6-7-2024

Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of Practicum and its Relationship to Self-Efficacy in Teaching

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2024

Abstract

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by

Terri L. Gray Johnson

MS, University of LaVerne, 2001

BS, California State University, Fullerton, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Limited research exists on the factors that contribute to community college students' development of self-efficacy (SE) while serving as preservice teachers (PSTs) during their early childhood education (ECE) practicum. This lack of research is concerning because educators who have high SE enhance the educational well-being of all children. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs. The conceptual framework was derived from Bandura's theory of SE. The focus of the research questions was on understanding the development of SE during practicum experiences and through coursework, and on identifying any other factors that might contribute to SE among PSTs. Nine virtual interviews were conducted with ECE teachers, college instructors and mentor teachers in Southern California with at least one year of experience in their role. Data analysis included sorting, coding, and triangulating data. A key finding is that certain tasks given to PSTs in practicum—writing lesson plans, conducting observations, and completing assessments—were helpful in building SE. Opportunities for hands-on experiences, role playing, small group work, problem solving, critical thinking, and reflective feedback were also major contributors to the development of SE. The study bolsters that PSTs need more time in the classroom observing teachers, having hands-on experiences, and engaging with families. The findings from this study could support positive social change by encouraging community college leaders to evaluate ECE programs and implement effective practicum experiences that will promote the development of SE in PSTs.

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Dedication

This doctoral disseration is dedicated to my parents. You both instilled in me the drive to be successful and to work hard. Thank you to my mother for the strength and independence that you built in me as a woman and to my father for the courage to face all obstacles that are placed before me. May you both continue to rest in peace. See you on the other side.

To my daughter, Brittany, this one is for you. Although your dreams of finishing college were not in God's plan, I knew that I had instilled in you the same values as my parents instilled in me. You had so much ambition and drive. I felt your spirit when I wanted to give up. My whole doctoral journey was for you. You are forever my "Angel Baby," and I miss you tremendously. See you on the other side.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I give thanks to God. I also thank my chair, Dr. Donald Yarosz, committee members, and university research reviews, Dr. Karen Hunt, Dr. Brian Berger, Dr. Beryl Watnick, and Dr. Tiffany Hamlett, for being patient, understanding, and supportive. Thank you to Dr. Morris Bidjerano, Dr. Shereeza Mohammed, and Dr. Nathan Sacks for your feedback and guidance. To my sister and brother, I love both of you very much. I feel that we were motivated by one another to continue our educational journeys. To my brother, Dr. Jeremy Gray, thank you for listening to my frustrations and giving advice. To my sister, Tenita Brown, thank you for just being you and keeping me sane with laughter.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Early childhood education (ECE) practicum is designed to prepare preservice teachers (PSTs) for early childhood work environments and equip them with the skills to promote positive developmental and educational outcomes for young children (Fadhilah et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2019; Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023). Practicum experiences develop and nurture PSTs use of knowledge from coursework and provide opportunities to apply professional judgment and demonstrate self-efficacy (SE) in addressing the full range of young children's needs and interests (Barenthien et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2021; Uygun & Avarogullari, 2020). However, there is limited information on specific practicum experiences that promote SE in early childhood PSTs at the community college level. Lack of SE plays a significant role in terms of how PSTs view their competence in the ECE workforce. The decision to remain in the field has become dependent on SE (Mahali & Sevigny, 2022; Reyhing & Perren, 2021).

Findings from this study could support positive social change for community colleges in terms informing ECE programs on implementing effective practicum experiences that can promote the development of SE in PSTs. Results could lead to conversations among local community colleges regarding their ECE course content, practicum structure, and what can be added or modified to ensure SE in early educators going into the field. An increase in SE among PSTs may reduce turnover rates, create positive outcomes for the ECE profession, and strengthen the workforce (Çelikkaleli & Ökman, 2021; Yilmaz et al., 2022).

Practical use of supervised practicum is one strategy to ensure knowledgeable teachers are entering the workforce (Kwok & Bartanen, 2022; Mahali & Sevigny, 2022). However, there is limited research on specific practicum experiences that promote SE in early childhood PSTs at the community college level. In this study, I sought to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs. Throughout California, 103 child development degree programs exist in community colleges, and of those, 91 community colleges have early childhood lab schools and childcare centers on-site (California Community College Early Childhood Educators, 2023). These lab schools and childcare centers are where many PSTs complete supervised practicum experiences in high-quality early childhood environments to practice and develop new skills and enhance existing skills (Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020; Hojeij et al., 2021; Kwok & Bartanen, 2022).

The function of the lab school is for PSTs to practice and demonstrate their teaching competencies under the supervision of an early childhood faculty member or another qualified early childhood professional, known as a mentor. Because a lab school is on-site, many students can complete their practicum coursework, have flexible hours to meet their school schedule, and receive childcare (California Community College Early Childhood Educators, 2023). This may alleviate added stress on PSTs, so they are able to focus on developing SE to work with children.

Having teachers who have high SE benefits the educational well-being of all children (Fadhilah et al., 2022; Longley & Craigo, 2023; Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023). About 30% of teacher preparation programs are hosted through alternative routes with

one being community colleges and vary in terms of design and delivery (Hood et al., 2022; Kwok & Bartanen, 2022). Community colleges are evaluated and assessed by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (2020) in the United States. The association's primary mission is to grant associate degrees and award certificates and other credentials, including bachelor's degrees. Its strategic plan for 2017 to 2025 includes having peer reviews that provide feedback and recommendations for areas of improvement. A second key strategy identified in the plan is fostering institutional innovation. The association's primary objective is to support institutional efforts to increase student achievement.

Community college provides an associate degree along with the needed units to obtain a Child Development Associate Teacher permit issued by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing in California. The Child Development Associate Teacher permit authorizes the holder to provide care and instructional service to children in a childcare and development program and to supervise an aide (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2023). Community colleges are accountable for ensuring PSTs are successful and develop SE by the time they leave the program. Systems have been put in place to monitor compliance and effectiveness of community colleges. The National Council on Teacher Quality recognizes the importance of teacher preparation programs and there is room for quality improvements. First-year teachers can be more effective if they do their clinical experience with an experienced and highly effective teacher (Pomerance & Walsh, 2020).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has put forth professional preparation standards to give teacher preparation programs guidance on the expectations for early childhood professionals. Educational institutions that follow NAEYC standards are required to design practicum experiences with specified learning goals that are built on evidence-based early childhood policy structures, with experiences that prepare educators for settings that promote inclusion and diversity. There are seven preparation standards: promoting child development and learning; building family and community relationships; observing, documenting, and assessing children; using developmentally effective approaches to connect with children and families; using content knowledge to build meaningful curriculum; becoming a professional; and participating in early childhood field experiences (NAEYC, 2020).

Early childhood programs that are NAEYC accredited must show evidence that they have prepared PSTs in these areas during practicum and fieldwork, and provide data from assessments that documents progress toward success. Leaders of early childhood programs abiding by NAEYC standards implement specific methods and practices in practicum courses. Teacher preparation programs prepare educators to implement effective strategies with confidence. Alignment with NAEYC standards may help ECE instructors plan and design course content.

Early childhood programs also have the challenge of keeping up with changing demographics. This includes children with disabilities and English language learners. Cultural diversity in the United States is projected to increase between 2014 and 2060; according to projections, the Hispanic population will double from 12.4% to 28.6%, the

African American population will grow from 14.3% to 17.9%, the Asian population will increase from 5.4% to 8.3%, and the non-Hispanic White population will decrease from 69.4% to 44% (Lash et al., 2022). There is a need for higher education institutions to ensure that PSTs implement effective strategies for inclusion and diversity. This also means having coursework and field experiences to equip PSTs with the confidence that is needed (Mickelson et al. 2023). Confidence levels relate to teacher turnover rates. Limited research exists on how SE of PSTs develop as they transition from practicum experiences in their teacher preparation programs into the early childhood workforce in terms of experiences working with diverse populations and children with special needs. Changes in policies and standards make it hard for early childhood programs to be consistent in terms of course content and field experiences (Brown et al., 2021; Doran, 2020; Zhang et al., 2023).

The role of practicum in early childhood teacher preparation programs is to provide PSTs with the opportunity to apply theories and concepts to actual practice in settings with young children (Brown et al., 2021; Roybal-Lewis, 2022; Visser-Jones & Liu, 2022). Bas (2022) found evidence showing that motivation is linked to SE. Teacher beliefs influence how they implement teaching practices and make decisions daily. Bas's findings indicated that student teachers at a university in Turkey optimized their skills when they had high SE, and low SE contributed to stress and feelings of discontentment while performing tasks. There was a link between teacher beliefs and SE. Teachers who had more positive outcomes during their student teaching experiences had higher SE

compared to student teachers who had unfavorable results during their student teacher experiences. Student teachers' attitudes towards teaching also influenced SE.

Garcia-Lazaro et al. (2022) stated that PSTs SE have an impact on their self-perception and how they perform during their practicum. Garcia-Lazaro et al. conducted a mixed methodological study to understand PSTs predictors and job satisfaction during practicum experiences. The results of the study indicated that PSTs perceived SE was developed based on social interactions and mastery. The social interactions PSTs had with mentor teachers influenced how they perceive their SE and satisfaction for working in early childhood. The well-being of PSTs is associated with the quality of care given to children. Practicum experiences give PSTs an idea of what it is like working in the classroom including the stressors, commitment, and areas of burnout. Because SE emerges during teacher education, rather than after entry into the teaching profession, it is important to focus on SE to ensure that PSTs have a clear understanding of expectations (Garcia-Lazaro et al., 2022).

However, there is limited research on the practicum experiences that support the development of SE of early childhood PST at the community college level. Most research on SE has been conducted with 4-year university PSTs with less than 8% of research focused on community college PSTs. This is due to undergraduate students accounting for only 26% of students enrolled in the United States in community colleges (United States Census Bureau, 2022; Wladis & Mesa, 2019). Previous researchers have noted a need for studies on the development of SE with a focus on community college students (Longley & Craigo, 2023; Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022).

In this chapter, I will briefly describe the ECE practicum and field experiences typically required in teacher preparation programs and address practicum experiences that have been found to promote the development of SE among PSTs. I will acknowledge the gap in the research literature regarding specific practices at the community college level by providing an overview of the limited research regarding practicum experiences and the development of teachers' SE among PSTs, which is an essential disposition in facilitating the care and development of young children (Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022; Zientek et al., 2019). I will also describe the conceptual framework of this study and provide a rationale for the nature of the study and methodology. The chapter will also include definitions of key concepts; a description of the local problem; the research questions (RQs); and discussion of the assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of the research.

Background

Practicum provides PSTs with opportunities to practice learned skills and pedagogical knowledge to work with young children. Practicum experiences are geared towards preparing PSTs to teach young children based on the State's educational goals and guidelines (Beisly & Lake, 2021; Hojeij et al., 2021; Roybal-Lewis, 2022). The completion requirements for practicum in community colleges vary, and, although there are no set universal requirements, hours range from 3 to 6 hours per week under the supervision of a mentor teacher for completion (La Paro et al., 2020). Several studies have focused on university or 4-year teacher preparation programs worldwide to understand the perspectives of PSTs and their practicum experiences that relate to SE.

However, these study authors have indicated that there is limited information regarding specific practicum experiences that promote SE in early childhood PST at the community college level (Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022; Zientek et al., 2019).

La Paro et al. (2020) conducted a study to understand to what extent does the relationship between the PSTs and supervising mentor teacher have on SE. This study was conducted because of the gap in literature on PSTs perceptions during practicum on their relationships with mentor teachers. The study consisted of 143 practicum students at Southeastern, West Coast and Midwestern universities. The results of the study showed that PSTs' relationship with their supervising mentor teacher was associated with their SE. PSTs who reported more positive relationships had higher teacher SE compared to PSTs who reported more negative relationships. The researchers acknowledged that everyday stressors may occur, and that practicum may consider stress management and mindful training as a part of part of teacher preparation programs.

Garcia-Lazaro et al. (2022) conducted a study to explore perceived SE of PSTs during practicum experiences. The findings indicated that through social interactions and mastery experiences, PSTs can develop SE. The results showed a significant correlation between PSTs competence, practicum experience, and SE. In this study, PSTs valued mastery experiences and psychological states over vicarious and persuasive experiences. PSTs reported they received not a lot of support and had gotten weak feedback from mentor teachers. Noting the relationship of perceived SE to reflective processes and emotional excitement, Garcia-Lazaro et al. stated that "positive emotions came from successful interactions, while negative emotions generated coping strategies" (p. 12).

Garcia-Lazaro not only identified SE as a global concern but also illustrates the importance of looking deeper into perceived practicum experiences of PSTs. In this study, I sought to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive as contributing to the development of SE among PSTs.

PSTs are exposed to a variety of reflective techniques to build skills and knowledge. Hojeij et al. (2021) explored the effects of critical and reflective thinking in practicum courses. Critical and reflective thinking enhances practice and professional growth. Practicum courses providing opportunities for reflective thinking builds the knowledge of PSTs and their ability to work with children. However, Hojeij et al. did not address how critical and reflective practices contribute to SE.

Identifying specific strategies for effective early childhood teacher practicum experiences is essential information, which is necessary to address the development of SE, a desired outcomes of practicum experiences. Clark and Newberry (2019) examined the correlation and effects of sources such as mastery, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and psychological states to SE. The results of this study showed that the three experiences that were found to be moderately and positively significant to SE were mastery, vicarious, and verbal persuasion. Although research has indicated that mastery is the most influential experience, this study showed that mastery did not correlate much differently from vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion. The researchers revealed that the direct experiences the students had during their practicum experiences were factors in the level of SE in instruction and adult-child interactions.

Arko (2021) suggested that SE is important to how teachers implement curriculum and various teaching strategies in Ghana. Arko examined social studies teachers' SE, focusing on how they implemented a social studies curriculum. In addition, Arko compared SE based on gender, age, and teaching experience. Using Bandura's theory of SE, Arko indicated that the four sources of SE that were needed to develop SE, and teachers can be successful in teacher training programs. The study finding showed the difference in SE based on gender, age, and teaching experience. Regarding SE in the implementation of the social studies curriculum, the researcher stated that implementation requires a high level of SE. The findings indicated that the social studies teacher participants felt they were highly effective in instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management. Classroom management, however, was the lowest of the three. For instructional strategies this meant the teachers were able to implement the curriculum and improve students' learning. Classroom management is a skill that needs to be learned to create a classroom atmosphere for learning. Furthermore, this study did suggest that years of teaching experience does not influence SE.

Schaub and Lutolf (2023) examined the attitudes and SE of early childhood educators towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in Switzerland. When children with disabilities are a part of an inclusive learning environment, they can develop better socioemotional and cognitive skills, according to Schaub and Lutolf. Teachers with high SE can believe in their ability to implement effective strategies for working with children with disabilities. On the other hand, teachers with low SE have difficulty applying effective strategies and are more likely to reject children with

disabilities. Schaub and Lutolf noted that there is a global concern on how teachers are implementing effective teaching practices related to children with disabilities. The results of the study indicated that through training on disability and inclusion experience had positive effects on the attitudes of teachers working with children with disabilities. Schaub and Lutolf suggested that their findings were in alignment with other studies showing the attitudes of teachers relate to their feeling and behaviors for children with disabilities. Teachers with direct interactions with children with disabilities had a higher level of SE. This finding demonstrated that mastery experiences were the strongest sources for developing SE in this study. This finding is in alignment with other studies where mastery has been identified as the main source of SE. The purpose of the present study was to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs.

Teachers have many opportunities to apply what they know about teaching children in their daily practice and decision-making. In doing so, they must acknowledge their own beliefs and values. Those beliefs and values create some teaching concerns and determine how effectively teachers will apply knowledge. Teaching concerns are described as concerns teachers have in their ability to manage the classroom, interact with children, relate to families, and relate to their coworkers. There is minimal information available on how teaching concerns relate to SE (Gale et al., 2021). In a mixed-methods study, Gale et al. (2021) explored the sources of SE and teaching experience. The participants of this study described the benefits of the sources of SE and how they developed their SE. The overall findings indicated that beginning teachers have lower SE

than teachers with experience. Gale et al. found that mastery experiences was the most mentioned means for the development of SE. This was followed by social persuasion and vicarious experiences.

A strong ECE workforce is needed, as teachers are faced with the challenge of improve student learning outcomes through having the ability to implement effective teaching practices and carry out their duties successfully. Narayanan et al. (2021) investigated personal factors in the development of early teacher SE. In this study, SE was not specifically investigated; however, the researchers coded over 800 instances of SE related to the work of the teachers in the study. The qualitative data from interviews showed a bigger picture of factors that influenced SE. In this study, there was a lot of reflection around classroom management and relationships. The findings showed that mastery, verbal persuasion, and vicarious experiences were the most influential in the development of SE. The findings of this study also revealed that participants had a postive outlook to stay in the field due to their strong SE beliefs.

