FIRST-YEAR EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS’ SENSE OF EFFICACY ACROSS MULTIPLE CONTEXTS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

Teachers’ sense of efficacy has gained increasing attention since the mid-1980s. However, only limited attention has been paid to the experiences of teachers in their specific contexts. The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of early childhood teachers and explore and analyze the role of context and first-year teaching experiences in teachers’ sense of efficacy. Specifically, the study aims to understand the support of and challenges to teachers’ sense of efficacy. The study utilized several complementary theories (e.g., sociocultural theory) and their related literature (e.g., induction year support, teacher beliefs) in order to derive multiple perspectives.

This interpretive-qualitative case study was conducted with four early childhood teachers from different school districts. Data collection lasted approximately five months during the academic year of 2006-2007. Data were collected through semi-structured and informal interviews, observations of local contexts, and a variety of documents related to the participants’ teacher education and induction-year programs, as well as their classroom and school contexts. To gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers’ experiences and contexts, the mentors and administrators of the participating teachers
were also interviewed. In the data analysis phase, the constant comparison method and interpretivist approach were used.

The data analysis revealed five assertions: (1) A teacher’s sense of efficacy is context-dependent, bounded, and dynamic; (2) A variety of interrelated personal and contextual features serve as supports and challenges to a teacher’s sense of efficacy; (3) Community members act as building blocks of efficacy; (4) Each teacher interprets similar induction-year experiences differentially; and (5) A collaboratively built, supportive school culture empowers teachers and contributes to their sense of efficacy. First-year teachers in this study specified diverse sources of their sense of efficacy for different aspect of teaching: (1) successful and unsuccessful experiences; (2) children’s progress as indicator of success; (3) supportive school programs; (4) experience and familiarity gains; (5) knowledge transfer from teacher training; and (6) supportive collegiality. The participants’ experiences depicted the individualized nature of support that increased teachers’ knowledge and confidence in teaching.

This study informs teacher educators, administrators, and mentor teachers about possible challenges to, and support of, early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy and their role in teachers’ experiences. The findings of this study have implications for re (structure) induction-year programs, including mentoring, as well as for teacher education programs.
Dedicated to my family:

my mother, Mujgan; my father, Necati, and my husband, Rifat
my sisters, Dilek and Melek
&
all teachers
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the countless people who saw me through my long journey to get to this point. First, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Rebecca Kantor for her guidance and support. I appreciated her invaluable insights into early childhood education and qualitative research. Thank you, Dr. Kantor, for being my advisor.

Second, I would like to thank Dr. Belinda Gimbert who stood by me at every step of writing this dissertation. Thank you for your encouragement, energy, your guidance, your constant e-mails day and night. Thank you, Dr. Gimbert, especially for increasing my sense of efficacy in dissertation writing and for your emotional support when I felt that I could not finish.

Third, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Anita Woolfolk Hoy, who introduced me to the construct of teachers’ sense of efficacy. Thank you, Dr. Hoy, for your kindness, expertise, empathy, mentorship, and feedback during this project--I feel indebted to you for all that I learned from you.

Fourth, I would like to thank Dr. Laurie Katz for her guidance and for sharing her expertise in teacher education. Thank you, Dr. Katz, for all your help. Whenever I had questions, your knowledge of teacher education was a great resource for me.
I am grateful to my committee members in my candidacy examination, my previous-advisor, Dr. David Fernie, and Dr. Barbara Kiefer. Thank you, Dr. Fernie, for your generous encouragement, guidance, and advice; and thank you, Dr. Kiefer, for your kind counsel. You truly renewed my love of children’s books. Thank you, Dr. Peter Demerath, your guidance in qualitative research. Finally, thank you, Dr. Robert Hite and Dr. Barbara Seidl, for your role in modeling teacher educators for me. You will always have a special place in my heart.

I cannot express enough appreciation to the teachers, mentors, and principals who participated in my study. Without your cooperation, patience, and effort this project would not have been possible. Thank you so much. I truly enjoyed working with and learning from each of you.

I also would like to thank the Ohio Transition to Teaching Team members for their roles in seeing me through this research process. Thank you, Maria, for being there for me whenever I needed a shoulder; you were my cheerleader. Thank you, Paula and Jan, for providing emotional support for me. It was wonderful to have you there on the sidelines in my busy life.

I would like to extend my gratitude to my friends for their sincere friendship in many ways during my time at Ohio State. Christina and Adrienne, thank you for our conversations and for the support you provided me over these seven years. Thank you, Anne, for your selfless friendship and our dissertation support sessions. Thank you, Mustafa, for your comments, your invaluable insights, and long-distance phone calls. Thank you, Cigdem, for our long conversations, and your great advice for life. Thank
you, Chiharu, Jeanne, and Lisa for being there. Thank you my Turkish friends, Elvan, Emine, Lisya, Gonul, Bayram, Cemalettin, Zekiye for your generosity and kindness. Thank you my friends in Turkey, Sevda and Emine for your encouragement and patience.

My deep gratitude goes to the Turkish Ministry of Education for providing me the scholarship and the opportunity to pursue my graduate studies at the Ohio State University.

I also would like to give my deepest appreciation to my beloved family: My parents Mujgan Ugur and Necati Ugur, I cannot express my gratitude for your unconditional love, dedication, encouragement and prayers. My sisters Dilek Ucar and Melek Ugur, you have made me feel lucky to have such great people in my life, thank you. My little nephews, Cagan and Yaman, thank you for being in my life. I missed part of your childhood years, but I promise I will be there anytime you need me. Thank you, my grandmother, Fito, my brother-in law, Bahattin, uncles, Naim and Niyazi, my cousin Levent, and my sister-in law Fatma, for your support in many ways. I thank each of you for believing in me, encouraging me to pursue my dreams. I am honored to have been lucky to share both the good times and the bad with all of you.

My dear husband, Rifat Sahin, you are more than my partner: you are everything to me. There are no words to express my gratitude to you for sacrificing so much, to be there for me in all weathers. You know that I love you. Life is wonderful with you, and I promise it can only get better from here.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The landmark federal legislation known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child, 2001) along with new insights into early brain development have increased attention to the role of the early childhood years in learning and development. Given the increasing concern around educating young children, necessity to connect state standards to classroom experiences, and the need for accountability to public interest, teachers of young children have been under more pressure than before (Goldstein, 2006). In addition, the diversity of students in today’s classrooms requires teachers to interact with children from a broad range of social and cultural backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

These social, historical, and cultural changes in the context of teaching bring about new responsibilities and more work for teachers, particularly adding to new teachers’ existing challenges. During pre-service education, most teacher candidates believe that they will not encounter the same problems as their peers in terms of organizing classrooms and managing student behavior. Weinstein (1988) labeled this situation as “unrealistic optimism.” For most first-year teachers, “leaving the support to which they are accustomed in their training may shatter the goals, diminish the spirits, and destroy the self confidence” (Certo & Fox, 2003, p. 59), and they experience “reality
shock” (Friedman, 2000, p. 598). When teachers begin their careers, they may “feel as though their personal philosophies of teaching and learning, as well as their senses of efficacy that they can teach all students successfully, are in conflict with or undermined by state, district, or site bureaucratic imperatives” (Turley, Powers, & Nakai, 2006, p. 27).

Background of the Study

Becoming a teacher is an extended, multifaceted, and complex process (Flores & Day, 2006). Although teachers pass through similar stages of development, experience similar problems, and take similar responsibilities, “the routes are varied to becoming a teacher” (Bullough, 1997, p. 121). New teachers’ beliefs about teaching, learning, and themselves as teachers affect their teaching process, the way that they manage their classrooms, and the way that they handle conflicts. Teacher beliefs also serve as cognitive filters for teachers’ knowledge construction (Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001).

A crucial belief that influences teachers in an educational setting is their belief about efficacy (Hebert, Lee, & Williamson, 1998). Teachers’ sense of efficacy is a self-perception about their abilities to support student learning (Ross, 1998). Teachers conceptions’ and beliefs about themselves affect how they look at the teaching profession and how they teach. Studying teachers’ sense of efficacy is important because the research suggests that teachers’ sense of efficacy is not only related to student achievement (Ashton & Web, 1986; Ross, 1992, 1998) but also influences teachers’ efforts, their investment in the profession, their level of aspiration, their resilience, and their persistence (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).
Teachers who are confident in their abilities and have a higher efficacy level tend to use more innovative approaches, believe all students can learn, and take risks (McMullen, 1999). More importantly, teachers’ sense of efficacy is related to their job satisfaction (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Stecha, 2003) and commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Tribble, 1986). Novice teachers with a high sense of teacher efficacy have greater satisfaction in teaching, a more positive reaction to teaching, and experience less stress (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005). Fortman and Pontius (2000) eloquently purported the importance of teachers’ sense of efficacy: “We may be neglecting an important aspect of education – instilling the confidence or belief that each soon-to-be teacher can make a difference in the lives of children no matter what level he or she teaches” (p. 10).

Statement of the Problem

Within the last two decades, teachers’ sense of efficacy as a topic of research has gained a great deal of acceptance in the field of education. Researchers have focused on different aspects of self-efficacy of teachers. Much of the research examined the meaning of efficacy and construction of valid and reliable measurements of teachers’ sense of efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk, & Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-Moran, & Woolfolk, 2001), explored the relationships between teachers’ efficacy beliefs and their behavior (Coladarci, 1992; Ross, 1998), and looked at whether experience in teaching changes teachers’ sense of efficacy (Fortman & Pontius, 2000; Li & Zhang, 2000; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005). Despite an increased interest in teachers’ sense of efficacy, minimal research attention has been directed toward the
experiences of teachers and social contexts. Therefore, the need exists to further investigate the issues discussed below.

First, although considerable research has focused on examining the relationship between teachers’ sense of efficacy and numerous variables (such as student achievement, burnout, and use of innovations), rather less attention has been given to the teachers’ own voice. Only a few studies (Milner & Woolfolk Hoy, 2003; Mulholland & Wallace, 2001; Rushton, 2000) have concentrated on teachers’ experiences and their own interpretations of their efficacy. Beliefs of self-efficacy develop at very early stages of learning and are prone to be more malleable (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, it is important to understand the experiences of first-year teachers and the support of and challenges to the development of their sense of efficacy. Cole (1992) stated:

New teachers—all teachers—need ongoing assistance and support in their development but such assistance and support need not, indeed cannot, be numerically prescribed, monitored, and controlled. … we need to consider how to find ways of helping teachers to identify their own support needs and preferences. (p. 378)

Although research has shown that support coming from others is a significant contributor to sense of efficacy (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005), how teachers perceive their context as a support of, or challenge to, their sense of efficacy still needs to be studied.

Second, even though teachers’ sense of efficacy began to be considered as context-based and situated (Labone, 2004), until recently, studies have included “context” merely as a variable that influences teachers’ sense of efficacy. In other words, these studies have decontextualized the subject of self-efficacy. Tschannnen-Moran,
Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998) developed a model that involves not only sources of efficacy but also takes into account how efficacy beliefs are processed. In their model, a teacher’s analysis of a teaching task and its context is a contributor to the development of a sense of efficacy. Following their lead, researchers need to explore teachers’ experiences in different social and cultural contexts.

Finally, research on teachers’ sense of efficacy has been conducted primarily with elementary and secondary pre-service and practicing teachers. Although teachers’ beliefs about themselves are important, limited research has been conducted with teachers of young children (Lamorey & Wilcox, 2005). To fill this gap, the nature of teacher efficacy in the early childhood classroom deserves attention (Vartuli, 2005). In addition, the current literature on teachers’ sense of efficacy mainly focuses on instruction (Labone, 2004) and the role of teachers in the classroom (Friedman & Kass, 2002). However, there is a need for research to understand teachers’ beliefs about themselves in different aspects of teaching, (e.g., teachers’ beliefs in their professional context.)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of early childhood first-year teachers and describe, explore, and analyze the role of their experiences in shaping their sense of efficacy. This study aimed to provide an insider’s perspective of teachers’ experiences in their first-year teaching, to highlight the importance of social context and interactions, to capture the voices of teachers as they experience support of and challenges to their sense of efficacy. This study focused on three aspects: (1) the nature of teacher efficacy of early childhood teachers; (2) the
sources, challenges, and supports to teachers’ sense of efficacy; and (3) the role of school context in teachers’ beliefs in their capabilities to work in early childhood classrooms.

Research Questions

The research questions that framed the study were, “What is the role of context in first-year teachers’ sense of efficacy, and how do teachers interpret contextual factors regarding their efficacy?” The following sub-questions guided this study:

1) What is the nature of participating teachers’ sense of efficacy in their particular context?

2) In which particular aspects of teaching do first-year early childhood teachers feel efficacious? How do they experience efficacy in different aspects of their teaching?

3) What are the sources of existing efficacy beliefs of early childhood teachers? How do teachers perceive these sources of their efficacy beliefs?

4) In what ways do contextual elements support or constrain teachers’ beliefs about their capabilities?

   a) What types of challenges, if any, do teachers encounter during their first-year teaching and how do these challenges influence their sense of efficacy? In other words, how do they perceive context as a challenge to their efficacy?

   b) What types of support, if any, do teachers receive during their first year teaching and how does this support influence their sense of efficacy? In other words, how do they perceive context as a support to their efficacy?
5) How do other members in the context (for example, children, mentors, principals) influence teachers’ beliefs about their sense of efficacy?

Theoretical Framework

The current study utilized complementary theories (e.g., sociocultural theory) and literature (e.g., induction year support, teacher beliefs) in order to derive multiple perspectives to explain teachers’ experiences in their schools and the role of these experiences in their sense of efficacy. Below, the theories this study drew upon are presented.

Sociocultural Perspective

This study was primarily grounded in the theoretical framework provided by sociocultural theories arguing that reality is socially and culturally constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Lave & Venger, 1991; Rogoff, 1984, 1990; Rogoff, Matusoy & White 1996; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, 1990, Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993). Sociocultural theories emphasize studying an individual in her or his own social and cultural context rather than in isolation, and aim to understand human mental function in its historical, cultural, and institutional contexts (Wertsch, del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995). In order to understand psychological processes, Vygotsky claimed that priority should be given to social life (Wertsch et al., 1993).

From the perspective of sociocultural theory, human beings do not only influence their environment but are also shaped by personal and social factors. Because sociocultural theory argues that the learning process initially occurs on an interpersonal (shared) plane and then transforms into an intrapersonal (individual) plane (Vygotsky,
1978), these theories provide a lens to look at the interactions between teachers and others, including children, colleagues, and administrators in the school context. Rogoff (2003) stated that the advocates of sociocultural theory agree that:

Individual development constitutes and is constituted by social and cultural-historical activities and practices. In the emerging socio-cultural perspective, culture is not an entity that influences individuals. Instead, people contribute to the creation of cultural processes and cultural processes contribute to the creation of people. (Italics in the original, p. 51)

Given the purposes of the current study, I utilized the terms culture, zone of proximal development (ZPD), apprenticeship, and communities of learners. These terms represent the tenets of social and cultural perspective and are mainly used for studies in children’s development and learning. However, the researchers such as Tharp and Gallimore (1988), have expanded the meaning of the terms to adult learning and specifically to teachers’ teaching and learning processes.

One of the notions proposed by Vygotsky was the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defined the zone of the proximal development as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). When novice teachers and experts interacted in this zone, this guidance and collaboration are more useful and effective in novice teachers’ development. Regarding the notion of apprenticeship that was proposed as a model for children’s cognitive development, Rogoff (1990) argued that even though children and older novices are different, apprenticeship and guided participation is evident in adult’s development.
As newcomers to the school environment, novice teachers need support and guidance as they interact with others and learn about their new sociocultural context. Moreover, novice teachers who partner with mentors possessing “relatively greater skill and understanding can often more easily find effective ways to achieve shared thinking that stretch the less skilled partner’s understanding” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 39). Therefore, expert teachers should guide novices by modeling strategies, presenting explanations, and giving support.

Teacher Efficacy

This study also used the construct of teachers’ sense of efficacy, which stems from two research avenues: the first one is based on Rotter’s Locus of Control and the Rand studies; the second line is grounded in Bandura’s (1997) Social Cognitive theory. After Gibson and Dembo (1984) developed the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES), most researchers took it as a starting point and developed revised teaching efficacy scales.

Bandura (1997) argues, “perceived self-efficacy is a judgment of one’s ability to organize and execute given types of performances” (p. 21). According to Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998), teacher efficacy is a combination of two components: analysis of the teaching task and analysis of competence. For the researchers, “Teacher efficacy is the teacher’s belief in her or his ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 233).

Although sociocultural theory and the research on teachers’ sense of efficacy served as theoretical influences, the current study applied an inductive approach and used
“big T” theories as a lens “to see the previously invisible and to see the previously visible in new ways” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 26).

Research Design

Given the purposes and theoretical influences previously described, this was a qualitative case study focused on humans’ experiences and sense-making in their social and cultural contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This study was conducted in the different school contexts in which the participants taught in early childhood classrooms. Data collection methods included semi-structured and informal interviews, observations of local contexts, collection of documents related to teacher education programs, participants’ classroom and school contexts, and professional development guidelines. The participants included four first-year early childhood teachers in public schools. Mentors and the administrators of the participating teachers were interviewed in order to understand the teachers’ experiences and contexts. In the data analysis phase, the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and interpretivist approach (Erickson, 1986) were utilized.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to research, theory, practice, and policy in early childhood education and teacher education. First, by using multiple cases and reflecting the voices of the participants, this study targeted a gap in the current research, previously dominated by quantitative research. Learning from teachers’ perspectives, understanding these teachers’ own interpretations of their contexts, and exploring different school contexts
contributes to an in-depth understanding of teachers’ efficacy beliefs which has been shown to be highly influential in teachers’ careers.

Second, this study contributes to the practice of early childhood educators through providing “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of teachers’ experiences and perceptions of their efficacy. The results of the study address a gap in the literature by focusing on early childhood teachers (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Vartuli, 2005). As Bullough (1989) has stated, “Written case and case studies are a means by which educators can explore how others confronted problems similar to their own. They are also a means by which to identify potential problems and a vehicle by which to begin thinking them through” (p. xii). Therefore, this study informs teacher educators, administrators, and mentor teachers about possible challenges to, and support of, early childhood teachers’ efficacy beliefs and their role in teachers’ experiences.

Finally, the results of this study contribute to a better understanding of the role of professional experiences and context on first-year teachers’ efficacy beliefs. Understanding key aspects that support first-year teachers may have strong implications in organizing induction-year programs, and reconsidering teacher education and professional development programs. In addition, policy makers and stakeholders may benefit from this study by adjusting their programs to allow teachers to reflect on their efficacy beliefs.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is presented in six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research by presenting background information of the study and discussing the importance of
teachers’ sense of efficacy. Chapter 2 offers a review of literature related to first-year teaching, induction, mentoring, and teachers’ sense of efficacy. Chapter 3 presents the research design and methods used throughout the study, the study’s data collection and analysis, and the ethical and quality considerations of the study. Chapter 4 provides the participants’ portraits, including their past and current experiences and their classroom and school contexts. Chapter 5 discusses the themes that emerged from inductive analysis. Chapter 6 connects this study’s findings to existing literature, describes this study’s implications for theory, research, and teacher education and makes recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This section provides a general overview of the conceptual framework of the study. The first part presents the current literature on induction year experiences, support programs, and challenges in the first year of teaching. The second part examines the literature on teachers’ beliefs in general, and teachers’ sense of efficacy in particular. The last section offers a discussion of studies that were conducted with early childhood teachers as well as research applying qualitative methodology.

First-Year Teaching

For new teachers, the first months of teaching are challenging times as they evaluate their capabilities and efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Fuller, 1969) that influence teachers’ decisions about their future careers. Novice teachers encounter daily dilemmas, difficulties, and uncertainties (Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, Yusko, 1999a) and “the stories of beginning teaching usually evolve around several themes: reality shock, the lonely struggle to survive, and a loss of idealism” (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 27). The most commonly identified complexities and problems in the literature include the following areas: management of student behavior (Bullough, 1987; Hebert & Worhty, 2001), isolation in their classrooms (Hebert & Worhty, 2001), assignment of the most
challenging classrooms (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Gold, 1996), responsibilities as other experienced teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2003), unfamiliarity with the curriculum and students (Bullough, 1987), and a lack of collaboration in the school context (Bullough, 1987; Feiman-Nemser et al, 1999; Stanulis, Fallona, Pearson, 2002).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1997), 9.3 % of public school teachers leave their jobs within the first year, and 20 % of public school teachers leave the profession within the first three years (Certo & Fox, 2002). At the same time, child enrollment rates and the need for new teachers are increasing. High attrition and turnover rates of early childhood teachers, as well as the teaching profession in general, are still chief concerns (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). According to Bullough (1987), the transitional period from student teaching to the first year of teaching is considered to be the survival stage in which “the beginning teacher either makes a place within the institution or is crushed by it” (p. 89). Hebert and Worthy (2001) stated that many teachers begin this period “filled with uncertainty, find their jobs more challenging than anticipated, and rethink career choice” (p. 898). Many first-year teachers encounter reality shock and may, in fact, change their minds about teaching; others make their way through first experiences with a renewed commitment and enthusiasm. For example, Hebert and Worthy (2001) cited an exception of a teacher who made her way through the first year successfully.

What are the lived experiences of first year teachers, and how does these experiences influence teachers’ decision about their profession? Research indicated that low salaries, lack of administrative support, lack of planning, and time demands are
significant reasons for leaving the teaching profession (Certo & Fox, 2002; Harrell, Leavel, Tassel, & McKee, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001). Moreover, as suggested in the research, perceived efficacy is related to teachers’ dropout rate before retirement (Milner & Hoy, 2003). In other words teachers’ lack of confidence and low sense of efficacy influences performance and may contribute to a decision to quit teaching. In their qualitative study with fifty new teachers, Johnson and The Project on the Next Generation Teachers (2004) found that new teachers’ perceptions of success in meeting the needs of their students encouraged them to continue to teach.

Moir (1999) summarized new teachers’ experiences and identified five phases that first-year teachers move through. These phases are anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, and reflection phases. The anticipation phase begins with student teaching and continues until teachers begin to teach in their own classrooms. In this phase, they feel committed to teaching, as well as enthusiastic and idealistic. In the survival phase, teachers encounter the real life challenges of teaching and are overwhelmed with the requirements and responsibilities of the job during the first month of teaching. In this phase, new teachers hope the degree of difficulty presented by these challenges will decrease. Characterized by stress, the disillusionment phase begins after six to eight weeks of teaching. This is when new teachers begin to evaluate their competence and commitment to teaching. Events at the school, like parent conferences, make more uncomfortable and the criticisms they receive from parents “hit new teachers at a time of waning self-esteem” (p. 21).
Teachers enter the rejuvenation phase following the long break from school during winter holiday, returning with more energy and a greater understanding of the system. Completing half of the school year gives new teachers an increased sense of confidence and hope for the rest of the school year. According to Moir (1999), first-year teachers enter the reflection phase in the last six weeks of school when they reflect about their strategies, events, and successes. This is when they also gain a vision for their second year of teaching.

During the first year of teaching, the support that teachers receive from other professionals is also crucial. The following section reviews the literature on professional support for beginning teachers, including induction-year programs, professional culture, and mentoring.

**Beginning Teacher Support**

The concept of teacher support is multidimensional and encompasses teachers’ various needs in different areas. These areas include pedagogical, curricular, psychological, logistical, and classroom management. For Feiman-Nemser et al. (1999a), “support connotes a responsive stance toward beginning teachers whose problems, needs, and concerns justify the existence of mentor teachers and other support providers” (p. 4).

According to Gold (1996), “a program of support that will assist [teachers] in making the transition from university to the classroom is vital in order to sustain and expand upon what is learned in pre-service teacher education” (p. 561).

Beginning teacher support is deemed necessary in order to both retain qualified teachers and help teachers improve themselves (Andrews & Quinn, 2005). According to
Gold (1996), there are two main supports for beginning teachers: (1) instructional support, which refers to providing teachers with necessary knowledge, skills, and strategies, and (2) psychological support, which includes enhancing feelings of self-esteem, self-confidence, effectiveness, and improving teachers’ ability to handle stress.

The provision of professional and personal support is crucial, since lack of support is one of the main reasons cited for leaving the teaching profession (Certo & Fox, 2002; Harrell, Leavel, Tassel, & McKee, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001). The research suggests that crucial variables that influence teacher retention include collegial support (Harrell et al., 2004), principal support (Jorissen, 2002; Quinn & Andrews, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), and mentor support (Ingersoll, 2001; Menchaca, 2003). In addition, collaboration with other teachers is a factor that reduces turnover and increases satisfaction (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). For example, research has indicated that teachers who have positive relationships with their principals and receive support are more likely to remain in teaching than those who do not (Jorissen, 2002).

In a qualitative study, Johnson et al. (2004) found that new teachers in a school context in which there was interaction among all experience levels were more likely to stay in teaching. Especially in the first years of teaching, support and constant feedback are valuable in building the strength to face challenges and influence teachers’ decisions to stay in the job. In a study by Andrews and Quinn (2005) first-year teachers perceived that they received most help in the areas of policies and procedures and personal/emotional support. The weakest area of support was perceived to be instruction/curriculum and resources/supplies.
Induction-Year Programs

Induction support constitutes one of the important issues to which university and school-based educators should pay attention (Stanulis et al., 2002). Feiman-Nemser et al., (1999b) referred to induction as “a process of initiating teachers into their new role” (p. 13). The idea of assisting beginning teachers has gained importance since the mid-1980s (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999a). Current trends in standard-based systems that require high student achievements have increased the importance of keeping quality teachers and supporting beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999a). The number of states implementing formal induction-year programs is increasing every year. The general purpose of these programs is to support novice teachers as they deal with problems they encounter, socialize teachers into the new school context, and, thereby increase retention (Wang & Odell, 2002).

According to the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2005) report, an induction system for new teachers should have the following characteristics: “Building and deepening teacher knowledge; integrating new practitioners into a teaching community and school culture that support the continuous professional growth of all teachers; supporting the constant development of the teaching community in the school and; encouraging a professional dialogue that articulates the goals, values, and best practices of a community” (p. 4).

Stanulis et al. (2002) stated that “effective induction support can benefit student learning, as competent, collaborative teachers who are energized feel professionally supported, and feel competent are best positioned to meet the needs of children” (p. 80).
During the induction process, participants, teachers, and beginning teachers should help each other and create a collaborative school culture (Feiman-Nemser, et al. 1999b). The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (2005) also described induction as a means for building and sustaining “21st century learning communities” (p. 4).

Professional Culture

Feiman-Nemser (2003) stated, “whether the early years of teaching are a time of constructive learning or period of coping, adjustment, and survival depends on largely on the working conditions and culture of teaching that new teachers encounter” (p. 27). Professional culture is defined as “the blend of values, norms, and modes of professional practice that develops among teachers in a school” (Johnson et al., 2004). Based on their qualitative study with first-year teachers, Johnson and et al. (2004) highlighted the role of professional culture, which encourages professional interaction among teachers and influences teachers’ decision to stay in teaching. According to Johnson et al. (2004), three important aspects of the school context are effective in new teachers’ decisions to continue teaching: recognition of new teachers’ “newness”, interaction among teachers in all levels, and collective responsibility. Johnson et al. called this type of school contexts “integrated professional cultures” (p. 159).

Johnson et al. (2004) defined veteran-oriented professional culture as a school context in which experienced teachers determine professional practices and they rarely collaborate with new teachers. At the same time, in some school contexts, novice teachers’ views and the values of new teachers were highly dominant because most of the teachers in this school culture were novice teachers. The researchers found that the
teachers in these novice-oriented professional cultures encountered the same lack of experienced guidance they would find in a veteran-oriented culture.

The professional culture of the school is another important component of teachers’ experiences in their first year of teaching. As Feiman-Nemser (2003) claims, “Even the best induction programs cannot compensate for an unhealthy school climate, a competitive teacher culture, or an inappropriate teaching assignment” (p. 28). Below, mentoring is presented as the key component of induction-year programs.

_Mentoring_

The real-life classroom presents questions that only real life experience can answer. Mentors help provide those answers. They give practical, concrete advice, pose important questions to prompt reflection, model teaching techniques in the classroom, observe and offer feedback, and offer another point of view at a time when it’s easy to loose all perspective. (Moir, 2005, p. 60)

As Moir (2005) espoused, mentors have important roles in helping teachers balance real life challenges with professional development. “Mentoring” is defined as “a form of personal and professional partnership which usually involves a more experienced practitioner supporting a less experienced one” (Arnold, 2006, p. 117). Mentoring is considered one of the main strategies for teacher retention as well as supporting teachers’ personal and professional competence (Tillman, 2005). Tillman defines mentoring as “a collaborative partnership in which individuals share and develop mutual interests” (Tillman, 2005, p. 611). Based on her study, she suggests that mentoring is a means for teachers’ professional and personal development; a way to pass on the school culture, rules, and expectations; and a way for the principal to support the teacher, which requires a shift in the principal’s role from traditional to transformative and collaborative.
From their review of the literature, Wang and Odell (2002) stated that both mentor and novice teachers consider a mentor to be an emotional and psychological supporter, or technical helper for novice teachers. Through an extensive review of the literature, these researchers present three perspectives to mentoring: humanistic, situated apprentice, and critical constructivist.

According to the humanistic perspective, if novice teachers are supported emotionally, they will overcome the challenges that come from “reality shock.” This perspective of mentoring emphasizes emotional support, helps solving personal problems, and focuses on the development of self-esteem, rather than learning content and principles. The mentor is considered a counselor who is always there; she or he listens, and understands the novice’s world and effectively builds interpersonal relationships.

The situated apprentice perspective allows the novice to enter into the existing culture of the school context and learn the techniques and strategies that support teaching in a particular setting (Wang & Odell, 2002). The situated apprentice perspective mainly focuses on training mentors by “developing their ability to articulate practical knowledge and make it accessible to novices through coaching and demonstration” (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 18).

The critical constructivist perspective is interested in transforming teaching and social justice, and emphasizes the knowledge created through collaborative inquiry of mentors and novices who have equal participation. This perspective advocates mentors
who possess “relevant dispositions for and commitment to improving or reforming teaching and education” (p. 20).

