B). Similar responses and

perspectives were color-coded to indicate similarity and assist with the coding process. I

used specific colors to represent each code that was identified. After highlighting, I made

notes in the margins pertaining to the words, phrases, and concepts. Table 2 shows an

example of eight open codes, participant identifiers, and examples of excerpts from the

data that fit each code.

Table 2

*Examples of Open Codes.*

| Open Codes | Participant Identifier | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|
| Child Development | B | "Knowledge of the child and understanding of the different developmental stages." |
| | G | "Knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices and the developmental areas that we are going to be working with." |
| Communication | H | "Good communication skills." |
| | D | "I believe communication is huge." |
| Empathy | C | "As a student, I understand what it is like to be in their shoes." |
| | B | "Remembering what it was like to be in their shoes. For me, it was easier to empathize with them because I had recently been trained by somebody." |
| Friendly | F | "I try to be super welcoming and friendly." |
| | H | "You want it to be friendly and positive. I build that by having the listening skills and positive attitude." |
| Modeling | F | "Modeling good relationships with families, being able to explain how we communicate with them – sometimes you have to change how you word things for certain parents." |
| | G | "Being able to guide the preservice teacher to success through modeling different strategies for them." |
| Experience | A | "It's made me grow from mentoring. I've learned how to teach better." |
| | D | "Experience from other teachers in your classroom that you can pass down to your mentee." |
| Culture | E | "Knowledge of cultures and how other people learn and the differences of how they learn compared to mine." |
| | A | "Knowledge of your background, your job, and people – understand adults." |
| Passion | B | "Desire to be a good mentor – being excited about what you are doing. I enjoy teaching people new things. I have enthusiasm for what I do so I am able to help another be enthusiastic about what we're doing." |
| | A | "You've got to first love your job. You have to enjoy your job. I want to learn. I'm excited to learn." |

After open coding, I coded the data using axial coding. Axial coding is a two-part process: (a) finding a relationship among open codes and review of the transcripts to form categories, and (b) searching the categories for patterns to form themes (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). I closely read a copy of each transcript reviewing the highlighted words,

phrases, and references to support revising the initial codes into categories more

applicable for concentrated contemplation. I searched the relationships among the open

codes to identify emerging categories.

Next, I created labels for portions of data and used a color-highlighting system to

group the codes into categories by similarities. I used my highlighting system to regroup

the categories based on similarities and other common characteristics. I compared and

arranged the categories to discover connections between the data and the research

question. Thirteen categories emerged using axial coding. I documented the identified

categories in a notebook to further examine the relationships among the categories. I

recorded the categories on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

Table 3 shows examples of the categories that developed, the participant

identifier, and excerpts from the interview transcripts.

Table 3

*Examples of Categories Based on Axial Coding.*

| Categories | Participant | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|
| Experience | D | "Experience from others… you can pass down to your mentee." |
| Education | C | "Early childhood education." |
| Teaching Strategies | F | "I think good communication skills are key." |
| Communication Skills | H | "Modeling skills. Skill needed to be a teacher." |
| Friendly | B | "I feel like I helped my students feel comfortable." |
| Vulnerability | A | "You're gonna see me mess up and admit my faults because I am not afraid of them." |
| Open-minded | E | "Having an open mind with people." |
| Passion | B | "Desire to want to be a good mentor." |
| Empathy | C | "I had a bad experience with a mentor that had no sense of relationship. I felt like a stranger in the classroom. That enabled me to become a stronger mentor." |
| Diversity | G | "See what their culture is and what they believe in." |
| Training | B | "I've had no formal training." |
| Professional Development | H | "I've definitely had a lot of meetings." |
| Experience | G | "I look back at when I did my student teaching…that was a really great opportunity to learn how to be a good mentor." |

## Step 3: Searched for Emerging Themes

After axial coding, I reviewed the categories for patterns or emerging themes. I investigated the patterns among the categories to distinguish relationships within the collections of mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications. I analyzed and condensed the categories into themes. I reviewed the themes to ensure alignment with the

conceptual framework and related literature. I sought to determine if the emerging themes

revealed mentor teachers' perspectives of qualifications to mentor early childhood

preservice teachers. I reviewed the data several times to condense categories into themes

in ways in which the participants' interview responses answered the research question:

What are mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood

preservice teachers at a 4-year university laboratory school? The themes that emerged

included mentor teachers' perspectives of what they perceived were the qualifications

necessary to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Table 4 shows the themes,

categories, and excerpts that emerged.

Table 4

*Axial Coding Themes, Categories and Excerpts.*

| Themes | Categories | Excerpts |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 1 | Respect | 12 |
| Qualifications for building mentoring relationships. | Empathy | 28 |
| | Motivation | 13 |
| | Friendly | |
| | Open-minded | 5 |
| | Passion | 10 |
| | Relationships | 10 |
| Theme 2 | Communication | 21 |
| Qualified mentor teachers create secure learning climates. | Teaching strategies | 11 |
| | Vulnerability | 10 |
| Theme 3 | Experience | 21 |
| Mentor teachers require specific knowledge to be qualified. | Education | 22 |
| | Training | 18 |

## Step 4: Defined Themes

I reviewed the research question, transcripts, and themes to define and determine the themes. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis were (a) qualifications for building mentoring relationships, (b) qualified mentor teachers create secure learning climates, and (c) mentor teachers require specific knowledge to be qualified. After careful analysis of the data, I was able to answer the research question: RQ: What are mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers at a 4-year university laboratory school?

All the participants referenced the dispositions, skills, knowledge, relationships, and development of qualifications necessary for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. The participants referenced the importance of specific dispositions for building relationships to support preservice teacher learning. They shared the dispositions and skills essential for creating a secure learning climate. All participants discussed the knowledge and acquisition of qualifications necessary to for mentoring. There were no discrepant cases identified through the data analysis process. Further analysis of the findings was deemed unnecessary.

