Early Childhood Education/Educare Career Express ECE2:

A Program for Retention and Completion of Community College Students

in the Area of Child Development

by

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ABSTRACT

There is a national shortage of highly qualified early childhood educators. For many early childhood educators, this career path begins with the Child Development Associate credential. Community colleges are well-positioned to award this credential and address the shortage of highly qualified early childhood educators. However, many students arrive at community colleges academically unprepared, with excessive work and family responsibilities. The purpose of my participatory action research study is to explore the impact of internships on early childhood education student attitudes towards persistence in their course of study. This study has the potential to impact strategies used with child development majors in the community college setting. Successful community college students who persist through their plan of study to graduate will experience the benefits that college completion brings. In addition to the interests of college completion, these students will enter the workforce or university setting with valuable work experience and professional credentials achieved in a supportive community. Both outcomes have the potential to positively affect the growth of the early childhood workforce. The findings of this study reveal that student interns placed in high-quality, early learning centers found support in the relationships with their mentor teachers, valuable experiences with the children in the rooms, and a new sense of self-efficacy when offered opportunities to participate in professional development activities, leading to persistence in their course of study.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family. I cannot begin to thank them enough for their patience and support. My life is richer, and I am a better person because of you all.

- First, and foremost, to Mark, you are forever my cheerleader and advocate. Thank you for believing in me. I love you!
- Jeremy, Josh, and Ben, you all make me laugh and inspire me every day! I am so proud of the men you have become.
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- Mom and Dad, thank you for everything!

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It isn't what we say or think that defines us, but what we do (Austen, 1995).

I must acknowledge in this space my overwhelming gratitude for the opportunity to be a member of the ASU Innovation and Leadership program. This program provided the roadmap to move my thoughts into action. As part of that journey, I must thank;

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

We embrace the central commitment of the field of early care and education to the healthy development and welfare of young children. Everything we do in our role as educators of adults is intended to further this ultimate commitment (Code of Ethical Conduct Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators, 2004, p.1).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has made the recruitment and retention of highly qualified early childhood educators a top priority (Allvin, 2014). In November of 2014, I attended the NAEYC Annual Conference and Expo in Dallas, Texas. At the conference, I visited a featured session hosted by Rhian Evans Allvin, NAEYC Executive Director. Allvin directed a panel discussion focused on finding a clear pathway for the profession of early childhood educators. The session summary stated,

> "The promise of early learning is that young children, having had rich language, cognitive, and social-emotional experiences in preschool, enter their kindergarten classrooms ready for the academic adventure that awaits them. Well-qualified early childhood educators hold the key to creating these experiences, but for many in our field, certificates, and degrees feel out of reach. NAEYC has made the recruitment and retention of highly qualified early childhood educators a top priority" (Allvin, 2014).

Allvin and higher education leaders discussed strategies for early childhood and higher education systems to ensure clear pathways for students to complete their degrees. The message was clear; there is a national need for highly qualified early childhood educators, and the profession is looking to higher education to find solutions. This declaration was a personal petition to me. As a faculty member in a community college child development and education program in Oklahoma, it is my undertaking to prepare students for the field of early childhood education and to guide them from our academic program to a university transfer or into the workforce. Creating clear pathways for students while supporting them in their academic and career endeavors is the focus of my research study.

Early Childhood Profession

No longer considered a job or occupation, early childhood education is now recognized as a professional field and career choice (Goble & Horm, 2010). The expectations and obligations that come with professional recognition include clear criteria for teaching credentials. Changes in federal, state, and local mandates continue to drive rapid growth and a need for clear, qualifying credentials in the field (Huss-Hage & Mitchell, 2013). For instance, at the national level, Head Start now requires half of all lead teachers in any Head Start program to have a baccalaureate degree. Also, all assistant teachers are required to have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or an associate degree. These changes are moving the profession closer to a consistent expectation for preparation (Wells, 2015). While Head Start designees have consistent

expectations for credentials, there is still a significant amount of variability among other early learning programs.

In 2003, The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) began publishing an annual report. The NIEER State of Preschools report ranks all states against ten published benchmarks, including teacher qualifications. From the inception of this report in 2003 to the most recent release in 2017, Oklahoma has met the NIEER benchmark for a baccalaureate degree requirement for lead teachers in public 4-year old pre-kindergarten. However, Oklahoma fails to meet the expectation of a CDA or an associate degree for assistant teachers in a public pre-kindergarten (NIEER, 2017). Yet, as in most states, Oklahoma requires one set of qualifications for teachers in regulated home-based programs and center-based child care and another for public preschool teachers (Whitebook, McLean, & Austin, 2016). The ever-evolving, yet still inconsistent expectations for early childhood educators leaves communities struggling with how to strengthen their initial teacher preparation programs to meet the needs of mandates and credentialing bodies (Whitebook, 2014).

Typically, states set their qualification standards for early educators in child care centers and preschool programs, and those requirements can vary according to setting and funding (Whitebook, McLean, & Austin, 2016). To standardize child care provider credentials in early care, The Department of Health and Human Services initiated a rating system for early care providers. Oklahoma is one of 36 states participating in the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Oklahoma's QRIS system launched in 1998. The QRIS system established criteria designed to improve and promote quality

environments for children in early care. Collectively, the requirements are used to determine ratings of programs that participate in QRIS, providing parents, policymakers, funders, and the public with information about the program's level of quality (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2015). Oklahoma's recognized rating system is called Reaching for the Stars (STAR). The rating program has four levels of child care program quality (One Star, One Star Plus, Two Star, and Three Star). One of the criteria for the STAR rating is the training and education level of the childcare provider (Wechsler, Melnick, Maier, & Bishop, 2016).

The Center for Early Childhood Professional Development (CECPD) monitors the training and education level of care providers recognized by the STAR rating in the state of Oklahoma. CECPD monitors all professional development for early care providers who work in Department of Human Services licensed home-based or center-based child care in Oklahoma. CECPD reviews educational documents to determine the appropriate level on the Professional Development Ladder (PDL) to place the care provider. The PDL reflects formal job-related education and credentials gained through universities, community colleges, technology centers, credentialing bodies, and CECPD approved training sponsors (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2015). The level of training will reflect the "step" on the ladder. The various steps on the PDL provide milestones for child care providers and connect with the state's QRIS and STAR professional development system. This site serves as a clearinghouse for those looking to gain professional development and those who wish to provide professional development. The PDL begins at level one, which indicates 12 clock hours of approved training and

progresses through level 10, which suggests a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education, child development, or related field. One-star licensed centers must have a master teacher on staff who ranks as a level 3 or 4 on the PDL (Oklahoma Department of Human Services-Child Care Services, 2016). Level 4 indicates an earned Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

The CDA is a nationally recognized first credential for early childhood educators. The Council for Professional Recognition in Washington D.C. issues the CDA credential. The CDA is foundational in the quest to professionalize the early childhood education workforce (Washington, 2017). The criteria to receive the CDA credential include a high school diploma, 120 hours of formal early childhood education training, 480 hours of work experience with children in the selected age group, a nationally administered exam, a professional portfolio, and classroom observation. Preferably, the 120 hours of formal training will apply to the student's associate degree earned at the two-year college. These credits can then transfer to the baccalaureate degree earned at the four-year university. If possible, students move seamlessly from one academic level to the next. My innovation has created a mechanism to support students as they begin work on the CDA requirements. Under my guidance, and with a clear pathway, students will gain valuable experience in the early childhood classroom as student interns, while increasing the formal education training and work experiences for the CDA.