In addition to first-year teaching, beginning teacher professional support, and induction-year programs such as mentoring, another key component of this study’s theoretical framework was teacher belief literature, and more specifically, teachers’ sense of efficacy. The following section reviews the literature on teachers’ beliefs.

Teachers’ Beliefs

Teachers’ beliefs are one of the most crucial and widely examined topics in educational psychology and teacher education. Beliefs are generally defined as “psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true” (Richardson, 1996, p. 103). Below is offered a historical overview of the research with teachers.

**Historical Overview of the Research with Teachers**

Research on teachers’ knowledge and beliefs has increased rapidly since the 1970s and 1980s. Teacher education research has shifted from the relationship between teacher behavior and student outcomes to teachers’ beliefs and practices (Fang, 1996). The essential questions address how teachers make meaning of their professional lives, how they understand teaching and learning, and what beliefs they bring into their classrooms and everyday practice. Research that emerged in the late 1960s stressed the relationships between observable teacher behavior and student achievement, aligning with a behaviorist stance (Calderhead, 1996; Fang, 1996). The basic aim of this “process product research” was to identify a linear and unidirectional correlation between what
teachers do in their classrooms and students’ behaviors and achievements. These studies focused on effective teachers’ behaviors and determined generalizable principles for learning and teaching.

Since the 1970s, researchers have become more interested in the multidimensional nature of teaching and have emphasized the complex nature of teachers’ cognitive processes in dynamic classroom contexts. Calderhead (1996) explained this shift from process-product to teacher cognition research by stating three factors: (a) a dissatisfaction with the narrow perspective of behaviorist research focusing on observable relationships and growing interest in ethnographic studies that describe teaching as a complex process; (b) the interest in cognitive psychology and the idea of active knowledge construction leading researchers to focus on teachers’ thought processes and the interrelationships of teachers’ and children’s behaviors; and (c) a recognition of the centrality of teachers’ role in the education process and curriculum development.

Research about teachers’ thought processes includes: (1) teachers’ decision-making; (2) teachers’ planning; and (3) teachers’ knowledge and beliefs (Calderhead, 1996). Rather than focusing on teachers’ instructional strategies and behaviors, researchers have studied the beliefs and perspectives that influenced teachers in employing these strategies and demonstrating certain behaviors (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000). Studies have focused on the consistency between teachers’ beliefs and practices, and the impact of teacher education and staff development programs on teachers’ beliefs (Richardson, 1996).
Belief is an important construct in understanding teachers’ practices. However, finding a precise definition of the term is problematic. Throughout the literature, the terms “knowledge” and “belief” have been used interchangeable and therefore not easily distinguishable. The common criterion for differentiating knowledge and belief is that beliefs are evaluative and affective and considered to be “the truth” by the individual holding them; yet, knowledge is based on objective facts (Einarsdottir, 2003; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). According to Nespor (1987), beliefs are connected with vivid memories of personal experiences. In the literature, the concepts of beliefs are used in various ways, such as implicit theories, values, images, perceptions, judgments, and personal theories (Einarsdottir, 2003; Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992). Pajares (1992) referred to beliefs as a “messy construct” (p. 307). In this argument, Pajares stated that such confusion in the definitions of teachers’ beliefs makes beliefs difficult to study. In Pajares’s words: “…many see it so steeped in mystery that it can never be clearly defined or made a useful subject of research” (Pajares, 1992, p. 308). In the meantime, despite these confusions, teachers’ beliefs are defined broadly as “tacit, often consciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught” (Kagan, 1992, p. 65).

Teachers’ Beliefs about Themselves

This section describes teachers’ sense of efficacy and presents examples in the early childhood area. Before discussing early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy, it is useful to clarify the meaning of teachers’ sense of efficacy and the related research. The
next section presents research on the importance of efficacy and research related to teaching experience.

**Conceptualization of Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy**

According to Bandura, there are basically two types of expectations: outcome expectations and efficacy expectations. Bandura (1997) states that, “perceived self-efficacy is a judgment of one’s ability to organize and execute given types of performances, whereas an outcome expectation is a judgment of the likely consequence such performances will produce” (p. 21). He states that perceived self-efficacy is related not only to the skills a person has but also to a person’s beliefs about his or her capability in specific situations. Perceived self-efficacy is a belief about what the person can do rather than a measure of his or her skills.

Based on Bandura’s self-efficacy theory and their own studies, Gibson and Dembo (1984) found that the sense of teaching efficacy has two dimensions: personal teaching efficacy (PTE) and teaching efficacy (TE). Personal teaching efficacy is related to one’s skills and abilities that are effective in students’ learning, and represents Bandura’s self-efficacy dimension. PTE corresponds to the item, “If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.” TE is a sense of efficacy that is changed by external factors, such as the home environment, and is related to Bandura’s general outcome expectancy. Gibson and Dembo stated that this dimension reflects the item, “When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can’t do much because most of a student’s motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment” (p. 574).
Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) suggest that these two dimensions are independent but they argue that Gibson and Dembo’s teaching efficacy dimension does not represent Bandura’s outcome expectancy. Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) redefined the dimensions as personal teaching efficacy (PTE) representing teachers’ sense of efficacy and general teaching efficacy (GTE) representing beliefs about being able to reach all children. Although the first dimension is determined as perceived teaching efficacy, there have been debates on the meaning of the second dimension, frequently called “general teaching efficacy” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) developed a model that used a broad perspective and accounted for contextual variables. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) suggested that teacher efficacy is a combination of two components: analysis of the teaching task and analysis of competence. These researchers defined teacher efficacy as “the teacher’s belief in her and his ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 233). Figure 2.1 demonstrates Tschannen-Moran et al.’s (1998) model.
Sources of Efficacy

Verbal Persuasion
Vicarious Experiences
Physiological Arousal
Mastery Experience
--------------------------------
New Sources of Efficacy Information
--------------------------------

Cognitive Processing

Analyzing of Teaching Task
Assessment of Personal Teaching Competence

Teacher Efficacy

Consequences of Teacher Efficacy
Goals, Efforts, Persistence, etc.

Performance

Figure 2.1: The cyclical nature of teacher efficacy.¹

Sources of Efficacy

Bandura (1997) suggests four sources for the construction of self-efficacy beliefs. These include enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states.

Enactive Mastery Experiences

The most influential source of efficacy is enactive mastery experiences that refer to one’s successes and failures in the experience. One’s success in performance increases one’s sense of efficacy while failure in performance decreases self-efficacy beliefs. Bandura (1997) stated, “enactive mastery produces stronger, more generalized efficacy beliefs than do modes of influence relying solely on vicarious experiences, cognitive stimulations, or verbal instruction” (p. 80).

Vicarious Experience

Vicarious experience is related to social comparison of one’s ability to others. Modeling is an effective tool for enhancing a teacher’s sense efficacy. Self-efficacy is increased when one’s performance is higher than referential comparative norms, and it is decreased if a person is ranked lower than norms of a reference group. Efficacy beliefs are heightened if people compare themselves with others who are in similar situations, such as peers and classmates (Bandura, 1997). If people who are similar to oneself perform successfully, then one feels that he or she can also be successful. If others fail in performing tasks, one’s efficacy beliefs will be lowered (Bandura, 1997).

Verbal Persuasion

Verbal persuasion is one of the means for enhancing one’s beliefs about his or her capabilities. According to Bandura (1997), verbal persuasion can foster people’s efforts on the task because they are persuaded that they are capable of succeeding at that task. However, the power of verbal persuasion is limited. If a persuader raises unrealistic
beliefs about one’s capabilities, this may not only discredit the persuader but also lower one’s beliefs about one’s abilities (Bandura, 1997).

**Physiological and Emotional States**

The fourth source is related to judging capabilities based on physiological and emotional states. Bandura (1997) stated, “People often read their physiological activation in stressful or taxing situations as signs of vulnerability or dysfunction” (p. 106). In this context, when they feel tense, people can associate this situation as an indicator of their failure or incapability. Mood is also a source of judging personal efficacy. While a negative mood activates negative evaluations and reminds one of past failures, a positive mood activates positive evaluations and past successes (Bandura, 1997).

**Research on Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy**

Studying teacher efficacy is crucial because teacher efficacy may affect teachers’ behavior and performance (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The research on teachers’ sense of efficacy indicated that teachers’ sense of efficacy is related to student achievement (Ashton & Web, 1986; Ross, 1992, 1998). Teachers’ sense of efficacy also affects teachers’ job satisfaction (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Stecha, 2003; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005), their commitment to and effort in teaching (Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Tribble, 1986), their investment in the profession, their levels of aspiration, resilience, and persistence (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001), and how positively they view teaching (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005). According to Praxis III: Classroom Performance Assessments (2001), teachers who have a high sense of efficacy search for new and alternative techniques to
help their students learn. Teachers with high efficacy are less likely to criticize students (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

To examine the antecedents and consequences of teacher efficacy, Ross (1998) reviewed 88 studies. According to Ross, teachers who have high expectations take risks and show more effort and persistence in a specific teaching task. Ross (1998) reported that having a higher sense of efficacy corresponds to using more challenging and difficult teaching strategies, implementing innovative programs, and giving students greater responsibility. Teachers who have higher expectations engage in activities that support children’s learning and, in turn, children’s academic achievement and growth (Ross, 1998).

*Teaching Experience and Efficacy*

Much of the research has focused on how experience affects teachers’ sense of efficacy. Personal experiences are among the greatest determinants of teachers’ sense of efficacy (Henson et al., 1999). Martin (1989) found that a strong sense of efficacy begins in the early phases of a teacher education program. Experiencing real classrooms, meeting, and working with children all can alter, either positively or negatively, teachers’ beliefs about teaching.

Research with teacher candidates demonstrates that teachers’ beliefs about their own ability—personal teaching efficacy—increased during their teacher preparation programs and after field experiences or student teaching (Forman & Pontius, 2000; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Li & Zhang, 2000). In one study, general teacher efficacy scores in four groups (elementary, middle, secondary, and special education) declined at the end of
student teaching (Fortman & Pontius, 2000). On the other hand, student teaching enhanced teachers’ personal efficacy, their beliefs about their own abilities to teach children.

Li and Zhang (2000) conducted research that explored the effects of early field experiences on pre-service teachers’ efficacy beliefs in two independent dimensions suggested by Gibson and Dembo (1984). The participants were early childhood and elementary pre-service teachers. The results showed that after the pre-service teachers were exposed to early field experiences, their general teaching efficacy decreased; on the other hand, their personal teaching efficacy increased. According to Ross (1998), general teaching efficacy may decrease when teachers start their job or field experiences. When teachers begin their careers, they do not consider the difficulties they will encounter teaching all the students in a class or handling all the other responsibilities of a teaching job.

Woolfolk Hoy and Burke-Spero (2005) conducted a longitudinal study that examined how teachers’ sense of efficacy changed during student teaching and the first year of teaching. Fifty-three prospective teachers were administered Gibson and Dembo’s Teacher Efficacy Scale short form, Bandura’s Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale, and the OSU Teaching Confidence Scale. The participants provided responses at three different times: the first quarter of their teacher preparation program (Phase 1), at the end of student teaching (Phase 2), and at the end of the first year of teaching (Phase 3). In their first teaching year, the participants also rated the sources and support in their schools. Significant increases in efficacy were observed between Phase 1 and Phase 2. There were
significant decreases in Bandura’s scale and the GTE scales between Phase 2 and Phase 3. Efficacy increased during teacher preparation and student teaching but fell with actual experience as a teacher. The results indicate significant increases in efficacy during student teaching but significant declines during the first year of teaching.

Research related to teaching experience produced different results. Although the research by Woolfolk Hoy and Burke-Spero (2005) suggested that personal teaching efficacy increases during the teacher preparation program, Lin and Gorrell (2001) found that beginning pre-service teachers had a higher score on the teacher efficacy scale than ending pre-service teachers. Moreover, while some research indicated that general teaching efficacy declined with experience, other research indicated a rise general teaching efficacy during student teaching. At the same time, studies indicated that experienced teachers had higher efficacy than less experienced teachers (Tschannen & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002).

The researchers suggested some possible explanations for changes in efficacy: failure in teaching a lesson; awareness of external factors such as family background, parental support, and teaching responsibilities; a teacher’s dislike for his/her “teacher self” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998); support from others (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke, 2005); opportunities to collaborate with other professionals (Ross, 1998); increased teaching competence (Lin et al., 1999; Tschannen-Moran et. al., 1998); and age or prior experience (Benz, Bradley, Alderman, & Flowers, 1992; Chester and Beaudin, 1996).
Research on/with Early Childhood Teachers

Although teacher efficacy research focused specifically on kindergarten and first-year teachers is limited, studies indicated that kindergarten teachers had higher efficacy than upper grade teachers (Taimalu & Oim, 2005), and elementary school teachers had higher efficacy than middle school and high school teachers (Evans and Tribble, 1986; Ross, 1998; Soadak & Podell, 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002).

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2002) reported that elementary teachers are more confident in their ability to engage “both very capable and struggling students” (p. 6), in implementing appropriate instructional strategies, and in managing student behaviors. Housego (1992) similarly found significant differences between early childhood and intermediate pre-service teachers. In Housego’s study, early childhood pre-service teachers’ teacher efficacy level was greater than intermediate pre-service teachers’ level after both groups attended extended practicum.

The available research on early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy primarily focused on pre-service teachers and examined differences between early childhood teacher candidates and elementary education teacher candidates (Housego, 1992; Lin & Gorrell, 1997; Lin, Taylor, & Gorrell, 1999; Lin & Gorrell, 2001). Lin and Gorrell (1997) examined early childhood pre-service teachers’ sense of efficacy beliefs in Taiwan. The participants were 398 candidates from four teacher preparation programs. The revised version of the Gibson and Dembo (1984) scale was used. The results indicated no significant differences in efficacy between entry-level pre-service teachers and senior level candidates. At the same time, entry-level candidates had confidence in their abilities
to facilitate children’s learning but were not confident when teaching especially challenging children. Ending pre-service teachers had confidence in their abilities to teach challenging children.

Lin and Gorrell (2001) further compared teachers’ efficacy in two groups—early childhood pre-service teachers and elementary pre-service teachers and concluded that there are differences between the two groups in terms of teaching confidence and teaching responsibility. Early childhood pre-service teachers were not confident that putting forth extra effort would have an impact on children’s learning. On the other hand, in comparison with elementary pre-service teachers, early childhood teachers were more confident in their abilities to guide challenging children.

Based on their qualitative and quantitative data, Lin Taylor, and Gorrell (1999) asserted that college coursework and related teaching experiences seemed to influence teacher candidates’ sense of efficacy beliefs. Furthermore, the evidence suggested that early childhood pre-service teachers in two different education programs held contrasting beliefs. For instance, early childhood pre-service teachers from a university that adopts Piagetian theory had strong beliefs that putting in extra effort would not produce better effects on children’s learning. By contrast, early childhood pre-service teachers from a different university, who attended a program addressing eclectic approaches, had strong feelings that their efforts would make a difference. These contrasting beliefs possibly originated from differing theoretical perspectives adopted by the universities’ teacher preparation programs (Lin, Taylor, & Gorrell, 1999).
One study in the existing literature focuses on practicing early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy. For her research, Eichman (2001) worked with preschool teachers and used both qualitative and quantitative data. From the qualitative data, the researcher found that four teachers believed they had an influence on children’s development because the children spent a great deal of time with them. One teacher reported that the children imitated her behavior and, because of this, the teacher believed that her behavior was important for modeling. Teachers’ interviews demonstrated that teachers in urban centers believed that they had an influence in the children’s lives because the children who came to their centers had needs that could not be met at home. These teachers believed that they were providing children more opportunity (Eichman, 2001). The research also showed that teachers who were members of professional organizations had higher efficacy beliefs. Preschool teachers with higher levels of education had more positive beliefs.

*Research Methods for Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy*

In quantitative teacher efficacy research, the researchers basically administer teacher efficacy scales, try to differentiate teachers with low and high efficacy, and then relate teachers’ sense of efficacy to different aspects of teaching. These methods have allowed researchers to learn about changes in efficacy during teaching experiences and teacher education programs. On the other hand, qualitative research (e.g., Lin & Gorrel, 1999) and longitudinal research (e.g., Woolfolk Hoy & Burke, 2005) provide us with more information to understand what factors may affect teachers’ beliefs self-perception.
Qualitative Studies on Teacher Sense of Efficacy

Only a few qualitative studies address teachers’ sense of efficacy and consider how contextual factors mitigate teachers’ beliefs about themselves. A case study conducted by Milner and Hoy (2003) is an example that illustrates how one teacher’s knowledge of teaching and sense of efficacy influenced her performance. The participant was a black woman with a doctoral degree and very successful in her teaching. Although the teacher had encountered many problems (such as stereotype threat as well as social and collegial isolation) she was confident in her own knowledge and accomplishments. She continued to teach successfully.

Mulholland & Wallace (2001) conducted a longitudinal study exploring one pre-service teachers’ experiences from the beginning of the teacher education program to in-service education. The study consisted of two phases: The first phase involved a reflective journal and semi-structured interviews with the participants during the pre-service period. The second phase consisted of unstructured interviews, classroom observations followed by interviews, and a written journal by the participant during teaching science. The data were analyzed using Polkinghorne’s narrative inquiry. In the pre-service period, lacking a role model constrained self-efficacy. On the other hand, the children’s enthusiasm and mastery experiences supported self-efficacy. During the in-service period, efficacy was supported by experiences from pre-service education and verbal persuasion from other teachers and children. One of the important findings from this study was that physiological and psychological state, Bandura’s fourth source of
efficacy, was a constraint. The teacher interpreted her fatigue as a sign of her inability to manage the class.

Another study using qualitative inquiry was Rushton’s study (2000) with five female pre-service teachers who attended their student teaching at inner-city schools. The data collection was comprised of four in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted at points throughout the student teaching period, two-page reflections focusing on teachers’ experiences for each week, and weekly taped discussions from cohort meetings. In the study, efficacy was defined as “the positive change in attitude toward self, teaching, and working with others” (Rushton, 2000, p. 371). According to the study, interns who were not prepared to work in inner-city schools experienced culture shock; they recognized the difference between reality and their preconceptions. Interns’ sense of efficacy centered on different aspects of teaching: classroom discipline and management, others’ respect, and their own sense of self worth. Rushton (2000) stated that the challenges of inner-city schools encouraged the development of a sense of efficacy.

Summary

In this chapter I reviewed two key strands of literature: research on first-year teaching including beginning teacher support, and research regarding teachers’ sense of efficacy. The literature presents first-year teachers’ challenges and problems (e.g., difficulty with classroom management) and the importance of support for beginning teachers. The literature regarding the second strand, teacher sense of efficacy, emphasizes that a sense of efficacy plays a critical role in teachers’ behaviors.
First-year teaching is a crucial period in which teachers develop their knowledge and skills, cultivate effective instructional strategies, and rethink their career choice. In addition, the early years of teaching are significant for the development of teachers’ sense of efficacy. Although the importance of teachers’ sense of efficacy has gained a great deal of acceptance, my review of literature indicates that very few studies focused on novice teachers’ sense of efficacy. The quantitative research of the last two decades allows researchers to show the power of the connection between a sense of efficacy and performance, however the scarcity of in-depth studies can only be remedied by qualitative research. The following chapter presents the methodology of my study, which is intended to fill the gap.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose and Research Questions

This chapter begins with a restatement of the purpose of this study, research questions, and a description of the methodology chosen to explore the research questions. The rationale for using qualitative methods, selecting the participants, and collecting and analyzing the data are provided. The chapter includes ethical considerations related to participants and the position of the researcher in a qualitative study and concludes with a discussion of the trustworthiness of the data.

The purpose of this study is to provide an insider’s perspective of teachers’ experiences in their first year of teaching, to highlight the importance of social context and interaction, and to capture the voices of teachers as they express their support, challenges, and sources of a sense of efficacy. The research questions that framed the study were, “What is the role of context in first-year teachers’ sense of efficacy, and how do teachers interpret contextual factors regarding their sense of efficacy?” The following sub-questions guided the study:
1) What is the nature of participating teachers’ sense of efficacy in their particular context?

2) In which particular aspects of teaching do first-year early childhood teachers feel efficacious? How do they experience efficacy in different aspects of their teaching?

3) What are the sources of existing efficacy beliefs of early childhood teachers? How do teachers perceive these sources of their efficacy beliefs?

4) In what ways do contextual elements support or constrain teachers’ beliefs about their capabilities?

   a) What types of challenges, if any, do teachers encountered during their first-year teaching and how do these challenges influence their sense of efficacy? In other words, how do they perceive context as a challenge to their efficacy?

   b) What types of support, if any, do teachers receive during their first year teaching and how does this support influence their sense of efficacy? In other words, how do they perceive context as a support to their efficacy?

5) How do other members in the context (for example, children, mentors, principals) influence teachers’ beliefs about their sense of efficacy?

Research Design

Qualitative/Interpretive Perspective

Qualitative research is an umbrella term referring to different forms of inquiry that help the researcher to understand the phenomena in natural settings (Erickson, 1986;
Merriam, 1998). In the literature, researchers have used the terms ‘qualitative’, ‘ethnography’, ‘constructivist’, ‘interpretive’, and ‘naturalistic inquiry’ interchangeably. The main tenet of the qualitative perspective is that knowledge is constructed in a social and cultural context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and human action is influenced by people’s perspectives and interpretations of life. Qualitative research provides, in Donmeyer’s (2001) words, “at best only high inference access to the black box of the human mind” (p. 174).

The interpretive-qualitative study can be described as open-ended and more sensitive to context; it is flexible and emergent (House, 1994). Given the ‘emergent nature’ of qualitative research, an initial framework and the research questions cannot be definitely established, but will evolve and change throughout the research process (Jones, 2002; Mertens, 1998). In a qualitative study, researchers assume that intervention can change the flow of behavior (Johnston & Christensen, 2004); therefore, they are not overtly manipulating and controlling, but study the behavior that occurs naturally. Given the purposes and research questions of this study, my aim was “to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5).

Justification of the Research Design

Advocates of qualitative research consider people as individuals who actively construct their own social and multiple realities in a social context; therefore, human behavior should be studied in terms of an emic (insider) perspective. A goal of a qualitative study is to describe the contexts, interactions, and processes, and is “interested
in understanding *the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how they make sense of their world and experiences they have in the world” (italics in original, Merriam, 1998, p. 6). One of the assumptions of this proposed study is that in order to understand teachers’ perspectives and to capture meaning that the participants bring to the world, the researcher should use qualitative methodology. The aim in this study was to make the participants’ world visible. Therefore, particular interest was on first-year early childhood teachers’ stories of events, their responses and interpretations of those events, and their interactions with other local practitioners.

Qualitative researchers focus on richness, complexity, and depth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1990; Schwandt, 2000). Because classroom and school contexts carry complex relationships and interactions, using qualitative methodology allows us to look deeply, to gather rich, complex, and often complicated details that provide us with a more sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon. In this study, I observed teachers in their classroom and school context to try to understand the world from their perspective. Conducting a qualitative study offered me the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the participants and to richly describe their contexts, their experiences in their first year of teaching, and their beliefs about themselves.

In order to understand the development of a teacher’s sense of efficacy, it is necessary to conduct qualitative inquiry and “in-depth study of teachers” (Henson, 2002, p. 147). Qualitative research explores “sociocultural and organizational processes [that] can identify and describe important aspects of the phenomenon under study” (Marshall &
Rossman, 1989, p. 29). Therefore, this research undertook an in-depth and long-term exploration of first-year teachers’ experiences.

Research that has addressed teachers’ sense of efficacy was based on two psychological lenses, Rotter’s (1966) Locus of Control and Bandura’s (1997) Self-efficacy; consequently, as Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) stated, a considerable number of studies have used mostly quantitative methodology. Quantitative methodology may not expose the detailed, nuanced, and diverse experiential contexts that influenced the participants’ sense of efficacy. As Henson (2002) states, “the context surrounding a person’s judgment is very relevant to study a teacher’s efficacy” (p. 147). Therefore, this qualitative study contributes to our understanding about the self-efficacy construct that appears to be situated and context-based (Henson, 2002; Labone, 2004).

Using qualitative methodology allowed me to “gain a better understanding of the complexities of human interactions” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 54) that occur in different school contexts. Given the underlying tenet of this study that knowledge is socially constructed through interactions with various mediating agents, this study addresses teachers' interactions within social and cultural contexts.

The Case Study Method

The current study utilized the case study research method. Merriam (1998) stated that case studies allow the researcher to gain in-depth understanding about a situation, individual, program, event, group, or community and is “interested in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, and discovery rather than confirmation” (p. 19). In qualitative case studies, the researcher collects data by spending
time in local settings, contacting local people, and “reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on” (Stake, 2000, p. 445). The aim of this study is “to examine, in-depth, a ‘case’ within its ‘real life’ context” (Yin, 2006, p. 111). For descriptive questions, like “what,” or explanatory questions, like “how” and “why,” case studies have powerful advantages (Yin, 1994, p. 9) over other methodologies. Moreover, Yin (2006) adds that case studies give an opportunity to get first-hand and in-depth understanding of a particular situation.

Stake (2000) identifies case studies in three categories: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. In an intrinsic case study, “the case itself is of interest” (p. 437) and the researcher’s aim is to understand the specific case. An instrumental case study is conducted to examine the cases in order to understand “an issue or redraw a generalization” (p. 437). A qualitative researcher conducting an instrumental case study examines the case in depth, with the aim of understanding a phenomenon, rather than the case itself. More than one individual instrumental case study is called a “collective case study,” in which the cases play a supportive role and allow the researcher to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Merriam (1998) also categorized case studies based on overall intent under three groups: descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative. This research is a descriptive, interpretive case study because its overall intent is not only to provide a description of the phenomenon, but also to develop conceptual categories and typologies through gathering rich information and thick description. The study consisted of multiple cases; in other words, it is a collective case study. Multiple cases are included in the study because as Merriam (1998) states, “The more cases included in a study and the greater the variation
across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be” (p. 40). Therefore, using multiple cases not only strengthens my findings, but also allows me to constantly compare the data (Yin, 2006).

Participant Selection

Qualitative studies do not aim to generalize the findings to a larger population as do quantitative studies; therefore, I employed purposive sampling to be able to select the most “information-rich cases” (Patton, 1990). In order to choose the participants, I used the following screening criteria that Yin (2006) suggests: (1) the willingness of the participants, (2) the opportunity to collect rich data, and (3) the evidence that the participants had experience with the phenomenon. First, in qualitative studies, it is crucial to choose participants who are willing to share their world with the researcher, in order to have the “opportunity to learn” (italics in original, Stake, 2000, p. 446). Consequently, each participant in this study voluntarily agreed to participate. Second, the participants of the study were first-year teachers who teach in different school districts, since the focus of this study is on teachers’ experiences and the role of context in their sense of efficacy. Third, the first-year teachers selected for this study graduated from the same teacher education program and obtained their first-year job in a public school in Midwestern Unites States. Since one of the aims of the study is to see the other professional’s roles in teachers’ experiences and their sense of efficacy, one of the selection criteria was for the participants to have an assigned mentor and be placed in an entry year program. A final screening criterion was gaining access to the school context as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1989).
The four participants of this study were first-year, early childhood teachers in different school districts. Based on the selection criteria, I contacted first-year teachers who graduated from the same teacher education program. As a Ph.D. candidate, I had previous experience with the participants’ teacher training program. Throughout the academic year of 2004-2005, I became a shadow supervisor who visited the school to learn how to coach pre-service teachers. I also conducted a small-scale study to explore a preservice teacher’s sense of efficacy throughout that academic year. Furthermore, during the summer quarter of 2006, I attended the preservice teachers’ master capstone seminar to become more familiar with the program.

During the autumn quarter of 2006, after receiving permission from Behavioral and Social Sciences Internal Review Board (IRB), I contacted the teachers who obtained a job in a public school through e-mail. Some of the volunteer teachers did not fit the criteria because their first-year teaching assignment was not in a kindergarten or first-grade classroom. One of the potential participants had to decline participation because another researcher was conducting a study in that classroom. Based on the criteria, I selected four participants. To gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers’ experiences and contexts, I also interviewed the mentors and administrators of the participating teachers and triangulated the data.

Ethical Considerations

Studies that focus on individuals’ thoughts and experiences raise some ethical concerns (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997). Throughout this study, the participants shared their professional and individual issues with the researcher. Since three of the participants
were engaged and planned to marry during summer break following data collection, the participants also shared their personal lives with the researcher. The most important issue for a qualitative researcher, according to Schwandt (2000), is to decide how to approach the participants. Trusting relationships should be established in order to enter participants’ worlds and to assure them of the confidentiality of the research process. Since reality is socially constructed, in order to understand reality, qualitative researchers live with, interact with, and talk with their participants (Glesne, 1999). Entering the participants’ world is regarded as a way to learn about another culture. Gaining access to sites and building long-term relationships is important to in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Thus, I gave further emphasis to three aspects of the study: gaining entry and access, confidentiality, and the role of the researcher.

*Gaining Entry and Access*

This study took place in different school contexts in which the participants began to teach in early childhood classrooms. In order to get permission to be in the school context, I contacted the ‘gatekeepers’ who control access (Seidman, 1998) and with whom I had to “negotiate the conditions of access” (Glesne, 1999, p. 39). After I obtained permission, I contacted school principals to get their permission to conduct research in their schools (see Appendix A for the Request for Permission) The principals also introduced me to the assistant principals and secretaries of the schools and explained my research to them to ensure my access to each building. This became useful in two of the schools that have a closed entrance; knowing these individuals helped me to be able to enter the building easily. In three of the schools, I was required to stop by the office and
sign the visitor’s log, while the fourth school permitted unlimited access, provided I wore an identity tag that the district gave me while I was on the school grounds.

I informed the participants about my research and sent an e-mail invitation that explained to the possible participants about the aim, duration, and data collection of the study and the right of the participants throughout the study. After they agreed to participate, I visited them in their schools and explained my study, answered their questions, and talked about my presence in the classroom. At the beginning of the study, I was not in the classroom to observe the teachers for long periods during the first couple of weeks. My goal that time was to build relationships with the participants. Throughout the study, I tried to spend as much time in the classrooms as I was allowed.