## Results

The responses from the mentor teachers are the data that were gleaned from the interviews. Three themes emerged: (a) qualifications for building mentoring relationships, (b) qualified mentor teachers create secure learning climates, and (c) mentor teachers require specific knowledge to be qualified.

### Theme 1: Qualifications for Building Mentoring Relationships

This theme contained relational dispositions mentor teachers perceived as crucial for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers, such as respect, empathy, and motivation. Seven of the eight participants spoke of the approaches applied to establish relationships and the benefits those relationships had on preservice teachers learning. Participant D stated, "Once you establish a good healthy relationship, you can balance each other with different skills that you bring to the table." Participant B shared a similar perspective: "Students are usually shy at first until they get to know my personality and then they felt more comfortable to volunteer, come out of their shell, and do more things with the kids in front of me."

The participants perceived it was necessary to have the disposition of respect for the preservice teacher. Seven participants shared they needed to support the preservice teachers to feel comfortable and welcome in their classrooms. Having patience, being kind, positive, and having a good attitude were all dispositions participants discussed as important for creating a respectful relationship with their preservice teachers. Participant G described the importance of being welcoming and acknowledging your preservice teacher as another teacher in the classroom,

"I've had a lot of students come in really nervous and not sure what to expect. So being open and welcoming to them so that they feel like part of the class or as a third teacher, is what I try and help them. I feel like I am really open and supportive."

Participant C similarly shared, "It is important to help them feel comfortable and welcome. [This is similar to creating a] sense of welcoming for strangers in the classroom."

Participants responded indicating the importance of passion and motivation for their job was necessary for building a relationship to support mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. Participant B stated,

"[You need to have a] desire to want to be a good mentor. Being excited about what you are doing. I enjoy teaching people. I have enthusiasm for what I do so I am able to help another teacher be enthusiastic about what we're doing."

Participant E and H agreed it is important as a mentor to be eager to learn. Participant A included, "You've got to first love your job. I love my job. I think that's a strength."

Relationships with preservice teachers require mentors to understand diversity and how to work with various cultures. Seven of the eight participants agreed understanding diversity and others' perspectives are essential for establishing a relationship. Participate G said, "I think it is super important to get to know the [student] before they're even in the classroom. [It is important to] see what their culture is and what they believe in, in their teaching philosophy." Participant E presented a different perspective but expressed a similar sentiment,

"Also, knowledge of cultures. How other people learn and the differences of how they learn compared to mine… I learned a lot how certain races may have different cultural beliefs, and how sometimes can have an effect how individuals were in school."

Seven participants perceived empathy as a disposition required for supporting a respectful relationship and supporting preservice student learning. Participant B elaborated,

"[It was important to] remember what it was like when you were in their shoes. For me, it was easier to empathize with them because I had just been trained by somebody. I was just mentored by some great mentors."

Participant C shared an example of how they developed empathy for preservice student learning based on difficult relationship circumstances, "As a student, I understand what it is like to be in their shoes. I had a bad experience with a mentor who had no sense of relationship. I felt like a stranger in the classroom." One of the eight participants described understanding of working with others as a strength. Participant B expressed how she uses this to support a relationship for mentoring early childhood preservice

teachers, "My strength is connecting with people of all different stages of life, patience, and teaching. I enjoy teaching people new things."

**Theme 2: Qualified Mentor Teachers Create Secure Learning Climates**

This theme contained three dispositions and skills connected to what mentor teachers perceived as essential for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers: communication, teaching strategies, and vulnerability to create a secure climate. The perspectives shared by the interviewed mentor teachers supported communication skills as the most important qualification for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. The participants referred to essential communication skills for mentoring including sharing information, listening skills, ability to delegate, discussing issues, and providing feedback. Participant D described, "I believe communication is huge, #1. Being able to delegate; to talk about serious issues in the classroom" are essential to creating a positive learning environment. Participant H explained, "If you have those qualities, positive qualities, good listening skills, good communication skills, then hopefully you can educate and build a good foundation where you can answer questions and be as helpful as possible." Five of the eight participants indicated communication skills as an area of weakness or opportunity for growth for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. Communication requires assertiveness and the ability to delegate. Participant F shared, "I think good communication skills are key. Being able to articulate your expectations to someone, provide constructive criticism where it's needed; give them suggestions… and guidance [are part of my responsibility as a mentor]." Participant B concurred,

> "Not being afraid to share with them or correct them if they need to do something
>
> differently [are essential in mentoring preservice teachers]. … I could definitely

grow in being more assertive, for being able to tell someone when I don't think they're doing something right, or if I think they should be doing something a different way, or give advice."

Participants agreed teaching skills and strategies were necessary to support early childhood preservice teachers. Participant G shared it is important to have the skills, "to guide the [preservice teacher] to success through modeling different strategies for them." Four of the eight participants stated that modeling, as a teaching skill, is used to demonstrate best practices with young children for the preservice teacher. Participant D shared, "Observing them first, seeing what they know and if there are areas that you want them to improve, or you see potential [are part of my responsibility]." Participant E shared her experience using scaffolding and reflective practices as skills for teaching her preservice teacher,

> "I ask them, 'What did you feel comfortable doing? What did you feel good about today? Do you have anything that you'd like to work on? Maybe you talk to me about [a specific topic]'…and maybe we share ideas or stuff to help with that."

Participants (50%) reported vulnerability is a disposition necessary for a safe learning climate which is necessary for preservice teachers to feel comfortable to try new things, make mistakes, and learn. Participant G said, "I actually tell [my preservice teachers], 'You're going to see me mess up and admit my faults,' because I am not afraid of them. You've got to have confidence to accept that." Participant A agreed sharing vulnerability helped establish trust, which is necessary for a secure climate for learning. Participant B included "you can't be afraid to share with them." Creating a safe climate

for learning requires specific skills, including communication, modeling patience, flexibility, and leadership skills.