I sought to gain a deeper understanding of PSTs' development of SE from coursework assignments and during practicum experiences for students at the community college level. I addressed the gap in practice by identifying specific strategies and support systems that develop SE in PSTs from coursework and during practicum experiences. The findings could influence key stakeholders, such as PSTs, administrators, child development centers, the early childhood workforce, policymakers, and higher learning institutes.

In reviewing the literature, I found little research on the practicum strategies used by community colleges and lab settings to promote SE among PSTs. A better understanding of practicum experiences could lead to social change not just in community colleges but also in the early childhood workforce, which employs and retains teachers. With SE, these teachers may be able to promote positive educational outcomes for young children. Other beneficiaries could include ECE centers, program administrators, and policymakers.

Problem Statement

The research problem for this study was the lack of understanding of how PSTs develop SE in early childhood practicum experiences at the community college level. Research is ongoing to understand how PSTs develop SE during their practicum experience. There continues to be research on what type of direct experiences affect SE and what supports are needed to develop SE for PSTs. Early childhood educators who have low SE are less likely to provide quality care and education for young children; they may lack the passion for teaching and may not implement effective teaching strategies or follow developmentally appropriate practices (Arko, 2021; Bas, 2022; Fadhilah et al., 2022) Due to stricter state mandates, teachers are faced with the challenges of complying by implementing new strategies in the learning environment and improve their teaching (Hood et al., 2022). There is limited research on how PSTs practicum experiences build SE (Longley & Craigo, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Typically, skills and dispositions, such as SE, are acquired through successful experiences in early childhood practicum;

however, there is minimal research on the specific tasks or experiences develop SE among PSTs.

A lack of adequate competence-building experiences in early childhood practicum courses has been identified as a concern in some ECE early childhood programs (Mak et al., 2022; Matengu et al., 2021; Mickelson et al., 2023). Mak et al. (2022) explored how PSTs developed SE in practicum through classroom-based research. Engagement in research helps PSTs in their professional development and adds to their skills and knowledge. As Mak et al. stated, “Teacher competence is considered as a dynamic multidimensional construct comprising knowledge, strategies, and dispositions, which are crucial determinants of instructional quality and a prerequisite for professional teacher behavior” (p. 2). Practicum is where PSTs learn to apply theory to practice and develop competence. The study findings showed that when PSTs undertook a research project, they were able to practice and apply theoretical knowledge to the real world. Classroom based research helped PSTs with their critical thinking, problem-solving, and social skills. The study revealed that the opportunities PSTs have during practicum can contribute to the development of competence. Integrating research helps PSTs build their SE and the way they implement teaching practices.

My professional experiences as an ECE program administrator informed my concerns about the hiring and retention of ECE teachers from community colleges. In my experience, many have lacked in their ability to be effective and have a low level of SE. My concerns are supported by research studies that indicate that there is a need to reform early childhood curriculum in community colleges to address the development of these

critical dispositions (e.g., La Paro et al., 2020; Visser-Jones & Liu, 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Through conducting classroom observations, monitoring lesson plans, and training in-service teachers, I have witnessed teachers who are unsure of their abilities or easily frustrated, or who show no desire to engage in their work.

The lack of SE can lead to a self-repeating cycle in which low SE leads to higher levels of anxiety, avoidant behaviors, and less opportunity to cope with unfamiliar challenges, which in turn lowers an individual's SE even more (Bandura, 1986). Limited research exists about specific practicum experiences that facilitate the development of dispositions such as SE at the 2-year or community college level where many of the early childhood workforces receive their credentials (Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022; Zientek et al., 2019). SE is defined as the ability and preparation to make decisions, execute a course of action, and complete a task successfully (Narayanan et al., 2021). It is also defined as a person's ability to manage their behavior, make decisions, take the initiative, and show determination when faced with challenging situations (Bandura, 1977).

Early childhood practicum experiences provide PSTs with opportunities to develop SE by applying knowledge and strategies learned during coursework. The practicum experience is meant to build the SE of future early childhood educators through real-life situations while at the same time, experiencing the challenges of working with young children. Research has shown that practicum experiences help to build teacher efficacy, but there is little research on what specific components and experiences of the practicum contribute to teacher efficacy (Longley & Craigo, 2023;

Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022). The level of SE connects with one's attitude about the profession, interest in applying for a job in ECE, and engagement in professional development (Bardach et al., 2022; Bas, 2022; Garcia-Lazaro et al., 2022). To date, there is a gap in the literature on what specific practicum experiences that facilitate the development of SE in early childhood PSTs at the community college level (Kwok & Bartanen, 2022; Matengu et al., 2021; Reyhing & Perren, 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). There was a need to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive as contributing to the development of SE among PSTs.

Purpose of the Study

Early childhood educators who have low SE are less likely to provide quality care and education for young children (Barenthien et al., 2020; Uygun & Avarogullari, 2020). In much of the literature I found on teacher efficacy, the participants were enrolled in graduate early childhood programs or in a 4-year college. Limited research exists on the practicum experiences within teacher preparation programs that facilitate the development of SE of early childhood PSTs at the community college level with less than 8% of research focused on community college PSTs (United States Census Bureau, 2022; Wladis & Mesa, 2019). The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs.

Previous researchers on SE have used various methods to collect data to understand this phenomenon. The five most common data collection tools were interviews questionnaires, surveys, reflective journals, and group discussions (Matengu et

al., 2021). Basic qualitative research design is the most common approach that has been used by researchers in studying topics in education or teacher practicum experiences (Merriam, 1998). I conducted virtual interviews to gather different perspectives regarding specific aspects of practicum experiences that are perceived to influence PSTs SE in early childhood settings. Specific curriculum, requirements, and assignments of community college practicum courses will be explored to discover elements that may contribute to SE among PSTs.

A greater understanding of the study phenomenon is needed because a lack of SE can hinder a teacher's ability to implement developmentally appropriate practices for young children; therefore, leading to poor educational outcomes for children (Clark & Newberry, 2019; Tang et al., 2020). Teachers are more likely to remain in the field due to their ability to maintain the quality of early childhood programs by having high levels of SE (Mahali & Sevigny, 2022; Reyhing & Perren, 2021). Having a high level of SE promotes a positive outlook on teaching early childhood, endurance in accomplishing tasks, meeting challenges, and remaining committed to the profession (Fadhilah et al., 2022; Longley & Craigo, 2023; Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023).

Research Questions

RQ1: What practicum/fieldwork experiences do ECE teachers and mentor teachers perceive to develop SE in community college early childhood PSTs?

RQ2: What teacher preparation coursework do ECE teachers and community college ECE instructors perceive to influence the SE levels of community college early

childhood graduates in applying theory to practice during early childhood preservice field experiences?

RQ3: What type of experiences do ECE teachers, mentor teachers, and community college ECE instructors perceive can enhance both early childhood practicum coursework and early childhood practicum activities to facilitate the development of early childhood PSTs' SE?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study consisted of Bandura's social cognitive theory of SE. SE is the ability to manage behavior, make decisions, take the initiative, and show determination when faced with challenging situations (Bandura, 1977). The environment, behavior, and cognitive processes all work together to form the social cognitive theory, which plays a role in the production of SE (Arko, 2021). Cognitive processes shape how a person interprets their experiences and then control the behavior and ability to execute the desired tasks with confidence (Arko, 2021; Bandura, 1982; Narayanan et al., 2021). PSTs use their knowledge gained from coursework and practicum experiences to determine and control how they perform and make decisions. Early childhood students entering the workforce need to have developed SE to apply knowledge and skills with young children once they complete their practicum. Supervised practicum and mentored field experiences are critical factors in determining whether a teacher has developed the skills and SE to perform tasks related to the teaching profession (Cutrer-Parraga et al., 2022; Dreer, 2021). In Chapter 2, I will present research studies that explain key sources or experiences, including practicum experiences, which

develop SE and link the importance of mentorship and co-teachers to the development of SE in PSTs.

Educational philosopher Dewey (1938) asserted that competence is formed by tangible experiences in the context of a culture, particularly when reflective practices are utilized. Just as children learn through exploration and interaction, Dewey contended that field experiences of PSTs influenced how they view their ability to teach young children. Using Dewey's theory, Hojeij et al. (2021) explored whether PSTs develop effective teaching strategies through the knowledge they gain from reflective practices. The result of the study indicated that PSTs gain knowledge about themselves, their students, and evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching. Hojeij et al. stated,

> Their first and most important characteristic of reflective teaching is that it could be an effective tool that enables teachers to collect data about their teaching, examine the underlying assumptions and beliefs, and visualize the inherent theories in their behavior and their teaching practices. (p. 132)

Several researchers have identified mastery experiences as the most typical source of SE (Bourne et al., 2021; Gale et al., 2021; Schaub & Lutolf, 2023). Mastery experiences provide PSTs the opportunities to develop effective teaching strategies through the knowledge they gain from having tangible experiences in the classroom setting where they can practice their skills.

I used a basic qualitative study approach because I sought to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs. Basic qualitative researchers seek an understanding of

the experiences of others and how they construct an understanding of those experiences (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). A basic qualitative study is one of the most used in educational research (Merriam, 1998). SE has four sources or types of experiences that contribute to SE, and by using a basic qualitative study approach, those experiences can be described by various individuals. The four types of experiences are mastery, vicarious, verbal or social persuasion, and psychological/ emotional states (Bandura, 1982). I will explore these elements as part of the analysis of the study results. Mastery comes with repeated successful experiences. Strong SE is developed through repeated successes (Bandura, 1977). Vicarious experiences come with observing others having successful experiences without any adverse consequences. Verbal persuasion is an attempt to influence the behavior of another person through suggestions or feedback. Psychological states are experiences people encounter where they evaluate how they are feeling emotionally.

The conceptual framework for this study will guide data collection and analysis through the identification of themes formed by identified practicum experiences that are linked to SE. The data will include the identification of which of the four types of SE experiences play a significant role in practicum. The interviews are designed to gather the perspectives from various members of the early childhood field regarding practicum experiences and coursework that build SE among PSTs. This basic qualitative study approach will support the data analysis and will help to identify and understand specific experiences that may contribute to developing SE during early childhood practicum assignments.

Nature of the Study

A basic qualitative study approach is used to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs. perceive contributes to the development of SE among PSTs. Participants working in an early childhood program as an ECE teacher in Southern California were selected. Mentor teachers and community college ECE instructors were selected from community colleges in the Southern California area. Limited research exists on the practicum experiences that facilitate the development of SE of early childhood PSTs at the community college level. Studies on SE with PSTs have used the qualitative approach and have found it to be insightful for understanding factors and views of PSTs that contribute to SE (Koubek et al., 2021; Mykkanen et al., 2022; Narayanan et al., 2021). A basic qualitative study approach is used for this study to explore the social experiences of the participants through different lenses, provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, and obtain data from multiple sources (Merriam, 2009; Sandelowski, 2000; Thorne et al., 1997). The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs. In this basic qualitative study approach, multiple sources of data were collected through semistructured and recorded interviews with ECE teachers, community college ECE instructors, and mentor teachers in Southern California.

Individual interviews allow a researcher to perform a formative analysis. The formative analysis will help the researcher to decide if changes need to be made on the RQ or tools used to collect data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Individual interviews also allow

the researcher to perform analytical data triangulation. With analytical data triangulation, data is collected at different times and with different people to compare and get a better idea of perspectives and any commonalities between individuals and within groups (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

A coding technique was used to analyze qualitative data. Coding techniques help to identify, sort, and group words or attributes of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2016). Themes were identified using coding techniques to provide an understanding of which specific factors contribute to the development of SE of PSTs during practicum experiences. Themes were identified by observing words or language consistently used by interviewees or other data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Themes identified helped to understand which specific coursework and practicum experiences are perceived to provide PSTs with the SE to work effectively with young children to achieve positive developmental and educational outcomes.

Definitions

Community college: A 2-year higher learning institution that offers a degree certificate or associate's degree (Beisly & Lake, 2021).

Coursework: Assignments given to a student during a period of time set aside for learning; "coursework" also refers to course content (Colomo-Magana et al., 2020).

Mentor teachers: Experienced teachers who supervise, train, and provide support to PSTs during their practicum (Simsar & Jones, 2021). Another term used is "co-teacher."

Practicum: A learning experience that is typically focused on a specific age group for a shorter duration and is associated with a specific course, which is supervised by external faculty or a mentor (La Paro et al., 2020). Other terms used are “fieldwork,” “field experience,” “classroom-based experiences,” or “student teaching.”

Preservice teacher (PST): A student enrolled in an ECE program who has not yet graduated from a higher learning institution; a student enrolls in an early childhood program to gain the knowledge and skills to teach children (Ene et al., 2021).

Self-efficacy (SE): The ability to manage behavior, make decisions, take the initiative, and show confidence when faced with challenging situations (Bandura, 1977).

Teacher preparation programs: Training in child development that is provided by institutions that offer a certificate, permit, or degree in early childhood (Hood et al., 2022).

Assumptions

One assumption is that there are specific sources or types of experiences that PSTs have during their practicum that are essential to developing SE in their teaching. Several studies have alluded to the importance of mentorship, reflective practices, and tangible experiences as contributors of SE in PSTs (Dreer, 2021; Hojeij et al., 2021; Roybal-Lewis, 2022). However, there is limited research on the practicum experiences that facilitate the development of SE of early childhood PSTs at the community college level. Several studies have examined SE of PSTs, and researchers have suggested continued study and research on factors that contribute to SE (Longley & Craigo, 2023; Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022).

The next assumption is that ECE teachers will be able to describe the experiences encountered during their practicum that contributed to SE. More specifically, participants shall be able to describe how tangible experiences, such as reflective feedback, supervision, and mentorship helped them to develop SE in addition to any other factors that contributed to SE. The mentor teachers and community college ECE instructors selected for this study will be able to provide further insight into how their relationships with PSTs guide the development of SE, including the structure of the practicum. Dreer (2021) found that positive mentoring contributes to how PSTs perceive their abilities to work effectively going into the early childhood workforce. The positive relationships established between the mentor teacher and PSTs are valuable and are a crucial factor in building SE.

The last assumption is that all participants will be honest in their descriptions of practicum experiences during the interviews. All participants will be informed of the purpose of the study and the safeguards used to ensure confidentiality.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this basic qualitative study is to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs. Community college graduates are selected for this research due to limited research on the practicum experiences that facilitate the development of SE in early childhood PSTs at the community college level (Longley & Craigo, 2023; Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022). I intend to exclude graduates, mentor teachers, and ECE instructors from a 4-year university because, in California, community

colleges are more likely than 4-year universities to focus on teaching practices (Gardner et. al., 2019, p.7). Furthermore, California has over 100 community colleges and less than 50 four-year colleges offering ECE programs (Gardner et. al., 2019, p.7). For many students entering the early childhood field, many of them complete their ECE coursework at community college. Community colleges are more likely to offer courses with a focus on birth to age 5 (Gardner et al., 2019, p. 109).

The focus will be on the practicum experiences of graduates from Southern California community colleges currently working in an early childhood program, as there is a lack of information for this group of early childhood educators. The study will include data from people who are mentors working at community colleges who supervise PSTs. Community college ECE instructors will also be a part of this study, as they are responsible for delivering the coursework that prepares PSTs with the knowledge needed to be effective in the workforce. The focus will be on direct experiences that participants report contribute to SE among PSTs. The opportunity for transferability might exist and be relevant to similar teacher preparation programs due to the data collected from various community colleges and participants. SE in early childhood educators is vital because it builds their ability to work with young children; therefore, increasing the likelihood of positive educational outcomes for children (Barenthien et al., 2020; Uygun & Avarogullari, 2020; Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023). SE affects a teacher's ability to work with young children, engage with families, and manage the learning environment (Bay, 2020; El-Abd & Chaaban, 2021; La Paro et al., 2020).

Limitations

I intended to choose ECE teachers who have graduated within the last six months and who are employed in a center-based early learning program for no more than 12 months. I was not able to obtain participants with those requirements and changed the requirement to ECE teachers who were graduates of a community college working in the ECE workforce for more than 1 year.

Another limitation was sample size. The lack of responses from teachers and community colleges due to the COVID-19 pandemic affected my solicitation process. Responses to the pandemic include program closures and lay-offs affecting the ECE community in Southern California. Community colleges limited their programs and courses, and some community college officials were placing external research requests on hold.

My administrative role in the early childhood field may have caused some bias, due to my years of experience in recruiting, hiring, and monitoring early childhood educators. To manage my potential biases and concerns, I strictly followed the interview protocol during my interviews. My role as an objective researcher in gathering data should be to present a process where I can listen carefully, decipher the information, and stay focused on the problem and purpose of the study. While examining transcripts and other data, I was careful to acknowledge any biases that might have existed. This was helpful to ensure that the data was valid.