Bragg (2007) noted that community colleges are appropriately situated to connect the work of high schools and the training for early childhood credentials to four-year baccalaureate degrees due to the community-based and student-centered missions of the

community college. For example, the Tulsa Community College Department of Child Development and Education (TCC DCD&E) established and maintains articulation agreements with several four-year state universities. The agreements allow community college students to earn a workforce certificate and apply these credits to an associate degree. These credits, in full, can then be transferred to the four-year baccalaureate degree. Students in the TCC DCD&E earn nine credit hours as they pursue the academic requirements for the CDA. When combined with an additional 9 academic credit hours on the academic plan of study, the student receives the Certificate of Mastery. Figure 1 illustrates the 18 hours earned with the Certificate of Mastery, move into the associate degree. The student must complete the remaining 43 academic hours of the required 61 prescribed academic hours for the associate degree. The 61 credit hours of the associate degree transfer to the four-year university, completing the student's first two years of the baccalaureate degree. When the student follows the recommended path and plan of study, there is no loss of credit hours and no duplication of coursework. This trend is seen nationally in community college associate degrees (Goble et al., 2015).

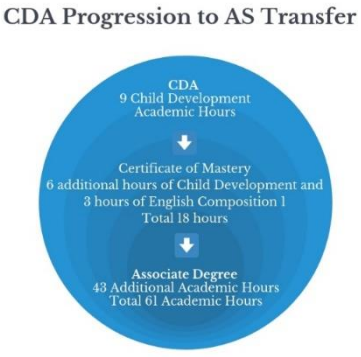

Figure 1.
CDA progression to associate degree

While community colleges are positioned to address the shortage of highly qualified early childhood educators, many students arrive at community colleges with inadequate academic preparation, excessive work and family responsibilities, and a lack of focus on educational goals (Bonet & Walters, 2016; Barr & Schuetz, 2008). Because community colleges attract and often are the more accessible option for non-traditional and academically fragile students, it follows that community colleges also educate students who are statistically least likely to complete degrees (CCCSE, 2014). This population places a challenge of retention and completion on the community colleges. Community colleges must create an environment and implement strategies that ensure students persist and complete. Student personal, academic, social, and financial challenges often require focused advisement, partnered with student-friendly educational strategies (Bonet & Walters, 2016). While research continues to explore retention issues, academic, service and social supports must be in place to guide the student to completion (Gurantz, 2015). My research will investigate one social support focused on academic program completion and career preparation.

Local Context

Retaining students during the first two years of a teacher preparation program is vital to their longevity in the teaching profession (Gutierrez, 2006). The TCC Child Development and Education program population is nontraditional, and retention in our program is a concern. Students range in age from concurrently enrolled high school students to senior citizens. Some students are the first in their families to attend college and are just beginning their academic and career journey, whereas others are older adults

making career changes. Many students are currently working in the field of early care and come back to school to increase their education for credentialing. However, there is a discrepancy between the number of students declaring child development majors and the number of students graduating. Students in the TCC DCD&E program experience barriers to retention and completion, such as financial constraints, social isolation, and academic weaknesses, as do most community college students across the nation (Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). Table 1 illustrates the lack of completion in the TCC DCD&E. In the 2017-2018 academic year, only 20.9% of the students with declared Child Development majors graduated.

Table 1.
Declared majors and graduates at TCC DCD&E

Degree	Number of Declared Majors AY 2017-2018	Graduates Summer 2017	Graduates Fall 2017	Graduates Spring 2018	Total Graduates AY 2017-2018
CDA	6	0	0	12	12
Certificate of Mastery	127	15	13	21	49
AAS Child Development	208	1	1	4	6
AS Transfer to OU	289	17	1	12	30
AS Transfer to OSU	55	0	1	1	2
AS Transfer to NSU	205	2	3	0	5

(TCC IRA, 2018)

Pathways

In November of 2015, TCC was one of thirty community colleges in the country selected to join a national initiative, known as the Pathways Project, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and led by American Association of Community Colleges

(AACC). The focus of this program is raising college graduation rates across the country through guided academic and career pathways. The Pathways Project intends to build connections for students from high school graduation to college completion, leading to university transfer or credentials that match labor market needs (Pathways Institute Shows Way Forward for TCC Strategic Plan, n.d.).

TCC administrators, faculty, staff, and board regents have attended six national Pathways Institutes, receiving information and training that is vital to the college-wide implementation of Pathways strategies. All Pathways strategies are designed to ensure more students graduate or transfer on time and are better prepared to enter the workforce through completion of a meaningful certificate program (Tulsa Community College, 2017). For instance, on time registration and new student orientation have been implemented, along with fast-track developmental classes. Both academic and student services are intimately involved in the implementation of Pathways strategies.

The recommended strategies used by TCC emanate from The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE). The CCCSE became part of the University of Texas College of Education in 2001. The Center functions as the umbrella organization for survey research, focus group work, and related services for the community and technical colleges interested in improving educational quality (CCCSE, n.d.). The recommended strategies include: academic pathways, academic goal setting and planning, new student orientation, accelerated or fast-track developmental education, first-year experience course, assessment and placement advisement, registration before

classes begin, class attendance alert intervention, tutoring, supplemental instruction, learning communities, and experiential learning beyond the classroom (CCSE, 2014).

TCC initiated the Pathways' journey by creating a two-prong course of action. First, addressing student services such as on-time enrollment and new student orientation. Second, by creating academic pathways for all degrees and certificates. A pathway is "a highly structured, coherent educational experience that is built around and through an area of study" (AACC, 2014, p. 11). The program pathways are not intended to limit student choice, but instead, they are designed to help direct students to a faculty-recommended path through an intricate inventory of programs and courses (Tulsa Community College, 2016). The academic pathways, in conjunction with changes to institutional processes, such as enrollment and advisement, ideally, make engagement inescapable (CCSE, 2014).

TCC implemented seven high impact practices within the first two years of participation in the Pathways program, as seen in Figure 2.

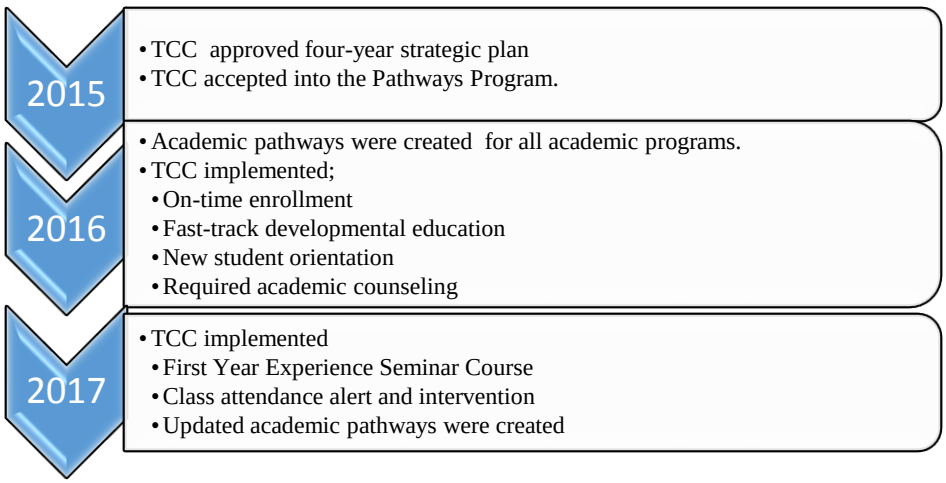

Figure 2.
TCC pathways timeline

Four recommended strategies are not yet institutionalized in the TCC reorganization: tutoring, supplemental instruction, learning communities, and experiential learning (internships). Meaningful learning experiences are a critical element to student retention and are the goal of my innovation. I created The Early Childhood Education/Educare Career Express (ECE^2) Internship Program to address student retention and completion in the TCC DCD&E. The purpose of the program is to create valuable and enriching learning experiences within the student's academic program (Roberts & Styron, 2012).