**Theme 3: Mentor Teachers Require Specific Knowledge to be Qualified**

Participants stated they relied on their prior experiences being mentored as students in the program or mentoring prior students for support of developing knowledge for mentoring. All eight participants described how their knowledge for mentoring preservice teachers developed with experience over time. Participant G expressed how experiences shaped  mentoring performance, "I actually look back at when I did my student teaching, even though I was just learning, I look back and say, that was a really good opportunity for learning how to be a good mentor." The participants perceived their knowledge to mentor developed over time and through experience mentoring others.

Four of the eight interview participants stated that their experiences of observing other teachers, support from administrators and professors, and interaction with family members in the education field increased abilities for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. Participant D stated support from mentors including supervisors, curriculum coordinator, professors, and other administrators have supported growth in the quality of mentoring,

> "I talk to my mentor and have meetings to reflect with her or if I need help, how [to] go about certain things, or how [to] address an issue in the classroom. I usually go to her and she provides support and guidance."

Participant E similarly described experiences with gaining mentoring knowledge from experience with others, "I have a lot of conversations with the professor and administration. If my student is having difficulty grasping a concept, I'll ask, 'What can I

do more?' Participant B said, "I was just mentored by some great mentors. It helped me know what they [the students] were feeling like apprehensiveness, being nervous, and scared."

Only one of the eight participants stated that mentoring knowledge was based on prior negative experiences. Participant H said,

"I'm just the type of person who is eager to learn… [This is] an important quality because I do try hard to teach things I wish were taught to me. So when I mentor, I definitely try hard to teach everything I know and be as helpful as I can."

Participants agreed early childhood education, child development, classroom management, and multicultural education were all courses that contributed to their knowledge to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Having a background in early childhood education was supported by six of the eight participants. Participant C elaborated on this by stating, "Early childhood education is different than other closely related fields." Participants A, B, C, E, and G agreed, "understanding the children" and "the different developmental stages" supported their background knowledge for quality mentoring. Participant B felt it was necessary to understand the "program's protocol [processes and procedures] and expectations." Participant E supported "multicultural education" as essential coursework for necessary mentoring qualifications. Participant D shared a perspective of having early childhood education background knowledge stating, "I sometimes, I don't feel like I can, I feel like I can't mentor [preservice teachers] because I don't have a background in early childhood [education]." Participant B felt like there is a need for more support to learn knowledge of mentoring and leadership skills. Participant B said, "I could definitely grow in the area to be a better mentor. More

knowledge, like continuing my education, and definitely continuing my early childhood education, would help me to become a better mentor."

Participants discussed their prior education and training, access, recommendations for professional development, and the resources used to support their knowledge for mentoring. Four of the eight participants felt their experience with a piloted mentor certification program was not as helpful as anticipated. Participant G explained, "I started the mentor program piloted at another institution, but it was a new [instructor]... It was unorganized. I had a really difficult time and I dropped it." Similarly, Participant E stated, "A mentor certification program, yes, I did half of the course. I had to withdraw [be]cause I was overwhelmed with everything in my personal life."

There is access to a multitude of opportunities for training, conferences, and professional development through the institution and program of study. Although, all eight participants stated they lacked systematic training to be prepared for the interactions necessary to engage in quality mentoring of early childhood preservice teachers. Participants B stated she did not have any type of formal mentor training before being assigned an early childhood preservice teacher to mentor. Similarly, Participant D indicated she had not participated in any mentoring specific classes or training.

Five of the eight participants perceived having more feedback on their mentoring performance would be supportive of their development. Participant F supported this statement by saying, "Some feedback would have been nice, what can we do to help the next set of students. I think everyone appreciates feedback." Participants A, C, G, and H felt unsure how their mentoring performance was evaluated or did not receive feedback. Similarly, Participant A was unaware of any type of feedback. She expressed, "I am sure

I get somewhat rated on my personal evaluation each year, but I don't know how much it weighs. I don't know what I could do to improve. I have no clue." Participant G agreed by explaining,

> "We are assessed…the preservice teacher does do an assessment on us towards the end of their whole experience on their mentor teacher. They turn it in to the professor and I don't, I've never seen one, we don't get to see them."

> Participant C was also unaware of the process and reported, "I'd like to see more and learn how I can grow." The participants perceived feedback on their performance as mentors could support the growth and development of their mentoring knowledge.

Six of the eight participants found it helpful to have mentoring support and resources readily available to them within their program. Participants A and H both relied on administrative mentors for support. Participant H found it helpful, she stated, "Administrators coming in and doing a quick check, just quick conversations to see how things are going and if any things have been addressed." Participant H also shared preservice teachers appreciated more formal type scheduled meetings where they could go more in depth about the student's support and progress. Participants C, D, E, and H agreed reflection time was helpful. Participant C stated, "We also receive support from staff and leadership. Support from the director and curriculum coordinator as they work side by side with me." Participant E provided, "I do like the required reflective practice training with the Administrative Coordinator. It was helpful to meet with others that were in the same situation as you."

Being a university laboratory school, access to learning resources were available to the participants. The mentor teachers shared that they are recorded to improve teaching

performance and to meet with their mentors to garner support in areas they select as goals. Participant C included, "Video reflections helped me to observe [my own] opportunities for growth. My mentor keeps me liable, just as I do with my students." Additionally, it was stated that one of the early childhood curriculum course professor's office is housed in the laboratory school. Participant F felt access to the professor of the course the preservice teachers are taking is helpful since she is readily available for support and questions.