Significance

Early childhood practicum experiences that promote the development of SE among PSTs within a community college teacher practicum program is the focus of this research. Existing research indicates that practicum experiences for early childhood educators can add value in developing skills needed to work with young children (Mak et. al., 2022). However, there is limited research regarding the preparation, instructional practices, and experiences that facilitate the development of SE in PSTs education at the community college level (Longley & Craigo, 2023; Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022). Early childhood educators' attitudes and perceptions of their ability to translate theory into practice has been minimally examined at a community college level, and the effects of practicum experiences as an important component in undergraduate preparation merits further study. SE is considered an essential disposition for professionals and is associated with teachers' perceptions of their capabilities within the teaching profession. SE includes the use of cognitive processes to interpret experiences and guide behavior (Bandura, 1982). Limited research exists on the SE of PSTs in ECE (Gale et al., 2021; Garcia-Lazaro et al., 2022; Simsar & Jones, 2023). Current research indicates that mentoring reflective practices help PSTs build skills, knowledge, and SE (Dreer, 2020). Hood et al. (2022) expressed a concern that TTPs in undergraduate studies are placing little to no effort in evaluating program improvements by exploring the experiences of PSTs that could create sustainability in the early childhood field.

In the study, themes will be derived from interviews to understand the coursework, practicum strategies, and experiences that served to develop SE of early

childhood PSTs. The findings will include recommendations for practicum strategies that can be disseminated to program administrators in community college programs that may serve to facilitate early childhood educator success. The findings from this study may be purposeful for positive social change for community colleges to better understand how to promote SE in PSTs during practicum experiences. Community college PSTs can be provided with practicum opportunities that will promote and facilitate SE and effective interactions with young children in educational settings.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs. Several researchers have examined SE and the benefits to PSTs in their support of the learning of young children. Researchers have used Bandura's social cognitive theory as a basis for their study of SE among educators. Many researchers included RQs that answered how PSTs viewed or interpreted their practicum or fieldwork experiences from teaching concepts, working with special needs, and relating to families. However, there is limited research on the practicum experiences that facilitate the development of SE of early childhood PSTs at the community college level as seen through the lens of graduates who are employed in early childhood workforce.

The RQs in this study are designed to understand the development of SE from ECE teachers and their practicum experiences. The RQs are formed to understand the perspectives of mentor teachers and community college ECE instructors on the development of SE based on PSTs practicum experiences, coursework, and any other

factors that might contribute to SE. Through the use of qualitative methods such as coding and thematic analysis, a better understanding of SE in PSTs may become understood.

Chapter 2 will provide a review of the strategies used to search literature and research that explore SE, a description of the conceptual framework that supports this study, a review of current literature that relate to the key concepts, a summary of themes represented in the literature, and discuss how the literature fills the gap in research regarding SE. Also, the conceptual framework for this study will be further defined, and an in-depth review of research on the sources or type of experiences that lead to SE and the connections to practicum experiences will be provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem for my study is the lack of understanding of how PSTs develop SE in early childhood practicum experiences at the community college level. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs. Coming into the early childhood workforce with less than a positive attitude may be a result of low SE; thus, making them less influential in their profession (Barenthien et al., 2020; Uygun & Avarogullari, 2020). The development of SE is the driving force for teacher performance in working with young children and the implementation of effective teaching strategies (Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023). Practicum experiences are designed to build skills and allow the practice of strategies to increase efficacy in PSTs (Brown et al., 2021).

A review of the literature revealed that there is limited research on specific practicum experiences that facilitate the development of SE of early childhood PSTs at the community college level (Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022; Zientek et al., 2019). This hinders early education programs from hiring teaching staff that are equipped with the skills and dispositions to sustain quality programs. The level of SE affects the educational outcomes of children (Fadhilah et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2019; Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023). The development of SE in PSTs has been an important issue among educators and researchers that need to be explored more thoroughly (Doran, 2020; Grant et al., 2019). More research is needed that includes different levels of teacher preparation programs to examine practicum experiences and SE (Brown et al., 2021; Garcia-Lazaro et al., 2022). Research is needed to understand what factors are useful in

practicum experiences that build efficacy (Doran, 2020; Garcia-Lazaro et al., 2022; Zientak et al., 2019). Researchers have recommended further studies on SE in community college PSTs to clearly understand the concept, provide direction to college instructors & administrators, and student success in their careers (Brown et al., 2021; Myran & Sylverster, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022).

Chapter 2 will include a literature search strategy which indicates how literature using key terms were found in various databases or information systems, the conceptual framework for the study and a review of research that explores Bandura's social cognitive theory, confidence, mentorship, reflective practices, flipped classrooms, teacher preparation programs, the development of SE, and a discussion of research that relate to the concepts of SE and practicum, and a summary on how the literature supports the need to conduct further research on SE and PSTs practicum experiences.

Literature Search Strategy

To find research articles, I used Walden University databases and the Google Scholar search engine. From the Walden University Library, I searched the following databases: Education Source, ERIC, Sage Journals, ProQuest Central, and ProQuest Dissertations & Thesis Global. The search terms and phrases included *self-efficacy, teacher efficacy, preservice teachers, practicum in early childhood, self-efficacy in preservice teachers, early childhood practicum experiences, Bandura's social cognitive theory, community college, teacher efficacy and confidence, early childhood practicum, student self-efficacy, practicum experiences in college,* and the *development of confidence through practicum experiences*. I also used the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global

database to find dissertations on topics such as *self-efficacy*, *preservice teachers*, *confidence and self-efficacy*, *field experience*, and *self-efficacy* to inform my understanding of this topic.

Conceptual Framework

Bandura's social cognitive theory will provide the framework for this study as it relates to the concepts of SE which are considered essential dispositions for effective teachers (Fadhilah et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2019; Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023). Teachers who demonstrate SE have been found to use knowledge, skills, and strategies to promote positive educational outcomes for young children (Fadhilah et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2019; Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023). Early childhood practicum experiences are intentionally designed to elicit the skills and strategies best suited for working with young children (Brown et al., 2021; Doran, 2020).

Bandura's social cognitive theory explains how an individual's behavior can be influenced by their perception of their abilities (self-confidence) and actual experiences (Koutroubas & Galanakis, 2022; Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023, Yough, 2019). SE is derived from the social cognitive theory because behavior and perception are formed from environmental experiences (Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023; Yough, 2019). Efficacy is the ability to make decisions, take the initiative, and show determination when faced with challenging situations. The development of efficacy is believed to come from four identified areas of experiences: (a) mastery, (b) vicarious, (c) social persuasion, and (d) physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1977). Mastery experiences have been identified as the most important source of high efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Stahlke &

Cranmore, 2022; Yough, 2019). Mastery is building up skills over time and with great accomplishment. Vicarious experiences come with observing others having successful experiences without any adverse consequences. Verbal persuasion is an attempt to influence the behavior of another person through suggestions or feedback. Psychological states are experiences people encounter where they evaluate how they are feeling emotionally. When analyzing the outcomes of practicum experiences for PSTs, an essential question is what are the specific practicum experiences that create moments of mastery and therefore, build SE. Strong SE is developed through repeated successes (Bandura, 1977).

Using SE as the conceptual framework for this study is a good fit because the experiences of PSTs will be explored to understand how practicum experiences formed their ability to become confident and self-efficient in working with young children. This study is to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Self-Efficacy and Confidence

Self-Efficacy

SE plays a role in how teachers implement curriculum and theory to practice (Arko, 2021). Experiences that may predict SE have been explored in Ghana. Arko (2021) performed research to examine SE of high school teachers in their implementation of Social Studies. In Ghana, students' low performance in Social Studies became a concern for parents. This led to the concern of whether teachers were competent and

prepared to teach Social Studies. The researcher used a descriptive survey design and used a modified version of Teachers' Sense of Efficacy scale (TSES) developed by Tshchannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). This was the chosen design to help gather data without manipulation of any variables.

The study consisted of 52 teachers in a public high school. The findings showed that the teachers were highly efficacious in instructional strategies, student engagement and classroom management. Instructional strategies were the higher of all three and classroom management was the lowest. The SE of teachers is linked to students' engagement and educational achievements. Classroom management is something that teachers need to have high SE in to create a learning environment where students can thrive and be successful (Arko, 2021). The researcher concluded that policymakers in Ghana should take in consideration that classroom management competencies still need to be developed so that it cannot negatively affect instructional practices and student engagement.

Reyhing and Perren (2021) conducted a longitudinal study on early childhood teachers to examine the stability or change in SE. This study included early childhood educators in Switzerland and examined changed in their SE over a time span of two and a half years. This study came about due to the lack of studies on SE of early childhood educators, especially longitudinal studies. The researcher used an exploratory design, and no hypotheses were formulated. The study used online surveys to gather data from educators in Switzerland.

Reyhing and Perren (2021) also mentioned Bandura's four sources of experiences for SE identifying mastery as the most influential for developing SE. SE can fluctuate when new curriculum and when resources or settings change (Reyhing & Perren, 2021). The researchers also explored the connection between job satisfaction with respect to changes in work conditions and SE. Although the scores showed minor changes in SE, there was a decrease in job satisfaction between timepoint 1 and timepoint 2. The findings also showed that teachers working fewer hours and in family-based settings had a lower SE profile. This is important in thinking about SE because working fewer hours meant less time practicing skills and implementing strategies. Less time was spent having those mastery or vicarious experiences. Working in a family-based setting may have meant less time collaborating with other early childhood educators and getting positive feedback.

Reyhing and Perren (2021) suggested the need for more coaching interventions when early childhood educators work in environments where they work fewer hours a week. More time would be given to have the vicarious experiences and positive feedback. They noted the importance of PSTs having vicarious experiences during preservice and to continue those same experiences after. A limitation mentioned in this research was the high attrition rate. Some of the participants from the first measurement point did not participate in the second measurement point. It was not known how the drop-out sample developed overtime.

Mahali and Sevigny (2022) conducted a study on SE and cultural responsiveness of PSTs in Canada. This study was important to examine due to the increase in

immigration in many parts of Canada and the growing diversity of students in the classroom. Limited studies exist on the development of SE of teachers who teach diverse students. This study established two RQs and two hypotheses. The first RQ was, Do PSTs enrolled in different years of their teacher education program vary in their culturally responsive teaching SE (CRTSE) levels? The hypothesis was that the more multicultural classes and training, the levels of CRTSE would increase. The second RQ was, do cross-cultural experiences, political worldviews, and burnout predict PSTs' CRTSE levels after accounting for the impact of demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, and ethnicity)? The hypothesis was that cultural experiences, political worldviews, and burnout do predict CRTSE.

In drawing from Bandura's social cognitive theory, I surmised that PSTs with high SE will be able to accomplish and complete tasks when faced with challenges. Too often, teachers do not feel they are prepared to teach in a diverse environment which in turn can affect student achievement outcomes (Mahali & Sevigny, 2022). SE can be content specific which is why it is important to have coursework specific to diversity and inclusion. Teachers who know their students and are familiar with their customs and culture are more likely to have high SE and confidence in working with a classroom with diverse students (Mahali & Sevigny, 2022).

The findings from this study showed that PSTs had high SE. However, it was noted by the researchers that this does not mean it will stay the same once they begin to enter the workforce. Prior research has shown a drop on SE after teachers enter the workforce (Mahali & Sevigny, 2022). This can lead to teacher burnout and job

dissatisfaction. In this study, it was hypothesized that teachers that had more training and multicultural coursework would have higher SE than those with less. The study was conducted 110 PSTs at a Canadian University with 90% of White European descent. An online survey, a questionnaire, and two scales were used (the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale and Multicultural Efficacy Scale) were used to gather data.

The results of the study showed no significant difference with SE between the senior and junior students in terms of their training and multicultural coursework taken. The first hypothesis was not confirmed. However, the findings did confirm the second hypothesis. Burnout, political views, and cultural experiences play a part in SE levels of PSTs. Having direct multicultural experiences means that those teachers can carry those experiences towards how they relate to others. That would be considered the direct mastery experiences that would increase their SE compared to those with multicultural experiences. This study demonstrates that importance of PSTs having direct experiences that are hands-on where they are exposed to multicultural platforms in various ways prior to entering the workforce. This may affect job burnout and satisfaction. One limitation mentioned for this study was that all participants were from one university. This is a concern because generalization may not be applied to other PSTs and universities. Another limitation of the study was that 90% of the participants were of European descendent. The researchers recommended further research with a more diverse sample and a comparison of CRTSE among different ethnicities.

Confidence and Competence

Gonzales-Gomez et al. (2022) conducted a study on SE and the attitudes of PSTs in a flipped classroom learning environment. The flipped classroom approach investigated how the self-esteem and confidence of PSTs to teach science would increase through various methods of learning used in a flipped classroom. The level of SE is connected to how confident a teacher will be in their teaching abilities (Gonzales-Gomez et al., 2022). The researchers used a pre- and posttest questionnaire to measure science SE and the Science Teacher Efficacy Belief Instrument-Preservice instrument (Riggs & Enochs, 1990).

The participants of the study were 68 PSTs at a Teacher Training University of Extremadura. The findings indicated that PSTs felt that having confidence in their abilities to teach science was an important factor in how they would implement teaching practices. Being able to implement the various learning methods in a flipped classroom (e.g. hands-on practice, applying practice to theory) helped to increase their confidence in teaching science. Having confidence builds SE and positive attitudes in PSTs towards teaching (Gonzlez-Gomez et al., 2022). The pre- and posttest questionnaire revealed that PSTs attitudes towards science changed from being negative to positive. The study showed a correlation between science SE and PSTs attitudes with being involved in science related activities and scientific content.

Clark and Newberry (2019) examined the four sources of SE and how they correlated with PSTs' SE. One construct of SE in PSTs is their confidence in their abilities to teach. This in turns influence student outcomes (Clark & Newberry, 2019).

The researchers used a large-scale quasi-experimental design to examine the correlation between the sources of teacher's SE and PSTs SE scale. Clark and Newberry (2019) used two instruments. The first was the Teacher's Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) and the Preservice Teacher Survey modeled after the Total Quality Partnerships Teacher Survey (Lasley et al., 2006).

This study consisted of 783 PSTs in the Western part of the United States. The findings of this study showed that mastery, verbal persuasion, and vicarious experiences influence SE of PSTs. When PSTs leave their educational program with these types of experiences, they can enter the workforce with confidence and meet the changing demands that come with it (Clark & Newberry, 2019). The researchers reported that a limitation was having the participants to self-report their own perceptions and abilities. This was a limitation because the data did not provide in-depth information and lead to the possibility of misrepresentation in the self-report. The study participants were predominantly White women; therefore, the researchers recommended further studies with a more diverse group of teachers.

Tang et al. (2020) conducted a mixed-methods study on PSTs intrinsic motivation and its effect on teachers' professional learning and competence. Building competence in PSTs is a goal of teacher training programs to help PSTs develop their skills and knowledge (Tang et al., 2020). How PSTs learn during practicum impacts their competence. The quantitative data were collected using a 6-point Likert scale where teachers were to rate themselves on their professional learning in fieldwork, courses,

interactions with others, and learning experiences. The researchers administered the survey to understand characteristics of teacher's intrinsic motivation.

Tang et al.'s (2020) study consisted of 346 PSTs at a university in Hong Kong. The findings of the study suggested that having practical knowledge and interactions with peers helped PSTs with their competence. Intrinsic motivation or having an interest in the early learning field may determine the desire to learn and then shape their competence, Tang et al. concluded. PSTs can build competence through real-life experiences and interactions with peers. The qualitative data showed that when PSTs are able to make choices and are engaged in their learning, active learning takes place. Students contribute to their professional and theoretical knowledge. Tang et al. mentioned that one limitation with the quantitative data was the absence of independent measures. This made it difficult to generalize the data to other teacher preparation programs.

Teacher Training Programs

Coursework

Birgili et al. (2021) conducted a study on the trends and outcomes of flipped classrooms. In a flipped classroom environment, teachers can modify course content from traditional learning where most time is spent lecturing. Flipped classrooms help to increase confidence in learners and have a positive effect on how students perform (Birgili et al., 2021). Students in flipped classrooms are actively learning and can construct knowledge in their own minds. The researchers of this study used a descriptive content analysis approach to review 316 research conceptual journals. Five databases were used to select studies: Web of Science, Science Direct, ERIC, ProQuest, and

EBSCO. Keyword searches included: flipped learning, flipped classrooms, and flipped learning approach.

Components of a flipped classroom include one-on-one interaction between student and teacher, role-playing, peer interactions, video, hands-on learning, and independent research (Birgili et al., 2021). The trends revealed that flipped classrooms are an effective way to blend learning, improved student performance, and helps students to achieve. The study concluded that flipped classrooms encourage student engagement and increases their interest in learning. Studies on flipped classrooms showed that most of the study participants were students, which is more effective because it captures their direct experiences and challenges. The researchers talked about a few limitations with one being further research to include graduate theses to include different types of work. Another limitation mentioned was expanding database search to include books, proceedings, and presentation abstracts.