Educare

I have been a full-time faculty member in the TCC DCD&E program for thirteen years. During this time, my work has allowed me the opportunity to connect with community partners and form associations with other organizations in the Tulsa early childhood community. Tulsa has a highly-collaborative child development community of professionals. Through shared community projects, I developed a healthy relationship with Tulsa Educare (TE).

TE is part of a national network of early childhood learning centers. Tulsa is the only city in the nation to have three Educare sites. A fourth center is currently in the planning phase and scheduled to open in the spring of 2020. The mission of Educare is to break the cycle of generational poverty by providing high-quality early experiences for children while supporting the family in education. Early experiences and care in life can have a lasting impact on a child's development and learning. The Educare website describes their mission with the four Ps; program, place, partnership, and platform (Tulsa Educare, n.d)

Educare purports to be a research-based program. The University of Oklahoma in Tulsa is the university partner engaged to conduct regular assessments on the physical environment, primary care, curriculum, schedule, program structure, and teacher/child interaction. Educare centers are state of the art, beautifully furnished buildings. Educare believes all children, including children living in poverty, should have a beautiful place to learn. Educare is deeply embedded and connected with the community through partnerships with local agencies and institutions of education. Educare receives support from the public and private sectors such as the State Department of Education, the local school district, and local philanthropy to create a shared mission with shared resources. The local philanthropic partner for TE is the George Kaiser Family Foundation (GKFF). And finally, Educare is a platform for advocacy and education. Educare actively participates in efforts to inform the community, stakeholders, and policymakers of the benefits of quality early care (Ucus, Acar, & Raikes, 2017).

In 2011, I was asked to serve as a member of the TE Board of Directors. My role as a faculty member at TCC and my role as board member at TE allowed me to see the direct connection between our students' success and successful entry into the early childhood profession. Many students from the TCC DCD&E find employment with TE, and many TE employees come back to the TCC DCD&E to further their education. Students who have desirable employment waiting after graduation gain motivation to complete their studies and TE employees who sense their employer is invested in their growth, feel empowered to achieve their scholarly work.

ECE^2 -Early Childhood Education/Educare Career Express.

Working with the leadership at TE, I created a partnership, ECE^2, between the TCC DCD&E and TE. Allying with TE was a natural fit for both programs and is the focus of my participatory action research innovation. The goal of ECE^2 is to provide TCC DCD&E students paid internships in TE facilities. The placements were developed to provide academic and career support and lead to employment with TE. My research will explore the impact these internships have on student perceptions of support, engagement, and persistence.

Typically, an entry-level credential, the CDA, is required for employment in early care at TE. However, the ECE^2 partnership allows TE to place the students as paid interns with no credential or prior experience. Thus, the ECE^2 program offers students the opportunity to move through the TCC DCD&E while participating in a paid internship supervised by TCC faculty and staff and leading to the CDA credential and potential employment with TE.

Regardless of degree plan, all student interns complete the 120 training hours through academic coursework to achieve the CDA credential in their first year fulfilling the critical first step in professional preparation. Their intern work experience at TE allows them to accrue the required 480 work hours necessary for the CDA credential. Students will complete all requirements for the CDA within the first year of the internship. Once the CDA certificate is received, the student is eligible to be hired by TE as an employee with a pay raise and benefits. Although students must achieve academic success to remain in college, it is also critical that they became involved and engaged in other areas

of academic and career life (Robert & Styron, 2010). All ECE^2 students will work with me as a mentor faculty member at TCC and will be assigned a mentor lead teacher at TE. Professional development is built into the program to provide an opportunity for the interns to come together, allowing relationships to form between peers.

Purpose of Study

Research has documented that community college students suffer from multiple obstacles, such as financial complications, academic unpreparedness, work and family obligations, and social isolation (Bragg, 2007; Barr & Schuetz, 2008; Roberts & Styron, 2010). While institutional practices and procedures address issues such as life challenges and financial needs, as a faculty member, I am best situated to aid in student career preparation and social connectedness. Learning, persistence, and accomplishment in college connect to students' active engagement with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter they are studying (CCSE, 2012). Using the ECE^2 internships in high-quality child care centers, the purpose of my participatory action research study is to explore the impact of internships on early childhood education student attitudes towards persistence in their course of study.

Significance of Study and Research Questions

This study has the potential to impact strategies used with child development majors in the community college setting. Successful community college students who persist through their plan of study to graduate will experience the benefits that college completion brings. In addition to the interests of college completion, these students will enter the workforce or university setting with valuable work experience and professional

credentials achieved in a supportive community. The combination of academic knowledge applied in the work setting can serve as a model for students as they approach university studies or workforce opportunities. Both outcomes have the potential to positively affect the growth of the early childhood workforce.

RQ1: What actions do ECE^2 students perceive as supportive in their role as interns?

RQ2: What experiences do ECE^2 student interns perceive as valuable in the Educare classroom?

RQ3: What practices motivate ECE^2 student interns to persist in their course of study?

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND GUIDING RESEARCH

Our work is always guided by the core values of the field of early care and education, including our commitment to ensuring the welfare of children. From that perspective, we prioritize the unique obligations of early childhood adult educators and acknowledge that our day-to-day responsibilities focus primarily on the professional development of adult learners (Code of Ethical Conduct Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators, 2004, p. 2).

The nation is suffering from a critical shortage of qualified early childhood educators. The early childhood profession is relying on institutions of higher learning to create opportunities for career pathways into the field. As a critical partner in this process, community colleges must work to address issues unique to their constituency of adult learners to ensure timely completion of the career and degree pathways. The TCC DCD&E works closely with community partners and state universities to create clear paths for students to university transfers and workforce credentials.

Chapter two contains five sections. Section one addresses the current state of community colleges and the barriers to student retention and completion. This section highlights areas of concern that are specific to the community college population. The identified concerns necessitate the need for innovation. Section two is devoted to sociocultural theory. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the interdependence of social and individual process in the co-construction of knowledge (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky's model provides a framework to support the interaction of student

interns with faculty, mentor teachers, and their peers. Section three features Tinto's Interactionalist Theory. Tinto's theory purports that success in college is closely related to student engagement and social connectedness (Tinto, 1996). A noted barrier for community college students is social isolation. The student internship innovation acts as a connecting endeavor for students. Section four focuses on the critical next-level challenge in community college work: strengthening student success by identifying the educational practices that matter most (CCCSE, 2012). It is in section four that student internships find a home. Student internships, or experiential learning, are a noted recommended best practice for community colleges. Section five discusses the uses and outcomes of student internships in academic programs.