Confidentiality

I assigned pseudonyms to participants and use the collected data in research reports for confidentiality. Each participant signed an informed consent according to the Internal Review Board (Appendix B). These steps occurred prior to the data collection. I also assigned pseudonyms to the schools to provide confidentiality. The participating principals and mentor teachers also signed an informed consent form. (Appendix C)

The Role of the Researcher

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) use a metaphor to explain the role of the qualitative researcher. They state that the researcher is, as in filmmaking, “a person who assembles images into montages” (p. 4). My role in the context moved back and forth along a continuum that ranged from participant observer to observer as participant. Like Gans (1982) states, the researcher participant is “one who participates in a social situation but
is personally only partially involved, so that he can function as a researcher” (p. 54, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 102). My position in the context changed from time to time. Sometimes I was a part of classroom activities, since an expectation in early childhood classrooms is for everybody to participate in hands-on practices or activities, such as singing and playing. However, I was predominantly an observer. My participation depended on the particular classroom and school activities and events at the time.

Data Collection Methods

In qualitative research, a combination of data collection methods is desirable (Glesne, 1999). Therefore, data were gathered using a variety of qualitative collection methods in order to explore the contexts and teachers’ beliefs about themselves. The data collection techniques were local context observations; in-depth, semi-structured and informal interviews with teachers; semi-structured interviews with mentors and building principals; and document collection. Table 3.1 shows how the organization of data collection in terms of type of data explored the research questions, and how the data were collected.
### Table 3.1: Data collection matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHY were data collected?</th>
<th>Local Context Observations</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Document Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To gain in-depth understanding about experiences of teachers in classroom and school contexts.</td>
<td>To gain understanding to the teachers’ past and current experiences</td>
<td>To gain insight about the nature of support, and induction year experiences of teachers.</td>
<td>To gain insight to the first-year teaching, guidelines, curriculum, classroom, school context and community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To understand teachers’ sense of efficacy, and challenges, supports to their efficacy beliefs.</td>
<td>To gain insight about school context and community</td>
<td></td>
<td>To gain understanding to teachers’ personal and professional experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHY were data collected?</td>
<td>Local Context Observations</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Document Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO (or What) were the sources of the data?</td>
<td>4 Early childhood teachers-Two kindergarten, two first grade.</td>
<td>4 Teachers</td>
<td>4 Mentor Teachers and 4 Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers’ electronic and hard copy portfolios, M.Ed. Handbook, induction year documents (e.g., Praxis III portfolios) teachers’ master capstone papers, journals, and mentoring handbooks, classroom and school contexts information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW LONG/WHEN were collected?</td>
<td>Throughout the Study-From October to March</td>
<td>3 Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing informal interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW data were collected?</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Semi-structured and Informal interviews-Audio recordings</td>
<td>Semi Structured Interviews-Audio Recordings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews

Semi-structured Interviews with Teachers

Semi-structured interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) were the primary method of data collection related to teachers’ beliefs about themselves and their perception about sources, challenges, and supports. Through interviews, I tried to understand teachers’ beliefs, feelings, and thoughts that cannot be observed from their behavior, and the interviews “allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 1990, p. 196) and make sense of the participants’ experiences and their worlds (Hatch, 2002, Seidman, 1998). In the current study, the preferred approach was to open my “ears to the voices and perspectives” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 11) and actively listen to the participants’ experiences.

Semi-structured formal interviews are planned events that are interactive in nature and more flexible than structured interviews (Hatch, 2002). I chose to conduct interviews of a semi-structured nature, as they would also allow me to respond to the situation with new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 1998). As Patton (1990) suggested, the researcher should primarily “go forth and question, ask and listen” (p. 278). During the interviews, I asked the same questions to the participants but I sometimes changed the order of the questions, as needed. In some cases, an answer to an earlier question necessitated that I postpone a later question or that I ask another question earlier than planned. Or if the participant brought up an issue that could be related to one of the questions, I rephrased my question and asked it again.
While conducting qualitative interviews, I utilized Seidman’s (1998) suggestion for using three interviews to collect participant’s constructions and perspectives. The structure and time intervals were different from Seidman’s discussion, but some ideas were integrated. The first interview focused on life history conversations with the participants. In this interview, I asked the participants about their experiences prior to becoming certified teachers in order to understand how their past experiences influence their current sense of efficacy.

In the second interview, I addressed the participants’ current practices and experiences in the school context to understand their relationships with other actors in the school. This interview focused on eliciting the support and challenges in the participants’ first year of teaching. In the third interviews I intended to gain more in-depth understanding about my emerging questions based on previous field observations and previous interviews (Appendix D).

In order to conduct formal interviews, I agreed to meet with each participant in a scheduled time after school hours. The participants were very cooperative to arrange the meeting despite their busy lives with teacher meetings, paperwork, Praxis III preparation, and lesson plans. The frequency and length of the interviews varied (see Table 3.2).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Interview Dates</th>
<th>Duration of the Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>November, 2006</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December, 2006</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February, 2007</td>
<td>47 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>December, 2006</td>
<td>46 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December, 2006</td>
<td>75 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February, 2007</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>November, 2006</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December, 2006</td>
<td>75 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February, 2007</td>
<td>55 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>December, 2006</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January, 2007</td>
<td>60 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 2007</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: The dates and duration of the semi-structured interviews.

One of the considerations during the interviews was data recording. I both use tape record and digital record for interviews with each participant’s permission. As needed, I also took notes, though infrequently, since I wanted to listen actively and interact with the participants. I wrote down any mention of important dates or events, questions that came to mind to ask later, and numbers or names to remember when I probed another emergent question. At the end of the interview, I asked each participant whether they would like to share any other information.

Informal Interviews with the Teachers

Throughout the study, I conducted open-ended informal interviews that mirror a conversation (Merriam, 1998). These unstructured conversations (Hatch, 2002) were
conducted in order to ask questions to extend what was observed in the context. At the beginning of the study, I informed the participants that I would take notes as needed during the informal interviews. I usually followed these conversations by writing out as many details as I could remember and integrating these details with my research protocols and journals. Informal interview times were data collection opportunities to co-construct the knowledge between the participants and me as a researcher (Hatch, 2002).

The informal interviews were primarily conducted after observing each participant’s classroom. In one kindergarten classroom, informal interviews were also conducted during recess time. In two first-grade classrooms, I talked with the teachers when students were in special activities. In the other kindergarten classroom, since the program was half day, the only time to speak with the teacher was after the students had left the building. During these conversations, we talked about specific issues that would help me to understand my observations, such as the reason to change classroom management strategy; the challenges for a specific day, or weekly programs, such as parent conferences or their entry-year meetings, and emergent events, such as a delay to the start of school. On many occasions, the participants talked about their experiences since my previous visit and shared their stories about specific students or issues we had previously discussed.

*Semi-Structured Interviews with Mentors and Principals*

To gain an in-depth understanding of the participants’ experiences, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the mentor teachers and administrators of the schools. These interviews mainly focused on learning about the perceptions of the mentor teachers
and principals regarding the support they provide to teachers. The interviews also addressed the mentors and principals’ perceptions of the teachers’ first-year teaching experiences (Appendix E).

Interviews were conducted as these individuals were available. I often had the chance to see some of them because I joined their weekly meeting with the participants. Since the mentor teachers were responsible for teaching their own classes and some of them were parents with their own children to pick up from school, they were not available after class. I therefore had to communicate with them through e-mail to find the best time for us to meet. I conducted the interviews with the mentors in their classroom. The principal was able to find the time during the day when the teachers and students were in the classroom. However, the principal interviews, as well as some mentor teacher interviews, were rescheduled because of school closures during February. The principals’ interviews were conducted in their office. Table 3.3 shows the interviews and duration of each.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
<th>Duration of the Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Mentor Principal</td>
<td>February, 2007</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March, 2007</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Mentor Principal</td>
<td>March, 2007</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February, 2007</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie Mentor Principal</td>
<td>March, 2007</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February, 2007</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Mentor Principal</td>
<td>March, 2007</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marcy, 2007</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3: The dates and duration of interviews with mentor teachers and principals.

Observations

Another data collection method used in this study was classroom observations in each local setting that allowed me to gather firsthand and contextual information. The purpose of such observations was primarily “to understand the culture, setting, or social phenomenon being studied from the perspectives of the participants” (Hatch, 2002, p. 72). These local observations provided me with an understanding about the context in which first-year teachers teach, enabling me to see their world through their eyes.

Observations took place once a week when the participants were available. To gain an overall understanding of different events within the focal schools, I visited the schools and conducted classroom observations at different days and times. Since one of the kindergarten classrooms was half day, I observed that classroom on different days of the week. It is important to build rapport with the participants to gain an in-depth
understanding (Glesne, 1999). Therefore, during the first two weeks of the study, I intentionally kept the duration of classroom observations short.

Drawing from Spradley’s (1980) study, the type of observations conducted in this study included descriptive, focused, and selective observations. The descriptive observations aimed to understand school and classroom context. After an initial analysis of data, I conducted more focused observations about the teachers’ relationships with other people in the school context and their experiences with teaching. Finally, I conducted more selective observations based on the ongoing classroom events and my preliminary data analysis. For example, when one of the participants stated that she used a new strategy for managing students’ behaviors during circle time, I visited the school early in the morning to observe this specific classroom activity. In addition, I observed the teachers while teaching different content areas.

During observations, I kept field notes that were comprised of descriptions of classroom contexts, actions, and conversations. During my visit to the classrooms, I carried a notebook with me at all times so that I could write my observations, my questions to ask during informal interviews, ideas to elaborate on later, and important dates and times. To be able to visualize events later, I also sketched scenes of classrooms and copied graphs or models that the teachers wrote on the blackboard or on the writing easel. Keeping observation notes gave me an opportunity to write what I saw, heard, felt, and sensed in a detailed way (Richardson, 2000). I converted these “raw field notes” into “research protocols” (Hatch, 2002, p. 83) by adding the information after leaving the field. These are referred to as “descriptive notes” and “analytic notes” by Glesne (1999)
or “condensed accounts” and “expanded accounts” by Spradley (1980). The research
protocols included my personal interpretations in brackets, as well as theoretical notes
and observational notes. These were organized the same day of the observation so as to
be ready to analyze. Every research protocol included the information as shown in
Table 3.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Julie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation Number</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>9.30-11.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation Setting</td>
<td>First Grade Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Circle time, Centers, Writers’ Workshop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4: Research protocol record

*Researcher Journal*

To track my own personal biases and feelings, I kept a researcher journal upon
returning from the field. This journal, as Hatch (2002) states, was a place in which I
described my challenges and achievements. Richardson (2000) puts eloquently the role of
personal notes in research: “Writing personal notes is a way for me to know myself
better, a way of using writing as a method of inquiry into the self” (p. 941). Keeping this
journal not only allowed me to be aware of my personal biases and feelings, but also
served as an important data source (Spradley, 1980). During this process, I reflected on
salient themes, my own questions about my methods, and ethical considerations in my
journal.
Unobtrusive Data

Unobtrusive data is collected “without disturbing the natural flow of human activity” (Hatch, 2002, p. 119), and it tells stories without interpretations of the participants. Documents about the schools’ philosophy, curriculum guidelines, district policy statements, daily schedules, and classroom organization were collected in order to gain an in-depth understanding about the history, the school context (Glesne, 1999; Jones, 2002), and experiences of the participants in their induction years. These documents served as a useful crosscheck on the primary interviews and observational data.

In addition, I reviewed the teachers’ teaching portfolios which included classroom assignments, journals and materials collected during their teacher education program. I also collected their master capstone papers (e.g., inner-life of a teacher and diversity). Document analysis of such materials added to my knowledge about the teachers’ experiences and their perspectives about their teacher education program.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described a data analysis as “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others” (p. 153). Marshall and Rossman (1999) describe data analysis in qualitative research as “a messy, ambiguous, time consuming, creative, and fascinating process” (p. 111). Data analysis in this study was a
prolonged and iterative process that involved describing, analyzing, and interpreting the data.

During data analysis, I utilized an eclectic approach that involves strategies from interpretivist approaches and grounded theory (Charmaiz, 2000; Erickson, 1986; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Boeije, 2002). Patton (1990) stated that inductive analysis refers to patterns, themes, and categories that "emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (p. 390). As many scholars (e.g., Glesne, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2006) suggest, the data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously. At different times during data collection, I read and re-read the data corpus. My findings from initial data analysis led me to further observation and interview questions.

Data Management and Storage

Data organization started on the first day of data collection. I dated and labeled all audio-tapes, field notes, journal entries, and documents that I collected throughout the study, using different colored folders to separate the data collected from each participant. In my personal computer, I kept a separate folder for each participant that I labeled chronologically. As mentioned earlier, on each page of data of observation record, I provided the date that field notes were taken and an identifying page number. Merriam (1998) stated that one of the alternatives for the qualitative researcher to organize the data includes keeping “a mix of manual and computer management” (p. 165). I used the NVivo 7 (QSR International, 2007)—a computer analysis software used by qualitative researchers—to store the data. Using NVivo also made it easier to code, categorize, and
retrieve the information. I was also able to create a data report for each coding category.
Besides the electronic storage system, I used colored folders to store documents that I
collected from the field and the participants. I copied these documents and hand coded
them, using the space in the margins.

*Exploration of the Data—Coding*

Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) stated that the heart of qualitative analysis is
coding all data—field notes, interviews, and documents—into meaningful categories:
“Coding is a process of data reduction” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 164). I used “open
coding” which is a technique recommended by advocators of grounded theory approach.
Open coding refers to reading and re-reading the data to determine patterns in the data.
Rather than imposing the existing frameworks, my goal during the data-coding was to see
the patterns as they emerged throughout the study.

For the initial data coding, I read the first interviews to gain an understanding of
the lives and experiences of the participants. This initial data reading and analysis helped
me create a sample of codes. In addition, I wrote “memos” to myself about what I was
learning (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) about my participants. I also looked through all of the
documents about the schools and participants’ teacher education. During this phase, I
began to write descriptive notes about the classroom and school contexts. After collecting
further data as well as routinely reading and reflecting on the data, I imported the
electronic files and documents into *NVivo 7*.

After reading and re-reading the data, I identified the emergent codes as *free
nodes* in *NVivo 7*. First, I read each participant data separately, creating free nodes for
them. While re-reading the existing data, I revisited the old codes, then created new codes and revised the old ones. I employed the same procedure for the data that comes from mentor teachers’ and principals’ interviews.

**Generating Categories and Themes**

During the coding process, I utilized *the constant comparison method*, an inductive data analysis, used by scholars who subscribe to the grounded theory approach (Boeije, 2002). Based on the constant comparison method, I coded, compared, and categorized the data from interviews, observations, and documents, constantly comparing and reflected “old” and “new” material (Boeije, 2002, p. 393). During this process, I combined my *free nodes* under *tree nodes*, which helped me to condense my data into meaningful categories. For example, I put my *free nodes*, “common experience,” “sharing stories,” “material support,” and “co-planning,” under the *tree node*, “Collegial Support” (see Table 3.5). I created my themes based on my categorized codes. Using *Nvivo 7* I created a decontextualized set of data. Therefore, I re-read the whole data corpus in order to prevent missing links that could be caused by coding the data using a computer program.
Sometimes I would go talk to [name], the other first year teacher, because she was a first year teacher last year and she remembers what it feels like. And I love talking with her because I feel like we are on the same page. And a lot of times I will go up and say, “I’m so frustrated with this.” And she’ll say, “I felt the same way last year. Don’t worry. That’s OK. That’s a normal feeling. You’ll be OK next year.” That’s comforting to know she felt the same way last year but she doesn’t feel that way anymore. So what I’m feeling is normal, but I won’t feel that forever. So it’s really I love talking with her.

It just makes you feel like, “OK, I’m not alone. It’s happen to them. It will happen to me many, many, many more times.” As much as you can get frustrated or overwhelmed or feel like you don’t know what you’re doing, they felt that way too. So it’s not just me. I’ve had to tell myself that a couple of times.

Table 3.5: An example of a free and tree node.

Developing Assertions

After reading the data corpus including memos and the researcher’s journal, hard copy documents and revisiting the codes and categories, I utilized the analytic induction technique (Erickson, 1986) to develop assertions related to my data. In addition, I wrote down my assertions on large post-it papers, creating tables and graphs to see the connections and to visualize my data. Next, I searched my data to find evidentiary warrants supporting my assertions and I located the negative cases that were disconfirming the evidence for a specific assertion.

During the write-up process, I presented my findings through using quotes from the participants, giving particular and general descriptions, and utilizing visual
representations (Erickson, 1986). I first provided detailed descriptions of each of the participants and their teaching contexts. I then presented the findings from themes that emerged from the data. I used *Inspiration* program to visualize my data.

Criteria for Quality

Qualitative research emphasizes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). “Trustworthiness” of the study is defined as how a researcher “persuade[s] his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). To increase the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher uses various procedures, including prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, and a reflective journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Creswell, 1998). The following section provides a short description of these procedures and describes how I used these procedures to increase the rigorousness of my study.

**Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation**

To establish credibility for the study, qualitative researchers spend sufficient time in learning the local culture and building trusting relationships with the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This enables researchers “to detect and take account of distortions that might otherwise creep into the data” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 302). In this study, I was in the school context from October 2006 to March 2006 to become acquainted with the context and the participants. I visited each participant’s school approximately 12-14 times. I also met with them outside of school in coffee shops. Throughout the study, I engaged in constant e-mail communication with the participants.
to determine times for observation or to collect further information related to my specific
questions to complement my observations. I also joined the participants’ mentor
meetings. Additionally, I had informal conversations with the teachers. These
conversations took place when students were engaged in special activity time or when
they were waiting for their parents to pick them up. As needed, I also stayed after school
to speak with the teachers.

As with prolonged engagement, persistent observation is also an important way
to establish credibility by observing the context to get in-depth information about the
problem being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, by conducting local context
observations, I was able to record important events, learn about classroom cultures, and
observe interactions in and out of the classroom context.

Spending prolonged time and engaging in observations enabled me to improve
my understanding. Having developed rapport and built trust with the participants and
other people in the school, I was able to collect more data. For example, the participants
were observed to be more willing to share school-related documents and seemed to be
more willing to help after they became familiar with me. In addition, students in each
classroom seemed to accept me as a part of their classroom.

**Triangulation**

To increase trustworthiness, the researcher triangulates the data by using multiple
investigators, multiple methods, and multiple sources of data (Merriam, 1998, Patton,
attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Denzin &
Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). According to Patton (1990), triangulation is a “means of comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means” (p. 467). Patton (1990) presents four types of triangulation: data sources, methods, theory/perspective, and investigators.

1. Data Sources: Throughout the study, I collected data from teachers, mentor teachers, and administrators. In-depth interviews with multiple informants at each site allowed me to triangulate findings across sources.

2. Methods: I collected data via conducting observation and interviews as well as collecting documents. Using multiple data collection methods enriched my data and helped establish trustworthiness. For example, one of the participants, Ashley, reported that she struggled in managing student behavior during circle time. I triangulated this statement with my observation of circle time and observed that Ashley had difficulty to get the students’ attention.

3. Theory/Perspective: In this study, I benefited from multiple theoretical perspectives, such as the literature on sociocultural theory and mentoring.

4. Investigator: Although I collected and analyzed the data by myself, I asked a faculty member, a researcher, and a friend with a Ph.D. in education to read my paper and give suggestions about representation of data. Peer debriefing was also an important process for discussing the findings. Figure 3.2 indicates a summary of research design with the consideration of triangulation to increase trustworthiness.
Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing is a technique that is used “to keep the inquirer ‘honest,’ exposing him or her to searching questions by an experienced protagonist doing his or her best to play the devil’s advocate” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). A graduate student who was also working on her dissertation in another area served as a disinterested peer. She was
knowledgeable in qualitative research and was in fact using qualitative methodology in her dissertation. I met with her in the earlier stages of my study to discuss my concerns and issues about data collection. Throughout my research, we discussed the methodological, ethical, and substantive aspects of our dissertations. During data collection and analysis, I asked her to look at the emerging categories, interpretations, and conceptual themes. During the report-writing phase, I asked her to read my data analysis and comment on my presentation of the data.

I also discussed my themes, findings, and my representations with faculty members, other fellow graduate students, and a colleague who had a Ph.D. in education. I also shared my initial hand codes with one of my committee members in order to receive her initial feedback on my coding process.

**Member Checking**

Member checking is a technique that refers to testing analytical categories, interpretations, and conclusions with participants of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); it is essential for establishing credibility (Creswell, 1998, Mertens, 1998). A member check involves sharing the data with the participants in order to verify that the constructed written representation accurately describes the participant’s position. Hatch (2002) stated that member checking would be different for different studies. In this study, I used two types of member checks: continuous informal conversation and formal sessions. Throughout the study, I asked the participants questions for clarification and verification. I also asked them questions related to their experiences that I read in the documents I had
collected from them. Informal and formal interviews served as a time for member checking, as well.

In the second type of member check, I arranged a formal meeting with each participant after I constructed a written form of my findings. First, I provided the portraits that I included in Chapter 4. During the formal sessions, I shared my findings and asked the participants to read and comment on the accuracy and consistency of my detailed descriptions of them and their classroom and school contexts. I also had the chance to ask questions for clarification of some issues. For example, during her interview, one of the participants remarked that she would like to receive “good feedback” from her principal. I asked her what she meant by “good feedback,” because the word “good” can be interpreted as “positive” or “effective” feedback based on the meaning attached it. She verified that she meant “constructive” feedback when she said “good” feedback.

In addition, when the participants read my transcriptions of their speech, they asked me to delete some words like “umm” and “like,” as well as commenting on their own ungrammatical use of English in some places. When they read quotes of their interviews, they sometimes elaborated on what they had meant. For example, Julie read her comments about children with special needs and stated that she had experience with children of diverse backgrounds during her student teaching. However, she added that having more than 20 students in her classroom made it difficult for her to work with individual students.
Transferability

In an interpretive paradigm, the term “generalizability” is replaced with transferability. In other words, the researcher’s task is not to be concerned about the generalizability of the results to a large population, but to provide sufficient descriptions of the context and results. In this manner, other researchers can judge the applicability of the findings to their study, and “those who read the study can connect to that experience, learn how it is constituted, and deepen their understanding of the issues it reflects” (Seidman, 1998, p. 44). Using multiple cases strengthened the transferability of my results (Yin, 1994). One of the aims of the current study was to provide, as much as possible, “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) to ensure the transferability and credibility of the research. Therefore, in the following chapter, I detailed the participants’ past and present experiences, beliefs about themselves, and their interactions in a multilayered context.
CHAPTER 4

PORTRAITS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This study documents the experiences of four early childhood teachers during their first year of teaching. To understand these new teachers’ experiences of learning to teach and teaching to learn, as well as how their sense of efficacy was shaped by their current teaching, the study explores the teachers’ individual school contexts and their emerging relationships with peer teachers, mentors, and school administrators. The individual descriptions presented in this chapter provide a portrait of each participant that scaffolds the reader’s knowledge of each beginning teacher’s personal history and current teaching context.

First, I present ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973) using information related to the participants’ background. I describe the participants, relevant past and current experiences to explain some of the support of challenges to their sense of efficacy. Second, I report demographics that inform the reader about the participants’ classrooms and school contexts. The data include a description of the number of K-12 students attending each participant’s school, the students’ backgrounds, and the physical layout of each participant’s classroom, as well as information about other school-based professionals, such as mentors, principals, and staff members. The new teachers in this
study had graduated from the same teacher preparation program and consequently, it is assumed that each participant was exposed to similar training experiences. Also included in this chapter are details about the particular teacher education program. In addition, the chapter offers a description of the state-mandated process that is required for the Entry Year program and Praxis III: Classroom Performance Assessment (2001).

Focal Participant #1: Ashley

Background

Ashley was a 28-year-old white middle-class female who grew up in a small town in the Midwest about 60 miles from her current school assignment. Ashley described herself as energetic and positive, but “not creative.” She was raised by a supportive family that stressed the importance of education. Her parents adopted the position that “it was never a question of if we’d go to college, it was where we’d go to college” (Interview, November, 2006). Ashley’s parents and her husband offered encouragement and supported her financially. Although she did not have any close relatives who influenced her decision to teach, she recognized that her third-grade teacher presented “a vision of becoming an awesome teacher” (Interview, November, 2006). Ashley recalled that [even though she had decided that her ex-teacher may not remember her], she sent a card to this teacher with a note that stated, “Thank you. You’re the reason I am doing this.”

Despite her early attraction to teaching, Ashley majored in Business Administration and worked as a credit analyst and accountant/financial analyst for five years. Financial stability seemed important in her initial career choice. Rather than
following a career path that she felt was an appropriate match for her dispositions, she chose as a profession based on financial gain. However, after she retrained and changed her career, re-training and changing her career, Ashley stated, “It’s nice to have a point of reference in doing something for five years that you aren’t happy doing, because sometimes teaching is stressful, and it’s a lot more hours than I think people realize” (Interview, November, 2006).

Ashley started her masters in education program after taking some prerequisite courses. Initially, she felt uncomfortable because her B.A. was different from that of other students who graduated with coursework that had provided a background in human development. As a career changer, Ashley stated that she did not know what to expect from the program. She rated the delivery of the teacher preparation coursework as excellent, and she used the metaphor of a “little family” to describe her experiences of learning to teach with peers and faculty members in a professional learning community. She considered this emerging sense of community to be a formative and indispensable part of her training. Ashley shared:

I thought that it was positive that we were broken into two groups, two cohorts because sixty people’s [sic] a lot to know. We had thirty, which felt like a little family by the end.... We really knew each other well and we could trust each other and work together and complain together during our student teaching, cry if we needed to ... It felt like a family. (Interview, November, 2006)

Ashley participated in an early field placement in a preschool classroom where she did not encounter major student behavior problems. Later, during her student teaching in a first-grade classroom, Ashley saw firsthand greater diversity in student behavior. At times, she was frustrated with her limited classroom management skills to
work with students “struggling with appropriate school behaviors.” With extended
practicum experiences in placements that included both preschool and primary
classrooms, Ashley extended her repertoire of teaching strategies. In summary, she
labeled her relationships with both her student teaching cooperative teacher and
university supervisor as “supportive.”

First-Year of Teaching

Ashley was teaching a full-time kindergarten class in a suburban school district.
In her first year of teaching, she was assigned a mentor teacher who had 27 years of
experience, and who held a bachelor’s degree from the same teacher education
institution, as well as a master’s degree in education. Ashley’s mentor teacher taught both
a morning and an afternoon kindergarten class, and she and her mentor met weekly to
talk about her concerns, as well as preparation to Praxis III: Classroom Performance
Assessment (Educational Testing Service, 2001). Required by the school district as part
of the induction process for all new teachers, these weekly mentor-mentee meetings were
considered essential steps in the mentoring system. Another district requirement was to
attend monthly entry-year teacher meetings. The district provided professional
conferences related to different aspects of teaching, such as discipline, and offered the
opportunity to observe other kindergarten classrooms in the district. The teachers in this
district also received professional support from the coordinator of the mentoring program.

In the school context, Ashley developed an intense professional working
relationship with another full-time kindergarten teacher who was in her second year of
teaching and had graduated from the same teacher preparation program. Collaboratively,
these two full-time teachers planned activities and lessons. Ashley considered her professional life a little “hectic.” She repeated the statement that she had heard experienced teachers state, “The best thing about the first year is it only happens once.” Ashley expressed satisfaction over her teaching assignment and described her school context as “a great place to work.”

To Ashley, children’s perceptions about their lives in the classroom were the most important goal. She said, “I really try to be upbeat and make the day as positive an experience as I can for the kids, so that [at the day’s end] they leave feeling [it] was a good day” (Interview, November 2006). Although Ashley believed she nourished a positive personal relationship with each child, she was, at times, unsure of her interpretations of perceptions of those interactions. She stated:

I think that they trust me and they’re comfortable. I think that they feel comfortable taking risks so that they know that it’s OK if they don’t know something right now. I want them to work hard and be the best that they can be. And I think that they understand that. A lot of times they’ll say, “Hey, mom. I mean, [name].” And so, I think that they view me as somebody that cares about them. Still they have a respect ... that’s how I think they view me. (Interview, November 2006)

Description of the School and Classroom Context

Ashley taught at North Elementary School, located in an economically diverse community in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city. The principal described this school “as a very level playing field for all kinds of kids because we do a really good job with kids from all different backgrounds and all kinds of abilities.” (Interview, March, 2006)

North Elementary School served kindergarten through sixth-grade children and Ashley was one of the three kindergarten teachers there. According to the 2005-2006
school report card from the State Department of Education, North School had approximately 455\(^2\) students. The population included 81\% White students, 8\% African-American students, 6\% Asian or Pacific Islander students, and 5\% from multiracial groups. Overall, 19.7\% of the children were economically disadvantaged, 6.2\% had limited English proficiency, and 8.9\% had disabilities. Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of students in terms of their ethnic backgrounds.

![Pie chart showing ethnic demographics of North Elementary School - Ashley’s school](image)

Figure 4.1: Ethnic demographics of North Elementary School - Ashley’s school

North Elementary School employed 22 classroom teachers, 2 reading specialists, 2 intervention specialists, and 1 special education assistant. All the teachers had bachelor

\[\text{\footnotesize \(2\) In order to provide confidentiality, the number of students and percentages of demographics was changed slightly.}\]
degrees and 70.4% of the teachers had master’s degrees. Although some teachers had retired the previous year, overall, the staff members of the school were mainly in the middle of their careers. The principal of the school had started her teaching career in special education, and held graduate degrees, both a master’s and a doctoral degree, in school psychology. She has been employed as a principal in general education since 1990.

Two of the kindergarten classrooms in the school offered full-day programs; one kindergarten class was a half-day program. Although these two kindergarten classrooms were adjacent to each other, with the back doors opening directly to the children’s play area, Ashley’s classroom was located at the rear of the school near the upper elementary classrooms.

*The Physical Space of the Classroom*

Ashley’s classroom was a renovated music classroom that had been refurnished to accommodate the children’s learning centers. There were two big carpeted areas that were used for writers’ workshops and circle time. The classroom layout reflected that of a typical early childhood classroom with a library corner and centers, as well as a big housekeeping area that included a small theatre. The room arrangements changed throughout the academic year. For example, a house in the housekeeping area was removed from the classroom after winter break because of classroom management issues.