Other recommendations for developing mentoring knowledge included reflective practices and communication training, and access to additional resources. Participant E recommended reflective practice training. Participant E explained,

"The knowledge that I have found most helpful is definitely reflective practices knowledge. [I think about] being able to teach someone without giving them the answers, without allowing them to critically think for themselves, and to [help preservice teachers] develop the answer by themselves, and guide them along."

The mentor teachers in this study found ways to support preservice teachers independent of the mentor training they received. Participant A found resources to support her knowledge of mentoring and elaborated stating, "I Google. I'll just look stuff up." Participant H requested support for delivering constructive criticism. Additionally, Participant H stated, "[I] definitely recommend everybody has training or more in depth than what I've had…I really don't mind what form it's in." Participant A preferred to have certain types of training in person, after work. Participant A explained, "I couldn't do a sign language [training]… There are certain situations where I would want in person

training, because I'd want to have a conversation [which would not be welcome in a sign language training]."

Five of the eight participants indicated they have participated in many meetings, training, and conferences. Participant G and Participant H agreed they had numerous opportunities for professional development. Participant E and B referred to annual training required by all teaching staff. Three of the eight participants have attended state or national conferences. Two of the eight participants stated they already had enough on their plate and taking on additional training would be overwhelming. Participant F recommended a downloadable file or access to resources that could be sought and researched on their own time.

## Evidence of Trustworthiness

### Credibility

Credibility is the reliability of the study. The accuracy and credibility of the findings for my study were validated by member checking. Member checking is the process of asking one or more participants of the study to check the findings for accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checks were conducted to clarify any possible disparities of the summary of my findings. Adequate time was allowed for data collection and review of the content (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I sought clarification of the findings from the participating mentor teachers and recorded no discrepant findings. I asked the mentor teachers to read the summary of the findings and to decide if the data were complete and realistic, if the themes were accurate, and if the interpretations were fair and representative of their responses (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were instructed they had 5 business days to respond by email to any discrepancies. Member

checking contributed to dependability of my study. Collecting data from participants based on their understanding or interpretations of the phenomenon of interest supports the credibility of this study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

**Transferability**

Transferability is the ability of the reader to apply qualitative research results to other contexts, settings, or populations. Providing a thick, rich description supports the transferability of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The thick description refers to providing enough description and information to determine if findings can be transferred (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). In this study, I provided information from the interview responses of mentor teachers that made transferability judgements possible on the part of others. I utilized semistructured interviews, additional question prompts, and my field notes to obtain rich, thick descriptions. In this chapter, I attempted to thoroughly document and report the participants' responses for readers to determine whether the findings are transferable.

**Dependability**

Dependability in qualitative research is important to trustworthiness because it establishes if the research findings are consistent and replicable (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Providing clear, detailed steps for this study supported the dependability of the findings. I kept an audit trail to track all steps taken during the data collection and analysis period. Keeping an audit trail supported the transparency and reliability of the study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). In addition, I reminded all participants of the voluntary nature of the study, stating that they could withdraw or discontinue their participation from the study at any time, for any reason. To support consistency of the data, I used

audio recordings on my iPhone, my laptop, and field notes to capture all of the data accurately. Lastly, emerging themes were compared to current literature for corroboration, advancement, or disregard of the findings.

**Confirmability**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), confirmability of a study is supported by acknowledgment and exploration of data used by researchers to interpret personal biases and prejudices and to consider issues using a structured reflexivity process. Reflexivity is necessary since there are multiple ways researcher bias could affect the study, including the development of data collection tools, to the collecting, analysis, and reporting of the data. I kept a reflective journal for documenting data collection and analysis. Descriptive notes were kept in the reflective journal. An annotated bibliography was used for indexing, and document storage and retrieval.

Confirmability is established when the findings of the study can be confirmed by other researchers. Since each participant brings a unique perspective to a study, the corroboration of participants' perspectives determines confirmability. All findings were related to the themes and all themes were related to the research question. I paid close attention to and kept an open mind to receive and reflect on the information in this study.

<div align="center">

**Summary**

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With this basic qualitative study, I explored mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. In Chapter 4, I presented the themes ascertained from the analysis of data collected via semistructured interviews of eight mentor teachers from a university laboratory school in a southwestern state in the United States. Using a basic qualitative approach, I explored mentor teachers'

perspectives shared through the interview process that guided the research and data collection processes.

After careful analysis of the data, I was able to answer the RQ: What are mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers at a 4-year university laboratory school? Their responses revealed dispositions for building relationships were perceived to be most important for their role in mentoring. Communication skills were considered the most important skills to acquire and the largest area of weakness perceived by mentor teachers. Additionally, specific dispositions and skills were reported as necessary for creating a secure learning climate. The mentor teachers stated their knowledge for mentoring developed from past experiences as previous students in the program or through experience mentoring others. More than half of the participants felt their experiences being mentored as a student or having prior mentoring experiences supported their mentoring knowledge. Participants made recommendations for necessary knowledge and resources they found supportive of their mentoring qualifications.

Chapter 5 includes conclusions, recommendations, interpretations of the findings for each theme, and suggested topics for further study. Chapter 5 includes the research findings as they connect with current literature and Ambrosetti's (2012) mentor preparation theory. Implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research are provided in this chapter. I used a qualitative method for this study because qualitative research focuses on understanding, interpreting, and explaining phenomena (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through the qualitative approach, I gained an understanding of the mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice

teachers at a 4-year university laboratory school. The participants in this study shared

their perspectives of the relational, developmental, and contextual components of their

mentoring qualifications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore mentor teachers'
perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers.
According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative design with interviews is
appropriate when the purpose of a study is to pursue the understanding of ways people
see, view, approach, experience, and make meaning of their individual experiences. This
study was relevant and necessary because there was limited research on mentor teachers'
perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers (see dos
Reis & Braund, 2019; see Gandhi & Johnson, 2016; see Hobbs & Stovall, 2015).