Crisis in the Community College

Community college students are failing at alarming rates (Rath, Rock, & Laferriere, 2013). In 2011, *Complete College America*, a non-profit organization devoted to removing achievement gaps for college students, challenged governors throughout the country by asking them to join the Alliance of States. The alliance is a network that would make commitments to substantially increase college completion and increase student success (Complete College America, 2013). The promises made by the alliance include; financial incentives to encourage the success of low-income students, co-requisite remediation, incentivize students to attend full-time and ensure that full-time means 15 credits per semester, assist working students by using structured scheduling of classes, and create predictable schedules and course maps (Complete College America, 2013). The 33 participating states reported less than 30% of students who enroll full-time

in community college complete an associate degree in three years (Rath, Rock, & Laferriere, 2013). Completion rates were even lower for minority, low-income, and older students as Rath, Rock, and Laferriere (2013) state,

> "A mere 7.5% of African American students, 11.1% of Hispanic students, 11.8% of low-income students, and 14.4% of students over the age of 25, enrolled full-time, complete a two-year associate degree in three years or less. Part-time students completed at even lower rates, with just over 2% of African American students, 2.6% of Hispanic students, and 4.3% of low-income students completing an associate degree in three years or less" (p.7).

The underlying reasons for not completing a college degree are as varied as the number and type of students who attend college (Therriault, 2014). However, Kyllonen (2012) proposed that many students who enter the community college are unprepared for the demands of higher education, and consequently, perform poorly, fail to keep up with assignments and other requirements, and potentially drop out of school altogether. This circumstance is frustrating to the individual and a waste of educational resources (Kyllonen, 2012). However, understanding why students choose to leave or decide to stay is essential to those wanting to make a difference in students' lives (Fike & Fike, 2008). This dilemma challenges states and community colleges to find practices and strategies that improve community college student outcomes (Rath, Rock & Laferriere, 2013).

Retention can be viewed from multiple perspectives and is not always measured by whether a student remains at an institution (Robert & Styron, 2010). Students may stay in

the college system but change institutions or may persist in the institution but revise their desired program of study. Though the process of student retention is not necessarily the opposite of student departure, there is an ever more sophisticated understanding of the complex web of actions shaping student departure and persistence. (Tinto, 2006). Retention in my study exemplify students remaining in TCC's DCD&E. Ideally, students preparing for careers in early childhood education will persist in their declared plan of study, moving into the field well-prepared.

As community colleges increasingly understand the importance of intentionally engaging students, they must turn to innovative and unique strategies in a concerted effort to increase college completion rates (CCCSE, 2013). When community college students receive the support they need, the economic and social benefits that come with college graduation are within their reach (Rath, Rock & Laferriere, 2013). These methods often include strategies that support student interaction with peers, faculty, and college staff, an experience often missing among community college student populations (Tinto, 1997).

Relationships and connection are critical components to student retention (Rath, Rock & Laferriere, 2013, Roberts & Styron, 2010). Collaborative, engaging scholarship is an essential component for academic success. Because students in TCC's DCD&E program can be isolated due to scheduling, work commitments, and family obligations, making connections must be intentional. Social interaction plays a significant role in student learning (Powell & Kalina, 2009). The most valuable social relationships serve all participants, the mentor, and student. The student gains a sense of professionalism and competence of skills. The mentor increases their sense of satisfaction helping a student

navigate a new experience (Kram & Issabella, 1985). The ECE^2 intern will have a network of support provided by the mentor faculty at TCC and mentor teachers on-site at TE. Together student and mentor create something that would not be possible in isolation.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

From a Vygotskian perspective, learning can be particularly useful when it occurs within a context where the intern engages with a mentor, as this affords opportunities for enculturation (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, according to sociocultural theory, the premise of student interns interacting with mentor teachers, as well as fellow interns, allows for productive learning that utilizes newly acquired knowledge, within the professional context. The ECE^2 intern program enables students to take information uniquely internalized in an academic setting and apply it in a child care setting under the guidance of a mentor teacher. These activities provide a context in which the student can grasp the meaningful use of knowledge acquired in the college classroom. Experiencing the effects of collaboration, the intern gains useful strategies and essential knowledge through their interactions in a social environment (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Accordingly, the learning environment becomes bidirectional. Interns affect the learning environment, just as learning environment actively influences the intern (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory supports the explanation of the vibrant connection between social and individual processes (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

To illustrate how social and participatory learning takes place, Vygotsky (1978) developed the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky defined the

ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined through independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under the guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). In other words, in my study, mentor teachers can provide the support as the more knowledgeable other. When student interns encounter situations or information that is beyond their current ability to understand, the mentor teacher can scaffold and support the learning through demonstration, guided practice, and explanation. Vygotsky (1978) extends this understanding further by stating, "What a student can do today in collaboration, they will achieve independently tomorrow" (p. 33). For example, child development majors encounter novel information in the TCC academic classroom, and then apply the information in the TE classroom. According to Vygotsky (1978), the student working independently with this new information may have limited success. "However, the new information awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that can operate only when the student is interacting with people in their environment. It is through this process the student begins to internalize the information, which then becomes part of the student's independent understanding and practice" (p. 35).

In the context of an internship, sociocultural theory emphasizes co-participation, cooperative learning, and mutual discovery between all participants: student, mentor teacher, and peers. Mentor teachers share existing knowledge with students by co-constructing it with them (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Successful strategies include creating an environment where students feel free to offer unique ideas, without the fear of failure. The intern will not be alone in their learning, rather they will be working with

their mentor teacher (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Supportive mentoring can aid student interns in confronting and moving through fear, helping to create an environment in which it is safe to grow (Daloz, 1983). A supportive environment is created by incorporating practices, such as identifying moments in the classroom when direction can be offered without judgment (Trube, 2017). The mentor teacher/intern dynamic includes honesty and trust so that teaching and learning become natural extensions of the developing relationship. In the pilot study of interns and mentor teachers at TE that I conducted, a mentor teacher shared the following thoughts on her relationship with the intern and the importance of patience in her ability to mentor students, "You got to be patient. You've got to give this person time to comprehend what they see and that they hear, because it's not, it's not easy, you know that." Thus, the early childhood classroom becomes a place of patience, a place of safety in which the discussions are open and where the students feel comfortable to discuss and test their ideas or concepts without doubt or worry.

Tinto's Interactionalist Theory

As students create knowledge with significant participants in their learning experience, they invest in the learning experience. According to Tinto, this investment acts as a defense against students prematurely leaving their program of study (1997). Tinto's Interactionalist Theory stated, "that individuals who do not feel they are part of the social system in college will not develop a high level of institutional commitment and are prone to voluntary dropout" (Racchini, 2005, p. 48). In other words, involvement matters related to college retention and success. Tinto (1997) explained that more

integration into the social and academic environments contributed to more institutional and goal commitment and consequently to lower dropout and higher completion rates. Student interns capitalize on their educational experience when they connect with faculty and their peers. The degree of success a student has in his or her pursuit of higher education influences the level of commitment a student has to an institution, academic goals, and career goals (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

The more significant the investment a student makes in college life, the more significant their knowledge and development of skills (Tinto, 1997). This investment includes academic and social pursuits. The subsequent level of institutional commitment is also positively affected by the extent of a student's integration into the social communities of the college (Braxton, 2008). Indeed, like most other challenges in life, a person is more likely to accomplish difficult tasks when he/she is in the company of others who are like-minded and facing similar challenges (Roberts & Styron, 2008).