Colomo-Magana et al. (2020) investigated the perception of higher education students regarding the usefulness of flipped classrooms. The methodological design for this research was a non-experimental quantitative study based on an ex post facto. Ex post facto is used to collect the perceptions on the usefulness of flipped classroom methodology from an instrument (Colomo-Magana et al., 2020). The study started with 192 students and ended with 123 participants. The tool used was a 5-point Likert scale.

Developing flipped classrooms encourages or increases student motivation and provides active learning experiences for students. In traditional classrooms, the content mostly consists of theoretical content leaving students to play only a passive role in their

learning. With flipped classrooms, students are actively involved in their learning, the learning styles of each student can be met, and leaves time for students to practice applying theory to practice (Colomo-Magana et al., 2020). The findings of this study revealed the benefits of flipped classrooms for students include the development of skills and competence, increased learning capacity, student engagement, and a better use of classroom time. The researchers recommend further studies to include pre- and posttest and analyze differences. It was also recommended to have a control group to for analyzing differences in flipped classrooms between the two groups.

A study by Al-Samarraie et al. (2020) found that flipped classrooms regardless of discipline are being advocated for positive student outcomes, achievement, and a greater understanding in the knowledge of the discipline. The researchers for this study conducted a literature review to explore flipped classrooms at universities to understand experiences and challenges. A total of 1621 articles were found but only 195 met specific criteria such as written in English and validated by a research design (quantitative or qualitative). Finally, based on the quality of the articles, the final count was 85.

Flipped classroom models provide multiple learning strategies, help students to engage in learning materials more frequently, and allows more time for students to actively engage in learning activities (Al-Samarraie et al., 2020). Lecture time is minimized in flipped classrooms. Students become responsible for their own learning and can apply knowledge to practice. When the researchers evaluated flipped classrooms, they found that students in flipped classrooms had higher scores in tests and quizzed compared to students in non-flipped classrooms (Al-Samarraie et al., 2020). Students in

flipped classrooms were more engaged in the learning and motivation, therefore, increasing their confidence.

In a flipped classroom, instructors are still interactive with students to provide feedback and answer questions. A student's SE and knowledge is developed in flipped classrooms that provide students with an opportunity to reflect, inquire, and be creative (Al-Samarraie et al., 2020). While flipped classrooms have many positive outcomes, there are few challenges. Flipped classrooms can cater to individual learning styles but the student must be able to be devoted to spending time engaging in the learning activities. Another challenge identified with flipped classrooms is that learning activities must allow time for students to have sufficient time to connect with instructor in between activities for immediate feedback. The learning materials in flipped classrooms such as videos, should have good sound quality.

Practicum

What a PSTs gets out of their practicum experiences are dependent on content, structure, their preparation, and how the practicum program is implemented (Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020). Practicum is meant to build PSTs knowledge in early childhood and opportunity to engage with professionals in the same field. Challenges experienced in practicum can strengthen their professional growth (Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020). Practicum students perform various functions with 14% of their time spent in observing, 26% of their time spent participating in various activities, and 60% of their time spent on teacher tasks (Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020).

A quantitative study was conducted with 248 students at a Spanish University to determine what teacher tasks are performed during practicum. The results of the study showed that PSTs did more tasks that involved planning curriculum for the children, evaluating children performance, reflecting, and executing tasks to support the entire classroom team. Reflective activities involved the PSTs and mentors with having opportunities for feedback which is a key component in the practicum process. PSTs had less participation in school activities (Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020). Fuentes-Abeledo et al. (2020) concluded that practicum experiences help PSTs understand their role as teachers and the expectations when given the proper training they need. Having meaningful experiences in practicum helps PSTs build SE (Clark & Newberry, 2019). The researchers recommended further research using a qualitative approach to understanding the experiences, perceptions, and ideas from PSTs to improve practicum experiences.

A qualitative study was conducted by Hojeij et al. (2021) to explore the reflective journal keeping of PSTs at university in United Arab Emirates. The participants were 30 female students. The qualitative approach was used along with an interpretivist paradigm as it was noted to be compatible so that participants are more analytical and effective in reflecting on their experiences (Hojeij et al., 2021). The study also included purposeful sampling in selecting PSTs doing practicum in different schools. The participants were in a 10-week practicum course at an elementary school and had to complete reflective journals as part of the course requirements.

Because reflective practices have shown through research to help PSTs be more aware of their skills and abilities, it is becoming more widely used in the United States (Hojeij et al., 2021). Reflective practices during the practicum experience help PSTs apply knowledge, use higher order thinking, and facilitate their learning. Reflective writing along with opportunities to apply theory to practice has positive outcomes for PSTs in practicum (Hojeij et al., 2021).

Three themes emerged from the study which were teaching using technology, constructive learning, experimental learning and play, and class management. Through descriptive and detailed journaling, the PSTs reflected their growth in classroom management and teaching skills. They reflected on the use of technology with children, interaction with children in the learning environment, and best practices for teaching young children. Hojeij et al. (2021) suggested reflective journaling to be a part of teacher training programs as a way for PSTs to improve their teaching skills and learn. Reflective journaling helps PSTs consistently reflect on what they are learning and evaluate their teaching practices. There was no mention of limitations for this study.

Mentorship

It is vital that mentors model skills so that PSTs can observe, learn, and gain experience. Effective practicum programs provide hands-on training and experienced mentors to provide guidance. These factors contribute to PSTs preparation and SE (Roybal-Lewis, 2022; Simsar & Jones, 2021). SE can be fostered through many types of experiences. Practicum fieldwork must be inclusive of a variety of opportunities for PSTs to have real and consistent experiences to practice skills. Mentor teachers must be

experienced enough to provide the proper guidance and model the essential skills to prepare PSTs.

The structure and support systems that embody practicum fieldwork is vital in building the pedagogical skills of PSTs and helping them to build SE. A mentor teacher is someone who provides supervision, guidance, and feedback to PSTs in practicum. The mentor teacher plays an instrumental role in the development and training of PSTs using strategies that involve reflective and constructive feedback (Dreer, 2021). Reflective practices consistently helps PSTs to process information, think, and resolve any uncertainties.

Dreer (2021) conducted a 15-week longitudinal analysis with 125 Germen student teachers to investigate the relationship quality of mentors and student teachers during field experiences. Participants were surveyed twice during the 15 weeks. The study examined two variables to study the causal relationships. The research was built in the conceptual framework PERMA, which identifies the five building blocks of well-being and the ability to be successful. The five building blocks are postive emotions (P), engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M), and achievement (A). The aim of this study was to examine how the mentor-mentee relationships affects PERMA and cross-checking to see to what extent.

Positive emotions contributed PSTs use of creativity and effective teaching practices. Engagment contributed to how PSTs created conditions for positive learning outcomes for students and acheivement. Relationships influences a teacher’s success and job satisfaction Meaning supports PSTs desire and motivation to teach and continue to be

engaged in postive teaching practices and strategies. Last, acheivement is important in the development of SE during practicum because it builds PSTs competence, supports their well-being, and keeps their interest in teaching.

The findings of the study suggested that relationship quality between a mentor and student teacher influenced PSTs well-being and their ability to be successful during practicum. Based on previous research, having experienced mentor teachers contributes to PSTs success and competence during practicum (Dreer, 2021). The results of the study showed that each PERMA building block was significant towards mentor teachers and student teachers. Furthermore, the findings suggest that postive mentor teachers and student teachers had an effect on PSTs well-being and their success during practicum. The highest effect was shown in relationships (R) and meaning (M). The reseacher suggested futher qualitative research needs to be conducted to explore the relationships between mentor teachers and PSTs. Dreer (2021) mentioned that teachers providing a self-report had limitations suggesting that more qualitative studies be conducted to gain the perspective on teachers and their mentor-mentee relationships.

Beek et al. (2019) conducted an exploratory study on mentors' role and feedback strategies to analyze the quality of mentoring dialogues with PSTs through the use of an observation tool. Using Van de Grift's International Comparative Analysis of Learning and Teachingobservational instrument, Beek et al. conducted observations twice a year over the course of 3 years. Seven mentor teachers participated along with their mentees. Dialogues were audio recorded. Beek et al. found that mentoring PSTs prepares them for the early childhood workforce, supports their development of teaching practices, and

prepares them for the realties of working in the early childhood workforce. Beek et al. stated that “classroom observation is considered one of the main resources for mentors to gain insight into the educational practices of teacher” (p. 15). Observation, along with effective feedback, contributes to PSTs’ practicum experiences and helps PSTs to be successful with the implementation of effective teaching pratices.

Beek et al. (2019) explored feedback examined four types of feedback dialogues identified as patterns. Pattern A identitied the mentor in a director role with feedback that is non-specific and brief. In this dialogue, the mentor does not respond to the input of the PSTs. Pattern B idenfifies the mentor mostly asking questions, actively listening, with positive not non-specific feedback. The mentor is emphathetic but provides no learning objectives. Pattern C identifies the mentor as the intiator of the conversation providing both postive and negative feeback along with both non-specific and specific feedback. Pattern D identifies the mentor providing mostly advice along with postive and negative feedback that is specific. Beek et al. suggested that feedback needs to be specific and provide both positive and negative feeback. Positive feedback needs to be more frequent than negative feedback. The study reflected that Pattern D is the representation of effective feedback with a focus on specfic elements of observed teaching practices.

Practicum programs need to have the appropriate support systems in place to assist PSTs in developing teaching skills, SE, and pedagogical knowledge. The support systems must be inclusive of mentor teachers who are equipped and trained to guide future educators. Practicum experience must be able to provide what is needed as students take what they learn from the classroom into the real world; hence, entering the

early childhood workforce to provide quality care and education. Beek et al. (2019) reported some limitations with the study. First the quantity and variety of recorded dialogues were low which limited their data for exploring feedback. Some of the mentor teachers reported they did submit all dialogues out of their own concern with quality. The size of the study group was small which was also reported as a limitation.

Summary and Conclusions

Major themes that have been identified in the literature include teacher tasks, reflective learning, relationships with mentors or coteachers, commitment to the field, and time spent in practicum. Literature does show the relationship between a teacher's SE and positive educational outcomes for children. What is known is that SE is developed through four types of experiences (mastery, vicarious, verbal persuasion, and psychological/emotional states). Experiencing repeated success builds mastery skills and lessens the negative experiences. Even occassional failures are overcome by the determination and experiences from mastery (Bandura, 1977). Vicarious experiences are captured through modeling behavior. Observing behavior being carried out with success encourages the observer; however, alone is not a sole dependable source of SE (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Verbal persuasion, although not as strong as mastery experiences, can build SE when additonal aids or supports are provided to encounter sucessful experiences (Bandura, 1977). The development of SE can be connected to a person's emotional state. High SE decreases fear and anxiety; whereas, low SE activates fear and anxiety while performing tasks that seem to be challenging (Bandura, 1982). Every source of SE has

different affects on different people. Each experience is not perceived that same by every person. With that, a person's SE will vary (Bandura, 1982; Bandura & Adams, 1977).

Numerous experiences can have an effect on SE and new experiences will give opportunities to reestablish SE. There is very little known about the SE experiences of practicum students in community colleges. There is a lack of research on what specific experiences that develop SE in PSTs during practicum. It is not known what guidelines or curriculum is in place to ensure all four experiences are present in a practicum program. Practicum fieldwork must meet the expectations of preparing PSTs for the workforce and shaping their pedagogical beliefs. Practicum experiences must provide sufficient training to ensure that teachers' have high SE.

This present study will fill the gap of understanding what specific practicum experience contributes to the four types of sources identified by Bandura's social cognitive theory. This study intends to examine specific practicum experiences that build SE through mastery, vicarious, and verbal persuasion. The findings of this study may create social change within early childhood programs in community colleges to be in alignment with how PSTs are learning and understand how practicum experiences mold and shape their SE.

The next chapter will focus on the research method and rationale for this study, my role as the researcher, methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. In Chapter 3, I will describe the process for recruiting the participants, methods of data collection, and the data analysis plan.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE. Understanding the types of practicum experiences that community college students had as PSTs that promoted SE was the focus of this study. When PSTs have high SE, they are prepared to enter the early childhood workforce ready to promote enriched learning experiences for children (Fadhilah et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2019; Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023). The research that exists on SE and PSTs is broad and does not explain specific factors that may influence the development of SE in PSTs (El-Abd & Chaaban, 2021; Hooper et al., 2022; Shah & Bhattarai, 2023). SE affects competence, and there is minimal research on SE and competency for PSTs (Gale et al., 2021; Kwok & Bartanen, 2022; La Paro et al., 2020).

More research is recommended that explores community college students and SE (Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022; Zientek et al., 2019). In my search for studies on SE and PSTs, the results led to an abundance of research on PSTs who were enrolled at 4-year universities (the United States and other countries) as well as a focus on K-12 teachers. Most research on the concept of SE surrounds university PSTs with less than 8% of research focused on community college PSTs. This is due to undergraduate students only account for 26% of students enrolled in the United States in community colleges (United States Census Bureau, 2022; Wladis & Mesa, 2019). A need for more research has been suggested by previous researchers on the development of SE

with a focus on community college students (Longley & Craigo, 2023; Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022).

This chapter focuses on six sections that compose the research method for this study: research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, trustworthiness, ethical procedures, and summary. The research design and rationale will include the RQs, the central concept, the research tradition, and the rationale for the research tradition. The role of the researcher identifies my role in this study, any relationship I might have with the participants, and how, if any, biases or ethical issues will be addressed. The section on methodology describes the number and criterion/criteria for recruiting the participants, the instrumentation and processes that were used to collect data, the process for recruiting participants and methods of data collection, and the data analysis plan. The specific process for identifying, contacting, and selecting participants will be included. The Trustworthiness section addresses the credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability of the strategies used in the study. Ethical procedures will outline institutional permissions including the treatment of the participants, institutional review board (IRB) approvals, the treatment of protection and confidentiality of data, data storage procedure, who will have access to the data, when the data will be destroyed and any relevant ethical concerns. The Summary section will include the main points of Chapter 3 and a transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

Three RQs have been formulated to explore the practicum and fieldwork experiences of PSTs and the development of SE.

RQ1: What practicum/fieldwork do ECE teachers and mentor teachers perceive to develop SE in community college early childhood PSTs?

RQ2: What teacher preparation coursework do ECE teachers and community college ECE instructors perceive to influence the SE levels of community college early childhood graduates in applying theory to practice during early childhood preservice field experiences?

RQ3: What type of experiences do ECE teachers, mentor teacher, and community college ECE instructors perceive can enhance both early childhood practicum coursework and early childhood practicum activities to facilitate the development of early childhood PSTs' SE?

The central concept of this study is that various practicum or fieldwork experiences contribute to the development of SE in PSTs (Barenthien et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2021; Uygun & Avarogullari, 2020). Practicum experiences are designed and structured to give community college PSTs the skills and strategies for working with young children (Fadhilah et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2019; Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023). SE is the ability to be confident in making decisions, taking the initiative, and showing determination when faced with challenging situations (Bandura, 1977). SE is necessary for early childhood teachers to aid in the overall development of children. SE promotes positive learning experiences and educational outcomes for children (Fadhilah et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2019; Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023).

Matengu et al. (2021) performed a semi-systemic literature review on research related to the early childhood practicum. The researchers' purpose was to address the gap

in knowledge of research on practicum experiences. Key topics were student teachers' learning process during practicum, operational and pedagogical practicum arrangements, and the social and collaborative construction of practicums and learning. The participants were student teachers, teacher education programs, supervising teachers, teacher educators, and in-service teachers. Matengu et al. noted a consensus in the literature that "teacher education programs have failed to maintain a connection between theoretical and practical learning. Consequently, teachers have lacked competencies to meet the demands of workplaces" (p. 1157). Table 1 is a summary of the methodology of the literature Matengu et al. reviewed.

Table 1

Methodologies, Data Sources, and Approaches in the Literature Reviewed by Matengu et al. (2021)

Methodology	Data source, technique, or approach
Qualitative research (e.g., case study, ethnography, etc.)	Open-ended survey, interviews, reflective journals, and field notes
Qualitative research (e.g., survey)	Questionnaire, written responses, surveys, observations, reflective journals
Both qualitative and quantitative research	Action research, experimental, theoretical

The five most common data collection tools were interviews questionnaires, surveys, reflective journals, and group discussions. Qualitative studies were more represented than quantitative studies in the literature review by Matengu et al. (2021). Basic qualitative research design is the most common approach that has been used by researchers in studying topics in education or teacher practicum experiences (Merriam,

1998). If research included mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative), it was determined that the qualitative data added more descriptive details, enriched the findings, and provided more comprehension to the topic (Matengu et al., 2021). The researchers mentioned Aristotle's notion of episteme and phronesis. Episteme is the scientific understanding of a problem; whereas phronesis offers practical insight that may be different from scientific knowledge (Matengu et al., 2021). Bringing those two concepts together helps in understanding practicum experiences and brings knowledge for building teacher competence.