Overall, the participants felt there were essential dispositions, skills, and
knowledge that contributed to their qualifications for mentoring early childhood
preservice teachers at a 4-year university laboratory school. The participants shared their
experiences and acquisition of their mentoring qualifications based on learning
opportunities and resources. In this chapter, I present an interpretation of the findings,
discuss limitations to the study, provide recommendations for future research, and
address potential social implications based on the findings of this study.

**Interpretation of the Findings**

Throughout my interpretation of the findings of this study, I considered the
literature I reviewed. The research question was used to explore mentor teachers'
perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers at a 4-
year university laboratory school. I used Ambrosetti's (2012) theory of mentor
preparation to focus on qualifications for mentoring. The findings of this study were
consistent with the findings of the studies discussed in Chapter 2 and Ambrosetti's theory

of mentor preparation, which included the interconnected components of mentoring that develop a holistic mentoring relationship. The three components of mentoring defined by Ambrosetti are relational, developmental, and contextual components. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis process aligned with the conceptual framework in this study. Mentor teachers perspectives of their qualifications to mentor aligned with Ambrosetti's theory of mentor preparation as follows: (a) relational component – mentor teachers expressed qualifications necessary to build a mentoring relationship, (b) contextual component – mentor teachers shared qualifications to create a safe learning climate for mentoring, and (c) developmental component – mentor teachers identified knowledge required for the acquisition of necessary mentoring qualifications.

The themes of this study suggested mentor teachers require a variety of qualifications for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. Participants agreed that their experience mentoring and/or being mentored supported their abilities to mentor others. This led them to recall their experiences as prior students in the program or experiences being mentored as new teachers, mentoring other new teachers, and previous experiences mentoring preservice teachers. According to Ambrosetti (2012), mentor teachers construct knowledge based on their developmental and individual experiences using the three components. Professional knowledge is the information, understanding, or skills gained from experience or education (Hairon et al., 2020; Whitebook & Bellm, 2014). Research by Whitebook and Bellm (2013) suggested that mentors have significant knowledge from their experience in teaching young children. Although teachers may be effective in the classroom, they do not naturally acquire the qualifications to mentor preservice teachers (Ambrosetti, 2012). Participants in this study reported the necessity of

experience to develop the specific dispositions, skills, and knowledge to mentor preservice teachers. The interview responses revealed that mentor teachers must have experience being mentored and/or mentoring others to develop these qualifications. Responses also concluded that mentor teachers lacked systematic training for their mentoring role.

The changes in teacher education, with an increased emphasis on the quality of clinical field experiences (NCATE, 2015; Nolan & Molla, 2018), has led to a broadening of the mentor teacher role. Due to the expansion of this role, decision makers must have a deeper understanding of the mentor teacher's experience (Fives et al., 2016; IOM & NRC, 2015). There is a lack of research on mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers (Hobbs & Stovall, 2015). Gandhi and Johnson (2016) and dos Reis and Braund (2019) agreed there is a need for more extensive research highlighting mentor teachers' perspectives on the mentoring process to improve preservice teacher preparation. Participants in this study agreed that specific dispositions, skills, and knowledge were necessary qualifications for mentoring. Existing literature stated challenges for mentor teachers when working with preservice teachers and indicated further research is necessary for understanding mentors' individual needs to support growth in their mentoring abilities (see dos Reis & Braund, 2019; see Gandhi & Johnson, 2016; see Hobbs & Stovall, 2015). The participants in this study agreed that a variety of specific qualifications allowed them to support the preparation of early childhood preservice teachers through mentoring.

**Theme 1: Qualifications for Building Mentoring Relationships**

Participants in this study stated they required specific qualifications to build relationships conducive to mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. Mentoring relationships are an essential step in developing preservice teachers into effective practitioners (Kupila et al., 2017; Russell & Russell, 2011; Wexler, 2019). Mentors should possess certain qualities and dispositions to support success (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). Participants in this study reported respect, empathy, and motivation were significant dispositions for establishing a trusting relationship with preservice teachers.

The goal of effective mentoring is to develop a personal relationship between the mentor and the mentee to encourage respectful dialogue and to feel comfortable speaking freely (Nolan & Molla, 2018). Mentors can link the support they provide to preservice teachers and the relationship developed with them to a shared understanding of the expectations and standards needed for preservice preparation (Ambrosetti's, 2012). Participants of my study said having dispositions for building a respectful relationship supported them in successfully mentoring preservice teachers. Researchers have categorized mentor relationships as evolving through three stages: formal, cordial, and friendship (Henning et al., 2015). Mentors in a collegial relationship are more direct, formal, and informative when giving feedback. In contrast, mentors in personal relationships tend to have an open dialogue that encourages preservice teachers to assertively ask questions and directly express their concerns (Henning et al., 2015). In my study, there was a mixture of the types of relationship recommended by the participants. Participant B said that a professional relationship should maintain a respectful boundary.

Participant E found it easier to mentor a preservice teacher when she had more in common with and had an understanding of her personal background. Interpersonal relationships in mentoring foster autonomy and professional responsibility (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). Effective mentoring occurs between the mentor and preservice teacher when characterized by coequal and reciprocal relationships (Kupila et al., 2017). All participants in this study agreed that developing relationships reflected their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers.