The most critical step to becoming engaged and involved is for students to interact with their peers (Roberts & Styron, 2008). Community colleges do not always offer opportunities for students to interact beyond the classroom. In my study, student interns had the additional benefit of connecting with peers at the site of the internship. Thus, not only did they share academic experiences, students also shared professional experiences. These experiences offered the student interns opportunities to co-construct their knowledge based on real-life experiences shared with peers and support their investment in college life (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012). In this regard, the peer relationship becomes as meaningful and relevant as the student/mentor teacher relationship (Kram &

Isabella, 1985). ECE[2] interns begin building relationships with their fellow students before placement at TE. Intern orientation is a team-building effort, in which students spend time together in training. Time is spent with other students, faculty, and staff who value their membership –they matter and belong (Tinto, 2017). According to a student intern in my pilot study at TE, "The girls I work with are my closest friends. We communicate outside of class and work."

High Impact Practices

In 2012, the CCCSE published the first of three reports that identified thirteen promising practices in community colleges, focused on retention and completion. Colleges must make decisions—about every hour spent, every dollar allocated, every policy set, and every practice implemented—based on whether those decisions will make engagement inescapable for large numbers of their students (CCCSE, 2013). Research conducted at the CCCSE focused on identified promising practices. The CCCSE recommend the following strategies: academic pathways, academic goal setting and planning, new student orientation, accelerated or fast-track developmental education, first-year experience course, placement assessment, placement advisement, registration before classes begin, class attendance alert intervention, tutoring, supplemental instruction, learning communities, and experiential learning beyond the classroom. The high-impact practice of experiential learning beyond the classroom includes hands-on education, such as internships, apprenticeships, field experiences, or clinical and community-based projects.

Internships are the foundational strategy used in my innovation. The CCCSE has worked to better understand high-impact educational practices in community colleges (CCCSE, 2014). These strategies are called high-impact practices because participation in them associates with high retention and persistence rates, as well as their association with student behaviors that bring meaningful gains (Bass, 2012). As a result, colleges and states are looking at new ways to promote more fundamental redesign of students' educational experiences (CCCSE, 2014). An effective way to ensure that students benefit from high-impact practices, such as internships, is to intentionally build many of these practices into every student's educational experience (Rath, Rock, & Laferriere, 2013; MacGregor, Tinto, & Lindbald, 2000). Bass (2012) argued that this can be accomplished by re-centering the standard college curriculum. The traditional classroom experience is no longer the center of the curriculum, but using high-impact practices, colleges can design for greater flexibility and connection between the formal curriculum and the experiential co-curriculum. One way to support the blending of traditional classroom curriculum with experiential co-curriculum is with internships.

The ECE^2 innovation takes traditional classroom experiences in the academic program at TCC and combines that knowledge with applied practice on site at TE. According to Kuh (2008), ECE^2 student interns "will invest considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks, interact with others about substantive matters, experience diversity, respond to more frequent feedback, reflect and integrate learning, and discover the relevance of learning through the real-world application" (p. 28). It is these elicited behaviors that deem internships to be high-impact practices.

Student Internships

Though student retention is ultimately an academic matter, it is also shaped—directly and indirectly—by social forces internal and external to the campus (Tinto, 1987). One critical factor which positively affects college students' persistence is that of being socially integrated and connected with others, especially other students (Roberts & Styron, 2008). The connection between student engagement and student success is well documented. (CCCSE, 2012; 2013; 2014). The CCCSE studies focus on quantitative and qualitative surveys that collectively create a picture to demonstrate how students connect with faculty, peers, and their course of study (CCCSE, 2014).

Included in the surveys was information on the use of student internships. CCCSE reported the value of student internships, along with other forms of experiential learning, and demonstrated that these experiences could support student retention (2013). A 2011 study at Fairview Community College noted that internships provided a clear connection to jobs. Participants in the Fairview study revealed that the internship's relevance to their career goals kept them interested and engaged in their coursework, leading them to complete their professional credentials (Nitecki, 2011). These outcomes indicated that efforts by programs to improve internship opportunities could have significant educational rewards (Coker & Porter, 2015).

However, few community college students participate in experiential learning, and most community college faculty do not require this type of experience (CCCSE, 2013). Experiential learning, including internships, continues to be an experience that is not readily available to most community college students. More than three-quarters (77%) of

CCCSE respondents said they have not participated in an experiential learning project. Only thirteen-percent of faculty (2,653 of 20,301) reported requiring students to be involved in an internship or other hands-on-learning experience (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2012). These statistics suggest that student internships are a powerful retention strategy that has yet to be embraced by most community colleges.

Internships steep students in content and context. Additionally, internships encourage students to make connections and forge relationships that can support them throughout college and beyond (CCCSE, 2012). Meaningful learning experiences are an essential key to student retention, and it is imperative for higher education institutions to create valuable and enriching learning experiences within their academic programs (Roberts & Styron, 2008). A Vygotskian perspective allows us to understand learning and development of the individual as part of a collective (Putney & Broughton, 2011). According to the CCCSE report, student internships—particularly experienced through active and collaborative learning and in a supportive institutional environment for learners—can result in higher graduation rates (CCCSE, 2014). Student interns in the ECE^2 program had the benefit of their academic study, partnered with hands-on experiential learning at TE.

Summary of Theoretical Perspectives

Internships and other discipline appropriate activities enable educators to structure learning so that students can apply, and practice newly acquired skills and knowledge (CCCSE, 2014). Community colleges must engage in high-impact practices that reinforce current best practice to create a productive academic and career pathway.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory supports the understanding that mentor teachers and students co-create knowledge and these methods support student retention. Whereas, Tinto's Interactionalist theory endorses the need for social connection and investment, guiding our understanding of the importance of the peer relationships. For internships to be productive, faculty, mentor teachers, and students must collaborate in a variety of ways (Tinto, 1998). Internships are also viewed as a dynamic practice that research has shown to be a useful tool in student retention efforts.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Some knowledge and skills needed by early childhood educators can only be acquired through direct experience in early childhood settings. Therefore, early childhood adult educators rely heavily on placements in programs in which students can apply what they have learned, get feedback from children and adults, and reflect on what they have learned from their experience (Code of Ethical Conduct Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators, 2004, p. 3).

Chapter 3 defines and reviews participatory action research (PAR) methodology. While preparing for this study, I had to consider the best approach to answer my research questions. This inquiry led initially to other questions that needed to be addressed first. Is research a means to an end only, or a means for action and change? Additionally, who is expected to act – the researcher, participants, both, or some unknown others who may come across the data produced (Kan, Bawani & Aziz, 2013)? PAR is a collaborative research method used to gather information for change on social issues. PAR has seven strengths: collaboration, knowledge, power, ethics, building theory, action, and emotion and well-being (Whitman, Pain, & Milledge, 2015). By the very name, participation is a critical component of the research process. PAR was particularly suitable for my research study, given the participants' level of involvement. Based on the theoretical foundation of the study, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, it was logical that my method of research would use a co-construction of knowledge designed to benefit all participants. PAR provided a bridge, connecting education and action (Khan, Bawani, & Aziz, 2013).