*Students*

Ashley’s classroom was comprised of 20 children (8 boys and 12 girls). The population included three African American children, one Asian or Pasific Islander, one
Hispanic Caucasian and 15 Caucasian children. Table 4.1 shows the demographic information of Ashley’s classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focal Participant #1</th>
<th>Ashley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>8 male, 12 female, total 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>1 Hispanic Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>1 Speech IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 OT IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Programs</td>
<td>5 Reading Intervention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Demographic characteristics of Ashley’s classroom

Ashley’s portrait in the above section provides information about her personal history experiences, as well as essential characteristics of the school context in which she taught kindergarten students. The second participant, Mary, is described in the following section.

Focal Participant # 2: Mary

Background

Mary was a white upper-middle class female who attained a bachelor’s degree in human ecology and a master’s degree in early childhood education. She was raised in a small rural town, but her family moved to a city when she was preschool age. Each of her parents had higher education beyond a bachelor’s degree, and education was strongly
encouraged in her family. Her father was a director of social services, and her mother was a kindergarten teacher for 36 years. About a year prior to the beginning of her first year of teaching, Mary married a music teacher.

Mary pointed out various people who had inspired her to choose teaching as a profession. She was influenced by her mother’s decision to teach. As a child, she reported that she often spent endless hours in her mother’s classroom. It was during this time that she recalled having decided that teaching was a “profession that she really enjoyed.” She stated:

I enjoy myself usually during the day. Some days are harder than others. But at the end of the day I think of all the things that happened and I am happy with, you know, what goes on. I didn’t go into education for this reason, but I stayed in education because I think it’s a profession worth fighting for. There’s [sic] so many things not happening in our schools that should be. You know, funding, all of those issues that really bother me. That’s why I keep staying in education and fighting for those. (Interview, December 2006)

Her third-grade teacher, professional colleagues during her student teaching, and a professor from her teacher education program were other individuals who inspired her to become a teacher. Prior to accepting a teaching position in her current school, Mary worked in different K-12 classrooms performing duties and responsibilities that included the work of a reading mentor with students and a substitute teacher. She also was a member of various professional associations (Document, Teacher Portfolio).

After completing earlier field experiences, Mary concluded that the two schools in which she had been placed professed opposing philosophies. This appeared to confuse Mary’s conceptions about how teaching and learning should “look and sound.” Although the school at which she satisfied the required preschool practicum was open to new
instructional practices, her elementary school placement required her to adhere to rigid curriculum guidelines and a specific set of teaching strategies. While she received little guidance from her university supervisor, her cooperating teachers in both placement schools were supportive. Mary stated:

Having two very different experiences helped me to see the entire spectrum. That’s given me the opportunity to modify my pedagogy to meet the needs of my class. Knowing those two different types of groups have [sic] helped a lot. (Interview, December, 2006)

*First-Year of Teaching*

Mary taught in a half-day kindergarten class, where she recognized an inherent challenge of teaching within a specific time frame. Regarding her classroom, she noted:

We have to go boom... boom... boom. It is time to go. So they don’t get as much as they would in a full day program and they don’t have as much time. But it also helps in the fact that a lot of them have never been to pre-school...they’ve never had to focus for a long time. So it helps them to learn how to sit down and practice their work and focus to know what you’re doing in the classroom. So there are benefits and disadvantages. (Interview, December, 2006)

Mary’s mentor teacher held a degree in K-8 education with endorsements in early childhood education and learning disabilities in K-12, and had taught both kindergarten and first grade for fourteen years. Mary and her mentor met every Tuesday to fulfill the guidelines for Praxis III. To make the most of her colleague’s expertise and her limited preparation time, Mary acknowledged and took advantage of the benefit of planning with her two kindergarten team members. She recognized that she did not need to “reinvent the wheel.” Since her mentor taught both morning and afternoon sessions, Mary had the opportunity to visit her mentor’s classroom to observe in the mornings. The school’s resource teacher was regularly scheduled in Mary’s classroom to work with one child,
and was considered by Mary to be very helpful. Likewise, a full time teacher’s aide for another student with special needs was also scheduled in the classroom every day after January. Mary’s classroom parents had formed a volunteer program, and each week a couple of parents were scheduled to assist students in different activities.

Description of the School and Classroom Context

Surrounded by a racially diverse community, East Elementary School reflected economic disparity. Twenty-five classroom teachers were employed by this K-5 elementary school. According to the 2005-2006 State Department of Education report card, East School’s average daily enrollment was 575. Overall, 76% of the children were White, 14% were African American, 4% were Asian or Pacific Islander, while 6.0% were multi-racial. The children with disabilities comprised 9.3% of the school population, and 2% of the children had limited English Proficiency. In this school, 10.5% of the children were considered economically disadvantaged. Figure 4.2 depicts the racial diversity of East Elementary School.
Each teacher at East Elementary School held at least a bachelor’s degree, and 61% had attained a minimum of a master’s degree. The principal, described as a white female, had a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a master’s degree in educational administration. The principal had taught for nine years in an elementary setting, and had sixteen years of administrative experience.

The Physical Space of the Classroom

Mary’s classroom had open space that was appropriately colorful for working with young children. Situated across the hallway classroom from her mentor teacher’s classroom and next to the resource room, Mary was afforded easy access to her experienced colleagues. During both individual and whole group instruction, Mary utilized work tables as well as a carpet area. She built melody and song as part of her
classroom management repertoire. For example, she used music to transition students, and to gain and maintain their attention, as well as for instructional purposes such as teaching the alphabet letters. Children had access to large closets to store and retrieve resources, as well as individual materials. This classroom also housed an overhead projector, a sensory table, a television, and computers.

**Students**

Mary was responsible for teaching 23 children (11 girls and 12 boys) in her classroom. The population included three African American children, three Hispanic children, 1 African, and 16 Caucasian children. The majority of the students in Mary’s classroom were considered children from the middle class. Table 4.2 shows the demographic information from Mary’s classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focal Participant #2</th>
<th>Mary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>Half Day Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>12 male, 11 female, total 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>2 IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Programs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Demographic information of Mary’s classroom.
Mary’s personal history and first-year teaching experiences discussed above provide insights for the reader into her background, personality, and teaching practices. Next, I introduce Julie who was a first-grade teacher.

Focal Participant # 3: Julie

Background

Julie grew up in a small town with her parents. Her father was a middle school English teacher and her mother worked in a home business. At the time of this study, her two sisters were teaching in a middle school. Julie was engaged to be married during the summer following the study’s data collection period. Emotionally sensitive, Julie portrayed herself as a hard working individual. She was fond of reading, and she described her home as a language-rich environment. Julie portrayed herself as “a planner.” She recounted:

As a young child, I remember planning activities for my neighborhood’s club house and helping mom to decide on plans for our family vacations. As I got older, I enjoyed planning social gatherings, such as surprise birthday parties, volunteering to organize school events, such as homecoming and prom, and participating in organizations required me to take a leadership role, such as being a co-chairman for a clothing drive. (Document, Teacher Portfolio)

Julie was a “perfectionist,” and she said that she often doubted her decisions, even though she was an A+ student. She recounted multiple times in her life when she worked with children, such as teaching swimming classes and babysitting. However, Julie highlighted that the strongest support for her career choice came from her family. Encouraged by her parents’ and sisters’ efforts as educators, Julie identified that she always wanted to become a teacher. Regarding teaching, she stated:
I saw how rewarding it was to my dad. Even though my dad complained sometimes about administration and about things he didn’t get done or how hard it was, he never complained about the students. It was usually something outside of education. And, I saw... how much passion he had about it and that was a role model for me. (Interview, December 2006).

With her father as a model, Julie explained how she considered teaching as a profession. For her, the act of teaching was more than about imparting a curriculum to students. “Teaching them [students] to be better people,” “how to care about others,” and “how to make better choices” underpinned Julie’s philosophy of teaching (Interview, December 2006).

Julie completed a bachelor’s degree in human development and family science at the same university from which she received her master’s degree in education. She began to study English as a major teaching area, but she was influenced by her field experiences in third and fourth-grade classrooms. These experiences gave her a sense that she would like to teach students, “but not kids older than fourth grade.” She talked about her experiences in a first-grade classroom, noting:

These kids are very, very needy. They need me everywhere ... I could never just be doing one thing at one time. I feel like I’m needed everywhere and that kind of bothers me about first grade. I think that sometimes I like to talk more about the curriculum. I like to talk more about the books and talk more about things ... For example, today I’m doing, “M –A – T” all day. I’m teaching them how to read instead of talking about what we’re reading. And sometimes the curriculum ... I’d like to be at a little higher level. So I think I’d enjoy maybe teaching at a higher level. (Interview, December, 2006)

Julie held high expectations for her primary-grade students. Sometimes she considered herself to be too demanding, and possibly lacking in compassion. She wanted her students to be consistently on-task. Julie stated, “I worry about how I am doing, about things to come” (Interview, December, 2006). Throughout her teacher education program
experiences, Julie recognized the importance of group work, and she had practiced this classroom management strategy in her early field placements, as well as student teaching. On another issue, she did not feel comfortable being observed and evaluated. Although she had set a goal to become relaxed with visitors and accustomed to evaluators, she noted that she was still not at ease with others in her classroom.

Julie expressed her positive feelings about her learning experiences in both the early field placements and student teaching practicum. She attributed her classroom successes and progress to her “cooperative teacher” who gave her effective feedback, as well as accepted suggestions from her. Julie also enjoyed participating in the cohort of pre-service teachers who espoused similar goals and “wanted to take something out of [teacher training]” (Interview, December, 2006).

First Year of Teaching

Julie was employed to teach first-grade students. With her mentor teacher who had taught for 13 years, an agenda was set in place for this new teacher and her experienced colleague to meet every Tuesday predominantly to address issues arising from Praxis III preparation. On a regular basis, Julie co-planned common instructional tasks with her grade-level teachers. She solicited and selected ideas and suggestions from another experienced teacher who had taught for thirty-six years. In addition, Julie formed a working relationship with another first-year special education teacher, and the two met weekly to sequence developmentally appropriate instructional tasks for Julie’s struggling students. Every month, Julie and the other first-year teacher participated in a regular
meeting with the principal to discuss their concerns and problems, and to review a book that highlighted first-year teachers’ experiences.

*Description of the School and Classroom Context*

West School, a first-grade through third-grade primary school, was located in a predominantly low income working-class area in a small Midwestern city. The average daily student enrollment rate was 270, with approximately 53% of students on free/reduced lunch. According to the principal, the school was eligible for Title 1 services, but there were two other schools that were prioritized to receive this support. West School’s population was comprised of 87% White students, 6% African-American, 7% multiracial, and 14% students with special needs. Figure 4.3 depicts the racial demographics of Julie’s school.

![Racial demographics of West Primary School - Julie’s school](image)

*Figure 4.3: Ethnic demographics of West Primary School - Julie’s school*
West School employs 12 general classroom teachers, 1.5 special education teachers, 3 special teachers (art, music, PE), a support staff of 9.5 people, including county special education aides, one part-time speech teacher, one-part time guidance counselor, and one part time nurse. Approximately 84.8% of the teachers have at least a bachelor’s degree and 54.5% have master’s degrees in education. More than half of the teachers have less than 5 years of experience, with only two teachers having more than 20 years of classroom teaching experience.

The principal had 13 years of experience in education, and a further 8 years of experience in administrative roles. Previously, she taught kindergarten through fourth grade, and currently held a teaching license for grades K-8. The academic year in which this study took place was for this principal her second year of administrative responsibility at this particular school.

*The Physical Space of the Classroom*

The school has four first-grade classrooms located on the first floor. Julie’s classroom was next to her mentor teacher’s classroom and was opposite the kitchen. Her classroom was a long rectangular room with big windows along one wall. The class had a small area for circle time, a computer center, a writing area, and a reading table. For management purposes, Julie changed her children’s sitting positions a couple of times in the course of the study.
**Students**

Julie taught 22 children (10 boys and 12 girls). The population included one Hispanic child and 21 White children. Table 4.3 displays the information related to her students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focal Participant #3</th>
<th>Julie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>First Grade Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>10 Male, 12 Female, Total 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>2 IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Programs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Student demographic information of Julie’s classroom.

**Focal Participant # 4: Jennifer**

**Background**

Jennifer was from a small town. After she completed secondary school, she relocated to a central city to continue her education. To supplement her income, she worked as a leasing agent at an apartment complex, while simultaneously completing a bachelor’s degree in human development and family science. Jennifer was engaged and, like Julie, planned to marry in the summer following the data collection for this study. Jennifer liked to read, enjoyed the outdoors, and was fond of dancing.
Jennifer recounted her childhood: “I decided very young that I wanted to be a teacher, which is not uncommon for a lot of young children to say that they want to be a teacher, but it just stuck with me because of the first-grade teacher that I had” (Interview, December, 2006). Besides her first-grade teacher, Jennifer had very supportive teachers and principals throughout her academic life. For her, the main reason she chose to become a teacher was “the children.” She stated:

Just working with them and watching them learn and watching them grow and watching the change and knowing that what I’m doing here makes a difference. And I see that difference from start to finish, whether that start to finish is in a day, in a week, in a month, or even the whole year. (Interview, December, 2006)

Jennifer also stated that her experiences in her master’s program solidified her decision. Although she described limited exposure to schools and children in her undergraduate program, Jennifer highlighted that working with diverse children in her master’s field experiences was one of the most fruitful aspects of her program. In her preschool placement, Jennifer formed positive relationships with her mentor teacher. For Jennifer, making the connection between theory and practice in her mentor’s classroom was “a refreshing experience.” On the other hand, Jennifer had negative experiences in her elementary placement:

In my first few weeks, I experienced turmoil internally because I felt as though my identity was being challenged. I did not see any of my beliefs about teaching, learning, and children reflected around me and this became another learning opportunity as I gained strength in my beliefs. (Document, Teacher Portfolio)

First Year of Teaching

Jennifer was appointed to teach in one of five first-grade classrooms. Initially, she stated that she did not have any leisure time after she began to teach. “There’s really no
outside of school hours for me” (Interview, December, 2006). Jennifer described endless hours in school spent planning lessons, as well as studying the curriculum at home to learn about specific instructional strategies, such as guided reading. Although Jennifer was not from the particular town in which she was employed, she had prepared her master capstone diversity assignment about the district in which she was hired to teach.

Jennifer participated in team planning with her first-grade colleagues. Her mentor teacher had taught for 13 years and had previously mentored new teachers. She stated that she taught first grade for all those years and she was in her seventh year in the school district. Jennifer’s mentor had a bachelor’s degree in education and a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction. Jennifer felt comfortable with her colleagues’ insights into teaching and learning, and participated in regular collegial discussions.

Description of the School and Classroom Context

Jennifer’s first teaching assignment was at South Elementary School, located on the outskirts of a large Midwestern city that was predominantly composed of white and middle class families. The average daily enrollment of the school was 470. The percentage of students on free/reduced lunch was 19%. The percentage of students with disabilities was 15.7%. In summary, 95% of the students were White, and 5% Asian and Pacific Islander (State School Report, 2006); 96.2% of the teachers had bachelor’s degrees and 56.8% of the teachers had master’s degrees.

Jennifer’s principal had fifteen years of experience in K-12 administration. She held a K-8 teaching license, a K-8 principal’s license, and an assistant superintendent’s
license. Figure 4.4 charts the racial make-up of South Elementary School. In early interviews, Jennifer highlighted the homogeneity of the school’s population.

![Figure 4.4: Ethnic demographics of South Elementary - Jennifer’s school](image)

The Physical Space of the Classroom

The classroom was colorful, well-lit, housed child-sized furniture, and displayed developmentally appropriate and appealing materials. Together, students and the teacher had created a mission statement, class goals, and rules that were posted on the classroom’s walls. Tangible mediators were placed in different parts of the classroom. For example, to remind children which activity would come next, a poster with a visual representation of the activities, such as library time, was placed on the board.
Students

Jennifer’s class was comprised of 23 children (13 boys and 10 girls). The population included 1 Hispanic child and 21 White children. Table 4.4 display the demographic information about Jennifer’s students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focal Participant #4</th>
<th>Jennifer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>First Grade Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>13 Male, 10 Female, Total 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>3 LD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Programs</td>
<td>2 MFE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Demographic information of Jennifer’s classroom

In the following section, I present the information about the teacher preparation program that each participant under study experienced. This description is followed by an outline of the Praxis III: Classroom Performance Assessment (Educational Testing Service, 2001).

Description of the Teacher Education Program of Teachers

Each participant in the study graduated from the same Master of Education program that culminated in state licensure in pre-K to Grade 3. The teacher education program admitted candidates who had completed an undergraduate degree in a related area. A majority of them studied child development and human development.
Once admitted to the teacher preparation program, each candidate was required to complete the program in five consecutive quarters beginning with a summer quarter. During those five quarters, each candidate satisfied the outcomes of the courses to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to theory and best practices of early childhood education (See Appendix F for course list).

Four themes are given importance throughout the program: (1) exploring the inner life of the teachers: (2) making decisions through case studies: (3) experiencing and understanding diverse contexts: and (4) planning curriculum, content knowledge, and pedagogies. In addition to studying child development, learning, teaching methods, technology, and diversity, each teacher candidate participated in field experiences in two different educational settings: a preschool and primary grade (K-3rd) (Document, Handbook of the Program). Moreover, during the last quarter of the program, each candidate participated in the Capstone Seminar in order to complete their M.Ed program. The program requirements for licensing teacher candidates are based on the professional standards; National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Description of Entry-Year Programs

In this study, each participant was accepted into an entry-year teacher program that provided support and assistance to beginning teachers. As a requirement of this program, each beginning teacher needed to pass Praxis III: Classroom Performance Assessment (Educational Testing Service, 2001) to continue their initial license. Praxis III was used for assessing the skills of beginning teachers and consisted of direct
observation of teachers in their classrooms and interviews about the teacher’s classroom performance over a teaching session. The beginner teachers were assessed by a Praxis III assessor who was trained in the process by the State Department of Education and the assessment involves four different domains teachers’ performance: (1) organizing content knowledge for student learning; (2) creating an environment for student learning; (3) teaching for student learning; and (4) teacher professionalism and nineteen criteria (Educational Testing Service, 2001).

In the participating schools, the principals and mentor teachers conducted formal observations for the Praxis III (Educational Testing Service, 2001) requirement. The assessment was conducted in the spring of their 1st year. In this study, the participants were observed and assessed by an assessor at the end of February and March. Each participant passed the assessment.

Each mentor teacher in this study held current state certification and licensure. In addition, each mentor had been trained in the use of Pathwise, an informal assessment tool based on the same domains and criteria as the Praxis III (Educational Testing Service, 2001). This performance-based assessment provided each mentor with observation and coaching strategies that supported the new teacher’s professional development.

Summary

The participants of this study held teaching assignments in early childhood classrooms (two kindergarten, two first grade), in four different school districts. Table 4.5 summarizes the teachers’ background information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Ashley</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>Jennifer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Late 20s</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>White-American</td>
<td>White-American</td>
<td>White-American</td>
<td>White-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>Kindergarten (Full time)</td>
<td>Kindergarten (Part Time)</td>
<td>First Grade (Full time)</td>
<td>First Grade (Full time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.A. Degree</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>Human Development</td>
<td>Human Development</td>
<td>Human Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Experience</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Preschool Laboratory School</td>
<td>First grade</td>
<td>Suburban-preschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Teaching</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Second grade</td>
<td>Urban-kindergarten</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Summary description of the participants

The four participants of this school taught different school districts. Ashley and Mary taught kindergarten in suburban schools. While Julie’s taught first grade classroom in an urban school, whereas Jennifer’s teaching was in a rural school. Table 4.7 provides a comparison of the four schools in terms of student’s demographics. The following Table 4.6 summarizes the participant’s first-year assignment and the information related to their mentor teachers and principals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Ashley</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Julie</th>
<th>Jennifer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
<td>Kindergarten (Full time)</td>
<td>Kindergarten (Part Time)</td>
<td>First Grade (Full time)</td>
<td>First Grade (Full time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>North School (Suburban)</td>
<td>East School (Suburban)</td>
<td>West School (Urban)</td>
<td>South School (Rural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Students</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Female-17 years of experience in K-12 elementary administration</td>
<td>Female-16 years of experience in K-12 administration</td>
<td>Female-8 years of experience in administration</td>
<td>Female-15 years of experience in K-12 administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor Teacher</td>
<td>Female-27 years of experience in kindergarten</td>
<td>Female-13 years of experience in teaching</td>
<td>Female-14 years of experience in teaching</td>
<td>Female-13 years of experience in first grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6: Summary of demographics related to first-year teaching
In Chapter 4, individual participant portraits offer the reader insights into each beginning teacher’s personal background and beginning professional scene, set the stage for each participant’s first-year experience, and illustrate each school and classroom context to help situate the teacher within the teaching environment.

As is understood from this chapter’s descriptions, each new teacher had a differing background, personality, and teaching context. Chapter 5 focuses on the four first-year teachers’ experiences and teachers’ sense of efficacy both inside and outside of the classroom context.
CHAPTER 5

NEW TEACHERS’ SENSE OF EFFICACY

In this chapter, are presented the five themes that emerged from the study’s data analysis disclosing the dynamic nature of new teachers’ sense of efficacy. These themes include: (1) efficacy as a context-based belief inside the classroom; (2) efficacy as a context-based belief outside the classroom; (3) efficacy as a dynamic belief over time; (4) community members as building blocks of efficacy; and, (5) positive induction experiences for building efficacy. The findings reveal how particular local and larger contexts in which new teachers got submerged during their first year of teaching influenced their sense of efficacy. Specifically, the data analyses highlight the context-dependent and dynamic nature of a new teacher’s sense of efficacy that tends to ebb and flow across time. The early childhood teachers in this study taught at different elementary schools that were in different school districts. Although these new teachers felt confident about their ability in particular dimensions of teaching and learning, they were challenged by other dimensions. Table 5.1 shows the main themes and categories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Themes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Categories</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Efficacy Inside the Classroom</td>
<td>• Variations in efficacy related in teaching different content areas&lt;br&gt;• Perceptions about teaching diverse children&lt;br&gt;• Instructional management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Efficacy Outside the Classroom</td>
<td>• School culture&lt;br&gt;• Induction as community practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Efficacy as a Dynamic Belief</td>
<td>• Unsuccessful experiences&lt;br&gt;• Gaining experience and familiarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Building Blocks of Efficacy</td>
<td>• Mentoring experiences&lt;br&gt;• Collegial support -- informal mentors&lt;br&gt;• Principal support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Positive Induction Experiences</td>
<td>• Verbal feedback&lt;br&gt;• Observation by self and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for Building Efficacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Main themes and categories.

Theme 1: Efficacy Inside the Classroom

Teachers’ sense of efficacy is supported and challenged by contexts comprised of personal, social, and socio-cultural elements at both local (e.g., the children and the daily life in the classroom) and distant (e.g., school curriculum). The context is not static but, rather, an ongoing process. Some scholars, who have advocated a situated perspective, suggest that context is multi-layered (Graue & Walsh, 1995; Rogoff, 2003). Findings from this study indicate that a new teacher’s sense of efficacy is shaped: local context,
inside the classroom; and the larger context, outside the classroom. Analyses of this study’s primary and secondary data sources (participant interviews and field observations) revealed that the teachers’ sense of efficacy inside the classroom was related to, and influenced by, three essentials within the domain of teaching: (1) the curricular content and its management; (2) the students with whom they worked with on a daily basis; and (3) instructional management. Figure 5.1 illustrates the categories related to the theme of efficacy inside the classroom.

Figure 5.1: Categories of efficacy inside the classroom
The following section details these three aspects (i.e., content, children, and instructional management) of teaching and how each relates to a sense of efficacy.

Variations in Efficacy Related to Teaching Different Content Areas

Early childhood teachers are responsible for teaching various content areas and for working with children with diverse backgrounds and abilities. The complex nature of the classroom social group and the comprehensive nature of the curriculum complicate the new teachers’ stories. Although the participants in this study felt efficacious teaching certain content areas, such as literacy, they reported less confidence when they taught other subject matter knowledge, for example, science. Literacy and math instruction were observed to be a high priority in the participants’ classrooms. Guided reading, writer’s workshop, counting, and integrated literacy and math tasks such as Calendar Time and Weather Watcher were common activities in all four early childhood classrooms.

Each participant emphasized that she felt confident teaching literacy. In Jennifer’s classroom, an interactive writers’ workshop was implemented daily. Jennifer reported that she felt successful in attracting children’s attention and helping them to actively participate in literacy related activities. In addition, Ashley and Julie reported literacy to be the content area that they felt most comfortable teaching, and advocated their strength for teaching this subject matter knowledge. Although Mary struggled to effectively manage time for every activity, she stated that she still felt confident in teaching reading and writing. Mary noted:

I feel confident in teaching reading strategies and teaching letters and phonics. But, there’s a caveat, too in that we’re only here for two and a half hours. The time that I get to spend on teaching letters or teaching reading is so short that I
feel confident in teaching but I don’t feel confident that I’m teaching everything. (Interview, December 2006)

Each participant offered differing reasons for why she felt confident about teaching literacy. Julie explained that she felt confident because of the importance she attributed to English language acquisition. She stated:

I want them to be successful...I want them to understand our language, so that they can be successful. And overall it should carry over into their whole life. But, it’s kind of motivating for me that I really want them to understand how the English language works, because it’s hard. (Interview, December 2006)

Julie articulated that teaching literacy allowed her to use different ways to help students learn to read and write. Raised by a family that advocated the use of grammatically correct American-English, Julie accepted that learning to apply spoken and written language appropriately was important for effective communication. She shared:

My dad teaches English and I’ve always had that background, so I know he’s always made it very important...because he teaches seniors. I know I teach first [grade]. By the time they get up there [to be a senior], I want them to know the different parts of reading, the different elements of reading. I want them to carry it through. So I really stress that importance. I really want them to notice how important it is. I think that makes it easier. You always teach better what you feel is the most important. And that’s what I feel is the most important. (Interview, February 2006)

Ashley believed that teaching her kindergarten children the reading and writing skills that would enable them to be successful in first grade was crucial. Consequently, Ashley’s daily teaching curriculum in her classroom was scheduled by reading and writing instructional tasks and interlaced by literacy activities. Ashley explained: “It’s so important to get to first grade to be a reader and a writer. So I focus on that.” Each participant stressed the importance of teaching each child to be literate. Literacy was the
‘backbone’ of each classroom’s daily activities. Although each participant struggled with many challenges, for example, finding time to cover activities, and teaching diverse groups of students in terms of students’ level of reading, they were consistent in their advocacy for the importance of learning to read and write. By allocating more time for literacy and integrating it into other activities, these new teachers strove to ensure that children acquired the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for reading and writing. These teachers believed that the teaching of literacy skills was their primary responsibility.

Similar to their beliefs about teaching literacy, the participants in this study also considered mathematics to be a crucial component of the curriculum in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. Math instruction was primarily integrated into kindergarten classrooms through such activities as calendar time, weather watchers, and using math manipulatives during play time. In the first-grade classrooms, teachers allocated their instruction time to basic math concepts, such as counting and addition. As with teaching literacy, the participants were confident in their ability to teach math concepts. Sometimes, they had to remind themselves to incorporate math into their daily instructional schedule.

Ashley’s background in finance triggered her excitement about the teaching of math concepts. She stated, “I enjoy teaching math the most because I am able to come up with more hands-on activities which are so important for them to do to help learn when they are so little” (Interview, December 2006). Ashley structured instructional tasks that afforded her students opportunities to use math manipulatives. She interpreted the
motivation that her students demonstrated to mean that the activity was meaningful for the children. Throughout her first year of teaching, Ashley remained persistent in her beliefs about teaching mathematics, but the time she allocated for math instruction decreased: “I feel confident teaching math. I just have to force myself to do it” (Interview, February 2006).

Julie reported that she was not comfortable teaching math at the beginning of the school year. In part, she attributed her level of discomfort with teaching mathematics to her own experiences of learning mathematics as an elementary student. She had learned mathematical skills procedurally, and was now expected to teach her mathematical understanding and skills conceptually. In the following example, Julie recounted her experiences of learning mathematics:

When I learned math, you taught it one way and this is the way you do it. You don’t have an option. Now it’s like there are five different ways they can learn to subtract or five different ways to learn to add. And, you can count on a number line or you can count on your fingers or you can draw a picture. And it’s all the different ways and it’s a lot for them to learn and it’s a lot for me to teach. (Interview, November 2006)

Julie also experienced difficulty because she lacked pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman (1986) described “pedagogical content knowledge” as a link between content and pedagogy, “the particular form of content knowledge that embodies the aspects of content most germane to its teachability” (as cited in Sosniak, 1999, p.194). Initially, Julie felt nervous about teaching mathematics to her students. However, as the year progressed, her confidence in teaching math increased because she used manipulatives to increase her own and her students’ conceptual understanding of mathematics. She stated that she also received support from other teachers.
Similarly, Jennifer espoused that her confidence grew as she became more knowledgeable about her school-based mathematics curriculum and her students’ needs. She stated:

Math is a little bit different because the *Math Program*, they have it all laid out for you. I’m feeling more confident in my ability to decipher, because there’s just so much packed into those lessons that they have, I feel more confident knowing, “OK. We can probably leave this part out. I might say this differently.” It’s not scripted, but they give you lots of ideas on how to describe things. I feel confident knowing my kids, knowing how they’ll understand this concept, what I can do that’s not in the book that would help them learn this. (Interview, January 2007)

Throughout the study, classroom observations were conducted on different days and at different times, in order to see diverse activities and interactions. Isolated science activities were not observed, except on one occasion in Jennifer’s classroom. Although each participant stated that they could not schedule specific teaching times for science, my classroom observations showed that teachers informally integrated explorations of scientific concepts through their varied approaches to literacy. For example, Jennifer facilitated her students’ learning of scientific information through the use of fictional or non-fictional concept books.