My review of the literature indicated the foundation of the mentoring relationship includes a motivation to the role of mentoring, building trust, establishing rapport, the establishment of interpersonal relationships, effectively communicating, and providing critical feedback to scaffold prospective teachers (see Baum & Korth, 2013; see Chu, 2014; see Graves, 2010; see La Paro et al., 2018; see Richardson et al., 2019; see Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012). One unexpected finding of this study was that participants concluded having empathy was a disposition necessary for a supportive mentoring relationship. The participants indicated putting themselves in the preservice teacher's shoes allowed them to better support their preparation as an early childhood teacher. Additionally, they better understood the preservice teachers' situation having recently been students in the early childhood teacher preparation program. Empathy gives mentors the ability to gauge the amount of support necessary based on their understanding of the preservice teachers' feelings and needs. Mentors require skills for gauging the amount of emotional support necessary for preservice teachers to connect theory during their practice (Arshavskaya, 2016). The results of the participants' responses in this study included empathy as an essential disposition for the foundation of the mentoring relationship.

Motivation is an indispensable characteristic of mentors as role models (Muñoz et al., 2015). Participants in this study determined their enthusiasm and passion for teaching supported their motivation for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. A motivated and engaged mentor plays a significant role in structuring and mediating the pedagogy of best practices (Kupila et al., 2017). Mentors need the motivation to set and work toward common goals (Vumilia & Semali, 2016). Participants in this study agreed motivation is integral for the mentoring relationship. To summarize, the results of this study are consistent with existing literature, which indicates respect and motivation may be valuable as qualifications for mentoring relationships (Nolan & Molla, 2018; Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017; Vumilia & Semali, 2016). Additionally, having empathy for preservice teachers was found to support mentor teachers in this role.

**Theme 2: Qualified Mentor Teachers Create Secure Learning Climates**

Communication is crucial for successful mentoring (Izadinia, 2016a, 2016b). In this study, communication skills were determined to be the most important mentoring skill by the participants. The ability to delegate, share information, discuss difficult issues, and provide critical criticism were all considered communication skills necessary to mentor preservice teachers. All participants in this study concluded communication skills were also the area they needed the most support. Participant B and F agreed that having conversations that required assertiveness or providing critical criticism was an area identified for growth.

Preservice teacher learning occurs through observation, modeling, and vicarious reinforcement by observing others (Bandura, 2012). Participants in this study reported the ability to model, scaffold, and reflect was required teaching strategies for creating a

secure climate. The connection of theory to practice occurs when preservice teachers are exposed to actual activities of teaching with adequate support from a mentor (Arshavskaya, 2016). The skills of teaching content matter, the skills of delivering lessons and activities, and the skills of addressing the individual and specific needs of preservice teachers are needed to be an effective mentor (Bandura, 2012; see Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). The participants disclosed their ability to use reflective practices as a teaching strategy supportive of preservice teacher learning. Preservice teachers try new practices and then alter what they do based on observation and collaborative reflection with their mentor through trial and error (Muhling, 2015). Throughout the interviews, participants' responses in this study supported the importance of these skills to create a secure climate to support preservice teacher learning and development.

Mentor teachers in this study expressed it was important for them to be vulnerable. They determined their vulnerability allowed preservice teachers to build confidence to try new things. Vulnerability is essential for creating a secure learning climate (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). The results of this study were consistent with this phenomenon. According to the participants, preservice teachers felt comfortable making mistakes without fear of reprimand. Most of the participants expressed vulnerability to create a secure learning environment. To summarize, the results of this study are consistent with existing literature, which indicates communication, teaching strategies, and vulnerability create a secure climate to support mentoring (Arshavskaya, 2016; Kahraman & Kuzu, 2016; Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017).

**Theme 3: Mentor Teachers Require Specific Knowledge to be Qualified**

Participants in this study noted that their previous experiences being mentored as students in the program or mentoring others were most influential in developing the knowledge necessary for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. It is not enough to simply "do" mentoring to internalize and be aware of its potential and impact; mentoring takes time to develop (Holland, 2018; McCorkel-Clinard & Ariav, 1998). Teacher preparation programs must recognize that mentor preparation is ongoing and cannot be accomplished through a one-time training (Childre & Van Rie, 2015). One participant in this study agreed, concluding that the knowledge necessary for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers were not something that could necessarily be taught in a training. Participants in this study expressed it was their experiences that had helped them to understand the requirements of preservice teachers and supported them in knowing how to better mentor them. This supports the need for mentor teachers to be at the "maturity stage" of development and have at least three years of teaching experience to mentor early childhood preservice teachers (see Magaya & Crawley, 2011; see Ronfeldt et al., 2018; see Roofe, & Cook, 2017).

Mentor teachers should be required to have a solid, current, and accurate background of early childhood education knowledge (Whitebook et al., 2009). Participants in this study discussed the knowledge to mentor early childhood preservice teachers came from their early childhood education background. Most importantly, they found it was essential to have a solid understanding of early childhood development, developmentally appropriate practices, classroom management, and multicultural education. Two of the participants in this study indicated they did not have early

childhood education and agreed taking courses in the field would support their mentoring abilities.

The complexity of the role of mentoring requires interactive professional development that focuses specifically on supporting preservice teachers (Hobbs & Stovall, 2015). Mentor teachers in this study shared their perspectives of the professional development, training, and resources to support their mentoring role. This result corroborated with research findings of Aspfors and Fransson (2015) and Tomlinson (2019) that indicated teacher preparation programs' requirements of mentors lack systematic processes and consistency.

Four of the eight mentor teachers in this study discussed a mandated mentor certification program offered by their administrators. Only one participant felt this program was beneficial to their knowledge of mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. The other three participants indicated the mentor certification program was disorganized or they withdrew from the program due to being overwhelmed with too many other requirements. One of the benefits of the mentor certification program was that its goal was to incentivize the additional responsibilities of mentoring. My review of existing literature indicated incentives for mentors were an inconsistent factor (see Flämig et al., 2015), although the participants in this study did not indicate if incentives influenced their mentoring role.