PAR is closely related to action research. PAR traces its history back to action research pioneered by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946). Action research proposes iterative cycles of planning, acting, developing, and evaluation to simultaneously solve problems and improve practice (Mertler, 2014). While participatory research gives PAR its ethical foundation, action research provides the demand for scientific rigor, and both should be integrated into a research process (Juujärvi & Lund, 2016). However, it is important to remember that rigor in action research is often interpreted in a much broader sense, referencing the entire process and audience, and not just about aspects of data collection, data analysis, and findings (Melrose, 2001). My research study included faculty, students, and mentor teachers who were concerned about or affected by the issue of teacher preparation and allowed them to participate in producing and using the knowledge generated by the study (Anderson et al., 2015).

Student participation provided an understanding of student values, perceptions, and motivations. Students documented their knowledge using the photovoice methodology described in the Data Sources and Collection Methods to follow. Viewing the academic and internship settings through a critical lens, the students and I moved toward a more systemic understanding of the issues students encounter (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Sociocultural theory supported learning based on the social interactions the students faced during the personal, critical-thinking process (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Ideally, student involvement as a participant in my research had the potential to change their lives. More than a methodology, PAR is an attitude that challenges power-over relations in all social undertakings, including academic research (Anderson et al., 2015). Using

photovoice, students documented and interpreted their experiences in the ECE^2 program, thus making them invaluable as the role of insider collaborating with me, as the observer-participant researcher. We co-constructed knowledge to create a new understanding. Anderson et al. (2015) found the result of the PAR collective inquiry with teacher candidates a meaningful and worthwhile endeavor. The ECE^2 experience supported an intentional examination of the student learning experience, while evaluating the needs of student interns in the early childhood classroom, thus informing the student intern actions and those of the mentors.

The next section provides a detailed account of the study setting, ECE^2 internship program, followed by the participants, and the role of the researcher. Data collection and data analysis procedures follow. Chapter three concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness as it relates to my study.

Background

Internships are a unique form of experiential education because they can serve different purposes for different students (O'Neill, 2014). My innovation using student internships featured an intentional connection between academic study, professional preparation, and the student/mentor teacher relationship at the internship placement site. Using internships in high-quality child care centers, the purpose of this qualitative participatory action research study was to explore the impact of internships on early childhood education student attitudes towards persistence in their course of study.
RQ1: What actions do ECE^2 students perceive as supportive in their role as interns?

RQ2: What experiences do ECE^2 student interns perceive as valuable in the Educare classroom?

RQ3: What practices motivate ECE^2 student interns to persist in their course of study?

Setting

The Educare Learning Network grew from the Ounce of Prevention Fund and the Buffett Early Childhood Fund in 2003 with the opening of Educare Omaha. In the 15 years since its inception, the Educare Learning Network has grown to 25 sites, in 17 states. The goal of Educare is to provide every child, regardless of birth, quality early experiences, in the care of highly trained teachers. The GKFF namesake, George Kaiser, is a vocal advocate of quality early care for Tulsa's most vulnerable children. As he explained, "I had the advantage of both genetics and upbringing. As I looked around at those who did not have these advantages, it became clear to me that I had a moral obligation to direct my resources to help repair that inequity" (Kaiser, 2010, p. 1). Research demonstrates an opportunity gap for children of color and poverty. Denying children equitable educational opportunities is bad policy and inconsistent with fundamental American values (Carter & Welner, 2013). Educare believes it is only fair that every child has access to qualified teachers and appropriate resources. The Educare Network is designed to deliver quality educational experiences that are data driven by best practice. Ucus, Acar& Raikes (2017) have studied and reported on the outcomes of children who experience Educare:

> Educare is different from many other early child care programs in that it is a unique model that gives students in poverty the best chance for

> success in school and in life by advocating for and providing the highest quality care and education from birth to age five (p. 48).

Equity and opportunity are expensive. It takes a coordinated effort of experts and multiple funding streams to support Educare. High-quality programs that produce the observed benefits have relied on highly qualified teachers with baccalaureate or master's degree in early childhood education, small class sizes, rich, hands-on learning materials, and parent outreach and teaching (Carter & Welner, 2013).

The Educare model foundation is current research and best practice in early childhood education, social work, and related fields. Four core features comprise the Educare model: data use, embedded professional development, high-quality teaching practices, and strong family engagement (Haynes& Stringfellow, 2014). With these core features, Educare moves to break the cycle of generational poverty by providing every child, regardless of birth, quality early experiences in the care of highly trained teachers.

TE acts as the training site for several university programs. TCC, The University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University, Northeastern State University, and The University of Tulsa use the Educare schools for internships and observation opportunities for their students. In addition to the commitment to Tulsa's early childhood community through philanthropic support of the TE early learning centers, GKFF is the funding source of the Bridging the Gap (BTG) Scholarship at TCC. The BTG Scholarship pays tuition, fees, and books (less a $10 per credit hour co-pay contributed by the scholar) for courses toward specific Child Development certificates and degrees. It also reimburses for related academic expenses including background checks, food handler's cards, and

CDA application fees. Through the scholarship funding, GKFF is also responsible for supporting the paid internship of ECE^2, reinforcing the continuous collaboration and integration of TCC's DCD&E and TE.

ECE^2 Internship Program Innovation

I created a partnership program called Early Childhood Education/Educare Career Express, ECE^2, in 2015. This program offered students the opportunity to move through the TCC's DCD&E academic program and participate in a paid internship in TE facilities. The internships were developed to provide academic and career support and lead to employment with TE. It is the goal of my innovation that all participants complete the requirements for the CDA as an ECE^2 intern.

ECE^2 students may pursue either the Certificate of Mastery, Associate of Applied Science or Associate of Science degree plan of study. Regardless of degree plan, all student interns complete the CDA 120 training hours to achieve the CDA in their first year, fulfilling the critical first step in professional preparation. The work experience at TE allow students to accrue the required 480 work hours that are necessary for the CDA. Students complete all requirements for the CDA within the first year of the internship to earn the CDA. Once this credential is received, the student is eligible to be hired by TE as an employee, with a pay raise and benefits.

Critical aspects of the ECE^2 innovation included connection and support on three fronts. Figure 3 illustrates the levels of support found in the ECE^2 program. The first level of support came from faculty at TCC. All ECE^2 students worked with me as a mentor faculty member. Faculty support took the form of weekly site visits. During the

weekly visits, I observed the interns in the TE classroom, had impromptu conversations, and provided encouragement and feedback. As the faculty mentor, I also facilitated planning of work and course schedules. Student interns were encouraged to take a full academic course load, which is 15 credit hours per semester and could work up to 15 hours a week as interns at TE. And while there was not a minimum hour restriction at TE, all interns were encouraged to work in three-hour increments to facilitate continuity of care in the TE classroom. It was important to remember that the student must accumulate 480 work hours over the course of the first year to meet the requirements of the CDA. At 15 hours a week, the student will complete the required CDA hours in 32 weeks, or one fall and spring semester.