Unlike their experiences of learning to teach literacy and math, the participants reported that they did not have the same experience with learning about how to teach science. For instance, Ashley stated that she struggled to find time to schedule science, social studies, and health because these content areas were not her teaching priority. Ashley noted, “Science is what I feel least competent in. I really have to push myself to incorporate science into our days, because if it were up to me, I probably would never have science” (Interview, November 2006).
Like Ashley, Julie stated that science was her least developed area of teaching. A combination of her lack of background of content in science and her weak pedagogical content knowledge caused her to report less confidence about teaching science to young children. Julie stated that she did not know how to teach scientific concepts to young children, and struggled to develop instructional tasks that were developmentally appropriate for her students. She articulated, “I can explain things because I can explain it to you how that works, but to try to get it down to their level is hard for me to try to use words … put things in words that they’re going to understand” (Interview, December 2006).

Even though the participants expressed confidence about teaching subject matter knowledge (e.g. literacy and math), these new teachers’ sense of efficacy was *bounded* by the grade level and specific curriculum that each taught. From the new teachers’ perspective, efficacy beliefs were situated in specific contexts and depended on the degree of difficulty of the mathematical concepts. Ashley did not feel confident in her ability to teach mathematical concepts to students in upper elementary grades. She stated:

If it was higher level, maybe I wouldn’t be so confident. But it’s kindergarten and it’s all fun things … things that we have to teach in math in kindergarten are all very natural like time, month, seasons, skip counting.” (Interview, February 2006)

Ashley’s confidence in her ability to teach mathematics was restricted to concepts of the kindergarten curriculum. Similarly, Julie noted that she would not feel at all confident teaching upper elementary grades. She noted:

If I go to another grade, I think I’d be a little nervous again about it because I don’t know what they learn in that grade yet. I’d have to get familiar with the curriculum. But for right now if I taught first grade again, I think I would be
confident because I know what first graders need to know by the end of it. (Interview, February 2007)

Although Jennifer’s confidence in math teaching increased as the study progressed, her sense of efficacy was bounded by the curriculum. Jennifer hypothesized that she may feel as confident teaching mathematics in another context if she consistently used the same curriculum to plan her lessons, Math Program. If she had to use another curriculum, she was not sure that she would feel the same sense of confidence in her ability to teach well. Jennifer stated:

If I was in a different mathematics program I would be interested to know how I would feel in that situation...like I said, I would be interested to know if I didn’t have the Math Program [or] if I was in a different setting how I would feel. Because I’m not so sure that I would feel comfortable with math if I didn’t have that backing me up. (Interview, February 2006)

From the data analysis, four (4) sub-categories emerged that captured how the participants perceived their first-year experiences as they related to efficacy and variations in content. These were: (1) knowledge transfer from teacher training; (2) support provided by various curricular school programs; (3) collegial support; and (4) children’s progress as indicator of success. Figure 5.2 is a typology of sub-categories that unfolded about the variations in efficacy among the new teachers, related to teaching different content areas.
(1) *Transferring Knowledge from Teacher Training*

Early childhood teacher education programs are designed to teach prospective teachers the necessary knowledge, skills, and disposition for teaching preK-3 grade students. Although each new teacher in the study experienced different struggles with learning pedagogical content knowledge, all participants reported a sense of efficacy in teaching children how to read and write. An important source that supported the development of their individual efficacy beliefs was the experiential knowledge each had gained from her preparation program. Specifically, the participants connected their efficacious beliefs with the diverse natures of both the early field practicum and the student teaching component that were afforded each new teacher during her teacher training.
Each participant stated emphatically that her teacher education program provided an essential foundation for preparing her to teach literacy. In reference to her pre-service field experiences, Ashley described the substantive support afforded her for learning how to teach reading: “I feel we were given a lot of strategies, a lot of experiences. We had to actually go out into our placements and try different strategies from reading. That’s probably why I had the confidence” (Interview, December 2006). Mary agreed that she “got a fairly decent overview in the M. Ed. Program” (Interview, February 2007).

My field observations showed that many of the instructional strategies the new teachers applied in their daily classroom practice mirrored the philosophies of their teacher education programs. For example, in writing workshops, the teachers collected and integrated the students’ ideas and practiced interactive writing with the children. Jennifer referred to knowledge she had acquired from her teacher education program:

I use that to make them think on a higher level, to give me more because I know they’re capable of it. So they’re really handy. But I remember in the program talking a lot about, in all aspects of the curriculum, using the children’s ideas and their thoughts, and starting from a point of interest. That’s what I try to do in my writing workshop. (Interview, January 2007)

Through classroom observations, I also noticed that Jennifer’s instructional style for writer’s workshop activities reflected her belief in a process of socially shared and constructed knowledge. Jennifer’s school and the university from which she earned her graduate degree continued to collaborate on literacy initiatives. In response, Jennifer was aware of her peers’ expectations because of her literacy training and background.

Each participant implemented a guided reading program that she had learned in her teacher education coursework. Throughout the participant interviews, the new
teachers reported that they referred to books that were used in their teacher education programs. The knowledge and skills they acquired from their teacher education coursework and field placements encouraged the teachers to be more confident when helping their students acquire literacy. The participants’ comments on the important role of their preparation indicated that their teacher training served to build these new teachers’ confidence in some content areas.

(2) Various Curricula Programs Offer Differing Levels of Support

Data analyses of classroom observations revealed that a prescribed curriculum or school-wide program for a specific content, or a program with which the new teacher had become familiar during teacher training, enabled teachers to feel more confident teaching some subject matter. For example, Ashley had concerns about writing at the beginning of the school year because she felt that she had “a little bit of a shortfall” in writing.

I’m lucky that I’m in North School and we have a good writing curriculum. We have the [the name] Writing Curriculum and it’s awesome and the kids are really responding to it. And they’re in kindergarten and they’re already writing stories. Some of them are hearing these sounds or writing these words and sentences and it’s awesome. But, if we didn’t have that, I was lost at the beginning of the year. (Interview, December 2006)

The curriculum framework for writing enabled Ashley to improve her skills to teach writing. Ashley acknowledged her growth in confidence in a content area in which she had initially lacked assurance.

In Jennifer’s school, the literacy curriculum paralleled what she had learned in her teacher education program. Jennifer stated, “There’s a big connection between our writing and spelling programs and what we learned there [in teacher preparation]” (Interview, January 2007). Curriculum ladders were the curriculum goals that showed
how and what to teach students in specific grades. Jennifer received information about the ladders and attended a conference to learn more about the writing and reading programs, specifically how to use the ladders to connect each lesson to a standard of learning. In her explanation about how using ladders in her instruction promote her students’ academic progress, as well as her ability to differentiate instruction, Jennifer stated:

Because it gives you reading and writing when you’re asking them to tell you about the story. And in first grade we mainly focus on identifying the characters. Can they tell me who the characters were? I have some [students] that are reading at a much higher level that are thinking at a much higher level. I’ll ask them to identify the characters and then describe. And that’s a second grade standard [of learning]. (Interview, January 2007)

According to Ashley, the mathematical concepts in the kindergarten curriculum were not difficult to teach because she was comfortable with her understanding of mathematics. The math curriculum consisted of basic patterns, counting, alternate counting, and measuring. She felt very confident about teaching mathematics through the use of hands-on manipulatives. Ashley reflected, “I think that when I can see that they’re working, they enjoy it more. It’s not just me standing up there talking to them. I think that that helps build my confidence” (Interview, December 2006). Likewise, Mary described she felt at ease with devising activities that enhanced her kindergarten students’ daily experiences of learning mathematics. She advocated that activities utilizing manipulatives supported the students’ conceptual understanding of mathematics.

However, Ashley and Julie noted that they felt less confident in teaching scientific content. According to the participants, teaching science was not a priority in kindergarten and first-grade-classrooms; neither was there pressure to teach science in the primary (K-
2) grades. Although Julie reported that she enjoyed her science methods coursework in her training program, she stated that she did not have the opportunity to teach science in her current position. And, since science is not the priority in first- and second-grade classrooms in her school district, she felt ‘excused’ from teaching science as a stand-alone content area. Julie explained:

I am not as confident teaching it. It’s probably because I was never good at it … we don’t hit science real hard in first grade. I wish we would ... I think the more lessons I teach in science then I’ll be more comfortable. But I haven’t taught a lot of science yet. (Interview, December 2006)

Similarly, Mary expressed concern over integrating social studies and science activities because of “finding time” to teach the way she had learned in her teacher training program. She stated:

Science and social studies go by the wayside a little bit when you’re in a two and a half hour program. I feel like we’re meeting those expectations but we’re not; we’re definitely not going as far as I’d like to. I focused in my M. Ed. Program. I did a lot of science inquiry projects. There’s just no time to do that. So I don’t feel like I’m getting to do everything I want to. (Interview, December 2006)

Ashley did not feel it was a priority to allocate class time for the instruction of science and social studies, because she did not have enough curriculum resources, or enough time to create materials, and felt enormous pressure to teach reading and writing. The following evidence illustrates Ashley’s experiences that led her to avoid planning instructional tasks for science:

I don’t have any real resources for science and social studies or health at my school. So anything that we would teach, I would just have to make up. And we have resources for reading, writing, and math. So I think that’s the other reason. I don’t want to say that I’m lazy. I think I’m just overwhelmed with everything else. (Interview, January, 2007)
In general, the early childhood teachers in this study were very hesitant to assign time and effort to teaching science. They considered their most important teaching duties to be directly connected with the teaching of reading and writing skills. And, since their daily professional schedules were already filled with unpredictable events, such as fire drills, staff meetings, parents’ visits, teaching responsibilities, and the Praxis III assessment, these new teachers tended not to allocate the time and resources necessary for teaching science.

One participant, Jennifer, reported that she did feel comfortable with scheduling science activities for young children in her classroom. Three factors motivated her to include teaching scientific concepts when she felt she could afford the time. First, she was personally passionate about science. Second, she believed that the first year of teaching was a time to broaden her content knowledge in teaching content areas. And third, she strongly advocated a view of teaching that was embedded in a socially constructed process between teacher and students, as well as among the students. The following excerpt illustrates the importance of Jennifer’s perspective on her teaching of scientific concepts through both individual and group exploration.

Because science when we teach it is much more hands on. It is not so much that I am telling them about all these things the kids are discovering it for themselves and I feel like learning is actually in their hands. They do not have to rely on me for all of this information because they are doing these things. Like we grew plants and we learned about the parts of the plant and we talked about it but when they actually got to watch their plants everyday and, make observations, and they were saying ‘Oh the stems are growing. Stems are red and their leaves are growing. All these different terms we talked about when they are actually using it they are control of their learning. (Formal Member Check, June, 2007).
3) Supportive Collegial Collaboration and Coaching

The new teachers in this study received instructional support from many experienced professionals in their individual classroom contexts. Each participant stressed that this coaching supported her beliefs in her own abilities to teach skills in reading, writing, and mathematics successfully. Most importantly, each new teacher consistently identified this professional support as an indispensable source of nourishment that was central for her growing confidence. Other colleagues also helped the participants feel more confident about their strategies and the way each implemented the programs in her classroom. Jennifer felt that she needed to know more about guided reading groups. Other teachers offered her feedback and advice about how to organize her guided reading notes and the information that she sent home with the children. Jennifer reported becoming more confident in teaching language arts with the help of other teachers:

When I started the school year, guided reading was this huge task that I didn’t even know where to begin. Now that I’ve had some coaching sessions with our literacy coordinator, and I’ve had people observing my lessons, and I have the reading recovery teacher, and I have my teammates: I really feel comfortable with what I am doing there. (Interview, March 2007)

In Jennifer’s school, a literacy coach supported each classroom teacher’s efforts to improve their knowledge about teaching literacy skills. Jennifer’s principal explained the role of the coach in helping new teachers: “I think that is a huge support. She’s in there helping those new teachers with assessment and making sure their instruction is targeted with that assessment information” (Interview, December, 2006). In addition, Jennifer received support from other teachers as they collectively learned the best practices for
teaching a mathematics curriculum. From her prior teacher training coursework, Jennifer understood some of the Math Program. However, she had not had an opportunity to enact this program in her field placements, nor her student teaching experience. Personally, she felt that math was not her strongest point; therefore, she was not confident about teaching it. As the school year progressed, Jennifer stated she was becoming more comfortable with teaching the mathematics curriculum. She received feedback and ongoing guidance from her mentor teacher whom she portrayed as a teacher with very effective skills for teaching math concepts. Jennifer learned how to ‘short-cut’ the mathematics curriculum in such a way that she was efficient and effective in teaching math. Jennifer stated:

It wasn’t until my mentor teacher observed my math period that I...felt comfortable. She said, “You can cut, you know, kind of pick and choose what you do for that day.” And I was thinking, “It’s in here so it must be really important so we need to get to it.” I’m still learning the program and the ins and outs and kind of what do I need to do and what can we maybe leave until later. (Interview, January 2007)

Like Jennifer, Mary expressed that her confidence for teaching literacy strategies grew from observing and being observed by her colleagues. She felt her confidence was reinforced because she surveyed “a lot of teachers implement things that I’m doing. And I’m modeling that in my classroom. I think that is why I feel confident with literacy” (Interview, December 2006). Besides, Mary felt at ease with her organizational skills for both individual and group math activities. She benefited from the help she received from her teammates, including her mentor teacher and a kindergarten teacher: “Most of my confidence in math right now comes from my other two teammates. I’ve never done kindergarten math, before and this is a new adventure for me” (Interview, February 2007). Julie also reported that other teachers helped her understand how to schedule and
implement activities from the mathematics program. With reference to her colleagues, Julie stated, “They’ve kind of filled me in, let me know how they do things” (Interview, December 2006).

However, the new teachers felt deprived of an opportunity to learn how to negotiate teaching the science curriculum from their experienced colleagues. The participants stated that these experienced teachers, like their new counterparts, did not pay too much attention to teaching science concepts in the early childhood classrooms. For instance, Julie stated,

The science, it’s just not stressed as much. They don’t talk about it as much. We don’t plan things together as much. So that’s probably why I don’t know how other teachers are doing it...A lot of them aren’t getting science in there very much...Knowing that it’s not one of the priorities right now in first grade, that’s probably why I don’t feel as confident. Because I’m like, “Am I doing this right? Am I supposed to be doing this? How am I supposed to be teaching this?” That’s probably why it’s not a priority. (Interview, February 2007)

Ashley’s experiences with teaching science lessons focused on scientific concepts were similar to Julie’s. Although Ashley received the most support in planning with the other kindergarten teacher, she noted that they were not focusing on planning science activities with her. Ashley expressed, “Dreaming up an entire science lesson all on my own, like a unit, would just be a lot more time, and I’m already working so much. It is my own time too, not time in the day, my own time” (Interview, December 2006). In short, reduced accountability and limited access to her experienced peers’ modeling of effective science lesson planning and teaching led to a lack of emphasis in science.
When the participants recognized that their teaching was supporting their students’ academic progress, the four new teachers who participated in this research attributed their better teaching practices to an enhanced confidence. Indicators such as verbal and non-verbal feedback from the children were used by the teachers to evaluate their teaching practices and capabilities. For example, Jennifer used informal assessment to monitor her progress with implementing the math program. As her students answered her questions correctly, or constructed problems together, she used that feedback to informally assess their individual knowledge gains. She explained that her confidence grew because her students appeared to be making significant leaps in their understanding and application of the content knowledge. Similarly, as Ashley accepted that she was making a positive difference in the children’s learning she recounted:

They really are learning a lot, I know they are. The letter sounds, in the beginning, some of them, they all knew their letters, but they didn’t make the connection. They don’t all know their letters still, a lot of them knew their letters, but now they’re making the connection between the letter and the sounds they make and how they can use them for the right thing... everyday they’ll be, “Mrs. [name], there’s a pattern, it’s a ‘A/B’ pattern.” And I’ll know that I taught them that, or their parents will say, “She’s looking for patterns all around our house,” or “They’re counting objects up to a hundred,” or “They taught me how to count by tens.” So, I know that they’re learning. (Interview, December 2006)

At a later time in the school year, Ashley commented:

Reading is what I feel most confident in right now. And that’s probably because I have seen growth. I mean I have actually seen evidence of growth in all of the students in reading...I’ve started reader’s workshop with them where I specifically, directly tell them different strategies to use when reading and let them go back to their seats and try the strategy out on their own. They love it...normally when I tell them it’s time to do something, they’re like, “Aw man.” [But] when I tell them it’s reader’s workshop time, they’re like, “Yes. We love
reader’s workshop.” So I think because I love teaching it, it shows [and] snowballs into them loving to learn it. (Interview, December 2006)

As this excerpt clearly shows, Ashley believed that her students’ progress and motivation made her feel more confident about her ability to teach reading. Julie offered a similar explanation. Although she believed that it was difficult for a first-grader to learn reading and writing, she reported that each child showed a gain from his or her starting point at the beginning of the school year:

I could see progress in reading...I could see some of the students who had no clue what a word said at all, I mean couldn’t read one word, could read a sentence. You know, things like that...[In] September, you don’t see much yet. You’re just starting to learn how to be in school, and, you know they can read a word here, a word there, but [by] October I started to see progress, especially with certain students. (Interview, December 2006)

Throughout the study, my observations showed that progress in reading and writing was evident, and that teachers could track this progress from the beginning of school to the present. As stated earlier, the data analysis indicated that observing children’s progress was a way for the new teacher to evaluate her success. In turn, the new teacher’s recognition of her professional growth helped to reshape and redefine her sense of efficacy.

Perceptions about Teaching Diverse Children

A second category that emerged from the data analysis of participant interviews and observations (see Figure 5.1) showed that the new teachers’ sense of efficacy changed by their interactions with diverse students in their classrooms, including students with special needs, students who struggled academically, and students who attained greater academic success. Despite advocating a sense of efficacy in some content areas,
Ashley, Julie, and Mary reported that they constantly struggled with working with diverse children.

*Transforming and Adapting the Curriculum*

Three participants confessed that despite their best efforts to hold themselves accountable for every student’s progress, they planned learning activities that were primarily devised to meet the learning needs of those students whose academic progress was described as moderate. Developmentally, each participant recognized that she was supposed to teach every individual child in her class, but she acknowledged her limited skill set for differentiating instruction. Early in the year, Ashley predicted that some students under her guidance could learn if she solely facilitated that learning. Other students, she hypothesized, required much greater individual one-on-one time. Ashley acknowledged that she felt most at ease with planning instructional tasks that would meet the needs of the majority of her students (Informal Interview, November 13, 2006). She stated that finding the time to assess children and work toward individual progress challenged her. Ashley described her situation as follows:

> I feel torn because some of those more difficult children I want to be able to spend one-on-one time, but then I’m ignoring the rest of the group. I struggle with: is it better for the whole group to move ahead or this one child to move ahead? And how do I split that time and make it fair for everybody? (Interview, December, 2006).

Like Ashley, Mary recognized that she should be meeting every child’s learning needs. She was frustrated that she did not feel confident in her ability to plan and deliver instruction to every child. Mary accurately diagnosed each child’s reading level, and described some students who could read at the third grade-level, and other students who
only recognized about half the letters of the alphabet. During group activities, Mary explained that she did not know how to “really differentiate it to make it fit for all kids … so that I don’t feel as secure with being able to teach reading and writing skills to all levels of instruction” (Interview, December 2006). Although she continued to expand her strategies to deliver instruction that could meet all her learners, Mary noted, “It ends up towards the average group” (Interview, December 2006). In Mary’s class there were some English as second language (ESL) learners. Mary stated that they usually talked to each other because they did not understand the content and formal and informal rules, and it was difficult for Mary to handle the situation. In her interview, Mary’s mentor teacher also stated that Mary was struggling to figure out how to best meet the learning needs of the non-native speakers in her class.

Julie’s students were also an academically diverse group. During some periods of group reading instruction, the children were divided into groups based on their need for specific instructional support. Julie appeared comfortable with planning instruction for students who were making consistent academic progress. But, like Mary, she struggled to create individualized instructional support that could be delivered one-on-one to students who required further practice to acquire skills and understanding. She tried to move from her comfort zone of teaching students who were making average academic gains. Julie noted:

I have a lot of middle ones and trying to plan a day and activities where my high ones feel challenged and my low ones don’t feel lost. You know, it seems like we always teach to the middle, always teach to the average student. And that’s why the gifted ones, the higher ones, don’t get…what they need. (Interview, December 2006)
Julie felt that she afforded a “disservice” to students who were making progress because she did not deliver instructional tasks that extended their thinking (Interview, February 2007).

Despite the opportunity to work with students from diverse backgrounds during teacher training, evidence from this study has identified a new teacher’s level of discomfort and uncertainty with diverse learners. An analysis of stories, portfolios, and coursework assignments that were completed during teacher training documented that these three prospective teachers had a range of experiences with diverse children in their field experiences and student teaching. However, these same new teachers’ first-year teaching experience, with its complex demands and responsibilities, made it difficult for them to plan and deliver instruction that was developmentally appropriate for each student. Table 5.2 indicates the challenges the teachers faced and supports of working with young children.
Table 5.2: Challenges and supports of working with young children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Self-expressed Efficacy</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Supports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Mary         | Low                     | ESL students  
Differences between lower and higher students in reading and writing |          |
| Julie        | Low                     | Lack of knowledge  
Lack of experience |          |
| Jennifer     | High                    | Building classroom community  
Mentor support |          |

Although the majority of the participants reported feeling less confident about teaching students with different backgrounds, Jennifer expressed confidence in her ability to work with struggling students on an individual level. She reported that she re-taught letters and rhyming because some children were not ready to read books. Jennifer successfully worked with each child. She stated that “other kids I see, with their reading and their writing, we’ve made so much progress just because in those reading groups and writing conferences, we can tailor my instruction to their needs” (Interview, March 2007).

Jennifer’s principal verified that one of her strengths was her ability to differentiate her reading instruction and to know her students. Referring to Jennifer, the principal said, “She truly meets kids where they are. She lets go of that ‘They should be
here. They should be performing there” (Interview, March 2007). In addition, Jennifer’s mentor teacher described Jennifer’s accelerated progress to support the needs of her more academically advanced students. The mentor teacher noted that Jennifer “is working with them and trying to get some new things for them. She’s getting some more advanced things for them” (Interview, March 2007).

Jennifer’s beliefs about her capabilities to construct instructional tasks that could meet the different learners were evidenced in her efforts to seek support from her mentor teacher, and exemplified in her interactions with children. Jennifer emphasized:

> It’s just doing different things for different students. I feel confident in knowing what I need to do for those different students. If I don’t know what to do, I go to see my mentor teacher. She’s excellent about giving me suggestions, or any of the other teachers. (Interview, March 2007)

According to Jennifer, her time spent building a sense of classroom community at the beginning of the year “paid off,” and, as a whole, the students took ownership of their learning. The following excerpt presents Jennifer’s ideas regarding building community in her classroom:

> I’ve learned that I can do and say and teach something one hundred different ways. But until they know what’s expected of them and until they know what I want to see from them and until they’re really interested in learning, it might not happen. So we’ve learned a lot about working together, and we’re in it as a team. (Interview, January 2007)

**Perceptions about Teaching Students with Special Needs**

In each classroom context, students were from diverse socioeconomic levels and cultural backgrounds. In the kindergarten classrooms in particular, some children had not been initially academically assessed, and the teachers struggled to determine what actions
to take for these children. Table 5.3 indicates the distribution of special needs children in the teachers’ classrooms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Students with Special Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>1 Speech IEP (Individual Education Program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 OT (Occupational Therapy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 Reading Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>2 IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 ADHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>2 IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>3 LD (Learning Disability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 MFE (MultiFactored Evaluation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3: Summary of classroom distribution of students with special needs.

Ashley also did not feel confident about teaching students with special needs. My classroom observation showed that Ashley spent most of her time warning the students about their behavior, answering these students’ questions, and making sure these students did not disturb other students.

[In regards to] students [who] struggle with correct behavior I am nervous that they’re not getting… I know that they’re not getting as much from the instruction as the others because they’re busy disrupting their learning and the learning of others. But I still try to make sure that they complete their work or understand what it is they were talking about and that’s part of the reason too that if the problem persists after the learning, they miss some of the free time at the end of the day. They stay in their seats now and catch up. I had too many kids not doing
their work during learning time. Now I have told them, “If you’re playing during learning time, then you’re going to learn during playing time.” I guess behavior problem students I have the most anxiousness about, but I hope that I’m teaching all of them. I don’t know. (Interview, December 2006)

For about a month, Ashley had a child with severe behavior problems in her classroom. Recalling her experiences during that time, she reported that her first two weeks were “horrible.” Despite her efforts to employ discipline strategies, including sending the child to the principal’s office, Ashley recounted, “I went home crying every night. I didn’t know what to do because I felt so badly for this little boy” (Interview, December 2006). Julie also shared that working with special needs children made her feel very “frustrated.” She explained:

It’s hard for me to understand. I don’t know how to explain things differently…I feel good when, this sounds awful, but when [teacher’s name] she was in there today. She works with them. When she comes in, you know, and works with them because she understands where they’re coming from. I’ll explain something and explain it another way and explain it another way and they’re still just not getting it…it’s really hard. I get frustrated. (Interview, December 2006)

Mary indicated that she felt hopeless as she tried to figure out how to teach students with special needs. Regarding her two students with disabilities, Mary stated that her greatest challenge was “finding provocations or props or something that can help them function successfully in the classroom, as well as ways that I can change my practice in the classroom to help them be more successful” (Interview, December 2006).

Another challenge for teachers was to complete the necessary paperwork and meetings (i.e., IEP and IAT) related to children with special needs. Referring to her students with behavior problems, Ashley said: “I don’t know when I should try to handle
Mary stated that even though she completed classes that focused on special needs in her teacher education program, she was unprepared for the reality of the classroom. She reported that her courses addressed differentiated instruction; however, she said, “that was the biggest gap that I realized is that I don’t have that knowledge of those small things I can do with them in the classroom to help them be successful.” Mary shared that she did not know what to do, because her core knowledge was not extensive. She added, “But it’s not in my knowledge base until I find out from somebody else.” She pondered, “What do I do with this child?” And I know that’s something you learn over time (Interview, December 2006). After January, Mary had a full time special education aide for the child with special needs. With this aide’s help, she felt some relief from the tension, but she did not feel confident when working with particular children.

Mary advocated for services that she believed would help to meet some children’s needs: I do find it challenging just getting kids to services that they need. And I think that’s true of most schools. You can’t get, especially with kindergarten, you can’t get services right away for you kids because they haven’t been in school long enough and administrators don’t always think that it’s appropriate to give them services right away when they could be given to first, second, third, fourth, fifth graders…so that’s been a little challenging. You know I think some of my kids need speech, but I can’t get them speech yet. (Interview, December 2006)
Jennifer expressed feeling confident about working with children with special needs, and declared that she could tailor her instruction to special needs. Referring to the children with learning disabilities, Jennifer stated:

Every time before we start writing, I meet with those three boys to get them focused. Their writing, I dot it out for them. They dictate the ideas to me and I dot out the letters. They’re practicing their letters, but it’s not so much of an obstacle to get their thoughts into words onto paper. Whereas, other kids in my room, I wouldn’t dream of doing that for because they can do it. So, again, it’s just doing different things for different students. I feel confident in knowing what I need to do for those different students. (Interview, December 2006)

Jennifer participated in three intervention meetings, and two of her students were referred for special education. Her mentor teacher considered Jennifer to be very competent with regards to implementing the IAT process and submitting the required paperwork.

*Instructional Management*

The third category that unfolded from the data analysis (see Figure 5.1) showed that new teachers’ sense of efficacy was shaped by their understanding of instructional management. Participants who shared classroom control with the children felt confident about the use of different teaching and learning strategies. Mary and Jennifer stated that they used a variety of learning strategies that ranged from teacher-directed to child-centered. Both participants implemented circle time as a whole group instruction strategy for teaching a new concept interactively. Using circle time to create an effective learning environment supported Jennifer’s efforts to share control of the classroom with the children:

In our school, every single class sits down for a morning meeting. I know some of the teachers kind of struggled with it. What do we do for all this time with our kids? That’s something that I felt comfortable with from the get-go because, you
know, it’s all about community building and there are things you can work on in that time. (Interview, January 2006)

In addition to circle time, Jennifer stated that she felt confident about organizing centers, leading the circle time, and orchestrating students to learn in small groups. She reminded her students regularly about her behavior expectations, and she and the students rehearsed through role play how to monitor their own behavior. Mary stated that she learned about collaborative and inquiry-based learning in her teacher training program. On the other hand, Mary was not sure she felt confident using these teaching strategies in her half-day kindergarten program.

The participants’ self reported beliefs about teaching and learning reflected the importance that each attributed to learning through hands-on activities. Ashley advocated giving children opportunities to actively construct their knowledge through interaction. She stated, “I know that the best way to learn is by talking to others, explaining what you know and working through things as a group” (Interview, December 2006).

Ashley professed that collaborative and hands on activities are best ways for her students’ learning. She stated that she applied Vygotsky’s theoretical framework of social learning (1978) that she learned in her teacher education curriculum. Ashley explained, “I purposefully grouped them together by mixed ability levels. So they can help each other and pull each other along” (Interview, December 2006). Although she espoused a constructivist perspective, Ashley stated that she enacted the strategy of direct instruction. She felt:

most confident that I’m getting the point across with direct instruction which is not the way that they learn the best so that’s a conflict. But I know when I’m, when they’re, when I’m trying to guide them into learning something, like by
exploring and collaborating with their peers, I don’t know if they’re getting… I can’t be ensured that they’re getting exactly what I want them to get out of it. So I feel more comfortable with direct instruction and I’m trying to more towards hands-on collaboration, you know, the way that I know children do learn best, more away from what I’m more comfortable with and they don’t learn best. (Interview, February, 2007)

As the excerpt shows, Ashley’s espoused beliefs about learning were inconsistent with her enacted classroom practices. In action, she did not feel more confident using interactive activities that supported her students’ learning, and did not give power to children to learn from each other. During direct instruction, she stated, “I’m in control. I know what I need to tell them and I am able to tell them” (Interview, February 2007).

From the following excerpt, Ashley revealed her frustration with her attempts to manage instructional learning centers that she believed required her to entirely turn over to her students the responsibility for their learning.

I could just pull my hair out sometimes because I spend all this time setting up centers and it’s so hard for me to make sure they’re doing what they’re supposed to be doing in centers without monitoring and walking around and watching what they’re doing. But the whole point of centers is that they’re able to do it on their own. And I spend so much time modeling and explaining and showing them what it is that I want them to be doing and they go and goof around or they have about a hundred questions… I spend the whole time walking around and policing the centers. (Interview, December, 2006)

From Ashley’s perspective, student learning centers were not operating as she desired in her classroom. Consequently, Ashley implemented a new technique that restricted the children’s behavior.