All participants in this study believed the support and resources they accessed assisted them in having the necessary knowledge to mentor. Studies on adult learning theories indicated that reflection on practice with guidance from a skilled mentor teacher promotes growth and development (IOM & NRC, 2015). Participants in this study

reported it was helpful for them to have access to their administrators, who they

considered to be their mentors. The participants had access to the course professor of the

course the preservice teachers were enrolled in. Participants in this study found it

accommodating to meet preservice teachers' needs to ask questions, receive guidance,

and seek support. Two participants signified monthly mentor teacher meetings were

supportive of their mentoring abilities. They explained the mentor teacher meetings were

an opportunity to discuss issues with each other and gain ideas for supporting their

assigned preservice teacher. To summarize, the results of this study are consistent with

existing literature, which indicates experience, education, and professional development

are necessary for mentor teachers' acquisition of the knowledge required for mentoring

early childhood preservice teachers (Henning et al., 2015; Magaya & Crawley, 2011;

Ronfeldt et al., 2018; Roofe, & Cook, 2017).

The results from this study were consistent with Ambrosetti's (2012) mentor

preparation theory. The theory of mentor preparation is defined by three components that

are interconnected to develop a holistic mentoring relationship. The components of

mentoring defined by Ambrosetti include contextual, developmental, and relational

components. I used the theory of mentor preparation in this study to review the

contextual, developmental, and relational components of mentoring from the perspectives

of mentor teachers from the semistructured interviews conducted. The findings supported

the theory of mentor preparation that enables mentor teachers to promote meaningful

learning opportunities and experiences for early childhood preservice teachers. I applied

the theory of mentor preparation to qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice

teachers because of its relevance to preparing mentor teachers for their role and responsibilities.

## Limitations of the Study

Possible limitations in this study included time for data collection and analysis, researcher bias, and impact of participant selection on sample size. I used several techniques to minimize the limitations of this study. The first limitation identified for this study was potential researcher bias. I am a former early childhood professor with 10 years of experience in teacher preparation. My passion and interest in developing a quality early childhood workforce drove this study. I needed not to manipulate the participants' responses to the interview questions. I did not allow my thoughts and perspectives interfere in this study. I used reflectivity when reviewing the interview transcriptions to check for biases. I documented participants' responses and insights in a reflective journal. Interview transcriptions helped to avoid bias, omissions, and misrepresentations.

The second limitation was the impact of participant selection, sample size, and snowball sampling of mentor teachers. Lead teachers with experience mentoring early childhood preservice teachers in a 4-year institution in a southwestern state in the United States were the sample. I used a snowball sampling strategy to invite 10 mentor teachers to participate and share their mentoring experiences with early childhood preservice teachers. The number of participants in this study may limit transferability to other populations. Transferability of the findings in this study is determined by the reader based on the limitations being addressed. Interviews were conducted with eight of 10 mentor teachers invited to participate. Several possibilities that influenced participation included

the timing of the data collection being during the summer, when teachers were off

contract, and COVID-19. I provided explanations of the necessary time for the interviews

to potential participants. They had the option of whether to volunteer for the study or not.

The volunteered participants reserved the right to withdraw from the study at any time

without consequence.

## Recommendations

I recommend replication of this study in various sites in different geographic areas

to better understand mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early

childhood preservice teachers. Different settings, including public and private schools,

may provide different perspectives on mentoring qualifications. Additionally, more

mentor teacher participants may yield additional information. A replication of this study

in a different geographic area might reveal necessary qualifications that differ from those

that I gathered and may add mentor teacher perspectives of qualifications to mentor early

childhood preservice teachers that differ from the perspectives of qualifications expressed

in the present study.

I also recommend a study be conducted that solicits the perspectives of the

administrators providing support to mentor teachers. Evidence gathered in this study

perspectives their input may be important when trying to find the type of mentoring

supports that could support qualifications for mentoring early childhood preservice

teachers. Systematic analysis of administrators' opinions would contribute to the

literature on mentor preparation. Understanding perspectives from administrators may be

necessary for administrators to train mentor teachers to be qualified.

**Implications**

The results of this study indicated specific dispositions, skills, and knowledge necessary to mentor early childhood preservice teachers at a 4-year university laboratory school. Mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications suggested qualifications necessary for building relationships with preservice teachers, dispositions, and skills essential for creating a safe learning climate, and knowledge necessary for mentoring. This study may promote positive social change by contributing mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. Administrators and professors in early childhood teacher preparation programs may use the mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to make improvements on mentor training and selection criteria for future mentors. Mentor teacher qualifications may be enhanced by participation in opportunities to support the development of their dispositions, skills, and knowledge identified in this study. Supporting the recommended dispositions, skills, and knowledge may support the preparation and selection criteria of mentor teachers for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers.

My review of the existing literature revealed that perspectives of mentor teachers' qualifications to mentor needed to be explored. An opportunity exists to expand the theoretical foundations underlying qualifications for mentor teachers of early childhood preservice teachers from the perspective of the mentor teacher. Researchers have indicated mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor have not been well explored; therefore, exploring their perspectives of their experiences with the mentoring process is imperative (dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Gandhi & Johnson, 2016). It is critical to gather data from mentor teachers regarding how they acquire dispositions,

skills, and knowledge to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. A large-scale study of mentor teachers might provide a more extensive viewpoint about mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers.

I interviewed eight mentor teachers who had experience mentoring early childhood preservice teachers at a 4-year university laboratory school to see what qualifications they perceived as necessary to mentor preservice teachers. The participants expressed their perspectives of qualifications for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. I conveyed how their perspectives would benefit the research through this study. Participants stated the qualifications they needed to be impactful when mentoring others.