The second level of support was provided by mentor teachers at TE. This support included guided practice, an opportunity to model daily work in the classroom with children, as well as an opportunity to discuss and reflect on classroom interactions. The mentor teacher at TE was the student's on-site contact and source of support. Through previous iterations of research, it was clear that the role of mentor teacher is a critical component to student success. Careful consideration was made by TE in the selection of mentor teachers. Desirable mentor qualities included at least five years of experience at TE, previous experience or training as a mentor or school leader, and a self-identified desire to mentor a student intern. It is important to note; mentors can represent not only a desired career role model for students but also a vision of what is possible person (Daloz, 1983).

The third and final opportunity for support came from fellow interns. Students participated in three group professional development activities to connect them with their fellow interns. The three scheduled professional development opportunities include; CPR and First Aid training in September, Safe Infant Sleep Training in October, and the University of Oklahoma Seed Sowers Lecture Series in November. Professional development was built into the program to provide an opportunity for the interns to come together, allowing relationships to form between peers. Ideally, ECE^2 students will graduate on time with an earned CDA, leading to employment with TE.

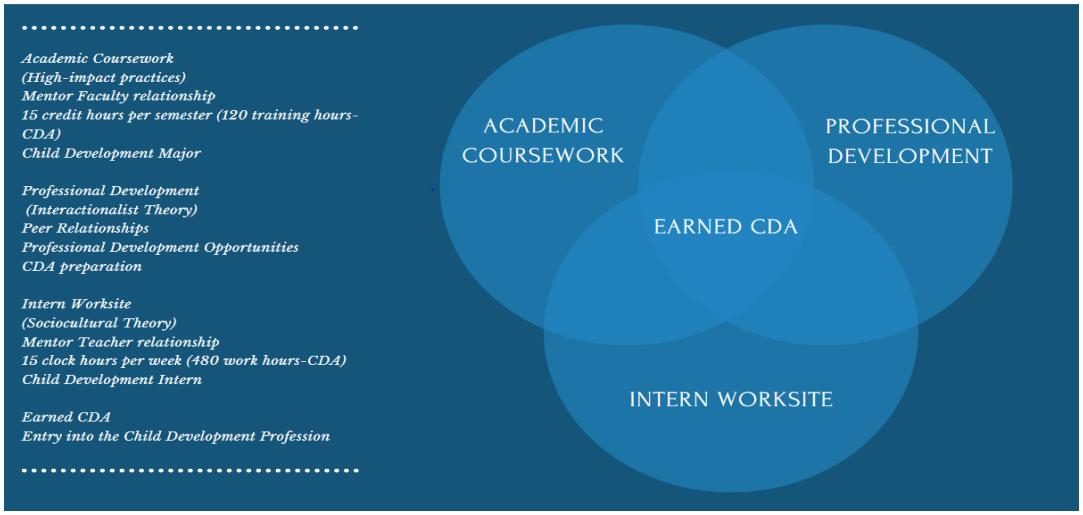

Figure 3.
ECE^2 internship essential elements

Participants

A purposeful sampling process was used to select four student interns placed at TE for the study. Purposeful sampling techniques are used mainly in qualitative studies and defined as selecting units (e.g., individuals, groups of individuals, institutions) based on specific purposes associated with answering research questions (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The participants in my study were recruited. The participants were majoring in degrees

within the TCC DCD&E. All students had been accepted into the Bridging the Gap Scholarship program. The students expressed an interest in participating in the internship at TE. None of the students selected were registered in my classes at the time of the study. However, two of the participants were previous students of mine. While four students began the internship in August, one student dropped out of the program in November due to life circumstances. This will be addressed in Chapter 5. The participants were not representative of the total student population; instead, they were students who were recruited by me from a very specific pool of students. Their participation in the Bridging the Gap Scholarship and expressed interest in an internship identified them as potential candidates (Anderson et al., 2015).

One aim of PAR is to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people through research, such as adult education, making a purposeful sampling appropriate for my study (Morales, 2016). PAR is typically more interested in generating knowledge that can support the setting under which the study took place, rather than creating knowledge for use beyond the context of the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Table 2 provides the demographic information for the student interns.

Table 2.
Participant demographic information

Participant Code	Pseudonym	Years at TCC	Major	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity
CAR4518	Becca	.5	AS	F	19	White
KIR6707	Lauren	4	AAS	F	23	Black
QUE5354	Anna	3	AS	F	51	Black
JEM8037	Kelly	1	AAS	F	21	Black

Role of the Researcher

It is important to note that in a PAR study, it was not my goal to remain objective. PAR requires academic researchers to extend what has conservatively been identified in scientific research as the role of a researcher –objective, dispassionate and unattached (Stirbys et al., 2017). Instead, I focused the lens of inquiry inward, reflecting on the role I, the researcher, played in the process of teaching and learning (Anderson et al., 2015). Self-awareness of my positionality allowed me the ability to distinguish my sense-making from the other participants' sense-making (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The student interns and I underwent a shared experience, but created understanding filtered through differing life experiences and education. I will use the information gained through the study to inform my future practice as an adult educator, while the student participants will use the information gained to inform their practice as early childhood educators. These different goals impacted the importance given to circumstances and understandings.

My role as researcher was that of an observer-participant in collaboration with insiders. I conducted observations, collected field notes and created memos, in addition to facilitated interviews and the focus group. I contributed to the conversations as the interns and I discussed the outcomes of the internship. Sociocultural theory supports the positionality of collaborator. The ECE^2 internship emphasis on co-participation, cooperative learning, and joint discovery, allowed me to bring existing knowledge to student interns by co-constructing new knowledge with them (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Learning was not by acquisition but construction. I viewed the students, along

with myself, as co-constructors, engaged in creating a more in-depth understanding of the internship process, researcher process, and ourselves (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

I have a long history with TE as a board member. I have served on the Advisory Board for six years. However, my board role has no power or authority over the school. It is merely an advisory position. My recognized position within TE is that of a supportive community partner. My presence at TE was not substantial enough to be considered an insider, but because of a long history of shared projects, the observer-participant in collaboration with insiders was accurate and descriptive. With this relationship comes the understanding that the students and I shared experiences and knowledge to create new understandings to form more efficient supports and practices that were shared with TE (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

I served as a mentor faculty member to the student interns. As the faculty mentor, I worked closely with the BTG scholarship office to check for academic schedules and progress toward completion. I was the students' point of contact at the TCC DCD&E, while the mentor teacher was be the point of contact at TE. I acted as the liaison between the TCC's DCD&E program and TE. These duties included planning the internship orientation, working closely with the TE school directors and HR department to ensure proper placement and assignment of a mentor teacher. I managed the students' internship schedules and visited the students on site at TE.

My personal experience with mentors was critical to my assumptions and interpretations of the participating teacher. In my teacher preparation, I was fortunate to be the focus of experienced and caring mentors. However, the experiences I perceived as

helpful and supportive may differ from another's perceptions. As I analyzed data, I was mindful of actions I understood to be supportive such as reinforcing language, guided opportunities, and a guiding hand. I was equally cognizant of activities and strategies I perceived to be discouraging, such as allowing too much independence or not providing enough verbal support. However, the student intern's perception was critical in this study. Therefore, the students' voice was of primary importance.