I’m assigning them a center and make them stay there for fifteen minutes while I do a guided reading group. And then they’re allowed to move when I tell them they can move. Because at first I wanted them to just be able to freely choose their centers and pick what they wanted to do. I don’t know how I feel about centers. I know they’re important and they’re awesome but when they’re in charge of their own learning and they’re five years old. I am having a hard time
making them, getting them to take accountability for their own learning and take pride in their own learning when I’m not watching them. They need to be able to do that. That’s part of being a human. You need to be able to take, you need to be able to take pride in your work and do what you can do best just because that’s what you want to do. But they’re five and it’s really hard. (Interview, February, 2007)

Julie also articulated the importance of hands-on activities. However, as she recounted her experiences in her student teaching, she added, “I hate to say this, but in student teaching I could do a lot more hands-on activities, things where we could feed kids and stuff.” During her first-year teaching experience, Julie stated that she could not hand over to the children the responsibility to self-monitor. She did not feel comfortable with the idea of distributing learning power to the children:

We were always told that they should be tired, we shouldn’t be. They should be the one working, not you all the time. I feel like I don’t give them enough independence sometimes. I try to do too much for them. I need to give them more jobs in the classroom, give them more ownership. I shouldn’t be worrying about them. I want them to feel like that they have a responsibility in the classroom. I’m not always so good at that because they are so needy. How do I do this [teacher’s name]? I should just say, Figure it out. Figure it out. Figure it out. But I have a hard time doing that. I feel bad for them. (Interview, February, 2007)

Moreover, Julie believed that preparing her students to be successful on the state-mandated tests eroded her teaching creativity and “forced” her to be more teacher directed. She stated:

I’m always, “they have to get this, they have to get this,” they’re not I don’t feel like I’m as exciting as a teacher…I could really be a better teacher if I wouldn’t have all that pressure on me…I feel very pressured as like there’s a lot they have to learn this year, and I feel like I’m not the best that I can be because I’m pressured… It’s just a lost of pressure. I think if they lifted that off of us, we would all be a little bit better teachers, I really do. Especially me, I think I’d use a lot more of my creativity. I think I could be a lot more creative in my teaching. (Interview, December 2006)
Theme 2: Efficacy Outside the Classroom

In this section, I present an analysis of data that detailed the new teachers’ sense of efficacy outside the classroom. The data analysis showed how the participants’ sense of efficacy is also influenced by the larger context of the individual school in which the new teacher was learning about teaching and how to teach, and how to be a teacher (Gimbert, 2001). Although the participants considered themselves to be relatively confident about teaching instructional practices, they reported that their sense of efficacy in outside the classroom was weak. School culture and induction as community practice emerged as categories from the data analysis, as shown in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3: Efficacy outside the classroom
School Culture

In this study, a school’s culture determined the rules, negotiations, participatory structures, and interactions between novice teachers and experienced teachers. A school’s organizational structure gave new teachers some flexibility to advocate their ideas, thereby helping new teachers make a contribution to the ongoing dialogue about how instruction and lesson planning should be performed in their classrooms. Even though the participants were trained and had an understanding of the programs that were implemented within the school context, they did not contribute to the ongoing discussions outside the classrooms. Consequently, they reported less of a sense of efficacy. This situation appeared to stem from the new teachers’ assumed perceptions about school cultures, and the socialization process that shaped new teachers’ first-year teaching experiences.

The teachers offered diverse explanations for their roles in the context of their schools. Mary explained, “I do not have experience to talk… “I’m usually a participant. Every now and then I give my two cents. Not often” (Mary, Interview, December 2006). Although Mary saw herself as an active contributor at grade-level meetings and considered her relationships with the other two kindergarten teachers to be a partnership, her voice was silenced in school-wide decisions. Mary had encountered some difficulties with the views held by experienced teachers regarding new teachers. Referring to groups and cliques in the school, she stated it was “disheartening, a little bit, to see professionals separate.” Mary articulated, “I’m the new one. And I feel like every now and then that I get stuck with jobs that I shouldn’t be stuck with…that people are
passing it off to me because I’m the new one. They think I don’t know any better. But that’s frustrating” (Interview, February 2007). Similar to Mary, Julie said that “I do not think that they will want to hear me” (Interview, December 2006). Julie further explained:

I always think there’s something’s going to be around. But, I don’t know, sometimes I just feel like sometimes, I don’t know, a couple of them have that attitude like, “If you don’t do it my way, it’s not right.” And so, that’s why I’m afraid at those big meetings to say what I think because I’m afraid that I might step on some people’s toes and they won’t like me anymore. So, I don’t want to do that. (Interview, December 2006)

In contrast to Mary’s and Julie’s experiences, Ashley’s contributions and participation outside of the classroom increased throughout the study. At the beginning of the study, Ashley felt that she was not an active participant in teacher meetings and school committees. However, as the study progressed, her mentor teacher described the active role that Ashley initiated with the other two kindergarten teachers as leaders of a school-wide professional development activity.

The participants were socialized into the pre-established or at least partly established norms of their school communities. The time span and the new teacher’s socialization into the school culture contributed the ease of each individual’s transition and their sense of belonging. Julie was teaching in a city with which she was not familiar. Most of the teachers working in her school were from the same city. Julie shared, “I’m out of the loop, and I’ll never get in the loop because I don’t know them from high school, or I don’t know them from ever. Some are better than others, some do their best to try and include me in things” (Interview, December 2006). In Julie’s school, the
attrition rate of teachers was high. Consequently, the teachers were accustomed to new staff in their school context.

Jennifer was also teaching in a new city. She felt that she was emotionally challenged when she came to school and joined an established community with which she was not familiar. She interpreted herself as a new teacher in her school context. She felt she had to overcome “some of the ideas that people have about you as a young teacher with a master’s degree” (Interview, January 2007). At the same time, her contribution to and participation in school-wide activities gradually increased.

*Induction as a Community Practice*

A large and proactive professional learning community enhanced the induction support that new teachers experienced. Consequently, the new teachers felt more confident in their ability to contribute to organizational decisions, as well as to voice their ideas.

At the beginning of the school year, Jennifer felt “overwhelmed” because she was coming into an established community, school, and team and “being that person all over again that didn’t know anybody.” Jennifer’s confidence in the classroom context extended outside the classroom through the help and support of her mentor, her principal, and other teachers. Jennifer became an active contributor and participant in the school-wide activities. For instance, she went to a professional development conference, where she and her colleagues learned about curriculum ladders. Then they presented curriculum ladders to the rest of the school staff. The principal’s words describe Jennifer’s position within the community: “She is a first-year teacher, teaching teachers. But she’s capable
of it and I don’t want to stifle that.” Referring to her relationships within the school context, Jennifer stated:

I think that it’s really important that you feel comfortable where you are and that you’re happy where you are, because, if you’re not happy where you are and you’re not comfortable with the things that are going on around you, it’s going to be very difficult for you to feel confident with what you’re doing. (Interview, February 2007)

Jennifer described the social environment in her school as ‘warm,’ measured by “getting a lot of hugs” from the staff. The school staff helps newcomers become socialized into the culture and provides a variety of (instructional, emotional, and material) support. For example, along with her mentor and her principal, her literacy coordinator helped her by listening to her and providing instructional and material support. Jennifer’s principal described the support that first-year teachers get in the community:

We read the book *Whatever it Takes*. It is all about working in professional learning communities. I think that supports the new teachers. Being able to participate as opposed to being directed. Here’s what we are doing. They become a part of that team offering their new ideas, their new knowledge and synergizing it and taking it to a new level. It’s a more collaborative effort in a team approach, as opposed to isolated classrooms. I think, from my experience, I think that’s when new teachers become frustrated is when they are isolated and they don’t feel they have the support of the other teachers. (Interview, March 2007)

In addition, Ashley stated that she did not come to a school where there were preformed relationships.

I’m really in a good school. I don’t feel like I disagree with anybody. All the teachers really work with the best interest of the children…at heart. And it’s just very foreign to me because at my student teaching school, the teachers came in grumbling, and grumpy, and hating their jobs, and talking badly about kids, and frustrated all the time. These teachers, you can tell they really want to be there. They have bad days and they are sometimes frustrated, but someone’s there to be
like, “It’s OK. It’ll be better tomorrow. What can I do to help?” It’s just really a wonderful school. (Interview, December 2006)

In Ashley’s school, the creation of building communities was highly valued. There was a shared responsibility for socializing new teachers into the school context. Ashley regularly received emotional and material support from the other teachers. My interview with her principal revealed that supporting a new teacher was not the job of only the mentor and the principal. Her principal stated: “the staff does a good job at helping young teachers adjust and have what they need to do their job well” (Interview, March, 2007). The principal’s perception about school culture mirrored Ashley’s interpretations of her school’s climate: “It’s not a place where there’s a lot of cliques or the older people versus the younger ones” (Interview, December 2006).

The interviews and observations showed that the principal’s role in socializing teachers into the school context was crucial. In discussions with Ashley, her descriptions of her work environment were shaped by her perception that her school was “a great place for new teachers” because the school’s principal created a friendly and supportive environment for all staff. Ashley explained further:

I’ve been in other schools where the principal isn’t like that. The teachers just aren’t happy with the principal. The whole climate of the school’s not a good place to work. Like in my student teaching experience. But the teachers respect her so much because she does support them and it makes the whole climate of the school a very great place to work. Because they know if they have a problem, she’s going to support them. They know no matter what, she’s going to say, “They’re the teacher. They know what’s going on.” She’s a wonderful, wonderful principal. (Interview, December 2006)

According to Ashley’s principal, from the beginning of the school year new teachers became a part of the community and had an opportunity “to learn together, plan together”
(Interview, March 2007). Ashley’s principal valued and encouraged her new teachers to actively participate in school-wide decision making.

Theme 3: Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy as a Dynamic Belief over Time

After attaining saturation from the data analysis, a third, and general, finding was disclosed: a teachers’ sense of efficacy is a dynamic set of beliefs. Further, through triangulating the data analyses from both primary and secondary data sources, two categories emerged: Unsuccessful Experiences, and Gaining Experience and Familiarity. Figure 5.4 displays the categories of efficacy from the data analysis.

![Figure 5.4: Categories of efficacy as dynamic belief](image)

Figure 5.4: Categories of efficacy as dynamic belief

Unsuccessful Experiences

Throughout the study, there were changes in the early childhood teachers’ beliefs about their abilities to cope with management problems and to create an environment in which children take responsibility for their learning and behaviors. Ashley and Julie’s beliefs in their abilities regarding classroom management changed throughout the study.
Both participants reported that they had confidence in managing classroom behavior at the beginning of the study. Their confidence about how well they could handle management problems appeared to decrease when they sensed failure from ineffective classroom management strategies. In the following section, examples are presented that illustrate the dynamic aspect of teachers’ sense of efficacy regarding classroom management.

Ashley and Julie’s perceptions about negative experiences in classroom management seemed to erode their sense of efficacy. Despite statements from her principal that indicated Julie was an effective classroom manager, as well as data from classroom observations that confirmed the principal’s perspective that Julie did not have significant problems managing her students as a whole group, Julie felt insecure with her classroom management skills.

I struggle with it. I think it’s a regular thing for first year teachers, but I really struggle with classroom management. I mean being consistent... Where we’re in a routine and I say, “OK. You’ve got a warning. OK. You get ten minutes recess.” That’s when we were back in like November before Thanksgiving, I was good with it. Now on days like today...we were doing something completely different than we usually do. That’s where I struggle with classroom management on those kinds of days because I’m busy, they’re busy...they’re supposed to be busy. I can’t figure out a system that always works and I know that you have to be flexible and when you’re flexible they don’t see that there’s consequences. But, I think that classroom management I have struggled with all year and I’m hoping that I’m a little better with it next year because I think that’s a key thing in learning. (Julie, December 2006)

As this excerpt suggests, Julie tried to be consistent with her classroom management strategies. For instance, in January, she used ticketing, putting children in rows, and changing their places. Many times she felt that she was unsuccessful (Informal Interview,
January 2007). Such situations seem to have led her to reflect negatively on her abilities to manage the classroom.

Although at the beginning of the study Ashley stated that she felt confident in managing the classroom, two months later she realized that her strategies did not work the way she had expected. Thus, she reported that she felt less confident about her abilities in managing student behavior. She explained:

I feel like I have a lot to learn and I have two books I’m going to look at over break...I’m going to set up my classroom again in a brand new way and see if that’s more effective for transitions and work areas, and...I’m just going to reiterate the rules again, and try to just really get the classroom management things down because that’s where I’m feeling most frustrated at the end of the day...I think that once I have that down, everything else will go a lot smoother. (Interview, December 2006)

Ashley also had difficulties with children with behavior problems. During the month of January, she began to use a new reward system, such as using a jewel jar for rewards. She also used a warning system if children did not do what they were supposed to do. A strategy that Ashley used later in the school year resulted in children being denied access to centers, recess time, or free time at the end of the day. Ashley stated that when the new strategy worked, she felt more confident, “So I’m not confident at all with classroom management strategies until it works. When it works, it builds my confidence” (Interview, February 2007). For circle time, she put pieces of tape on the floor to solve the problems of children who did not sit appropriately on the carpet. She said that she felt confident because it worked well. However, during my classroom observations, it appeared to me that Ashley was having difficulty getting the children’s attention.
To guide the development of their classroom management skills, Ashley and Julie received suggestions from their experienced colleagues. Often, however, they did not incorporate these new strategies into their repertoires, or they dismissed the strategies too soon if they initially appeared not to work. This frequent change of strategies often appeared to confuse the students. For example, students were unsure about how to respond when a new transition was introduced every week to move them from one activity to the next. Both Ashley and Julie’s classroom management strategies were introduced, but not rehearsed and reinforced with the students, to allow these adaptations to become part of the accepted daily routine. During data analysis, Ashley and Julie’s struggle to shape a philosophy of classroom management is categorized as borrowed strategies. Each participant expected other teachers and staff to make suggestions in relation to their management strategies. However, borrowed strategies were ineffective as long as the new teachers did not spend time to reflect on how these strategies could be appropriated successfully to meet their students’ needs in a different classroom context. Consequently the new teachers felt unproductive, and the resulting unsuccessful experiences challenged the teachers’ sense of efficacy.

Reflective practice is considered an important aspect of a teacher’s professional development (Schon, 1987). My data analysis indicated that teachers who critiqued themselves unconstructively reported more self-doubt. For instance, when Ashley talked with her mentor teacher about the strategies for working with young children, she stated: “How did I not know to do that? Like, What’s wrong with me? How did I not know that I
have to show them every single little thing?” (Interview, December 2006). Julie also questioned herself by asking, “Am I cut out for this?”

When the participants were unsuccessful, they entirely discarded those strategies, and instigated new ones. Although applying a new strategy that had been modeled by experts is recommended and has potential, without self-reflection and multiple attempts, it seemed to bring about new challenges. For example, when a previous strategy appeared not to function, Julie placed the children into rows for whole-group instruction. When many of the children appeared unable to focus, rather than changing some of the children’s sitting positions, she rearranged the seating plan one more. Although Ashley and Julie tended to make instant changes in their strategies, Jennifer and Mary advocated that “reflection in and on practice” was part of their daily lives. Noting the importance of reflection, Jennifer said,

> Once I went to set up my classroom and started thinking about, you know, what am I going to teach and how am I going to teach it? What do I believe about classroom management and discipline? Some of those things I’m still thinking about and still sorting out. (Interview, March 2007)

The following quote illustrates how Mary emphasized the role of reflection in her professional development:

> I can definitely learn from the mistakes that I’ve made already and use that to implement in the future when I try that again. I’ve done a lot of reflecting on just small things to focus their attention. And that’s caused me to research some things and I’ve found some websites I like where I pull little rhymes or games that we can do to focus our attention. (Interview, February 2007)

From Mary’s perspective, the mentor and principal could help novice teachers by offering them opportunities to reflect on their practices:
Take a look at their practice and lead them to suggestions. Like what my mentor is doing. She’ll watch my practice and ask me how I thought it went. Then she’ll give me suggestions of what she saw and what went really good and suggestions like, “Oh next time you might want to try it this way or try it this way.” (Interview, February 2007)

Jennifer and Mary perceived the first-year teaching as a step of an ongoing process of professional development. The data analyses revealed that these new teachers had adopted a teacher identity during their initial teacher training program. These teachers already began to develop a sense of ownership regarding their philosophies, as they accommodated new strategies into their classrooms. When asked to comment about her teacher preparation, Jennifer stated, “I would say that when I finished the program, I felt very confident in my beliefs about education and I felt very secure in my knowledge of children. And secure in the ideas and the philosophies that we learned in the program” (Interview, December 2006).

Jennifer expressed a sense of ownership for her teaching philosophy and described her first year of teaching as a “continual learning process” (Interview, January, 2007). Jennifer felt her philosophy and beliefs about teaching were similar to her school’s mission. This sense of agreement provided her a working environment in which she felt positively encouraged to evaluate and modify her teaching practices with new strategies. Emphasizing the significance of ownership, Jennifer stated, “I am a first-year teacher, but it is OK if I stand my ground because it’s what I believe in” (Interview, January 2007). Jennifer reported that knowing her students well, understanding textbook information about children’s development, and recognizing what students need to learn were important for decision-making. In addition, Jennifer’s principal stated that she
demonstrated exceptional teaching skills when compared to other first-year teachers. Referring to Jennifer’s qualities, the principal stated, “She’s very committed and she believes in what she believes. It doesn’t matter who’s around her, she believes in it” (Interview, March 2007).

Jennifer sorted suggestions from colleagues, and subsequently employed strategies that she considered would benefit her students’ learning. With reference to her mentor teacher, Jennifer stated, “I don’t always take her advice. I don’t always take her suggestions. But, you know, if it’s something that I want to try, she always has ideas for me.” Jennifer referred to her previous experiences, revised some ideas about shared control, and enacted the most appropriate strategy. Likewise, Mary tactically assessed the use of strategies in relation to her students’ needs. She said, “If I don’t think it would work with those kids, I don’t try it. I try something else.” Like Jennifer, Mary also adapted, modified, or discarded strategies in response to the current classroom circumstances. Mary added, “It’s nice just to know that I have a stock set of lessons. And I can deviate from that in whichever way I see fit.” Jennifer and Mary felt ownership and the power to believe that they could make decisions on their own to find better strategies, in terms of their students’ needs.

**Gaining Experience and Familiarity**

Throughout the study, the participants gained a great deal of experience, knowledge, and skills that positively amplified their confidence in teaching young children and help them learn. For example, Jennifer stated that her confidence about teaching mathematics rose during the months from December to March. At the beginning
of the study, Jennifer felt less confident about teaching mathematical content, and reported that it was “never her strong point.” Jennifer stated, “The more I get used to the program itself and what’s in each lesson, the more confident I feel leaving parts out or adding to that, because I know my kids.” Through field observations, it became clear that Jennifer’s confidence increased as she became familiar with using Math Program. Subsequently, she was more attentive to structuring meaningful mathematical activities.

Julie stated that she did not feel confident about teaching science in early childhood classrooms. She gained experience with incorporating hands-on scientific resources and materials into her daily lesson plans, which increased her confidence. Referring to her current activities and experiments with science, Julie stated:

I’m getting more confident. I like science, but I’m getting the students excited about it is another thing. So I’m trying to build up different exciting lessons for them in science so that can start seeing the importance of it and start seeing what it’s all about. (Interview, February 2007)

Theme 4: Building Blocks of Efficacy

Data analysis showed that support afforded by community members, mentor teachers, other teachers, and principals enabled new teachers to attain an elevated sense of efficacy. The presence of a mentor, colleagues, and supportive leaders in a new teacher’s professional life within the school context contributed to first-year early childhood teachers’ confidence. As they deciphered and gained insights from mentors about how to successfully teach young children, the participants became more confident about their teaching strategies.

During an induction-year program, first-year early childhood teachers received two types of support: organized and voluntary. Organized support included professional
development activities, mentoring programs, and district-level meetings. For instance, even though some districts provided more support than others, all of the participants had an assigned mentor and were registered in an entry-year teacher program. Volunteer support came from other teachers, particularly from teachers who were also first-year teachers in the same school, or who were new teachers at that same school during the previous year.

According to Gold (1996), teacher support has two dimensions: emotional and instructional. My data analysis showed that teacher support was multifaceted and included both emotional and instructional support. The following paragraphs detail how mentoring experiences, collegial support, and principal support were interrelated with the teachers’ sense of efficacy. Figure 5.5 shows Theme four and its associated categories.

![Building Blocks of Efficacy Diagram](image)

Figure 5.5: Categories for the building blocks of efficacy.
Mentoring Experience

Mentoring was a key aspect of the new teachers’ experiences that surfaced in this study. When challenged by new demands, the participants reported that they sought advice from their mentor teachers. The common understanding about mentoring in participating schools was that mentor teachers were available, that they would provide resources, that they prepared teachers for their Praxis III assessments, and that they gave the new teachers instructional support. The aspects of mentor support can be listed as follows: (1) being accessible; (2) listening to novice teachers’ concerns and problems; (3) giving instructional advice and serving as models; and (4) providing teaching materials. To gain a better understanding of the mentoring experiences of the participants, the following section is devoted to describing the new teachers’ mentor-mentee relationships.

Constructing a Unique Experience

To be in compliance with state regulations, each new professional was required to complete the Praxis III assessment, and each new teacher was assigned an experienced professional who was expected to serve as a mentor. Even though each participant received support from her mentor teachers, the structure of mentoring was different for each participant. The relationships and subsequent interactions that evolved between a mentor and a mentee were mediated by several factors such as the different approaches to mentoring, preferred learning styles, and the professional and emotional needs of both professionals. In all cases, these interactions were highly valued by the first-year teachers. Table 5.4 presents a typology of mentor interactions and mentor support.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Nature of Mentoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ashley       | Giving instructional strategies  
Model to work with young children  
Help her to solve problems with interaction with parents  
Providing instructional and organizational materials | Expert-Novice Relationships |
| Mary         | Plan together  
Be there for her when she needs it  
Share ideas and stories about teaching and learning | Professional Partnership   |
| Julie        | Talk about the concerns  
Give instructional strategies  
Help with the curriculum procedures  
Be there  
Give reflective feedback | Collegial Alliance          |
| Jennifer     | Plan together  
Take suggestions from each other  
Work and present together  
Know each other’s strengths and share ideas | Reciprocal Interaction     |

Table 5.4: Mentor-mentee interaction and mentor support.

The relationships and interactions that occurred between a participant and her mentor were profiled as a means to illustrate the interactions that were adapted to the unique needs of the participants.

*Ashley and her mentor: Expert-Novice.* Ashley and her mentor were involved in a structured district mentorship program. The district program requirements included a reflective log where the participants recorded issues and ideas, tasks for mentor and mentee, and appropriate follow-up actions. Ashley stated that her mentor-mentee
experience provided her “awesome support.” According to Ashley, her mentor offered invaluable assistance from the beginning of the school year:

She’s able to come into my classroom and give me really constructive criticism and feedback. And without that, I’d still be doing the same mistakes that I was making the first day of school and I think I’d be really worn out and just frustrated and not loving my life right now. And I think that it’s just healthy to be talking about what you’re feeling or what your concerns are. And she’s been…I can’t imagine not having her as a mentor. (Interview, December 2006)

As Ashley’s words indicate, her mentor teacher gave her suggestions, observed her classroom regularly, served as a guide who showed how to work with young children, and provided Ashley with constructive and comforting feedback.

Ashley implemented the strategies her mentor suggested; she was willing to use her ideas in her classroom. Her mentor reported that Ashley listened carefully to her advice and took notes, and that she did not procrastinate. The interaction between Ashley and her mentor was constructed as an expert-novice relationship. The mentor had a range of experiences in kindergarten teaching and was a teacher who wanted to help new teachers in their overwhelming experiences. As a new teacher, Ashley was willing to use new strategies and to collaborate with her mentor teacher to make progress in her professional development.

Mary and her mentor: Professional partnership. Mary perceived her relationship with her mentor as unstructured mentor-mentee interaction. She explained that their relationship was “friendly” and “casual,” rather than formal. As to the nature of the support she received, Mary called it “a mixed bag.” Although Mary primarily asked for help, her mentor teacher also checked on her regularly and offered support.
Julie and her mentor: Collegial alliance. The amount of interaction between Julie and her mentor teacher was driven by Julie’s immediate needs. When she was concerned about an issue, Julie sought out her mentor for immediate advice, and stated that she benefited from the shared expertise. According to Julie, her mentor made life easier for her because she provided “another brain to think.” Julie explained:

Just general problems, like of students, different issues of students, just things that, like that I haven’t done before. How do I, the first time I did progress reports, how do I come up with a grade? Or how do I go about contacting a parent ... As the year goes on, there’s less and less that I have to ask her about ... I can figure it out myself. (Interview, December 2006)

Julie’s mentor articulated that the role of a mentor was to give suggestions and offer guidance to the new teacher to help her better understand how to implement the curriculum. Julie’s mentor emphasized her role in preparing her new charge to be successful with Praxis III. She stated, “I don’t think mentoring has all the answers but it can help her find them.” Her mentor teacher prefaced an important aspect of mentoring as “knowing when to be involved.”

Jennifer and her mentor: Reciprocal interaction. Jennifer described her interactions with her mentor teacher as “open communication.” Daily, she and her mentor met informally. However, as per the district’s requirement, they participated in a monthly meeting. Since Jennifer and her mentor planned lessons together, and they shared stories about their classrooms, Jennifer considered her relationship with her mentor “an equal partnership.” She stated, “I think that it’s very important that you make it very explicit that the door is always open … and share some of your stories with them” (Interview, January 2007).
Jennifer’s mentor teacher claimed that her relationship with her mentee involved much more than a one-way information transfer. She described the process of mentoring as “an ongoing two way conversation,” and used the team metaphor to illustrate their mentor-mentee relationship. Her mentor described Jennifer as an active contributor at their grade-level meetings, and as a willing distributor of ideas. Jennifer’s mentor considered herself to be Jennifer’s “private cheerleader.” She supported Jennifer when she noticed her confidence somewhat deteriorating, and she celebrated with Jennifer’s ‘milestones’ and successes. Jennifer’s mentor was willing to contribute to her professional growth and help her in different aspects of teaching.

Meeting Professional and Emotional Needs

Two important characteristics in the mentoring process supported the teachers’ sense of efficacy beliefs: listening to novice concerns, and providing opportunities for apprenticeship in terms of instructional and material support. All of the participants stated that they were relieved to be able to converse with a colleague who empathically and patiently listened to concerns. For Ashley and Mary, their mentors represented an active “listening ear.” Primary data analysis indicated that Ashley’s mentor supported her regarding her concerns about becoming a teacher. Ashley’s mentor described her support as: “Checking up on her, making the time to walk up the hall and see how she’s doing; if things worked out” (Interview, February 2007).

Mary’s mentor teacher was a professional with whom Mary could talk freely. She could “Go in there and say, ‘I had a crappy day. How do I fix this? How do I make this better?’ Or being able to tell her successes that I’ve had” (Interview, December 2006).
Jennifer’s mentor also made her feel at ease. She stated, “I’m not alone. That I’m not in this alone” (Interview, January 2007). When Jennifer needed “to bounce ideas off” and “to let someone know that,” her mentor stated that she was a “good listener” for her (Interview, March 2007). Her mentor described her role as follows:

I think just the constant knowing what’s going on in her classroom, being able to answer the right questions, and to let her know that I’m listening, but I think the biggest thing is just letting her know that if she has any thoughts and concerns or questions that she can come here and I’m going to listen to her. If I’m working on something, I’ll put it aside and listen to her. (Interview, March 2007)

Similarly, Julie needed access to a professional colleague who was prepared to be a proactive supporter. Julie commented, “It’s a good feeling knowing that you’re not out there with nobody to turn to” (Interview, December 2006). Analyses from data sources indicated that when Julie had a question, or when she was confused about using a strategy or about how to conduct an activity in her classroom, she visited her mentor teacher’s classroom to seek advice. Mentoring was a significant process in the eyes of the new teachers since it afforded them assurances that they were not alone when they were confronted with classroom and school challenges. Those mentor teachers who listened to the new teachers’ ideas and concerns assisted the novice teachers so that they could feel more secure about their ideas. The participants agreed that a mentor who was approachable and available helped to relieve their stress.

Another valuable support that mentors provided was suggestions and resources for instruction. Ashley’s mentor assisted her with procedures for working with children and provided materials to communicate with parents (e.g., parent information letter). Her
mentor made sure that Ashley was ready for her first classroom, and helped her make the classroom into “a welcoming place.”

I felt happy. I felt so grateful, and at the same time I was like, “Oh, my gosh. What if I didn’t have this help? What would I do? Because I’d never have thought of these thing. What if they don’t tell me something else, and I don’t know it?” Because I never would have thought to do ninety % of the things that [name] told me to do, or gave me, or information. But I was so grateful that she was offering that, taking the time to do all that with me, because she had to set up her own classroom, too, and she was taking so much of her time to help me make my classroom a welcoming place and make sure that I was oriented, and that my meet the teacher day was going to be successful, and that my first day with the students was going to be successful. (Interview, December 2006)

According to her mentor teacher, Mary needed more support in completing required paperwork, planning, understanding standards, and integrating learning standards into her lesson plans.

She needed help with lesson planning. Just how to do it. What do we do? How do you set up? How do you break up your day? How do you structure it? What to do to teach the Ohio Standards? What themes are we going to cover? How are we going to organize the year? How are we going to break down the months from there? (Interview, March 2007)

Because Mary and her mentor planned collaboratively and shared activities, Mary described that she often used her mentor’s strategies, and if they did not work, she “changed” or “tailored” them. If she did not understand how she should deliver a lesson, Mary observed her mentor who taught a half-day morning class. Likewise, Jennifer ascertained her mentor’s teaching strengths, and asked guidance about specific strategies.