The participants confirmed various qualifications for mentoring are necessary. Education, ongoing professional development, and resources are supportive of developing these qualifications. I was surprised to learn that the majority of mentor teachers relied on their previous experiences being mentored as a student in the program or previous mentoring experiences as beneficial for developing qualifications for mentoring. I was also surprised to learn that one of the eight participants who taught for 12 years, felt the essential skills for mentoring could not be taught, that they are developed over time with experience. This participant concluded there was not a specific type of training for mentors to 'learn' the essential mentoring qualifications. It is true that as educators, we learn from our experiences and many of our qualifications and abilities to mentor are based on character dispositions or personality traits. As lifelong learners, it is our job to do what we can to support mentors to develop and grow their dispositions, skills, and knowledge for mentoring.

This study was significant because it allowed teachers to express their understanding of qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. The findings of this study may be used as a guide the planning and implementation of professional development opportunities and training for mentor preparation. The participants' perspectives provided new insight into the qualifications necessary for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers at a 4-year university laboratory school. The study also has implications for positive social change as it suggests that individual mentor teachers can improve their qualifications for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers.

In the future, mentoring for early childhood preservice teachers may benefit from data collected from administrators of mentor teachers. Further research may uncover additional information about administrators' perspectives on preparation of the qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. Data gathered in this study suggest that administrators' input may be important when trying to find the type of professional development and resources that can support the development of the qualifications for mentor teachers.

## Conclusion

The results of my study filled a gap in practice according to the literature. Early childhood mentor teachers are unprepared to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. This piqued my interest and drove me to ask what could support mentor teacher development. The results of this study indicate specific qualifications to mentor are important for supporting the preparation of early childhood preservice teachers. Mentor teacher participants indicated they needed dispositions, skills, and knowledge to build a

relationship, create a secure learning climate, and to have the knowledge necessary for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. Overall, mentor teachers believed qualifications to build a trusting relationship with preservice teachers had the greatest impact on mentoring because relationships are the foundation for learning. This knowledge may promote positive social change by contributing mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications for mentoring early childhood preservice teachers. Administrators and professors in early childhood teacher preparation programs may use the mentor teachers' perspectives of their qualifications to make improvements in mentor training and selection criteria for future mentors.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Participants (Title and Name): _____

Interviewer: _____

Survey Section Used:

_____ A: Interview Background

_____ B: Interview Questions

Post Interview Comments or Leads:

_____

Introductory Protocol

*Thank you for agreeing to participate.*

*I have planned this interview to last 45 to 60 minutes. During this time, I have questions that I would like to cover.*

Introduction

You have volunteered to speak with me today. You have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. My research study focuses on mentors' perspectives of their qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers. My study does not aim to evaluate your techniques or experiences. Rather, I am trying to learn more about the qualifications and training necessary for best mentoring practices for teacher preparation, and hopefully this will provide school administrators and educational leaders with critical knowledge that may be beneficial in their efforts to the initiate procedures, strategies, and mentoring programs.

A. Participants' Background

How long have you been

_____ mentoring early childhood preservice teachers?

_____ at this school?

Interesting background information on participants:

What is your highest degree? _____

What is your field of study? _____

    1.) Share the experience(s) you have had with mentoring early childhood preservice teachers.

2.) What abilities should a mentor teacher have to mentor early childhood preservice teachers?

3.) What knowledge do you believe is necessary for mentoring?

4.) What skills do you believe are necessary for mentoring?

5.) What character dispositions or attitudes do you believe are necessary for mentoring?

6.) Tell me about the relationships that occurs between the mentor teacher and preservice teacher.

7.) Tell me about the functions and processes used to develop the personal and professional goals of the mentor teacher and preservice teacher.

8.) Tell me about the setting of the mentoring you are involved in.

9.) Describe the mentoring qualifications considered to be your strengths.

10.) Describe the mentoring qualifications considered to be your weaknesses or opportunities for growth.

11.) How is your performance to mentor preservice teachers evaluated?

11.) Describe, if any, previous training you have received to support your qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers.

12.) Is there any training you would like to have or recommend to support qualifications to mentor early childhood preservice teachers? If so, what are your recommendations?

Possible follow up prompts that I will keep visable as I interview each participant:

What did you mean by….?

Tell me more about…

You mentioned… Tell me more.

What did you mean by…?

Please give me an example of when that … worked/didn't work…

Appendix B: Coding Matrix

*Coding*

| Open Codes | Categories | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Friendly | | |
| Love for job | | |
| Open-minded | Respect | |
| Positive attitude | | |
| Happy | | |
| Crazy | | |
| Spontaneous | | |
| Eager | Empathy | 1. Qualifications for building mentoring relationships. |
| Kind | | |
| Calm | | |
| Sense of humor | | |
| Approachable | | |
| Empathetic | Motivation | |
| Respect | | |
| Supportive | | |
| Desire | | |
| Enthusiasm | | |
| Motivation | | |
| Patience | | |
| Control | | |
| Welcoming | Communication | |
| Vulnerability | | |
| Creativeness | | |
| Working with others | Teaching Strategies | 2. Qualified mentor teachers create secure learning climates. |
| Organization | | |
| Leadership | | |
| Self-Regulation | | |
| Flexibility | Vulnerability | |
| Improvise | | |
| Modeling | | |

Teaching Strategies                                    *(table continues)*

| Open Codes | Categories | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| No formal training | | |
| Experience | Experience | |
| Professional development | | |
| Mentor certification | | |
| Early childhood education | Education | |
| Meetings, trainings, & conferences | | |
| Resources | | |
| Reflective Practices | Training | 3. Mentor teachers require specific knowledge to be qualified. |
| Communication | | |
| Training | | |
| Diversity and Culture | | |
| Developmentally appropriate practices | | |
| Reflective practices | | |
| Education | | |
| Child Development | | |
| Communication | | |
| Delegation | | |
| Assertiveness | | |