Role of the Researcher

As the sole researcher in this qualitative study, my role as the interviewer was to listen carefully, decipher information, and stay focused on the problem and purpose of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Self-awareness is a part of the process as well. While examining memos and notes, I carefully acknowledged any biases that might exist. This is helpful to ensure the data is valid. In my role as a researcher, it was important to maintain a balance between what I already know about practicum experiences, early education programs, and practitioners in the field to avoid biases and beliefs (Berger, 2015).

As the interviewer, I was careful to ensure that none of the participants were previous or current employees. This might create a bias and a conflict of interest regarding my findings. This would be an ethical issue and create flaws in the data because participants may be reluctant to express themselves fully (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A conflict of interest may arise if the interviewer stands to benefit from the data. My role

as the interviewer could sway the questioning and results. As a researcher, my position must be considered so that the data is valid and to eliminate any biases (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This was done by following the interview protocol, which ensured that that all interviewees are asked the same questions and interviews are recorded. Participants were allowed to stop the interview if uncomfortable or withdraw from the study altogether. As a researcher, I was responsible for interviews and analyzing data. As I reviewed interview transcripts, I looked for key terminology and listened for comments and statements (raw data) that were highlighted in the conversations.

For this study, other roles include a doctoral student, early education educator, mentor, and program director. I did not have any supervisory role with any of the participants. It is important for participants to feel comfortable during the interview. Another ethical issue that may have arisen was my perceptions about how I view new early childhood educators in terms of lacking skills to work with young children. This was managed by keeping an open mind and focusing on the purpose of the study which is to understand the development of SE through practicum experiences.

Methodology

The nature of this study was a basic qualitative study to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs. This criterion will be defined in the section on participant selection. Individual interviews were conducted as the primary means of data collection. Qualitative research is consistent with understanding the experiences of PSTs that serve to develop SE in working with young children. The focus of this research is to

investigate how practicum experiences contribute to SE in PSTs. The research will align with Bandura's theory of efficacy (Bandura, 1977) in an examination of practicum experiences that develop the ability to make independent decisions in various situations when working with young children. The focus of the research will also provide an understanding of teacher preparation factors that contribute to the SE levels of PSTs. Based on an understanding of practicum experiences, implementation of an improved curriculum may be provided to community colleges to improve student outcomes in fieldwork or practicum experiences.

Participant Selection

The population for this study included two early childhood teachers in Southern California area who are graduates from a community college. Other participants of the study included two mentor teachers from community colleges and five ECE instructors from community colleges in the Southern California area for a total of nine early childhood educators for the sample. The mentor teachers selected for the study have at least 1 year of experience as a mentor teacher in a child development center at a community college. Community college ECE instructors selected for the study have at least 1 year teaching ECE coursework at a higher learning institute. Various community colleges were contacted to request IRB Institution approval for soliciting community college ECE instructors and mentor teachers. Once permission was granted from program administrators, consent forms were emailed to community college ECE instructors and mentor teachers who met the study criteria. In qualitative research, a small sample size is manageable and practical (Emmel, 2013). Participants were also recruited by way of

social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) and Snowball sampling. Participants that elected to participate in the study were emailed and required to respond by a specified date. Participants were contacted as to the date and time of the interview which took place via Zoom. Participants were provided with a gift card as an incentive for their participation. Four community colleges in the Southern California area were contacted, and IRB approval was obtained before contacting mentor teachers and community college ECE instructors. Once mentor teachers and ECE instructors provided consent forms for their participation, they were contacted as to date, time of the interview. Interviews will take place through Zoom. The same process took place for ECE teacher participants.

The strategy used in this study to identify the participants was purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling ensures that the best participants are selected that will give the most insight into the RQs (Emmel, 2013). Teachers who are community college graduates in early childhood were the best candidates for this study to explore and understand practicum experiences. The same holds true to the selection of mentor teachers and community college ECE instructors who can provide real-life experiences in working with PSTs. Using purposeful sampling involves selecting participants can be credible and provide useful information (Emmel, 2013).

Instrumentation

Qualitative data provides insights and understanding of a particular context when there is minimal information (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). To capture the experiences of the participants', semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data for the

study. I developed the interview questions contained in the interview protocol (see Appendix) in alignment with the RQs. Individual interviews allow a researcher to perform a formative analysis. This is because a formative analysis encourages the researcher to decide if changes need to be made on the RQ(s) or tools used to collect data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Individual interviews also allow the researcher to perform analytical data triangulation. With analytical data triangulation, data are collected at different times and with different people to get a better idea of perspectives and any commonalities between individuals and within groups as data is integrated (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Mentors can provide insights on their experiences with PSTs. Early childhood instructors can provide insights on coursework content that may influence SE. ECE teachers who are graduates of a community college can give direct insight on their practicum experiences.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The participants were a total of nine people with early learning knowledge in the Southern California area. Participation was voluntary. Teachers in the early learning programs were contacted by way of email to describe the purpose of the study, the criteria, and what incentives will be offered for their participation. Participants for the study included two community college graduates with an ECE degree, two mentor teachers from two community colleges, and five community college ECE instructors from four community colleges in Southern California. All participants were contacted by way of email with flyers and consent forms attached. All participants were informed as to

how the data will be used, how much time to allow for interview, the fact that their participation is voluntary, and that they may withdraw from the study at any time.

The semi-structured interviews took place virtually on Zoom. The expected duration for each interview was approximately 1 hour. As the interviewer, I asked follow-up or probing questions for clarity of the responses. The interviews were recorded, and participants had the option to leave cameras off. Due to the number of expected participants (teachers, mentors, and community college ECE instructors), the interviews occurred over several weeks. After the interview sessions, participants were provided with a gift card as an incentive for their full participation. Participants were asked if they wish to receive further information on the study and if they will be available for any follow-up interviews.

Data Analysis Plan

This basic qualitative study is exploratory in which practicum experiences will be examined to determine which factors are perceived to contribute to SE among PSTs. Explorative studies seek to explore and understand a case due to the lack of clear outcomes (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Woodside, 2010). The RQs were designed to explore and understand the past practicum experiences ECE teachers had as PSTs at a community college. Data analysis included the process of sorting, coding, and triangulation. Triangulation is the process of analyzing various data to build a case and validate data (Woodside, 2010). Through semi-structured interviews with PSTs, mentor teachers, and community college ECE instructors, triangulation of data could strengthen the findings.

Qualitative research involves the use of text-based data, and qualitative data programs have been developed to assist in the process of coding. I used a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software application known as NVivo to code and analyze data. NVivo is popular in qualitative research and gives more accurate results (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Hilal & Alabri, 2013; Zamawe, 2015). Using NVivo is ideal for handling a large amount of text data and saves time in the data collection process (Hilal & Alabri, 2013; Zamawe, 2015). The coding process did involve two cycles. The first cycle of coding included taking segments of the transcripts from the interviews and identifying words that may have meaning or work frequency. The first cycle is what is called “descriptive” coding. The second cycle of coding involved taking a segment from the transcripts and determining what concepts or ideas were expressed. The second cycle is called “concept” coding (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The first and second cycle coding helps to extract information from the transcripts for a sound interpretation of the data (Laureate Education, 2016). Coding helps to structure data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Saldana (2016) mentions that one method of coding is acceptable, depending on what information the study is intended to provide. Two are better to identify a more specific phenomenon. Categorizing is a part of the second cycle of coding (Saldana, 2016). This second cycle coding helps in narrowing down categories. Developing themes is the final stage of analysis (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Trustworthiness

The quality of qualitative research is dependent on four criteria which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). These are

systems that need to be in place to ensure the quality of the research. It is the responsibility of the researcher to take measures that will include all four criteria so that trustworthiness can be built.

Research that shows internal validity demonstrates credibility (Shenton, 2004). The credibility of the data analysis was performed through the process of triangulation. Triangulation is the use of more than one method for gathering data (Burkholder et al., 2016). Various data sources were collected by the researcher (ECE teachers, mentor teachers, and community college ECE instructors) to develop themes. Although themes may not be identical across participants, the similarity that exists may explain practicum experiences. Strategies to help with this process are to design the research based on a literature review of similar studies and qualitative research. Another strategy for ensuring credibility is to develop a trusting relationship with the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Some of the participants I had developed relationships with through networking with other ECE professionals or had met them in past early childhood conferences.

Transferability refers to the ability to use the same research design to explore other populations. This ensures external validity (Shenton, 2004). A strategy to ensure transferability is to conclude with research that is rich in data, and the phenomenon is thoroughly explained. Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated, “Detail, especially when combined with thoroughness, helps create nuanced understanding” (p. 63). This study may or may not provide transferability due to the limitations of the population being studied, which are community college graduates from the Southern California region. Similar studies

have occurred with 4-year university graduates and early education PSTs in other countries.

Determining if research is dependable means that if repeated, the same findings and results will appear. This addresses the issue of reliability (Shenton, 2004). A strategy for dependability is to ensure the research has specific and identifying processes that can be easily copied. Burkholder et al. (2016) indicated that a strategy to ensure dependability is triangulation. This would also include using multiple sources in gathering accurate details. These strategies must be very clear for qualitative research to be repeated. I triangulated the data by analyzing interview transcripts among the three different groups of participants and noticed similarities.

Confirmability is about the researcher being able to put aside their biases so that the data gathered is based on the participant responses and other data provided (Shenton, 2004). Strategies for confirmability would include triangulation and me being aware of my position or role as the researcher. Another strategy confirmability is member checking. Member checking helps because the participants can confirm their responses for accuracy and ensures the dependability of the research. Member checking was completed by sending all participants a copy of their transcript for review and to check for discrepancies. The process of confirmability will help others to have the same conclusions as the researcher. Using audit trails, a researcher can explain how they derived to data analysis (Burkholder et al., 2016). A detailed description of the analysis process aids in the audit trails. Processes were taken to ensure confirmability by showing

how the findings were a result of the research done and how the participants provided sufficient information to determine an appropriate analysis.

Ethical Procedures

In doing this research, respect for the human participants was respected by having the right to participate voluntarily. The participants were not harmed, and the information on the research will be readily available to the public where necessary. The IRB is responsible for ensuring the research is monitored and in compliance with ethical standards (Babbie, 2017). This is to ensure that information in the research was appropriate and did not jeopardize the participants. The research proposal for this research was reviewed by the IRB to determine if any risk is involved by the participants. I obtained Walden University IRB approval (no. 02-05-21-0624492) before engaging in data collection. Employers and college institutions were informed of the purpose and significance of the study. Once employers and college institutes agree to assist in the solicitation of volunteers, a copy of the flyer was provided to the early childhood programs and community colleges institutes. Participants were notified and sent a consent form, which notifies the participants that their participation is voluntary and full disclosure of any risks that may be involved in the research.

One ethical concern is confidentiality. The information in the research will not identify participants. Each participant was assigned an identification (ID) number. This will prevent biases in the research (Babbie, 2017). Another ethical concern is confidentiality. Maintaining confidential information eliminates publicizing sensitive information in the research. This will be eliminated by destroying all participants' names

and ID numbers after 5 years. This will also ensure that even if documents are court-ordered, no participants can be identified. Confidentiality and anonymity are not the same things (Babbie, 2017).

Concerning data collection, improper analysis, and reporting would be an ethical concern (Babbie, 2017). All data and analyses will be reported with honesty and integrity. Results will be organized, thorough, and transparent. Any negative results will be reported, and limitations will be noted. Data will be stored and under the supervision of the researcher. Data was transcribed and stored on a USB. Upon completion and approval of the dissertation, data pertaining to participants will be destroyed after 5 years.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided information on the research design and rationale which included the RQs and central concept that practicum experiences contribute to the development of SE in PSTs. The rationale was explained by identifying that a basic qualitative study was the conventional approach in studies that explored practicum experiences. This chapter discussed the role of the researcher and how I examined data to prevent ethical issues such as biases and conflict of interest. The Methodology section included information on the conceptual framework, participant selection, instrumentation, and procedures taken to select participants. Procedures for data collections and data analysis plan were identified. Trustworthiness was mentioned in this chapter and included elements for credibility, transferability, dependability, and, last, confirmability. The last section of Chapter 3 included ethical procedures and how what ethical concerns might occur along with the process to address ethical issues. In Chapter 4, I will reflect on the

purpose of the study and the RQs. The setting in which the semi-structured interviews take place, the data collection process, and data analysis. The results of the study will be discussed as they relate to the RQs.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs. The participants included two teachers from early learning programs in Southern California and who were community college graduates, two mentor teachers from two community colleges in Southern California, and five community college ECE instructors from four community colleges in Southern California. My aim for answering RQ1 was to gather what practicum/fieldwork experiences develop SE in community college early childhood PSTs from ECE teachers, mentor teachers, and community college ECE instructors. For RQ2, the focus was to understand what preparation coursework influences the SE levels of community college early childhood PSTs. For RQ3, my goal was to understand what types of experiences in early childhood coursework and practicum can facilitate the development of SE in early childhood PSTs. Chapter 4 includes the results of this study, along with discussion of the study setting, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a summary of key points.

Setting

The participants consisted of a purposeful sample of nine ECE educators with experience in the early childhood field. The two ECE teachers are community college graduates and have worked in the ECE field for more than 1 year in Southern California. The two mentor teachers currently work at a community college in Southern California with more than 1 year of experience. The five community college ECE instructors

currently work at a community college in Southern California and have taught child development coursework for more than 1 year. All nine participants were able to complete the steps outlined in Chapter 3. Participant demographics are included in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Identifier	Group	Degree in ECE	Years of experience
I1	Instructor	Bachelor's	10
I2	Instructor	Master's	11
I3	Instructor	Doctoral (EdD)	18
I4	Instructor	Doctoral (EdD)	20
I5	Instructor	Master's	9
T1	Teacher	Master's	30
T2	Teacher	Associate's	21
M1	Mentor teacher	Bachelor's	10
M2	Mentor teacher	Master's	11

Note. ECE = early childhood education; EdD = Doctor of Education.

Data Collection

Nine ECE educators participated in the semi-structured interviews that lasted for approximately 1 hour. All interviews were conducted virtually on Zoom. Participants were aware the interview was being recorded, and they had a choice of turning their cameras on or leaving them off. All elected to leave cameras on. All interviews were uploaded and saved on a secured device.

My initial intent was to have a greater number of ECE teachers; however, I was not able to obtain a sufficient sample in the population. Another challenge was the COVID-19 pandemic that had a great impact on early childhood programs and higher

education institutes. Many programs had shut down, and the ECE educator pool became limited where many people left the field or were laid-off from work. During the recruitment process, I received IRB approval to change the criteria for ECE teachers to ECE teachers working in the field versus 1st year ECE teachers. I hoped by using this recruitment method, the study would not only appeal to novice teachers but ECE teachers with more experience as well. Another challenge that was encountered was getting IRB approval from institutions to assist in the recruitment of mentor teachers and community college ECE instructors. Due to COVID-19, many institutions were not accepting IRB requests. All interviews were initially to take place face-to-face but pandemic conditions made this impossible, and my interview processes needed to be revised to host virtual or telephone interviews. During the pandemic, this was something that many people were reluctant to do.

Once I made the revisions needed, I started the data collection. Once I obtained Walden University IRB approval, I requested IRB approvals from community colleges in Southern California. The purpose of getting institution IRB approval was to grant me access to solicit research participation from community college ECE instructors, mentor teachers, or any ECE teachers working for the community college. This also allowed their employees to assist me in the solicitation of potential candidates. While initial responses were low, I received IRB approval to add to my recruitment process "snowball" sampling. Through this process, I was able to reach out to a network of ECE colleagues at meetings and other networking events. The "snowball" sampling was used to reach out via social media such as Facebook and Instagram. I was able to get four

community college institutions for IRB approval. Six of the nine participants came through community college IRB approvals, one through networking, one from social media, and one from snowball. All participants were contacted by email which contained the recruitment flyer and consent form. All participants responded "I consent" to confirm their participation. Next, I scheduled and conducted the Zoom interviews over a course of ten months. Recordings from interviews were transcribed through Microsoft Word app. I reviewed recordings to make corrections that were not transcribable or clear in transcripts.

Data Analysis

Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that coding helps researchers to structure data collection. In the first cycle of coding, known as "descriptive" coding, I identified words in the transcripts that may have had meaning or word frequency. I used NVivo to do so. The first cycle of coding included taking segments of the transcripts from the interviews and identified words that may have meaning or were used frequently. I used a "bottom-up" method to reveal words or phrases that were similar or unique. Based on the interview questions, I identified the ones that directly pertained to the RQ for each participant. I uploaded the transcripts onto NVivo software. The coding process I used was to identify repeated words or word frequency used by the participants for the question. I created a word cloud with two criteria: 10 or 25 most frequent words, depending on response and stemmed word grouping (talk, talked, talking). Once word cloud was created, I also reviewed summary list of words. I identified word lists from individual participants and did comparison between different participants groups.