She asked for her suggestions that would help her to strengthen her teaching skills in content areas in which she was not as confident:

She’s [mentor teacher] very strong in math which I don’t feel as comfortable. It helps to have that other person that I can go to and say, “Ah! I’m really struggling to teach this. What are you doing?” She’s very child-centered, very good in the
Jennifer’s mentor stated that she needed the most support with “what to do with this child sort of thing.” Julie reported that she regularly questioned her mentor teacher about procedures, planning, and policies. Interviews and field observations showed that Julie received instructional and emotional support from her mentor, such as giving her suggestions about organizing art activities in the classroom.

**Collegial support: Informal Mentors**

Collegial support was a second sub-theme that stemmed from field observations and interviews. The participants of the study reported that they received various types of support from their colleagues that helped them cope with struggles and feel more confident about teaching. Three common features of informal mentoring were: (1) giving verbal support to teachers; (2) planning together with them; and (3) sharing their positive and negative experiences in their current and past teaching.

Colleagues in participating schools supported novice teachers by providing them with verbal assurances. Ashley and other full-day kindergarten teachers worked closely on every aspect of teaching. Ashley reported:

Diane is awesome support. I just talk a lot of times when I’m frustrated, confused, or a lot of times when I feel like I’m the world’s worst teacher, that’s when I talk to Diane. [She says], “Don’t worry. You’re not.” And I’ll say, “What if they’re not learning? What if my kids and your kids all go to first grade and mine don’t know what your kids know.” And she says, “Don’t worry. They’re learning. You’re doing fine.” Just reassuring that…she doesn’t try to solve anything. She’s just a reassuring voice. (Interview, December 2006)
Similar to Ashley’s case, talking with other kindergarten teachers, as well as with the mentor teacher, was very supportive to Mary. She referred to another kindergarten teacher as a “co-teacher.” Their classrooms were next to each other. Jennifer reported that when she was challenged by an issue, she had “a lot of hugs” from her colleagues: “I would go and seek that support from people in the school. They would give me lots of hugs and say, “It’s not just you. It’s the whole group.” (Interview, January 2007).

Julie reported that when other teachers encouraged her, her confidence increased. Sometimes when I talk to other teachers and tell them what I did that day, I’ll be like, “Oh, we did this today.” They’ll be like, “That’s a good idea.” You know when they kind of give me an encouragement like, “Oh, I never thought about doing that.” That kind of stuff. But that’s not usually. (Interview, February 2007)

As the participants’ words showed, other teachers in the schools, especially the same grade-level teachers, performed the role of informal mentor, and enhanced these new teachers’ confidence by providing encouragement.

Planning appropriate activities for young children and aligning lesson plans with current state standards were crucial tasks with which co-workers assisted the new teachers. Ashley recognized her co-teacher’s help in the first week of school:

We plan together. And it was so helpful because that first week she [Diane] said, “Let’s sit down and plan for next week.” So we had the whole next week planned the first week. And…it was not as overwhelming, because the first week I was like, “Oh my gosh, I’m going to have to come up with all these ideas and all these activities and all these learning lessons and how am I ever going to think up something to take up the whole day? All day, every day.” When we sat down together, it became really easy to use her ideas from last year and my ideas from student teaching and come up with new ideas. I was very comforted by that. (Interview, December 2006)

Ashley’s words indicate the importance of co-planning as a means to enhance her comfort level with her teaching skills. Moreover, Ashley and her colleague worked with
an experienced kindergarten teacher from another school, and this conjoined effort allowed her to exchange ideas and gain further insights into teaching.

Jennifer planned the lessons with her grade-level teachers each week. She considered these meetings an opportunity for “a mutual seeking of information” and a “collaborative effort.” Like Jennifer, Mary planned with her grade-level teachers, even though she tried to solve some of the problems in her classroom by herself. Mary did not want to “reinvent the wheel,” and her team used plans from previous years. She stated that in “Grade-level meetings, my team is really good. They don’t treat me like a new teacher. They treat me like a colleague (Interview, February 2007). Collaborative planning was one of the important supports for Mary. She noted:

If I didn’t have someone to plan with, you know, if I didn’t have her to plan with I would definitely be just struggling to come up with exactly what to do every day…[and] plotting it out over the course of the year. That kind of scares me if I had to do that on my own. Just being able to save enough time to get to the standard and this standard. Just being able to plot it out so we can hit every subject and every standard. I would be very frazzled. I would be working a lot more than I actually do. (Interview, December 2006)

Julie worked with a first-year teacher who was in special education. She stated, “We’re kind of figuring things out together” (Interview, November 2006). Although Julie met with her grade-level teachers every week, she stated that they were not collaborating enough due to time restrictions. Julie also used ideas from an experienced first-grade teacher and shared knowledge with her.

Sharing experiences and encountering the same dilemmas and difficulties helped novice teachers feel better about their abilities. According to Ashley, talking with a
kindergarten teacher who was a first-year teacher the previous year supported her positive attitude toward her teaching. Ashley noted:

A lot of times I will go up and say, “I’m so frustrated with this.” And she’ll say, “I felt the same way last year. Don’t worry. That’s OK. That’s a normal feeling. You’ll be OK next year.” That’s comforting to know she felt the same way last year but she doesn’t feel that way anymore. So what I’m feeling is normal, but I won’t feel that forever. So it’s really I love talking with her. (Interview, December 2006)

When Jennifer was overwhelmed by issues in her classroom, she sought help from other teachers. Understanding their similar experiences and problems was very helpful for Jennifer to self-assess.

Just talking to my colleagues, my teammates and knowing that I’m not the only one that has hard days. I might have a really great day, but hearing someone else say, “My morning was just awful.” It’s not just me. I’m not alone. That’s helpful. (Interview, March 2007)

Jennifer acknowledged that sharing stories with others helped her realize, “It’s [happened] to them. It will happen to me many, many, many more times.” As much as you can get frustrated or overwhelmed or feel like you don’t know what you’re doing, they felt that way, too. So it’s not just me. I’ve had to tell myself that a couple of times (Interview, March 2007).

Julie stated that getting advice for her problems and hearing about what others had to deal with made her feel better. She noted that one of the best ways to help a novice teacher was to “Tell them some stories” as they struggled and “So that they’re aware of things to come that might happen and not be worried about them” (Interview, February 2007). Mary also stated that she was visiting other kindergarten teachers’ classrooms and that they shared about life in each other’s classrooms.
Principal Support

The principals were key in creating the professional culture in which the new teachers were supported and empowered. The principals of the schools supported new teachers in a variety of ways. For example, they coordinated school events to actively help new teachers. Their support was shaped by their perspectives about themselves and the needs of first-year teachers, as well as their interactions with new teachers. The common patterns for principal support were accessibility of principals and “backing up” the teachers.

Each participant stated that her principal was accessible when she needed to talk about a problem or ask a question. Both Ashley and Mary had professional relationships with their principals. Ashley stated that although she did not talk to her principal regularly because she had her questions answered by others, if she had major problems, she knew that she could go to the principal.

I know that if I ever need her, she’s there. And she is, like when I needed her to come in and have that conference with [name] mom, she was there. The very next day we had the conference. So she’s there if I need her and I know that. So day-to-day, everyday questions, I know there’s other resources to use. But any major concerns or problems or anything I need to talk to her about, she’s there and she’s always just supportive. She’s so supportive of the teachers. It’s just amazing. (Interview, December 2006)

Mary also felt that her principal was available whenever she needed her help. Field observation confirmed that Mary’s principal was checking her classroom almost every day. Mary also used e-mail communication to ask her principal questions, and she said that she received very quick replies.
Furthermore, Jennifer and Julie described their professional relationships with the principals as friendly. According to Jennifer, her principal trusted and respected what she was doing in her classroom, because Jennifer had training that paralleled the school’s guidance program. Jennifer thought that her principal trusted her abilities to implement the program. She reported an open relationship with her principal, and commented, “I feel like I can consult her with any concerns, or issues, or uncertainties that I have.” She further stated that “I feel like I can go to her and ask her anything, you know, from specific kids in my room to our retirement plan. I feel like I can go and ask her pretty much any question that I have. It’s very much an open relationship” (Interview, February 2007).

Julie also described a “friendly” relationship with her principal. Her principal wanted to help new teachers and be accessible. My observations showed that the principal visited Julie’s classroom regularly and talked with her after school. Julie stated:

> When I want to talk to her and stuff she’s always there listening and she’s not judgmental or anything, you know. She always wants to know my ideas or things that are frustrating me. So she does her best to try to solve those problems. (Interview, December 2006)

Another issue that emerged from the field observations and interviews was the principals’ role of advocacy for the teachers. Ashley said that it was comforting to know that her principal supported the teachers in her school. When Ashley was becoming overwhelmed by discussions with a parent who thought that she was not a good teacher for her son, she reported:

> The only saving grace is that I talked to my principal about it. I talked to our reading teacher about it. They both had experiences with him. They both keep reassuring me that they’ve had experiences with the mom in the past. They’ve had
experiences with [student name.] That what I’m doing is what I should be doing and keep at it…it’s always nice to have that support. (Interview, December 2006)

Jennifer also encountered challenging parents. When she had a problem with parents, she went to talk to her principal, and they decided together what the next step would be.

Jennifer stated:

I guess you just become more aware [of] what people are thinking of you and maybe you become more aware of the fact that you might have to explain yourself more often and defend what you’re doing sometimes. because I’ve had some parents. But my principal’s always stood behind me no matter what. (Interview, February 2007)

Table 5.5 summarizes the types of support the principals provided these new teachers and their roles in the context.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Principal Perceptions about their Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ashley       | Being there  
    Creating a context in which other teachers take responsibility for supporting new teachers  
    Setting up goals and action plans together | Effective Manager |
| Mary         | Being there  
    Giving advice to improve instruction and practice  
    Observing regularly and providing feedback based on observations | Effective Manager |
| Julie        | Being there  
    Providing reflective feedback  
    Meeting regularly with first-year teachers | Instructional Leader |
| Jennifer     | Reassurance  
    Providing opportunity to get involved with different training  
    Matching new teachers with the right people and resources  
    Modeling  
    Giving formal and informal feedback | Instructional Leader |

Table 5.5: Summary of principal support.

Theme 5: Induction Experiences for Building Efficacy

Data analysis indicated that what counts as a positive experience for building efficacy is constructed between individual and context. The participants interpreted their first-year support differently. Figure 5.6 indicates two categories.
Figure 5.6: Categories of positive induction-year experiences

*Verbal Feedback*

As part of an induction process, early childhood teachers received formal and informal feedback. The following table, Table 5.6, the types of feedback the teachers received from their mentors and principals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Type of Feedback Principal</th>
<th>Type of Feedback Mentor</th>
<th>Preferred Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Positive feedback</td>
<td>Constructive feedback</td>
<td>Constructive feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td>Both positive and constructive feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Reflective feedback, Positive feedback</td>
<td>Reflective feedback</td>
<td>Positive feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Constructive feedback, Positive feedback</td>
<td>Constructive feedback, positive feedback</td>
<td>Both positive and constructive feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6: Summary of the nature of feedback and individual preferences for feedback

The novice teachers under study received feedback at different levels. For example, Mary received a significant number of suggestions that helped her select and implement targeted strategies. Ashley reported that constructive feedback was invaluable. She shared, “Because I want to be the best teacher I can be. And if somebody is seeing me do something in my classroom that I could do better, tell me so I can fix it…. To me, that’s the most helpful thing” (Interview, December 2006). Ashley preferred to receive more than positive feedback from her principal:

My principal comes in for observations, but [name] is just all positive. Like all she talks about is positive, positive, positive and that’s not helpful to me. You know, like, “Thank you” But tell me what I could do better, not just positive. (Interview, December 2006)

Jennifer was also encouraged by positive feedback from her principal and literacy coordinator since these verbal remarks made her feel that she was on target. Jennifer
further stated that she would like to know about her teaching and hear comments such as
“Maybe you could try this,” or “Yeah, what you were doing is right on target. That was
great.” “Other than that” she commented, “I just always want to know how I’m doing,
what I can do better” (Interview, January 2007). Jennifer reflected on being told,

“You’re doing exactly what you should be doing with this specific group of kids.”
It really builds your confidence, because you know that you made that decision on
your own and to have somebody tell you that you’re exactly right, that’s helpful.
(Interview, March 2007)

According to Jennifer, any type of feedback was useful for her professional development
and contributed to her confidence:

I know that my confidence would rise every time that I would have somebody in
observing my reading groups or observing my lesson and we got to talk about it
afterwards. You know, they just say, “You’re doing a great job.” Even if they
offer some suggestions, I’m learning. I need those suggestions. So that part of the
relationship is important to me. (Interview, January 2007)

The feedback Julie received was focused on her daily classroom practice. Both
her principal and her mentor teacher took descriptive notes about Julie’s teaching, and
afterwards discussed their observations with Julie. Although her principal redirected
some instructional suggestions, Julie said that “you want to hear, ‘Good job’ … And I
know that it doesn’t help you become a better teacher. Every once in a while you just like
to feel like, “OK. You know she liked it” (Interview, December 2006). Julie also stated
that she would like to get more positive feedback about her teaching: “That kind of
makes you feel a little like ‘Well, yeah. There has to be something good in there.’ So that
kind of thing does make me kind of doubt [my]self a little bit.” Julie reported that she
usually had self-doubts and hearing positive comments from her colleagues helped her
feel good about herself.
**Observing by Self and Others**

During the induction-year program, teachers observed or were observed by others as part of support and assessment process. The following table, Table 5.7, summarizes the types of observations that the participants experienced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Observation of</th>
<th>Observation by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Mentor Teacher</td>
<td>Principal-formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kindergarten Teachers in Other Schools</td>
<td>Mentor-formal and informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinator of Mentoring Program</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Praxis III Assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Mentor Teacher</td>
<td>Principal-formal and informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor-formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Praxis III Assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>No Observation</td>
<td>Principal-formal and informal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor-Formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Praxis III Assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>No Observation</td>
<td>Principal-formal and informal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor-formal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Praxis III Assessor</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy Coordinator</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.7: Summary of teachers’ experiences with observation

Observing experienced teachers provided some learners with new ideas as well as sources of frustration. When talking about her observation of others and effects this had on her confidence, Ashley responded:

> It’s still very frustrating and sometimes I’ll feel like I want to cry. Like “Oh my gosh. Look at their classroom. Look at their ideas. Look at the way their kids are treating each other.” I know that things get easier, but it’s very frustrating to want
to be there now and to know that you just have to have time and experience to get there. And that’s very frustrating. (Interview, December 2006)

Although Ashley gained knowledge about strategies and took notes on how teachers handled situations in the classroom and used voice as a classroom management tool, her observations of experienced teachers had a negative effect: “That’s when I come back extra frustrated and with tons of great ideas, but extra upset [that] I’m not that good of a teacher” (Interview, December 2006). As the opportunity was provided by districts, Ashley visited two kindergarten classrooms every month for two hours. She said regarding these experiences, “going into other teachers’ classrooms who have been teaching for a while, that’s very overwhelming to me because I want to be where they are now.”

Ashley raised this concern several times, and concluded that observing other teachers challenged her sense of efficacy. The following excerpt from Ashley’s interview demonstrates how observing of others frustrated her. Ashley:

I’ll go observe another teacher and her kids will be sitting there with their legs folded and their hands in their lap and their eyes are on the teacher and they never even look away. They don’t touch the person next to them and they don’t talk at all. And I’m like, “I’m the worst teacher. My kids are rolling on the carpet. Why am I so bad and they’re so good?” So it’s frustrating. (Interview, February 2007)

Mary also had the opportunity to observe her mentor teacher’s classroom regularly. Since her mentor taught morning and afternoon sections, Mary observed her whenever she had problems with understanding planning, or when she had problems with the implementation of some activities. Observing her mentor was a positive experience that raised Mary’s confidence. Mary explained that watching her mentor teacher made her think, “Oh. I’m doing the same thing. OK. Maybe I’m doing a good job” (Interview,
December 2006). As Mary’s words show, this apprenticeship helped Mary feel more confident about what she was doing in her classroom. She reported that being in her mentor teacher’s classroom allowed her to “watch,” “reflect,” and “try”: “That was what eased my tension and my concerns the most.” Mary elaborated:

To understand what they were thinking during that time and just watching them…watching the ease with which they were able to teach. You know, it seemed like second nature to them. It was really easy for them… to teach a lesson so...just watching them made me feel more comfortable. (Interview, December 2006)

Julie and Jennifer did not have an opportunity to observe other teachers’ classrooms. Jennifer’s mentor teacher could not arrange a time together because they were both teaching at the same time; therefore, they were trying to find another grade teacher’s classroom for her. In addition, Julie’s school district did not offer visiting other classrooms. Despite not being able to observe in other classrooms, Julie believed that observations could have helped her improve her strategies and techniques:

But just to kind of see how they do things that maybe, even just the little things, just to see how maybe their classroom management is different than mine, pick up some of their ideas, see how maybe they reach the needs of the other students in their class, just seeing their personalities, too. (Interview, December 2006)

Julie acknowledged that observations of experienced teachers would help her feel more confident about her teaching prospects. “It makes you kind of hopeful like there is another way of doing it. You know, it’s not like everything’s failed. There’s always another way” (Interview, December 2006).

Another procedure that was conducted during the induction year by mentors, principals, or curriculum coordinators was observation of first-year teachers’ classrooms. The new teachers’ experiences culminated with different reactions from the participants.
Ashley and Jennifer reported that observations by a principal and a mentor teacher were “useful,” because they provided them an opportunity to see different perspectives about their teaching. Ashley stated, “That’s really helpful, because I’ve gotten some ideas that I would have never even thought to try before.” Mary’s mentor teacher, principal, and vice principal observed her to make a formal assessment. My field observation showed that Mary’s principal visited her classroom almost every day. Mary reported that she was getting feedback after each of these observations. Although other participants did not feel uncomfortable in general with immediate colleagues’ observations, the presence of an administrator in her classroom made Julie somewhat nervous. A review of Julie’s teaching portfolio and my classroom observations indicated that Julie was very concerned about being watched by an evaluator. She described her feelings as follows:

I still am like that not so much [with] you [The researcher] because you’re not evaluating me. But, like [when] my principal comes in… I’m like, “Great!” Because I’m like, “Who’s doing what they’re not supposed to be doing?” She writes it all down. I get nervous and I shouldn’t, because she does it for everybody. I don’t like being watched. I don’t think [that] if I talked to someone who [teacher’s name] down the hall who’s been teaching for thirty years, still doesn’t like to be watched. It’s just something that, I don’t know, it just makes you nervous. Like what are they writing, you know? (Interview, November 2006)

Regarding induction-year support, Jennifer’s principal stated, “It varies depending on the person.” She added, “It is really an individualized process, getting them what they need and helping them meet their needs and hooking them up with the right resources and the right people” (Interview, March 2007).

The participants’ experiences depicted the individualized nature of support that increased teachers’ knowledge and confidence in teaching. The participants shared diverse opinions about what was helpful and valuable for them. During the induction
year, the participants’ interpretations of their induction-year experiences were varied, depending on the context.

Chapter 5 proposed five themes and associated categories that contributed the sense of efficacy of new teachers. The concluding chapter draws assertions pertaining to new teachers’ sense of efficacy and discussions based on the study’s findings with respect to the current scholarship. Moreover, implications of the findings and suggestions for future research are presented.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the first section situates my study’s findings within the existing literature and posits five major assertions. The second section enumerates this study’s implications for teacher education. The final section provides recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers’ experiences in their first year of teaching and the role the first-year context may play in shaping a new teacher’s sense of efficacy. The primary and secondary data sources were observations, document collection, and interviews with teachers, mentors, and principals. This study’s research questions were:

1) What is the nature of participating teachers’ sense of efficacy in their particular context?

2) In which particular aspects of teaching do first-year early childhood teachers feel efficacious? How do they experience efficacy in different aspects of their teaching?

3) What are the sources of existing efficacy beliefs of early childhood teachers? How do teachers perceive these sources of their efficacy beliefs?
4) In what ways do contextual elements support or constrain teachers’ beliefs about their capabilities?

5) How do other members in the context (for example, children, mentors, principals) influence teachers’ beliefs about their sense of efficacy?

This study depicts the first year of teaching as the complex process as cited in the literature and reveals that a first-year teacher’s sense of efficacy is not a static belief. Data also showed that a sense of efficacy is supported and challenged by diverse contextual features. Based on this study’s findings, the first year of teaching is a crucial period for building new teachers’ sense of efficacy.

Unpredictability, Complexity, and Responsibility

“Teaching is unforgivingly complex” (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 4). This quote eloquently states the nature of teaching for the participants in my study. The participants’ first year of teaching was full of surprises and unpredictable events. Although some teachers experienced “roller coaster emotions,” others had a “very calm experience.” Although the teachers in this study felt prepared to teach in early childhood classrooms at the end of their teacher-training program, after starting their jobs, they felt that it was challenging to prepare themselves for their first year of teaching. Jennifer said, “There’s no way that I think you’re ever fully prepared, but being a first year teacher, you don’t have as wide a foundation of knowledge as some teachers do [since] maybe they’ve been in a similar situation or they know what’s appropriate or inappropriate” (Interview, January, 2007). Based on their personality and background, there were personal differences regarding coping strategies when the teachers were teachers adopted different
coping strategies when facing problems and reacting to events. The teachers’ experiences also showed similarities and differences rooted in their teaching contexts.

McDonald (1991) characterized teaching as “a messy, uncertain business” (p.54). Likewise, first-year teaching was shown to be a complicated process wherein the participants experienced “fluctuations of emotions.” The teachers described their first year of teaching as “busy,” “frantic,” and “fun.” For some, the first days of school were easier because the children’s transition to the school was gradual, and they, as teachers, received a great deal of support. For example, Mary had half of the children for one day and the other half the next day. Working with fewer children helped Mary handle situations more effectively and prevented her from being overwhelmed by having more than 20 children in her classroom. Ashley called her first few days of school the “honeymoon period.” On the other hand, she also was “bombarded” with “What if” questions such as, “What if [the senior teachers] don’t tell me something else?” (Interview, December 2006).

As the literature suggests, for the participants of this study, teaching was a “challenging and rewarding experience” (Flores & Day, 2006). Referring to her “busy life,” Mary recounted, “I always feel like, at the end of the day, I just can’t think of words to say. I can’t go home always and have an intelligent conversation with my husband. I mean sometimes I just feel so stretched, you know, mentally. But it’s been fun. I feel like I’m enjoying myself” (Interview, December 2006). The teachers in this study were not overwhelmed and stressed in the ways one might expect; as her mentor teacher put it, Jennifer did not have “first-year tears” (Interview, March 2006). The transition from
student to teacher is considered stressful. Previous research suggested that the first year of teaching is a “traumatic experience for many and a considerable shock for most” (Gold, 1996, p. 562). Although the studies conducted “on” or “with” teachers indicated that the first year of teaching is considered a “challenging” period of life, the teachers in this study had unique experiences. Their experiences provide an alternate narrative of first-year teaching as a success.

This study’s field observations and interviews suggest that the teachers’ biggest problem was not having enough practical knowledge—which only develops with experience—to face the unpredictability of first-year teaching. Even though the teachers had two 3-day orientation sessions at the district level to complete paperwork and go over policies and legal issues, and additional meetings at their particular schools, they still carried the “newness of the context” with them. Julie described the situation:

Every week there’s more, Oh, well, then you have to do this too, and Oh, you have to do this too, and You’re not doing that? You have to do this. You know there’s all these different things that teachers tell you and administration tells, you have to do and that you thought you were doing okay, but then they tell you something else that you’re not doing that you have to do, like, for example, you need your progress reports done by next week. I did, like, Progress reports, how do you determine that? And, they tell me just different things. And, Oh, you have to IAT. What does that mean? (Interview, December, 2006).

As Julie’s words indicate, being new to the school and to the profession brings many challenges. During the interview, Ashley’s mentor also brought up the unpredictable nature of teaching and stated that new teachers were challenged by ongoing, unpredictable events.
This study highlights several common themes that describe the complex experiences of first-year teachers and their efficacy beliefs within multifaceted classroom and school contexts.

Five assertions emerge from the teachers’ experiences: (1) a teacher’s sense of efficacy is a context dependent, dynamic, and bounded belief; (2) a variety of interrelated personal and contextual features support and challenge a teacher’s sense of efficacy; (3) community members act as building blocks of efficacy; (4) each teacher interprets similar induction-year experiences differentially, and (5) a collaboratively built, supportive school culture empowers teachers and contributes to their sense of efficacy.

**Assertion 1: Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy is Context Dependent, Dynamic, and Bounded Belief**

First-year early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy is a context-dependent belief that fluctuates over time and is bounded by a specific context. The majority of studies in teachers’ sense of efficacy provided valuable insights into areas in which teachers’ felt efficacious and the relationship between a sense of efficacy and other variables (Coladarci, 1992; Forman & Pontius, 2000; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Housego, 1992; Li & Zhang, 2000; Ross, 1998; Lin & Gorrell, 1997; Lin, Taylor, & Gorrell, 1999; Lin & Gorrell, 2001). This study contextualizes our knowledge of teachers’ sense of efficacy by analyzing teachers’ experiences in multiple contexts.

This study revealed that context matters for first-year teachers’ sense of efficacy. In this study, context is defined “by multiple criteria, not [only] by general physical settings” (Green & Harker, 1982, p. 192, see also Erickson & Schultz, 1983) and is taken
to be multilayered (Graue & Walsh, 1995; Rogoff, 2003). First-year teachers’ efficacy changes depend on “who” they teach, “what” they teach, and “where” they work. For example, although Ashley felt confident about teaching literacy to young children, she had difficult times with classroom management and felt less confident in her ability to manage student behavior. However, Ashley worked with a supportive mentor and colleagues who helped her to feel less stress. If Ashley had taught in an unsupportive context, she would be more overwhelmed with the teaching responsibilities. This study showed that in order to understand early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy in working with young children, there is a need closely to examine the experiences of teachers in different contexts over time.

Based on the findings of my study, teachers’ sense of efficacy has two aspects: (1) teachers’ sense of efficacy inside the classroom and (2) teachers’ sense of efficacy outside the classroom. Figure 6.1 illustrates the many facets of context. The local context consists of children, instructional management, and content; the larger context consists of a school’s culture and induction-year experiences. Other professionals in the larger context—mentor, principal, staff, and mentor coordinator—cross over the two contexts.
My study agrees with the research that has found teachers’ sense of efficacy to be a content-specific belief (Tschannen-Morran et al., 1998). First-year early childhood teachers have a greater sense of efficacy teaching literacy and math than teaching science. Hodson’s study (2002) attributes the “science reluctance” of elementary teachers to unfamiliar content and unfamiliar pedagogical strategies. Other studies have also shown that teachers avoid teaching topics they do not know well (Mulholland & Wallace, 2001) and suggested that low achievement in science courses may be related to low teaching efficacy (Tosun, 2000). Ramey-Gassert, Shroyer, and Stayer (1996) stated, “The old
adage that ‘success breeds success’ applies to factors which influence science teaching self-efficacy” (p. 304). They concluded that teachers with high efficacy had success in three areas: pre-service education, professional development, and science-related experiences. In my study, the teachers lacking experience and interest in science reported a lower sense of efficacy than those with a strong background in science. In addition, a lack of both apprenticeship and collaborative support in science lesson planning contributed to a lack of emphasis on teaching science.

This study also corroborates studies suggesting that teachers’ sense of efficacy is not one-dimensional. Sense of efficacy is considered to have two dimensions: personal teaching efficacy (PTE) and general teaching efficacy (GTE). In my study, even though teachers felt confident teaching some content areas and adapting their instruction to students who attain average achievement progress, the teachers had difficulty implementing strategies to meet the needs of special education students.

This study also suggested that teachers’ sense of efficacy in working with young children is dynamic and fluctuates over time. Teacher-belief literature has argued that once beliefs are set, they are stable (Kagan, 1992) and resistant to change (Pajares, 1992). However, my results more closely reflect Bandura (1997), who has suggested that self-efficacy beliefs are malleable in early learning and tend to become stable and resistant to change once established.

Throughout my study, teachers talked about the “ebb” and “flow” in their efficacy when dealing with the many concerns, dilemmas, and challenges of working with young children. Ashley and Julie’s major concern, like most novice and experienced teachers,
was student discipline (Certo & Fox, 2002). These two teachers reported that they did not feel confident in their ability to manage the classroom. For example, Julie believed that she was “a good classroom manager” at the beginning of the study, and she expected few problems. Julie’s sense of efficacy in classroom management decreased over the course of the study because she had some unsuccessful experiences. Nevertheless, during debriefing—member checking—she stated that she felt more confident in classroom management. This corroborates Bandura’s (1997) premise and suggests that a teacher’s sense of efficacy is “fragile” during the first year of teaching.

**Assertion 2: A Variety of Interrelated Personal and Contextual Features Support or Challenge a Teacher’s Sense of Efficacy.**

First-year teachers in this study specified diverse sources of their sense of efficacy for different aspect of teaching: (1) successful and unsuccessful experiences; (2) children’s progress as indicator of success; (3) supportive programs; (4) experience and familiarity gains; (5) knowledge transfer from teacher training; and (6) supportive collegiality. As Milner (2002) highlighted, the sources of efficacy are interconnected. For example, feedback coming from a mentor could enhance a teacher’s instructional strategies and lead to successful experiences in the classroom. In this situation, both verbal feedback and successful experiences could be triggers for teachers’ sense of efficacy.

This study suggests that early childhood teachers feel less confident about their abilities when they are unsuccessful. To illustrate this, Ashley and Julie had difficulties managing the classroom. They reported less confidence in management than other two
teachers who felt successful in their classroom management. Having unsuccessful experiences may lead teachers to change their strategies without reflecting constructively and creating new challenges for themselves. This study supports Bandura’s (1997) argument about *enactive mastery experiences*, which refers to the phenomenon that success in a task elevates self-efficacy while failure in a task erodes it.

Another finding is that teachers feel more confident about their abilities when they see the children making progress. This study corroborates Mulholland and Wallace’s (2001) finding that children’s enthusiasm supports a teacher’s science teaching efficacy. For example, in first-grade and kindergarten classrooms, teachers have the opportunity to observe children’s growth in literacy. Receiving verbal or non-verbal feedback from children to indicate their learning is one of the sources of a sense of efficacy. In this situation, teachers feel successful because they believe that they are able to teach to young children. Feeling successful in teaching might increase teachers’ sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In my study, Ashley and Julie stated that they felt more confident in teaching literacy because they see the progress in reading and writing.