The second cycle is called “concept” coding (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In the second cycle, I identified concepts from the transcripts. In the second cycle, this was my opportunity to reorganize and refine words or phrases. This was also my opportunity to identify words or phrases that were not related or pertinent to the RQ. For this process, I included the process of hand coding in the second cycle. I reviewed transcripts and highlighted words or phrases that may have had meaning pertinent to the RQ. I highlighted codes identified from the first cycle of coding with the intent to understand the context for which a word was used or meaning. In NVivo I created codes identified in word frequency list pertinent to RQs and connected specific sentences or responses that related to a code word or phrase.

Using both cycles of coding helped to extract information from the transcripts for a sound interpretation of the data (Laureate Education, 2016). The second cycle coding helped in narrowing down categories and developing themes as the final stage of data analysis (Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Based on code words or phrases identified, categories were created for each RQ. I tried to identify categories that were relatable to the RQ and by the commonality of each code or phrase. From there themes were identified for each RQ. My data analysis process was iterative and reflective. I consistently reviewed the data codes, categories, and themes. I reflected consistently on my RQs and the strategies used to identify codes, categories, and themes.

Table 3 outlines the codes words, categories, and themes identified for RQ1. Common code words/phases that I found were lesson planning, observations,

assessments, implement, hands-on experiences, engaging, communication, building relationships, initiative, decisions, coaching, and support.

Table 3

Code Words/Phrases, Categories, and Themes for Research Question 1

Code word/phrase	Category	Theme
"Lesson planning," "writing anecdotal notes," "completing children's assessments," "conducting observations," "engage children," "accommodate children with special needs," "implement activities," "model to children," "assessment, conducting observations"	Teacher tasks	Practicum experiences
"Communication with teaching team/families," "developing partnerships," "helping teachers," "shadow teachers," "connect with children," "hands-on experiences," "observe teacher/children"	Relationships	Building rapport and team support
"Take initiative," "make decisions," "feeling not included," "getting hired after practicum," "struggled with classroom management," "did not know expectations," "fear and anxiety with lesson planning," "lack of self-worth"	Confidence	Self-efficacy
"Coaching," "role modeling," "guidance/support," "having resources," "self-reflections," "support and partnership," "having teacher input," "honest feedback"	Mentor support	Resources and support

Table 4 outlines the code words, categories, and themes identified for RQ2. Common codes words/phases were principles and practices, observations, assignments, facilitate learning, hands-on experience, practice skills, reflections, experiences, SE, theoretical knowledge, mastery, expectations, explore, developmentally appropriate

practice, diversity, communications, and application. I noted in my journal notes that many of the community college ECE instructors more than once mentioned the importance of PSTs understanding the expectations of being a teacher working in an early childhood program and the ability to apply theory to practice through reflections and observations.

Table 4

Code Word/Phrases, Categories, and Themes for Research Question 2

Code word/phrase	Category	Theme
"Curriculum"; "child, family, and community course"; "child development course"; "understanding developmentally appropriate practice"; "communication with parents"; "principles and practices course"; "diversity"; "communication"	Course topics	Course content
"Applications," "reflections," "critical thinking," "research," "observing teachers and children," "lesson planning," "writing philosophy," "statements," "applying theory to practice," "complete assignments," "evaluate," "practice skills," "hands-on experience," "participate," "facilitate own learning," "building self-efficacy," "applying theoretical knowledge," "develop mastery," "accountability," "try new ideas," "build knowledge," "implement learning"	Practicing	Assignments

For RQ3, the words/phrases that were common were intentional, expectations, self-esteem, opportunities, time, building rapport, confidence, growth, engagement, hands-on experiences, hours, guest speakers, applications, groups, videos, behavior management, diversity, inclusion, and reflections. Table 5 outlines the code

words/phrases, categories, and themes identified for RQ3. In my journal notes, I noted that ECE instructors stressed that importance of more hours in practicum and opportunities to apply theory to practice in all courses.

Table 5

Code Word/Phrases, Categories, and Themes for Research Question 3

Code word/phrase	Category	Theme
"More observation time," "more hands-on experience," "more hours," "more time completing teacher tasks," "more time doing anecdotal," "requirements," "opportunities," "learning," "experiences," "several sessions," "engagement," "lab schools," "group projects"	Improvements	Quantity of experiences
"Notes/assessments," "working as a group," "practice application in all courses," "quality videos," "guest speakers," "recording reflections," "behavior management," "inclusion and equity," "diversity," "intentional and meaningful experiences," "build self-esteem," "empower students," "presentations," "build rapport," "videotapes," "self-efficacy," "interdependence"	Different types of practicum experiences	Quality of experiences

This qualitative study is exploratory in which practicum experiences were examined to determine which factors are perceived to contribute to SE. Explorative studies seek to explore and understand a case due to the lack of clear outcomes (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Woodside, 2010). Data analysis includes the process of sorting, coding, and triangulation. Triangulation is the process of analyzing various data to build a case and validate data (Woodside, 2010). In reviewing the transcripts, recorded interviews, and

responses, my goal was to compare data to determine themes or concepts. This was done numerous times to reflect on the RQs and how participants responded to the interview questions.

My research process included reviewing my journal notes for any follow up or probing questions I asked. I reviewed recordings to clarify any wording or statements that were unclear in the transcripts. I used NVivo to code across participants in the same classification for each question to identify saturation. Too small of a sample lessens the richness of data and the right amount helps to achieve saturation and redundancy (Emmel, 2013). Saturation is met when no new information is provided in data collection, and sufficient data has been collected to develop findings (Lowe et al., 2018). Although I used NVivo to assist with coding, I went back through all transcripts to identify any codes that may not have been discovered through NVivo based on the questions asked and concepts.

I found similar codes for RQ1 and RQ2. Pertinent codes for RQ1 for mentor teachers and ECE teachers were observations and lesson plans. Similar codes for both mentor teachers were lesson plans and communication. The same with both ECE teachers where the similar codes identified between the two were lesson plans and observation/anecdotal notes. In RQ2, for ECE instructors, pertinent codes also included observations and lesson plan were identified. All but one ECE instructor had similar identified codes such as observations and reflections. This one ECE instructor had codes such as critical thinking and research that were not identified with any other ECE instructor. With RQ1 and RQ2, the identified themes that were common was having

resources or tools. A theme that I identified across all participants for RQ3 was quantity in terms of practicum hours and opportunities to apply theory to practice. With all the codes, I combined some and was able to develop common themes for each RQ.

Results

I summarized each RQ from the nine participants who were interviewed. Codes and themes will be discussed in Chapter 4 along with direct quotes from participants. The focus of the RQ1 was to gather information on what practicum/fieldwork experiences develop SE. The findings for RQ1 were data collected from ECE teachers and mentor teachers. For RQ2, the focus was to understand what preparation coursework influences the SE levels. The findings for RQ2 were data collected from ECE teachers and community college ECE instructors. For RQ3, my goal was to understand what types of experiences in early childhood coursework and practicum can facilitate the development of SE. I collected data for this question from all nine participants.

Research Question 1

RQ1 was, “What practicum/fieldwork experiences do ECE teachers and mentor teachers/supervisors perceive to develop SE in community college early childhood PSTs?” Themes that emerged from the data analysis are practicum experiences, development of rapport and team support, SE, resources, and support. Reflected in these themes were Bandura’s social cognitive theory for mastery, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion. See Table 3 for concepts, themes, and codes identified for RQ1.

Practicum Experiences

Planning in the classroom involves understanding child development and the ability to plan activities for the children. I asked the participants to reflect on their practicum experiences and identify what teacher tasks do they believe helped to develop SE. Lesson planning, writing anecdotal notes, and completing children's assessments were experiences reported by ECE teachers and mentor teachers. T2 stated that having to develop lesson plans to implement actual activities is a teaching task that helped to develop SE. T1 also stated that she spent some practicum hours doing lesson plans. Both ECE teacher participants stated that having the teacher task of writing anecdotal notes helped in developing the SE. Overall, the teachers believed that tasks such as completing lesson plans, writing children's observations, and completing children assessments helped to develop SE during their practicum experience. T2 indicated that part of her SE development came from interacting and engaging with different age groups and understanding developmentally appropriate practices. Both teachers talked about how shadowing the head teachers in practicum helped them to develop SE by being able to observe methods and techniques teachers used in the classroom. Tasks where PSTs had focused, or intentional observations helped to develop analytical thinking such as working with children with challenging behaviors and trying to assess what strategies might work well for behavior modification. This built SE by being able to implement those strategies with success.

I asked mentor teachers which teacher tasks contribute to SE. M1 indicated that teacher tasks such as lesson planning gives PSTs hands on experience to work with

children and focus on the growth and development of children. M2 stated that in terms of teacher tasks, lesson planning is a part of their responsibility in addition to collecting observation notes. Mentor teachers expressed that tasks involving the need to communicate and engage with children, parents, or other teaching staff were important in practicum. Consistent communication of expectations helped PSTs to make informed decisions and problem solve.

ECE teachers were asked what strategies they implemented to develop SE. Strategies reported were observing children and teachers, communication with families and team members, and developing partnerships. T1 stated, “In the beginning I was just shadowing the head teachers, observing and seeing what they do”. T2 mentioned that she followed the lead teacher in the classroom as she observed. For communication and partnership, the mentor teachers mentioned this more than the ECE teachers whether it was with team members, children, or families.

Development of Rapport and Team Support

I asked teacher participants what specific strategies they used to work effectively with families, children, and manage the classroom to build SE. Developing relationships with teaching team, children, and parents were an important strategy for building SE. Teachers expressed the importance of building trust and establishing rapport with families. One teacher mentioned that it was important for her to make connections with the children early in practicum. T1 stated, “First you do not want to jump in and talk to their parents because they really do not know you and you do not know them. So, you want to establish that partnership and build those relationships”. T2 stated

> Even as an employee or a teacher, I know I don't want to be talked to any kind of way, so I always greeted everyone really bubbly, happily, friendly with a smile and pleasant, and sometimes go overboard with the joyfulness of being happy because that alone sets an atmosphere.

Overall, teachers believed that it was important to make connections with children, families, and classroom team. T1 mentioned that she made connections with the children early during practicum and then with the parents. T2 believed that if you have confidence and competence within the team, it helps with SE. Both teachers talked about the importance of having a partnership with the teaching team, team communication, teamwork, and being able to learn from one another, build team support and SE. Another important factor for team support was having PSTs be included in classroom team discussions such as lesson planning, providing individual support for children, and staying informed on day-to -day classroom activities.

I asked mentor teachers what tasks contribute to practicum students building SE. M1 mentioned how it was important when preparing the environment that PSTs serve as a third teacher in the classroom to engage with the children and form a partnership with the other teachers in the classroom. Students were given tasks of communicating with families. M1 stated, “I have a parent cafe for the parents, so we do sessions with the parent cafe, and we talk about how to work with the children.”. M2 mentioned about having communication among the team and stated, “If there are any parent complaints or concerns, or maybe child behaviors that we're observing or addressing when we start off the day with that communication”. Overall, mentor teachers talked about that as PSTs

built rapport with parents and engaged more frequently, they were able to manage their behavior and take the initiative. M2 felt that by the time PSTs left their practicum, she observed a change or improvement in their SE and communication with families and children. She stated that with her PSTs, one of the first things she does is to ensure open communication with the teaching team, children, and parents.

Self-Efficacy

At the beginning of practicum, T1 mentioned that it was hard because she did not know what to expect or to do. She stated, “I always had a teacher, or mentor who explained and guided me. It was easier. I think it is important”. Not having any guidance or support would make the development of SE in practicum hard. T2 stated, “I was shy and timid at the beginning of practicum, but I linked practice and having hands-on learning”. Both teacher participants felt that having the support of the mentor teacher or other teachers was an important part of building SE in practicum. When asked about challenges or initial SE in practicum, the participants mentioned that not having team support or not being included in the team would be a challenge for building SE during practicum. Not knowing expectations and struggling with classroom management created low SE. Building SE in practicum was connected to having support, teacher input, and developing partnerships. Both teachers commented that whatever challenges they may have faced during their practicum experiences, they were sure to take those learned experiences as what not to do should they become mentor teachers. Any positive experiences they had during practicum, they continued to use those strategies in the classrooms or to mentor others.

For mentor teachers, M2 mentioned the difference between PSTs with experience versus PST without experience. She commented that from her observations, PSTs with no experience had low SE. PSTs with no experience and had poor attendance or frequent absences, had low SE versus experienced PSTs or the students that attended practicum more frequently. Building relationships with the children is a way to get to know them and you will have more engagement and more opportunities to build SE. M2 also felt that if a PSTs had a negative experience with parents, it also affected the SE.

Resources and Support

I asked teachers what specifically helped them to build SE while performing a task. Having the right resources and mentor teacher facilitation played a part in the development of SE during practicum. T1 talked about having support from the mentor teacher was important to be successful while doing practicum. T2 expressed that having input from the teaching team showed support. Mentor teachers were asked how they facilitated the development of SE for a specific task given to PSTs. Mentor teachers talked about role modeling, moments of self-reflections, communication, and coaching. M1 stated, “They saw me preparing like a Zoom meeting, preparing a Google slide, preparing presentation to the children and documenting, like looking for resources for the parents”. M2 stated, “Yes, I do a lot of coaching, it happens on the spot. There is a lot of coaching involved and with that in addition to that communication “. M2 also mentioned that she put post-it notes around the classroom or in general areas to communicate information with teaching staff. M1 expressed that she has PSTs do a reflective story and develop a PPT to share their story and experiences in practicum. M1 talked more about

her role modeling techniques where she would role model and then ask the PSTs to take over while continuing to observe or how she might sit close to listen. M2 stated

> Coaching reflection is so important. After they do their lesson for the day, I will have them at the end of the day when all the children are gone, and no one else is there, it is just the both of us. I would have to grade them and see how they did, but my question is how do you think you did? I always start off with them. Yes, so they can give me honest feedback before I can provide what I see.

Overall, mentor teachers felt that PSTs built SE when they could reflect on their experiences to discuss anxieties and fears. Reflective practices help PSTs to make decisions, so they can complete assigned tasks with success. How children respond to activities or how they engage with you may contribute to SE. Reflective practices allow PSTs to evaluate their performance and look for areas of improvement. Other support given to PSTs from mentor teachers were role modeling, coaching on the spot, meeting the PSTs where they are. Both mentor teachers discussed how they learn about PSTs from the beginning. They learn about their goals, interests, and what areas they feel they need to improve or want to focus on more. Practicum experience is about learning how to apply theory to practice. Mentor teachers felt that by encouraging PSTs to observe, watch, and listen helps with having confidence. M1 shared that she role models to PSTs on the areas they feel that need to improve. This way she is giving them the opportunity to see interactions in real time. They encourage the current teaching team to work as a team so that the classroom energy is positive, and PSTs feel welcomed.

M2 also observed that experienced PSTs come into practicum implementing strategies they have used before. Both mentor teachers mentioned that having PSTs attend an orientation was important. It is necessary for PSTs to understand expectations and the program philosophy. M2 shared an observation of one PSTs who was adamant about using her own approach when working with the children instead of the recommendations of the mentor teacher. This was an opportunity for the PSTs to learn about herself and see how her approach did not match the practicum program approach. This was also important as PSTs are learning about the ECE field and may determine whether they stay in the field. M1 shared how she would help PSTs make their time spent doing their practicum by finding out about their interests and how to apply it to engaging with the children. She encouraged PSTs to connect what they were interested in such as soccer or playing a musical instrument and build knowledge with the children. She gave the PSTs strategies for scaffolding to make the experience for the children more meaningful.

Between both groups, teachers and mentors, data triangulation was discovered because there was some similarity in data analysis. Data triangulation is the collection of data from different sources in which there is a common thought (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Both groups mentioned that lesson planning and writing observation notes were teacher tasks given to PSTs to help with SE. Teachers and mentors mentioned that building rapport with families was important and support from mentor teachers played a role in building SE in practicum.

Research Question 2

RQ2 was, “What teacher preparation coursework do ECE teachers and community college ECE instructors perceive to influence the SE levels of community college early childhood graduates in applying theory to practice during early childhood preservice field experiences?” Themes that emerged from the data analysis are course content and assignments. Reflected in these themes were Bandura’s social cognitive theory for vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion. See Table 4 for concepts, themes, and codes identified for RQ2.

Course Content

ECE teachers mentioned content in courses that facilitated the development of SE prior to practicum. T1 mentioned that the course that outlines developmentally appropriate practice. The participant stated, “Knowing that we are doing the right thing in thinking about what level are you using. If it's a 3-year-old, it's going to look different than a 4-year-old.” T2 talked about the specific course titled, “Child, Family, and Community” and “Introduction to Child Development.” T2 stated, “Those two were two pillars that really set the tone in my life.” Overall, both ECE teachers believed that courses that helped with building SE included learning about developmentally appropriate practices, curriculum planning and development, and learning about the basics of child development.

Three ECE instructors shared courses that talked about the principles and practices in working in the early childhood field help to build SE in PSTs prior to practicum. The ECE instructors stated that PSTs must be able to understand the roles and

responsibilities of teachers working with young children and expectations. I5 stated, “The first class that pops into mind is our principles and practices course, and we ask students to think about who they are as educators to write about their philosophy”. I3 stated, “To introduce best practices so that once they get to the practicum, they're really supposed to be implementing everything they learned in all their prior courses.” She mentioned that courses should be designed to build skills so that once they are in practicum, hands-on practice can take place. I1 stated

> I want to emphasize what happens in my principles and practices class just because that's like an overview of the field. That class is a little bit of all the classes. It's a fast-paced class because it moves from topic to topic each week. We cover developmentally appropriate practice to family involvement, diversity, so it's just a little bit of everything.

Overall, ECE instructors felt that courses that build SE prior to practicum would include writing a philosophy statement to understand who you want to be as a teacher or an educator. Courses reviewing the principles and practices of early childhood describe the expectations of working in early childhood. Courses that developed knowledge and skills were also important. Having courses on working with and communicating with families is helpful in providing PSTs with the tools needed to be confident in this area. ECE instructors mentioned that courses that included opportunities for real life applications and critical thinking help to build SE in PSTs prior to practicum.

Assignments

Both teacher participants shared that giving the assignment of building a curriculum such as, doing a lesson plan helped to build SE prior to practicum. T1 shared one assignment about doing a parent newsletter that helped her to have communication with parents and to build SE as well. The courses and assignments enhanced their knowledge of child development. Assignments during coursework included building child portfolios for different age groups, lesson planning, and doing and implementing content specific activities such as math or science activities helped to build SE prior to practicum.

When asked about assignments that facilitate the development of SE, ECE instructors talked about having PSTs conduct observations in a child development center and creating lesson plans. I3 stated, “Yes they are working on developing activities so that they can learn how to write lesson plans in some of the child development courses”. I5 stated, “It's like in person, some of the assignments we would ask students to do is go to a site and ask permission to do a 1-hr observation. We would ask him to focus on curriculum for example”. I1 stated, “I have an assignment, for instance that makes them connect with a teacher that had a positive impact in their lives and then they have to come up with some of the qualities they saw”. Other assignments given mentioned by ECE instructors were applications. Students were asked to role play a scenario and apply what they learn, plan an activity with children and implement, prepare specific content in a lesson plan (math, science, etc.), apply a theory and practice, and peer modeling where they would observe a peer doing an activity. Another assignment mentioned by I4 to

encourage critical thinking was to have PSTs research information on the internet that may involve a book study or playground safety evaluation. I4 stated, “Some of my classes will read books like the Erosion of Childhood or something else”. Other assignments consisted of reflective conversations. I5 stated

> Based on concepts that we talk about in class they would take notes and then evaluate what went on and how the teacher facilitated the experience and what went well and what didn't go well. Those assignments asked students what you would do differently.

Assignments that would allow PSTs to do critical thinking were important as they talked about theories, philosophy statements, and developed learning objectives from observing children. Role playing was an assignment mentioned by I1 that helped PSTs develop confidence because they were able to practice with their peers and see the role modeling taking place. Overall, ECE instructors felt that assignments that would help develop SE prior to practicum would be the ones that would enhance critical thinking. Having assignments that are open-ended would allow PSTs to research information and develop a sense of independence. All ECE instructors mentioned observations as part of course assignments. PSTs were to learn by observing teachers in the classroom and children. Having opportunities to plan experiences for the children and create portfolios would give PSTs a chance to practice being teachers while getting consistent feedback from peers or instructors. Getting consistent positive feedback was important in building SE mentioned by I2.

Other assignments given to PSTs included opportunities to create scenarios and role play with peers, conduct focused observations so that PSTs can connect what they learn in their courses and review case studies. I5 mentioned that having other course topics with content about working with families and how to communicate with families was important as well to give PSTs the tools and knowledge they need going into practicum. Overall, ECE instructors talked about focused observations that were connected to what the PSTs were learning in their courses and connecting theories. Role playing, peer and classroom observations, reviewing case studies were important assignments given to PSTs prior to practicum. Practical applications were mentioned by I4 as a key factor for the development of SE. Having PSTs to build child portfolios and develop lesson plans for children helped PSTs to practice skills for developmentally appropriate practices and understanding child development. Data triangulation showed that both groups— teachers and community college instructors—mentioned the completion of various assignments such as writing lesson plans and developing activities for children. I found that the ECE instructors verbalized more and provided more details on assignments they felt helped in the development of SE.

Research Question 3

RQ3 was, "What type of experiences do ECE teachers, mentor teacher/supervisors, and ECE community college ECE instructors perceive can enhance both early childhood practicum coursework and early childhood practicum activities to facilitate the development of early childhood PSTs' SE." Themes that emerged from the data analysis are quality of experiences and quantity of experiences. Reflected in these

themes were Bandura's social cognitive theory for mastery and vicarious experiences. See Table 5 for concepts, themes, and codes identified for RQ3.

Quality of Experiences.

I asked all participants a question about what was missing or what could be added to build SE in practicum for PSTs. The ECE instructors focused on ways to help PSTs apply theory to practice. One way mentioned by an instructor would be the benefits of having a lab school. I5 talked about in the lab school how PSTs could observe and have an instructor describe what they are seeing and the strategies that the teacher is using. She stated

> I wish we had a lab school because you could talk about it all you want, and you can show as many videos as you as you want in class, but unless students are there seeing it in person and then having the instructor guide their attention and describe what they are doing, PSTs would have to imagine what it is like.

Another experience that would help with building SE for PSTs mentioned was doing observation critiques. This is where the PSTs would video record themselves practicing what they learned in class. I5 stated, "Try and get them to practice the practical application of whatever they're learning in my class. That's the important assignment for SE; knowing that it's not just SE but also determining whether this is the field you". Having opportunities for PSTs to work in a group was another experience mentioned. This would be an added support for students that may be struggling in a course. I1 commented

> When students are working in groups and scaffolding each other's learning rather than working on their own, this benefits them. I have seen some students who have a learning disability that are really struggling learning on their own, even when I'm giving them so much feedback.

I1 mentioned the lack of quality videos for PSTs to watch of teachers interacting with children. Putting cameras at lab schools to record teachers in real situations interacting with children would be helpful. This would be natural, less intrusive, and capture authentic experiences in the classrooms. PSTs will be able to analyze real time observations. Overall, ECE instructors felt that having guest speakers visit the class would help the PSTs gain more tools and knowledge from other experts in the field. PSTs would have the opportunity to ask questions and reflect on their learning.

Other courses are needed prior to going into practicum. I4 stated, "Starting in early childhood teaching people how to use restorative justice practices and conscious discipline. Those kinds of things should be mandatory in early childhood". ECE instructors mentioned having courses on behavior management. I2 indicated that it is discussed in some courses, but it is only a small component. I3 stated, "There is a disconnect between the coursework and the actual implementation in the classroom". She mentioned that designing practical applications with all courses would be helpful so that PSTs are engaged with children and will increase the feedback they receive. I3 believed that PSTs should have the opportunities to not only have assignments in select course to practice, but every single course should have some type of application so that PSTs will be evaluated not just on how well they develop activities on content, but also on

interactions with children and other parts of the day as a teacher. There should always be opportunities for PSTs to implement theory to practice and apply what they have learned in courses.

The ECE teachers mentioned how communication and team planning were important keys in having quality practicum experiences. T1talked about how it was important that parents are introduced to all classroom teaching staff to help build rapport and partnerships. Parents should be aware of who the PSTs are and their roles in the classroom and working with their child. It was also important to do curriculum planning together as a classroom team. T2 felt that PSTs should not be handed completed lesson plan and just told to implement it without knowing the individual needs of the children in the classroom or any other directives from the teachers. T2 also stated, “PSTs should feel welcome in the classroom environment and as part of the team all the time. There cannot be a lack of team communication from the 1st day of the practicum experience.” It is important that teachers working with PSTs understand the roles of everyone, including their own when it comes to PSTs completing their practicum. Everyone is expected to be a team player.

Mentor teachers mentioned that some things that can improve the quality of practicum experiences are to make sure orientations are taking place where you get to know the PSTs in terms of their interests and goals. The requirements should include PSTs to experience family engagement events and facilitate for the full experience. This way they are learning more about child development and important home-school connections. M2 stated, “More opportunities to build the writing skills of PSTs is

important for them to write quality observations and participate in every aspect of working with the parents such as participation in parent teacher conferences". M1 felt that PSTs should have the opportunity to work with different mentor teachers. This will give PSTs more exposure to different ideas and a variety of feedback.

Quantity of Experiences

Both ECE teachers felt that more hands-on opportunities need to be available for PSTs where they can engage with children and implement curriculum is missing. T1 expressed that along with the courses, there should be more practical applications and observations involved while taking the courses. She stated

> I think the practicum class is a great opportunity to teach teachers because you are in the grind, and you really learn from being in the classroom more than you're sitting in hearing your lecture. Not that it's not important, it is. I'm just thinking that while you practice it, it's much better if you see it in action. It's different than reading it in your textbook.

Mentor teachers felt that time spent in practicum was important. M2 shared that the amount time for her program is not enough for PSTs. When commenting about PSTs being prepared when they leave her program M2 stated

> Honestly, if you're going to ask me if they are ready to go into the field, I want to say 80% no. Maybe 90%, no, they're not. While they may earn their Associate's degree, I want to say 80% or 90% of those who do leave are not ready. They don't have the confidence.

In some cases, students who graduated return to the location of their practicum experience to do volunteer work. M2 felt this was an opportunity for them to build a better rapport with parents and have more growth. Overall, both mentor teachers believed that time spent in practicum needs to increase. M1 stated

> When they do the practice in our classroom, it's limited experience. They do 54 hr in our classroom, and I don't think that 54 hr is enough to prepare a teacher for real life. I wish that the class could be broken into several sessions to gain the experience before they are out there on their own because it takes time. It takes time and I told them like even give yourself a time before accepting a job.

When I interviewed the community college ECE instructors, the overall concern was the number of hours put into practicum. They felt that the time spent in practicum was not enough to implement theory into practice, engage with children, or learn skills such as behavior management, and curriculum implementation. Both I3 and I5 commented on the importance of having time to apply theory to practice. Increasing assignments during coursework that includes having to do fieldwork would increase child engagement and feedback. I3 stated

> Even though they could do the presentations in the class, they would still be required to go to a center and see a teacher reading a story or doing a puppet play or a flannel board story or doing something dealing with the dramatic play area. That class should require them to go into a center and see that in action so then by the time you get to the practicum, all of this is not new.

She was referring to when assignments are given, the PSTs are conducting observations at a center to observe the specific assignment whether its language or literacy, math, or science. I3 felt that this should be a requirement for all coursework for practical applications. I5 mentioned extra funding to colleges to extend practicum hours or have paid internships. She felt that practicum should be a year versus one semester. The first part of practicum can have PSTs focused on observing and the second part can have PSTs facilitating. This also will increase PSTs engagement with children and instructors will give more feedback to PSTs. PSTs need to learn how to not only apply theory to practice, but also have opportunities to reflect on theoretical learning.

I1 felt that colleges should require more classes to be taken prior to practicum. I1 stated

> They need four of our core classes, which is the 12 units. Other colleges require a lot more before students take practicum. They expect students to also take the assessment class, the diversity class, the health and safety, and nutrition class. Those classes that I just mentioned are part of our certificate of achievement, and sometimes we debated, like maybe we should require more requirements and classes.

Both I2 and I4 focused more on the type of courses that should be required before practicum. PSTs should have more courses on behavior management, special needs to include training on Individual Educational Plan (IEP), advocacy, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), restorative justice, and conscious discipline. I1 felt that by not taking courses on diversity, PSTs may go into practicum with biases and make judgements on

the family. I4 expressed that PSTs will come into practicum facing those challenges, and they do not have the training or knowledge to manage children with behavioral challenges and special needs. She believed this does not help the SE of PSTs practicum experience. They are already set up for failure. I4 stated, “Shame on us for having such low standards for the critical years of development. I would love all courses to have a DEI component. That is, on the rise.” I4 also stated, “I have something that I call lethal rejection.”

I4 believes that children in preschool are more likely to be expelled than all of K through 12 combined stating, “I would love to have a mandatory class on restorative justice practices. Starting in early childhood and teaching people how to use restorative justice practices, and conscious discipline. Those kinds of things should be mandatory in early childhood”.

Data triangulation was found with all groups, teachers, and community college ECE instructors with the quality of experiences being a common theme. Although quality of experiences was identified as a common theme, each group identified various experiences that could improve the quality of PSTs experiences in practicum from their perspective. For quantity of experiences, all three groups mentioned how important it was for PSTs to have more time in practicum, having hand-on practice and engaging with children. Time spent in practicum was very common and was a major concern for quantity of experiences.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Research that shows internal validity demonstrates credibility (Shenton, 2004). The credibility of the data analysis was performed through the process of triangulation. Data triangulation is the use of more than one source for gathering data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data I collected were from three categories: community college ECE instructors, mentor teachers, and ECE teachers. I asked probing questions when needed for clarity. Credibility was increased by asking probing questions for clarity and summarizing their responses after the interview giving them the opportunity to make any corrections or clarifications. There were similarities in the themes among the three groups. With analytical data triangulation, data is collected at separate times and with different people to compare and get a better idea of perspectives and any commonalities between individuals and within groups; data are integrated (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability refers to the ability to use the same research design to explore other populations. This ensures external validity (Shenton, 2004). A strategy to ensure transferability is to have research that is rich in data, and the phenomenon is thoroughly explained. All the participants in this study are professionals in the field ranging from 9 to 21 years of experience. All the participants had firsthand knowledge of practicum programs. Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated, “Detail, especially when combined with thoroughness, helps create nuanced understanding” (p. 63). For this study, the participants held various titles and worked at various community colleges or ECE programs in Southern California.

A strategy for ensuring dependability is member checking helps because the participants can confirm their responses for accuracy and ensures the dependability of the research. Member checking was completed by sending all participants a copy of their transcript for review. Transcription was done via the Microsoft Word application, but before sending them, I carefully compared transcripts with the audio recordings for accuracy for all nine transcripts. Participants were allowed to review transcripts for accuracy. Participants were allowed to respond if they found any discrepancies in their responses. The participants reported no discrepancies.

Confirmability is about the researcher being able to put aside their biases so that the data gathered is based on the participant responses and other data provided (Shenton, 2004). My experience in the ECE field working in many different positions, including taking a practicum course helped me to use my knowledge to ask probing questions during the interview. I described my data analysis and how I developed my findings. My findings are solely based on the responses of the participants and the information they provided during the interviews. Using audit trails, a researcher can explain how they derived to data analysis (Burkholder et al., 2016). I reviewed the transcripts and audio recordings several times to ensure that I captured responses that may have not been clear.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I discussed the three RQs and identified code words/phrases, categories, and themes. I presented a data analysis from the Zoom interviews. This included the setting, data collection procedures, data analysis process, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. The results of RQ1 revealed various teacher tasks and

strategies used that would help PSTs develop SE. The data analysis showed that learning how to develop curriculum for children through practice writing lesson plans, writing anecdotal notes, and completing assessments, were important tasks for PSTs in practicum. Building rapport with other teachers and families was important as well and implementing various strategies for building rapport contributed to SE including having support and resources. The literature review revealed that practicum plays a vital role for PSTs practicing and building strategies for working in the early childhood field. The literature review also revealed that support and guidance from mentor teachers play an integral part for PSTs in practicum.

Qualitative research has been conducted by using semi-structured interviews that revealed the importance of tangible and realistic experiences for developing SE. In Chapter 2, I mentioned Bandura's social cognitive theory and identified four sources of SE. The data analysis for RQ1 revealed mastery experiences when PSTs have opportunities to write lesson plans and observation notes consistently including implementing various strategies for building rapport with teachers, children, and families. The strategies mentioned were consistent communication, observing children, and team meetings. The results of RQ1 are consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory and Dewey's theory.

For RQ2, the data analysis revealed that course content and the type of assignments that PSTs were exposed to were important for the development of SE. Opportunities for mentor teachers to provide reflective feedback to PSTs helped in building SE because teachers were able to think about how they were implementing

strategies and learned how to problem solve. The literature review for coursework revealed that SE can be developed when PSTs have courses that include learned centered activities to include observing teachers, role playing, small groups, and individual assignments. Courses are to provide PSTs opportunities for problem solving and critical thinking. The data analysis for RQ2 revealed mastery experiences and vicarious experiences. In Chapter 2, I mentioned that vicarious experiences occur when PSTs have opportunities to observe consistently when courses are designed to include students going into classrooms to observe as a part of their assignments. The results of RQ2 are aligned with Bandura's social cognitive theory and Dewey's theory.