In their school context, teachers are responsible to teach specific programs used by the school district. Johnson and Kauffman (2004) stated that most new teachers need curricular support because of the daily challenge of planning and organizing activities. A school curriculum is “defined simply as what and how teachers are expected to teach, is a mechanism for providing such support and guidance” (p. 119). My study shows that having familiar programs and a detailed curriculum supported teacher’s efficacy beliefs. Knowing what to do and what to teach helped teachers feel more confident about their
teaching. For example, Jennifer felt more confident about her ability to teach reading and writing because her school has a literacy partnership with her education program. The writing curriculum in Ashley’s school helped her surmount the challenges of teaching writing, although she reported a lack of knowledge in that area.

In this study, teachers improved their sense of efficacy as they gained teaching experience and became more familiar with the program. Jennifer’s math teaching efficacy increased as she gained more information about the specific program used in her school district and experience in using the program. Julie also reported that she increased her science teaching efficacy by organizing more science activities and integrating manipulatives. Although research related to experience and teachers’ sense of efficacy shows inconsistent results, the current study indicates that experience in teaching helps teachers feel confident in teaching (Tschannen & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002).

Transferring knowledge from teacher education program also contributes to a teacher’s sense of efficacy. In their study of early childhood pre-service teachers, Lin and Gorrell (1999) assert that college coursework and teaching experiences seem to influence pre-service teachers’ sense of efficacy. Possessing knowledge and skills in teaching content and pedagogy helped them to feel more confident in their abilities and also may contribute to successful teaching experiences.

**Assertion 3: Community Members Are Building Blocks for Efficacy**

First-year early childhood teachers receive different levels of support from community members, who act as caretakers in building a first-year teacher’s sense of efficacy. Sociocultural theory argues that learning to teach is a social process and
knowledge is created through interactions with others (Vygotsky, 1978). First-year
teachers’ interactions with others are important in their professional learning and
development.

Research in teacher attrition and turnover shows that personal and professional
support is crucial for increasing teacher retention (Harrell et al., 2004; Ingersoll, 2001;

A major challenge to educators today is one of offering the right type of support
to new teachers during the transition period so that they may be encouraged to
keep the flame of commitment and the excitement for teaching burning brightly
throughout their careers. (p. 560)

Woolfolk Hoy and Burke-Spero (2005) found that changes in efficacy in the first year of
teaching were related to support teachers received. My study corroborates these findings
and helps illuminate the central role of professional peers and mentors in building
teachers’ sense of efficacy.

This current study indicates that mentoring is a means, not only for learning to
teach in early childhood classrooms, but also for building a teacher’s sense of efficacy.
Assignment of mentors to first-year teachers was a requirement for all the districts
included in this study, so each first-year teacher had the opportunity to work with
mentors. Unique experiences with mentors created a space wherein first-year teachers
were assisted and where they felt supported assisted. Working with more knowledgeable
others helps teachers extend their knowledge and feel more secure in their ability to teach
young children (Vygotsky, 1978). *Scaffolding* new teachers’ learning contributes to their
gain in practical knowledge and new instructional strategies. Ashley explained the
support she received:
I met with [name] every single Wednesday for about an hour and a half. She always has a list of things we need to talk about. But then she just let me talk about my concerns and problems. Some weeks I have none. But some weeks I have big concerns and she’s, like, Well, let’s try this or let’s do this. (Interview, December, 2006)

In a recent study (Marable and Raimondi, 2007), teachers named mentoring as the most significant source of support; teachers suggested that for quality mentoring, there should be “pairing with a mentor in the same building and same area of certification, offering similar schedules to mentor-intern pairs and built-in time to spent together” (p.36). In the present study, mentor-mentee interactions were facilitated through by locating mentor teachers who taught the same grade level at the same site as the new teacher (Turley, Powers, & Nakai, 2006). Ongoing dialogue with mentors, availability of mentors, and frequent interactions built trust and encouraged new teachers to seek help and share their concerns. Designing appropriate mentoring programs requires an understanding of how individualized aspects of support can boost the confidence of teachers.

In the existing literature, support for new teachers is divided into two approaches: personal (emotional), support, and technical and experiential support (Gold, 1996). Personal support builds teachers’ self-confidence. Technical and experiential support guides teachers toward developing a base of sophisticated instructional and practical knowledge. For teachers’ sense of efficacy, these two approaches are valuable. In this study, while emotional support helped first-year early childhood teachers feel more confident about their ability, technical support creates a space where teachers may have successful experiences. In turn, teachers may feel more confident in their ability to teach.
Gold (1996) professed that “either approach alone is imperfect; both are needed in enhancing development of new professionals and helping to improve the profession” (p. 587).

In their study, Turley, Powers and Nakai (2006) found that, for new teachers, key functions of support providers included sharing knowledge and information, providing feedback and emotional support, and simply being available every day. Teachers have reported greater gains in self-efficacy beliefs in schools that exhibit high degrees of collaboration among teachers and administrators (Chester & Beaudin, 1996). On the other hand, Stanulis, Fallona, and Pearson (2002) found that the isolated nature of teaching, coupled with a lack of collaboration, made first-year teachers struggle; other problems included new teachers’ sacrificing of philosophies and practices learned in university preparation, exposure to mentors who were from different grade levels or not in close proximity, and mentors’ undetermined roles. In his study, Friedman (2002) has documented criticism, isolation, lack of rewards, and inappropriate teacher training as sources of stress and threats to teacher efficacy. The current study suggested that first-year teachers received different levels of personal and instructional support raised first-year teachers’ confidence in their own abilities. Teachers who reported confidence described their teacher training, collaboration in the school, and verbal support from colleagues as sources of their efficacy.

**Assertion 4: Each Teacher Interprets Similar Induction-Year Experiences Differentially**

My data analysis shows that what counts as a positive experience for building efficacy is constructed between individual and the context. In teacher education literature,
feedback and observation are considered important components of induction year programs. As a state requirement, teachers need to pass the Praxis III (Educational Testing Center, 2001) and enroll in a district entry-year program. The new teachers’ mentors and principals prepared the new teachers for the Praxis III assessment and fostered their professional development. The teachers had the opportunity to observe their more experienced peers in the classroom and to attend professional induction-year workshops.

Bandura (1997) argues that the observation of others creates a *vicarious experience* which can elevate or erode efficacy. Successful teachers model to new teachers that the teaching task is manageable. This study found that, in the case of Mary, watching successful others could be a support for building efficacy. However, for Ashley, this created a negative self-evaluation and challenged her confidence. Ashley had the same problem when she was in student teaching. Therefore, for some new teachers, seeing experienced teachers perform successfully in areas in which the new teacher lacks confidence (e.g. classroom management) may result in decreased confidence.

Schunk and Hanson (1985) have found that children who observed their peers performing a cognitive skill increased their self-efficacy more than those who observed their teachers perform the same skill (as cited in Labone, 2004). In Ashley’s situation, observing experienced teachers eroded her efficacy in classroom management. As Labone (2004) discusses, modeling by other first-year teachers may be more beneficial than modeling by mentors or experienced teachers.
In addition to observing senior teachers, being observed by mentors and principals is common practice in induction year programs. In this study, all the teachers except Julie found observation useful for getting feedback and learning new strategies. Julie reacted negatively to others’ observation. Stanulis et al. (2002) found that “the role of mentor as one who asked to observe (but never followed through), or asked to observe too much (without explaining her motivation), created more anxiety for the novices than did support their development” (p. 79). Although Chester and Beaudin (1996) found that beginning teachers who were observed multiple times reported an increased sense of self-efficacy (Chester & Beaudin, 1996), my study indicates the need for an individualized induction program for new teachers.

Another common practice of induction year programs is to give formal or informal feedback to new teachers. Bandura (1997) stated that verbal persuasion increases teachers’ sense of efficacy. On the other hand, verbal persuasion generally has a strong influence when teachers have a reasonable basis for high efficacy. Teachers in this study reported diverse preferences for feedback. While Jennifer preferred both types of feedback, positive and constructive, Ashley preferred critically constructive feedback. For example, Ashley did not interpret positive verbal feedback from her principal as a support for her efficacy. However, Julie preferred to receive positive feedback and reported that receiving this type of feedback would increase her confidence. As Feiman-Nemser (2001) has suggested, feedback should be neither negative nor “just phony pats on the back” (p. 23), and it should be individualized.
Assertion 5: Collaborative Induction Empowers Teachers

Teachers are empowered within the school context and gain a sense of efficacy outside the classroom when they work in a supportive school culture that considers induction a community practice. Current research views learning as a socially constructed process situated in a specific cultural and historical context. Establishing a supportive school context is crucial for new teachers’ professional development (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Rogoff et al. (1996) advocate a “community of learners,” a school context in which novices actively promote their own learning and coordinate with experienced teachers.

The first-year teachers in this study benefited from their supportive environment. Particularly, Ashley and Jennifer had the opportunity to interact with each other and senior teachers, and the more experienced teachers assisted the newcomers in learning and professional development. This collaborative setting increased the new teachers’ sense of belonging and confidence about in their own abilities. Each first-year teacher reported that she did not participate in decision-making processes or voice her opinion. However, teachers increased their active participation in decision-making processes over time in school contexts where induction was viewed as more than the sole responsibility of a mentor teacher or a principal. In their study, Kardos et al. (2007) found that new teachers tend to be isolated in their work, expect to be independent and expert, and expect to work without the support of a professional community. However, this present study shows that Jennifer and Ashley benefited from their schools’ view of induction as a
collective effort. In such a context, teachers share their successes and failures with other
teachers and staff, and they seek help when necessary.

This study’s findings corroborate the premise of current scholarship that a
supportive context increases teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2001). For instance, in their
qualitative study with 50 teachers, Kardos et al. (2001) found that teachers in integrated
professional cultures are more likely to stay in teaching (as cited in Kardos et.al., 2007).
Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that teachers who not only had mentor teachers in the
same grade level but also taught in schools where induction was considered a collective
responsibility were less likely to leave the profession. During debriefing sessions, all
participants of this study stated that they would teach in same districts. Ashley planned to
teach first grade in the same school, while Mary was going to teach full-time
kindergarten in another school. Jennifer stated that she would be teaching first grade in
her current school. Even though Julie stated that she preferred to teach an upper
elementary grade, she was going to continue to teach first grade in the same school.
Below, I present the implications of this study for induction-year programs, teacher
education, and school-based support providers.

Implications

This study’s findings have noteworthy implications for teacher educators, mentor
teachers, principals, and policy makers. Educators may gain insight into their role
supporting or challenging new teachers’ sense of efficacy through the experiences of
these first-year early childhood teachers.
Implications for Induction-Year Programs

- This study indicated that teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs are dynamic and fluctuate throughout the first year of teaching. Therefore, necessary instructional and emotional support should be provided to help teachers build on their confidence. Induction-year programs need to consider how to respond effectively to first-year teachers’ individual needs for teachers’ specific tasks (e.g., preparing the portfolio for Praxis III, writing report cards) while they support children’s learning in “complex” and “diverse” classrooms. New teacher orientation at both the school and the district levels should not solely address the technical aspects of teaching; orientation should be an opportunity to exchange ideas, concerns, and needs. Effective induction programs should allocate resources and time for training and recruiting mentor teachers. Mentors are the backbone of new teachers’ professional and emotional support, and are necessary to promote new teachers’ efficacy.

- Mentoring programs should allow new teachers to build trusting relationships and to discuss and reflect on their beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning.

If mentoring programs are structured to allow trust and discussion, mentor teachers can “come to know their protégés’ unique developmental needs” (Clifford & Green, 1996, p. 76) and individualize their support to some degree. Such individualization would enhance new teachers’ professional development and increase their sense of efficacy. Particularly, mentors should meet regularly with novices, participate in entry-year meetings, and organize individual orientation sessions. Such
practices would provide space and time for working on each novice’s zone of proximal development.

- An induction year program should include observation of multiple, diverse teachers in their classrooms.

First-year teachers should be modeled not only by experienced teachers, but also by other new teachers whose ability and attributes are comparable to their own. New teachers are learners. Therefore, we need to (re)consider providing them with assignments that “allow time for observation, co-planning, collaborative problem solving, and reflection” (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999a, p. 7). At the same time, first-year teachers’ need a mediator to help them determine which aspects of teaching they need to improve and learn useful classroom strategies. Novice teachers’ learning might be mediated by checklists for classroom observation, writing reflective statements, or observing other classrooms together with their mentors. The mentor teacher could guide the new teacher’s learning.

School-Based Support Providers

- This study’s assertions illuminate how an “unpredictable” and “complex” context provides a professional space where mentors, peer teachers, and principals are responsible for nurturing first-year teachers’ sense of efficacy.

Mentor teachers are key “old timers” in schools who make “new comers” feel welcome and supported (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Mentors help build new teachers’ sense of efficacy when mentors allocate time for ongoing dialogue, provide personal and professional support, and are accessible when new teachers need them.
School administrators should create shared activity time for facilitating collaboration among new and experienced teachers so the two groups may work and solve problems together. Thus, informal mentors of novices would find the opportunity to be more proactive in their assistance. Particularly, administrators should arrange common planning time and interaction opportunities for mentor teachers and new teachers. The principal should take an active, rather than passive, role in the mentoring process (Tillman, 2005). Principals should distribute the responsibility of helping new teachers by creating learning communities.

_Implications for Teacher Education_

This study has found that teacher education program is one of the contributors of teachers’ sense of efficacy. Teachers in this study indicated that their field experience and student teaching provided them with knowledge and skills that help build confidence in teaching. Reflecting on self-efficacy beliefs should be also a part of teacher education coursework. Teacher educators should prioritize training teachers not only to be successful in the classroom but also prepare teachers for “the informal aspects of relationships with colleagues” (Friedman & Kass, 2002).

_Implications for Future Research_

This study employed a case study design to investigate first-year early childhood teachers’ experiences. This study, as suggested by other researchers (Milner & Hoy, 2003) investigated teachers’ sense of efficacy in different contexts. This description and analysis of the complex nature of efficacy provides insight into first-year teachers’ sense of efficacy. Several directions for future inquiry have evolved from this study.
First, in order to understand how teachers’ sense of efficacy develops, and under what conditions teachers’ sense of efficacy is challenged or supported, researchers need to take into account the multifaceted aspects of the teaching context. Particularly, longitudinal follow-up studies need to be carried out to gain more understanding about the development of efficacy beliefs. Studies that follow teachers from their student teaching to their third year of teaching would allow a more thorough examination changes in efficacy beliefs and the role of sense of efficacy in teachers’ professional development. In addition, conducting mixed-method studies would provide the opportunity to gain in-depth information and to understand “more fully” (Greene, 2001) teachers’ beliefs about themselves.

Regarding the analysis of the teachers in this study, a sense of efficacy is a context-based belief. Much of the research about teachers’ sense of efficacy has been conducted using questionnaires. Although findings from survey research are informative, there is a need to develop and use content- and context-based measurements.

This study found some areas in which early childhood teachers feel more or less confident in their ability to work with young children. Future studies focusing on each specific area would provide more understanding about early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy. For example, teachers in this study indicated less confidence in their ability to work with children with special needs. The future research could address early childhood teachers’ beliefs about inclusion and their sense of efficacy in greater depth.
Last, this study addressed given the crucial role mentors play in shaping teachers’ beliefs about their efficacy. Further research needs to focus, at a micro-level, on the interaction between mentors and mentees in order to explore what sort of mentoring challenges or supports a first-year teacher’s sense of efficacy.
APPENDIX A

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION
Dear Principal,

Hello, I am a PhD candidate in Integrated Teaching and Learning. My major is Early Childhood Education and I am working with Dr. Rebecca Kantor and Dr. Belinda Gimbert at the Ohio State University. We are asking your permission to conduct my dissertation research entitled “An exploratory study of first-year early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy: Multiple case studies in different contexts” in your school.

The purpose of this study is to understand first-year early childhood teachers’ beliefs about themselves. In particular, the goal of this project is to explore the sources and challenges of early childhood teachers’ self efficacy in their first year teaching. The research questions will focus on stories and past and current life experiences of teachers. The study will also include the perspectives of mentor teachers and new teacher administrators (e.g., principals and curriculum coordinators). Understanding experiences of first-year teachers in early childhood classrooms is important to improve induction-year programs and teacher education programs.

Data collection will include the following:

1) Interviews with participating teachers to gain an understanding of their experiences, and perspectives.

2) Observation of teachers to gain an understanding of the classroom and school context.

3) Interviews with mentor teachers and new teacher administrators (principals or curriculum coordinators) to gain an understanding about support they provide to teachers and their perceptions about teachers’ experiences in the classroom and school context.

4) Collecting documents to gain an understanding about classroom and school contexts, teachers’ classroom assignments in their teacher education programs, and induction-year programs.

Participants and school names of this study will be changed to pseudonyms. There are no foreseeable risks associated with the study. With regard to benefits of this...
research, we hope that our research will help educators and researchers better understand the nature of first-year teachers’ sense of efficacy and improve the programs related to teacher education.

Thank you very much for reading this letter. Should you have further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or my dissertation advisors, Dr. Rebecca Kantor (kantor-martin.1@osu.edu) and Dr. Belinda Gimbert (gimbert.1@osu.edu)

I look forward to hearing from you,

Sincerely,

Figen Sahin
Ph.D. Candidate
Integrated Teaching and LearningThe Ohio State University
Email: sahin.15@osu.edu, (614) XXX-XXXX
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORMS FOR TEACHERS
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Protocol Title: An exploratory study of first-year early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy: Multiple case studies in different contexts

Protocol Number: 2006E0651
Principal Investigator: Dr. Rebecca Kantor
School of Teaching and Learning
Arps Hall 1945 North High Street, Columbus, OH 43210
Telephone number: 614-XXX-XXXX
e-mail: kantor-martin.1@osu.edu

Co-Investigator: Dr. Belinda Gimbert
School of Policy and Leadership
301E Ramseyer Hall, Columbus, OH 43210
Telephone Number: 614-XXX-XXXX
e-mail: gimbert.1@osu.edu

Co-investigator: Figen Sahin
Ph.D. Candidate in Integrated Teaching and Learning
The Ohio State University
Telephone Number: (614) XXX-XXXX
e-mail: sahin.15@osu.edu

Dear Early Childhood Teacher,

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand first-year early childhood teachers’ beliefs about themselves. In particular, the goal of this project is to explore the sources and challenges of the first-year teachers’ sense of efficacy. The research questions will focus on your stories and past and current life experiences.

Procedures: If you give permission, I, Figen Sahin, will have a role as an observer in the classroom that you will be teaching during the 2006-2007 academic year. I would like to observe you in your classroom. I will be conducting informal interviews after some classroom observations in order to clarify or elaborate my questions. I will also interview you regarding your past and current experiences. Your mentor teachers
and your principal or new teacher administrator will also be interviewed once or twice with their permission. We also need to collect documents related to classroom and school contexts, your classroom assignments in your teacher education program, and your induction year. I will also meet and share the data with you, and allow you to review transcriptions to get feedback from you. For these debriefings, we could meet, have phone conversations, or e-mail to each other. The meetings or phone conversations will be audio recorded and e-mails will be saved with your permission.

**Duration:** This study will be carried out over one academic year (Fall 2006–Summer 2007). Interviews will be approximately 60-90 minutes and will take place 3-4 times. We may ask you to participate in additional interviews if more time is needed. Observations will take place once or twice a week with your permission.

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with the Ohio State University.

**Confidentiality:** The information that you provide will be kept confidential. Only the investigators of this study will have access to these tapes. Participants and school names of this study will be changed to pseudonyms.

**Risks and Benefits:** There are no risks associated with the study. With regard to benefits of the research, we hope that our research will help educators and researchers understand the nature of teachers’ sense of efficacy of first year teachers and improve the program related to teacher education.

**Incentives:** No incentives will be given.

**Participant Rights:** You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

**Inquiries:** It is important to us that you feel comfortable with this project, therefore we encourage you to express any questions or concerns that you may have by contacting Dr. Rebecca Kantor at (614) XXX-XXXX, Dr. Belinda Gimbert (614) XXX-XXXX, and Figen Sahin at sahin.15@osu.edu

In lieu of a signed consent form, your participation in the study allows Dr. Rebecca Kantor, Belinda Gimbert, and Figen Sahin to use the data obtained in presentations and publications. If you would like to participate please sign the attached consent form.

We thank you in advance for your time and consideration.
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Protocol Title: An exploratory study of first-year early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy: Multiple case studies in different contexts

I consent to my participation in research being conducted by Dr. Rebecca Kantor and her authorized representatives, Dr. Belinda Gimbert and Figen Sahin, at the Ohio State University. The investigators have explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. I know that I can choose not to participate without penalty. I consent to the use of audiotapes. I understand how the tapes will be used for this study. I also consent to use of documents related to classroom and school context, classroom assignments in my teacher education program, and my induction year.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Print Your Name:

Date: ___________________________        Signed: ___________________________

(Participant)

Signed: ___________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)

Signed: ___________________________

(Person authorized to consent for participant, if required)
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORMS FOR MENTORS AND PRINCIPALS
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Protocol Title: An exploratory study of first-year early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy: Multiple case studies in different contexts

Protocol Number: 2006E0651
Principal Investigator: Dr. Rebecca Kantor
School of Teaching and Learning
Arps Hall 1945 North High Street,
Columbus, OH, 43210
Telephone number: 614-XXX-XXXX
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Co-Investigator: Dr. Belinda Gimbert
School of Policy and Leadership
301E Ramseyer Hall, Columbus, OH, 43210
Telephone Number: 614-XXX-XXXX
e-mail: gimbert.1@osu.edu

Co-investigator: Figen Sahin
Ph.D. Candidate in Integrated Teaching
and Learning
The Ohio State University
Telephone Number: 614-XXX-XXXX
e-mail: sahin.15@osu.edu

Dear Mentor Teacher,

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand first year early childhood teachers’ beliefs about themselves. In particular, the goal of this project is to explore the sources and challenges of the first-year teachers’ sense of efficacy and their past and current experiences.
Procedures: If you give permission, I would like to join your conversations and meetings with the teacher you are mentoring. I will also need to interview about support you are providing to first-year teachers, your relationships with them and their experiences in induction year. Interviews and conversations will be audiotaped with your permission.

Duration: The data collection will be carried out over one academic year (Fall 2006, Summer 2007). Interviews will be approximately 60-90 minutes and will take place over 1-2 times. We may ask you to participate in additional interviews if more time is needed.

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Confidentiality: The information that you provide will be kept confidential. Only the investigators of this study will have access to these tapes. Participants and school names of this study will be referred by pseudonyms.

Risks and Benefits: There are no risks associated with the study. With regard to benefits of the research, we hope that our research will help educators and researchers understand the nature of teachers’ sense of efficacy of first year teachers, and improve the program related to teacher education.

Incentives: No incentives will be given.

Participant Rights: You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

Inquiries: It is important to us that you feel comfortable with this project, therefore we encourage you to express any questions or concerns that you may have by contacting Dr. Rebecca Kantor at (614) XXX-XXXX, Dr. Belinda Gimbert (614) XXX-XXXX, and Figen Sahin at sahin.15@osu.edu

In lieu of a signed consent form, your participation in the study allows Dr. Rebecca Kantor, Belinda Gimbert, and Figen Sahin to use the data obtained in presentations and publications. If you would like to participate please sign the attached consent form.

We thank you in advance for your time and consideration.
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Protocol Title: An exploratory study of first-year early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy: Multiple case studies in different contexts

I consent to my participation in research being conducted by Dr. Rebecca Kantor and her authorized representatives, Dr. Belinda Gimbert and Figen Sahin, at The Ohio State University. The investigators have explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described. I know that I can choose not to participate without penalty. I consent to the use of audiotapes. I understand how the tapes will be used for this study.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Print Your Name:

Date: ____________________________  Signed: ____________________________

(Participant)

Signed: ____________________________  Signed: ____________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)

(Person authorized to consent for participant, if required)
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Protocol Title: An exploratory study of first-year early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy: Multiple case studies in different contexts

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Principal Investigator: Dr. Rebecca Kantor
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Co-investigator: Figen Sahin
Ph.D. Candidate in Integrated Teaching and Learning
The Ohio State University
Telephone Number: (614) -XXX-XXXX
e-mail: sahin.15@osu.edu

Dear Principal,

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand first year early childhood teachers’ beliefs about themselves. In particular, the goal of this project is to explore the sources and challenges of the first year teachers’ sense of efficacy and their past and current experiences.
Procedures: If you give permission, I will need to interview you about support you are providing first-year teachers, your relationships with them, and their experiences in their induction year. Interviews will be audiotaped with your permission.

Duration: The data collection will be carried out over one academic year (Fall 2006- Summer 2007). Interviews will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will take place over 1-2 times. We may ask you to participate in additional interviews if more time is needed.

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Confidentiality: The information that you provide will be kept confidential. Only the investigators of this study will have access to these tapes. Participants and school names of this study will be changed to pseudonyms.

Risks and Benefits: There are no risks associated with the study. With regard to benefits of the research, we hope that our research will help educators and researchers understand the nature of teachers’ sense of efficacy of first year teachers, and improve the program related to teacher education.

Incentives: No incentives will be given.

Participant Rights: You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

Inquiries: It is important to us that you feel comfortable with this project; therefore we encourage you to express any questions or concerns that you may have by contacting Dr. Rebecca Kantor at (614) XXX-XXXX, Dr. Belinda Gimbert 614-XXX-XXXX, and Figen Sahin at sahin.15@osu.edu

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We thank you in advance for your time and consideration
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Protocol Title: An exploratory study of first-year early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy: Multiple case studies in different contexts

I consent to my participation in research being conducted by Dr. Rebecca Kantor and her authorized representatives, Dr. Belinda Gimbert and Figen Sahin, at The Ohio State University. The investigators have explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described. I know that I can choose not to participate without penalty. I consent to the use of audiotapes. I understand how the tapes will be used for this study.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Print Your Name:

Date: ____________________________

Signed: ____________________________

(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)

Signed: ____________________________

(Person authorized to consent for participant, if required)

Signed: ____________________________

(Participant)
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH TEACHERS
Sample Interview Questions:

Focusing on Past Experiences

- Could you tell me more about yourself?
- What are some reasons for you to choose the teaching profession?
- Do you have someone who influenced you in choosing this profession?
- How do you describe yourself as an early childhood teacher?
- What type of challenges did you encounter during your coursework in your teacher education program?
- What were the highlights of your teacher preparation program?
- What were the challenges you encounter in your teaching during your preparation program?
- Could you explain your first experiences in teaching? How did you feel?
- Tell me more about one of your successful experiences in teaching.
- Could you describe your experiences during the first weeks of school?
- In which areas of teaching do you feel more comfortable? Tell me more about this.
- What do you think about the connection between your training program and your classroom activities?

Current Experiences, Resources, and Supports

- Could you describe your experiences in your first three months of teaching?
- How did you feel as a beginning teacher?
- What types of challenges do you encounter during teaching?
- In which areas do you feel more confident in working with young children?
- What type of support did you get during your first three months of teaching?
- When you faced a challenge during the first three months of your teaching, who did you turn to for assistance?
- How often do you consult with your mentor teacher? How do you and your mentor work together? Could you give an example?
- How do you describe your relationship with your mentor teacher?
- What type of feedback do you receive from your mentor teacher? How did this feedback help you?
- In which areas would you like to receive more help from your mentor teacher?
- What type of mentoring was helpful / unhelpful for you?
- How do you describe your relationship with your principal?
- How often do you consult with your principal?
- What types of feedback do you receive from your principal? How did this feedback help you?
- In which areas would you like to receive more help from your mentor teacher?

Sample Questions from the Third Interview

- Could you describe your experiences up to this month? What has it been like to teach after the Winter break?
- What types of challenges did you encounter after school started?
- When you are discouraged, what helps you to be optimistic again?
- What type of support did you receive after school started?
- What is easy / difficult about working with young children? What makes it easy/difficult?
- In which areas do you feel more confident in working with young children?
- What activities for young children do you feel most confident to organize?
- What type of management tasks do you feel most/least confident? What supports your confidence?
- If you were an experienced teacher supporting a new teacher, what would you do to boost the confidence of that new teacher?
- If you were an administrator charged with supporting new teacher, what would you do to boost the confidence of that new teacher?
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH MENTOR TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS
Sample Interview Questions: Mentor Teachers

General Questions:
- Would you tell me about yourself a little bit?
- How do you describe yourself as a mentor?
- Tell me more about the reasons you chose to be a mentor.

Questions about Mentoring:
- What types of support have you given the novice teacher?
- What were the most challenging aspects of mentoring this novice teacher?
- How does good mentoring look?
- What are the difficulties that your novice teacher has encountered?
- How did you help the novice teacher in challenging times?
- How do you give feedback to your novice teacher?

Sample of Interview Questions: Principals

General Questions:
- Could you please tell me about yourself?
- How do you describe your school? How do you describe your community? How do you describe your students?
- How do you describe yourself as a principal?

Questions related to Induction:
- What types of events are organized in this school to help new teachers?
- How are new teachers socialized into your school context?
- What opportunities are provided for new teachers in your school district?
- In which areas do you see that new teachers need to be supported? In this school, how do you support new teachers?
- How do you give feedback to your novice teacher?
- What types of professional activities do you encourage your novice teachers to attend?
APPENDIX F

COURSE LIST OF TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coursework and Planned Field Experiences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer Courses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pedagogy I</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Media and Technology in Education</td>
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<td>• Language Arts</td>
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<td>• Reading Foundations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pedagogy</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Autumn Courses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Seminar and Pre-K-3 Field Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pedagogy II</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reading Methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Social Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Classroom Community and Guidelines (Four Sessions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Critical Reading in the Content Fields</td>
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<tr>
<td>• OR Teaching as Profession</td>
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<tr>
<td>• (Each cohort take a week-long Diversity course)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Winter Courses</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Seminar and Pre-K Field Experience</td>
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<td>• Science</td>
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<td>• Math</td>
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<td>• Classroom Community and Guidance (Four Sessions)</td>
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<td>Winter Courses</td>
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<td>Spring Courses</td>
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<td>Summer Courses</td>
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LIST OF REFERENCES


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