The results of RQ3 revealed that the quality and quantity of the experiences in practicum play important roles in building SE. The design of the practicum and how much time PSTs spend in practicum was consistent among all three groups. In the literature review, it was mentioned that SE and confidence were related to the quality of fieldwork. The quality of fieldwork should provide mastery and vicarious experiences for PSTs to build and develop SE. The quantity of experiences was revealed in the literature review for SE. Research showed that the time spent in fieldwork was critical for building confidence and SE in PSTs. Teachers need time to develop skills and strategies.

In the final chapter that follows, I will present interpretation of the results, how the results support the literature described in Chapter 2, the conceptual framework, limitations, potential implications for social change, recommendations, implications, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences in practicum that early childhood educators perceive contribute to the development of SE among PSTs. Virtual interviews were used to gather the perspectives of ECE teachers, community college ECE instructors, and mentor teachers in Southern California regarding specific aspects of practicum experiences that are perceived to influence preschool teacher's SE in early childhood settings. The conceptual framework that was used to explore SE and PSTs was Bandura's social cognitive theory along with Dewey's theory. The themes in this study were curriculum development, building rapport, resources/support, course content, assignments, quality of experiences, and quantity of experiences. Chapter 5 includes the interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and conclusions.

Interpretation of the Findings

I generated conclusions by creating tables with the identified word codes/phrases, categories, and themes. I analyzed the data and compared the findings to those in the peer-reviewed literature reported in Chapter 2. The lens for analyzing the data was provided by social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977).

Key Finding 1

ECE teachers and mentor teachers both agreed that tasks or teacher duties given to PSTs in practicum that help in the building of SE were writing lesson plans, writing observations, and completing assessments. The study by Fuentes-Abeledo et al. (2020) confirmed that PSTs did more tasks that involved planning curriculum for children,

evaluating children performance, reflecting, and executing tasks to support the entire classroom team. Both groups discussed the relevance of having various strategies for having rapport with children and families including the other teachers which include communication, observing children, and regular meeting with teaching team. Curriculum development and building rapport with other teachers, children, and families helped in building SE. This is consistent with the study by Tang et al. (2020). The findings of the study suggested that having practical knowledge and interactions with peers helped PSTs with their competence. PSTs can build competence through real-life experiences and interactions with peers.

Having opportunities to practice completing teacher tasks and implementing various strategies for working with families creates opportunities for building SE. This is consistent with the study by Garcia-Lazaro et al. (2022) where the results of the study indicated that PSTs perceived SE was developed based on social interactions and mastery. Four types of experiences contribute to the development of efficacy: (a) mastery, (b) vicarious, (c) social persuasion, and (d) physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1977). Mastery experiences have been identified as the most important source of high efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022; Yough, 2019). This aligns with the findings and through the reporting of the participants. PSTs are provided with many opportunities during their practicum to practice completing various teacher tasks and performing duties. Mastery of skills are developed when a task is consistently performed on several occasions. Practicum students perform various functions with 14% of their time spent in observing, 26% of their time spent participating in various

activities, and 60% of their time spent on teacher tasks (Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020). Mastery experiences have been identified as the most important source of high efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022; Yough, 2019).

Having the necessary resources and support also helps in building SE in PSTs. ECE teachers described how the support and guidance of mentor teachers influence how they develop SE during practicum. It is vital that mentors model skills so that PSTs can observe, learn, and gain experience from. Effective practicum programs provide hands-on training and experienced mentors to provide guidance. These factors contribute to PSTs preparation and SE (Roybal-Lewis, 2022; Simsar & Jones, 2021). Mentor teachers described how they used various strategies with PSTs to mentor them during practicum. Mentor teachers also shared how they saw the growth of PSTs by the end of practicum. ECE teachers mentioned that having the support of mentor teachers helped them and those supports were also a part of them developing SE by the end of practicum. Mentor teachers discussed the difference in PSTs already working with children compared to those coming in with no experience. Participants observed PSTs with classroom experience to have more confidence than PSTs with no prior classroom experience. Social persuasion is another form of experience that builds SE. Mentor teachers talked about the support and guidance they give to PSTs during practicum. Consistent opportunities for reflective feedback and positive reinforcement provides PSTs with the confidence that helps to build SE. This finding also aligns with research. The mentor teacher plays an instrumental role in the development and training of PSTs using strategies that involve reflective and constructive feedback (Dreer, 2021).

Key Finding 2

Both ECE teachers and community college ECE instructors discussed course content and assignments the helped to build SE in PSTs. ECE teachers primarily focused on basic child development courses, while ECE instructors focused more on courses about principles and practices working in the early childhood field. Courses in basic child development are designed to help PSTs understand developmentally appropriate practices and how children develop. Courses on principles and practices are designed to help PSTs think about their philosophy for working with children, understand the expectations of working in early childhood, and their role as an educator. Courses on principles and practices help in building SE because PSTs are aware of what to expect in a classroom working with children and are not going into practicum unaware. This finding is consistent with the study by Al-Samarraie et al. (2020) that indicated student's SE and knowledge are developed in flipped classrooms that provide students with an opportunity to reflect, inquire, and be creative.

Having various assignments that gave PSTs opportunities for hands-on experiences, role playing, small groups activities, problems solving, critical thinking, and reflective feedback were major contributors for building and developing SE. The study by Birgili et al. (2021) confirmed a classroom that includes one-on-one interaction between student and teacher, role-playing, peer interactions, video, hands-on learning, and independent research are an effective way to blend learning, improved student performance, and helps students to achieve. ECE teachers discussed having assignments

to practice writing lesson plans and developing curriculum activities for children helped in their SE levels.

ECE instructors discussed having assignments where students can have opportunities to apply theory to practice, align assignments with course content, and work with groups help in the SE of PSTs. This is consistent with the study by Colomo-Magana et al. (2020). This finding is consistent with the study by Colomo-Magana et al. (2020) indicating that in a flipped classroom, students are actively involved in their learning, the learning styles of each student can be met, and leaves time for students to practice applying theory to practice. Teachers are provided with a variety of learning methods where they can practice applying theory to practice. This helps in the development of their SE. The benefits of flipped classrooms to students include the development of skills and competence, increased learning capacity, student engagement, and a better use of classroom time (Colomo-Magana et al., 2020). Participants reported experiences that allowed them to practice skills, observe others, and receive consistent feedback. In the mixed methods study by Gale et al. (2021), they explored the sources of SE and teaching experience. The study found that mastery experiences was the most mentioned for the development of SE. This was followed by social persuasion, and vicarious experiences.

Key Finding 3

Participants in all three groups identified various experiences that could enhance the development of SE for practicum students. The findings are consistent with research stating that opportunities for PSTs to experience mastery, vicarious experiences, and social persuasion are all important factors for developing SE. ECE instructors expressed

the need for more lab schools so that PSTs can observe and have more opportunities for practical application. This was important so that PSTs can practice what they learn from the classroom lectures and put them in action. This is consistent with the study by Mak et al. (2022) which revealed that the opportunities PSTs have during practicum can contribute to the development of competence. Integrating research helps PSTs build their SE and the way they implement teaching practices. The study by Reyhing and Perren (2021) suggested more time should be provided to have vicarious experiences and positive feedback. They noted the importance of PSTs having vicarious experiences during preservice. Practical experiences should be designed based on the learning objectives of courses. Applying theory to practice and having opportunities to implement is important for the development of SE.

ECE teachers expressed the importance of having practicum experiences where all teachers are consistently supportive of each other helped in building SE. Working in an environment that was positive and that had a sense of teamwork was important. Another experience expressed by ECE teachers was having opportunities to not only develop rapport among the teaching staff but also the children and families. Teachers felt those experiences allowed them the chance to get to know the children to understand their development and build a connection with the parents. Building the relationships with the parents would help in SE because PSTs were able to be comfortable to having open and honest communication with the parents.

Mentor teachers expressed that PSTs should have experiences that will give them full exposure to all the duties and responsibilities of a teacher. From being a part of

parent meetings to participating in parent conferences. PSTs can build SE when exposed to every task that teachers are to do when working with children and families. Mentor teachers felt that practicum programs should evaluate their student orientations processes. Mentor teachers should have opportunities to get to know each PSTs and understand their goals and interests. This will help to provide PSTs with quality feedback and build on their strengths as well as guide them more in areas that need improvements.

All three groups expressed that the amount of time spent in practicum is not sufficient. PSTs need more time in the classroom observing teachers, having hands-on experiences, taking on teacher tasks, and engaging with families. More time to practice building the necessary skills is important in developing SE. PSTs should have more opportunities for practical application and given more time to practice applying theory to practice and implementing activities for children. Participants reported that practicum hours are not sufficient and do not allow PSTs enough time to develop the confidence they need to work effectively with children. Practicum programs need to reevaluate the hours required to complete practicum with one possible solution of having PSTs start their practicum earlier in their studies and requiring practicum more than one term. What a PSTs gets out of their practicum experiences are dependent on content, structure, their preparation, and how the practicum program is implemented (Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020).

ECE instructors expressed that more courses need to be required than just the usual child development courses such as, child development, child, family & community, and curriculum. Participants felt that colleges need to require courses that are current to

trends in the early childhood field such as, social emotional development, diversity, inclusion, conscious discipline, and special needs. These courses are more needed now than before.

Limitations to the Study

Originally, I intended to choose ECE teachers who have graduated within the last six months and who are employed in a center-based early learning program for no more than 12 months. This time period was selected to ensure that the participants can recall their PSTs experiences accurately through memory. I was not able to obtain participants with those requirements and changed the requirement to ECE teachers who were graduates of a community college working in the ECE workforce for more than 1 year.

Another limitation was sample size. The lack of responses from teachers and community colleges due to the COVID-19 pandemic affected my solicitation process. Responses to the pandemic include program closures and lay-offs affecting ECE educators in Southern California. Community colleges limited their programs and courses, and some community college officials were placing external research requests on hold. I obtained IRB approval to add “snowballing” to my research to reach other platforms for participants.

My administrative role in the early childhood field may have caused some bias, due to my years of experience in recruiting, hiring, and monitoring early childhood educators. To manage my potential biases and concerns, I was receptive to their experiences to understand what is needed to have a strong ECE workforce. I was careful to not give my opinion on my thoughts and feelings. I maintained by role as an objective

researcher to gather data where I can listen carefully, decipher the information, and stay focused on the problem and purpose of the study.

Recommendations

Given the gap in research on Community College PSTs practicum experiences, more research is recommended in the United States. I say this because much of my research in literature reviews is found in other countries. The value of having effective teachers in our early childhood system must be examined more carefully in the United States. Early childhood educators need to be more responsive to research geared towards building SE in PSTs for a stronger and confidence workforce in early childhood. Researchers have recommended further studies on SE in community college PST to clearly understand the concept, provide direction to college instructors & administrators, and student success in their careers (Brown et al., 2021; Myran & Sylvester, 2021; Stahlke & Cranmore, 2022).

Researchers could also examine community college early childhood coursework and its content. Flipped classrooms are being recognized more to support PSTs ability to apply theory to practice and give them accountability for their learning. This study focused more on practicum experiences. Studies on class content and design would help programs to ensure proper alignment as PSTs transition from in class courses into their practicum or fieldwork. Practicum should be an extension of PSTs being able to spend more time applying theory to practice more effectively.

The findings of this study also suggested the need for more research on time PSTs spend in practicum and the effects of SE. Comparison studies might work well for this

type of research. Not only within community colleges but also comparison to 4-year universities. While many students are not afforded the ability to attend a 4-year college, regardless of where they attend, every TPP should be able to invest in their PSTs to have a competent and confident workforce for positive outcomes for all children.

Implications

The reason I selected this topic is because of the commitment that I have as an early childhood educator and the belief that all children deserve to have teachers that are qualified to do the work with confidence. I place high value on professional development and hope that every teacher entering this field would have and retain the passion for the work set before each of us. We must understand what the driving force is for building SE in PSTs by the time they graduate from school. Some may already be working in the ECE field prior to practicum or graduation. Regardless, building the SE of non-experienced and experienced teachers is vital to the success of young children.

It is with hope that the findings from this study have provided information to support positive social change for early childhood graduates from community colleges so that they can engage in practicum experiences that will promote SE and effective interactions with young children in educational settings. Two things should take place. First, stakeholders of local community colleges should converse regarding their ECE course content and practicum structure. Second, stakeholders should assess what can be added or modified in course content and or practicum to ensure the SE in early educators going into the field. An increase in SE among PSTs may reduce turnover rates, create

positive outcomes for the ECE profession, and strengthen the workforce (Çelikkaleli & Ökmen, 2021; Yilmaz et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The key findings aligned with Bandura's social cognitive theory and were confirmed by the participants. Various types of experiences must occur in practicum for PSTs to be on track to developing or building SE. Students should be accountable for their learning, but, at the same time, community college educators must support the individual learning styles of their students. The findings in this research support the need for multiple learning experiences. Participants provided various examples for mastery, vicarious, and social persuasion, psychological states that supported their development of SE among PSTs.

Based on research, mastery experiences were identified as the most influential source for developing SE. This was reported in PSTs having to complete various teacher tasks repeatedly during their practicum such as lesson plans and observations. Vicarious experiences were another influential source for developing SE. Participants reported PSTs observing the teaching team, mentor teachers, or peers performing a task. Social persuasion was demonstrated by the support of mentor teachers where PSTs were provided feedback and reflective experiences. Based on the interviews, second to mastery, the participants commented more support from mentor teachers. Research shows that when PSTs are supported during practicum, this affects their well-being. This leads to the fourth source of SE which is a person's psychological state.

Practicum courses need to consider the quality of the experiences PSTs. It was reported learning videos need to be of good quality for viewing. Videos guide them in applying theory to practice and show a variety of everyday situations in early childcare programs. Participants reported that the rapport between the teaching team and mentor teachers is very important. In terms of quantity, practicum programs do not require enough time and hours for PSTs or practicum courses happen later in their studies rather than sooner. More classroom topics need to be required to address specific topics such as special needs, inclusion, conscious discipline, and diversity. These are optional courses and are often selected as electives. The early childhood field is consistently changing, and course requirements need to reflect trends in ECE. The findings from this study could support positive social change by encouraging community college leaders to evaluate ECE programs and implement effective practicum experiences that will promote the development of SE in PSTs.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Preservice Teacher Questions

"*Teacher duties" refer to tasks that are the responsibility of a teacher in the classroom (e.g., lesson plans, assessments, etc.).*

1. Reflecting on your practicum experiences, tell me what tasks contributed to your self-efficacy. (The definition of SE will be provided to participants prior to their interview.)
2. Explain in detail three specific tasks that built your self-efficacy.
3. Tell me about your self-efficacy level initially doing a specific task at the beginning of practicum.
4. By the end of practicum, what was your self-efficacy level with that same task?
5. What specifically about those tasks helped you to build self-efficacy? Or what do you feel was missing that would have built your self-efficacy?

"*Strategies" refers to techniques used to work effectively with children, families, and classroom management.*

1. During your practicum experience tell me what initial strategies helped to develop self-efficacy.
2. Did you continue to use the same strategy for learning, or did you change strategies? Why or why not?
3. What challenges did you experience that blocked your ability to develop self-efficacy for any specific skill set?

"*Coursework" refers to ECE/CD classes.*

1. Tell me about ECE/CD courses that helped to facilitate the development of self-efficacy prior to practicum.
2. What specific assignments in that course helped to facilitate the development of self-efficacy prior to practicum?
3. What was missing in the ECE/CD coursework that would have been beneficial in facilitating confidence prior to practicum?

Mentor Teacher Questions

"Teacher duties" refer to tasks that are the responsibility of a teacher in the classroom (e.g., lesson plans, assessments, etc.).

1. Tell me what tasks contribute to practicum students building self-efficacy.
2. How have you observed a student's self-efficacy in initially doing those tasks and by the end of the practicum?
3. How did you facilitate the development of self-efficacy for a specific task?

"Strategies" refers to techniques used to work effectively with children, families, and classroom management.

1. Describe initial strategies you observed practicum students using in applying theory to practice in working with children.
2. Did they continue to use the same strategy for that skill, or did it change over time?
3. Have you observed growth in your students from the start to the finish? If so, can you share some of your observations?

4. Describe how you facilitated the ability to take the initiative and build confidence in a specific skill set in applying theory to practice?
5. What did you do to assist the student in overcoming any challenges applying theory to practice?
6. As a mentor teacher/supervisor in practicum what strategies are missing to strengthening the development of self-efficacy in students in applying theory to practice?

Community College Instructors

"Coursework" refers to ECE/CD classes.

1. Tell me about how the course builds self-efficacy in students prior to their practicum experience.
2. Describe specific assignments that facilitate the development of self-efficacy in applying theory to practice?
3. What additional assignments could be added to help the development of self-efficacy in applying theory to practice?
4. What coursework could be added to ensure students have self-efficacy starting their practicum that would be beneficial in applying theory to practice? Why?