Data Sources and Collection Methods

Data was collected through several sources. The primary sources of data came from the students themselves, by way of their photographs and discussion about the photographs. Photovoice provided the student interns the opportunity to create an in-depth response to the research questions, with the potential to more clearly demonstrate their experiences, and the strengths and weaknesses of the internship program (Langdon, Walker, Gavin, & Pritchard, 2014). Additionally, on-site observations offered an occasion to view the student interns in the early childhood classroom, create field notes, and have ongoing conversations with the interns and their mentor teachers. A secondary data set came in the form of bi-weekly surveys submitted by the interns and their mentor teachers. The surveys gave both parties the option to check in and give brief, but frequent feedback.

Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory method that involves individuals taking photographic images to document and reflect on issues significant to them and how they view themselves and others (Wang & Burris, 1997). Because the purpose of the PAR study is

to gain insight into the student perceptions of the internship, it was critical for the student intern to be intimately involved in the collection of data. It was the student's perception and vision that would tell the story of the success or failure of the ECE^2 internship program.

Students collected data through photographs, using the Photovoice method. The intern participants used their smartphones to capture images that illustrated their experiences as an intern. The photos taken by the intern participants served as the basis of individual interviews to produce a narrative of the student intern experience. As prescribed in the photovoice method, students participated in one-on-one, open-ended interviews and a focus group. The use of a focus group allowed the student interns to share their photos and understandings with each other. Evidence of student perceptions and reactions could only come from those who live the students' experiences. Preferably, the outcomes from the study would be a source of empowerment for the participants' daily lives. Therefore, the participants did not merely generate information to inform my practice, but also to improve their work and experiences as well (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The goals of using photovoice included the empowerment of the interns to record and reflect on their perceptions of community value, support, and persistence, and to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through large and small group discussion of their photographs (Wang, 1999).

Research Procedures.

1. The initial meeting with the student included instructions about the photovoice study. Photovoice is typically used to allow participants to authenticate their experiences

visually using photography. The training consisted of the purpose of the study and application of the camera. The student interns were asked to identify and photograph experiences and actions that they believed demonstrated value in their relationship with their peers and mentors, activities they perceived to be supportive, and practices or skills that they thought motivated them to persist in their course of study. I provided general instruction, as the participant's observations are the primary focus. The student interns had two weeks to take photos. Students uploaded photos that they selected for the study into a designated Dropbox. All photographs uploaded into the Dropbox became artifacts of the study.

2. Students uploaded any photograph that exemplified their experience as an intern. I printed all photographs uploaded by the students. Following this process, I scheduled individual meetings with each student intern. In the interview, the interns reviewed the images with me, selecting the photos that they believed best represented their experience. The interview included the SHOWED questions. Standardized by Wang (1999), photovoice studies typically follow the SHOWED process for analyzing photographs. The five questions involved in this process are (1) What do you see here? (2) What is happening? (3) How does this affect our lives? (4) Why does this strength or weakness exist? (5) What can we do about it? (Wang, 1999). The SHOWED questions served as baseline questions. However, it must be noted, that a social constructivist perspective suggests that interview questions not be definitively established before the study begins, but instead start with a goal that allowed the inquiries to evolve and change as the investigation progresses (Mertens, 2014). With this in mind, interview questions were

added and refined during the interview process. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

3. Following the individual meetings, all participants met with me as a focus group to view all the photos selected. The focus group had the opportunity not only to answer questions posed to the team but also to ask questions of each other. Participants were encouraged to share the story of their photos. Why did they take that picture? What did they want to capture? How does this photo tell the story of a student intern? The focus group meeting was audiotaped and transcribed.

The focus group contributed to the analysis of the photos. The interns looked for topics that appeared across the photographs, as well as isolated or unique ideas captured by individual pictures. When seeking data totality, it was assumed that interviews and focus groups would reveal different perspectives of similar experiences, adding to a complete understanding, expanding the breadth and depth of the findings (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008).

Participant observations

Observations involved a systematic and detailed recording of events, actions, and interactions (Metler, 2014). Data was collected using field notes from semi-structured observations of students in cooperation with their mentor teacher and children at their placement site. Field notes were also taken during semi-structured observations of peer interaction during their professional development opportunities. Semi-structured observations allowed me the flexibility to interact briefly with the interns, then return to observation. Critical observation times included lunch and post-naptime transitions. Post-

naptime was as an ideal opportunity for the intern and mentor teacher to connect and reflect, without the immediate distraction of childcare. The lunch/naptime transition allowed me to observe the student intern interaction with the classroom children and other adults in the room, as well as the more personal interactions with the mentor teacher and intern.

I used a semi-structured observation tool to guide student observations (Appendix A). This tool featured nine goals that were based on the NAEYC 2010 Standards for Initial Early Childhood Professional. The students were observed and identified as having met, approaching, not yet met each standard. In addition to the observed NAEYC goals, the tool noted observed outcomes, process, and interactions. Each observation goal supported the three stated research questions.

Bi-weekly survey

The mentor teachers and student interns participated in bi-weekly reflections. These reflections consisted of answering five questions on a three-point Likert scale Survey Monkey. The mentor survey focused on professional dispositions observed in the intern, such as timeliness, appropriate dress, and proper classroom interactions. See Appendix B for the Mentor Survey. The intern survey focused on intern satisfaction, such as feelings of support, engagement, and connectedness. See Appendix C for the Student Survey. The survey links were emailed to the mentor teachers and interns every other week. The surveys were designed to take approximately one minute to complete. The information gathered in the polls served as a periodic check on satisfaction and success in the classroom.

Data Analysis Procedures

A bottom-up approach or inductive analysis was used. Developing codes inductively through a thematic analysis offered a specific lens through which to view the data (Stirbys et al., 2017). Rather than beginning with a hypothesis, looking for confirmation, an inductive review started with observations and photovoice evidence, moving to identified patterns, and finally to potential beliefs or understandings (Mertler, 2014). The interviews and focus group discussion transcripts were coded. The coding scheme used grouped information into similar categories. Specific codes included relationships, student contribution, mentor support, the value of the work with children, classroom contributions, and motivations to continue work as a scholar and educator. Existing topics were examined for relevance and accuracy as new themes emerge. Similar words and ideas were unified. Any issues or categories not directly related to the research questions were set aside, with attention to keeping details that offer diversity and unique understandings. The zoom analysis provided the framework for analysis.

I used Atlas.ti 8, a qualitative analysis software, to organize data into the zoom levels of understanding. Atlas.ti 8 allowed me to locate, code, and connect themes in primary data material, to assess their relevance to the research questions and discover relationships between them (Silver & Lewins, 2014).

Zoom Analysis

Both thematically and informatively, the zoom method of analysis was suitable for my study. The technique was framed by a metaphor drawn from the field of photography, that of the zoom lens that allowed us to focus in on the fine details found in a broader

context (Pamphilon, 1999). Because the purpose of the study was to examine student perceptions in the context of their academic and school experiences, the zoom method was appropriate. The zoom method acknowledged the participation of the researcher and the participant in the analysis process. In a sociocultural PAR study, it was fitting that the student interns and I worked together. The zoom method of data analysis invited the individual story interpreter to focus on the following four levels: the macro, the meso, the micro, and the interactional (Pamphilon, 1999).

Following the understanding of inductive analysis, the interactional level, as the first point of analysis, was essential for two reasons. First, the examination consisted of how I received the stories and how the participant told me the stories. Second, my role as the researcher was an interpretative role, as I selected what to prompt, highlight, make visible, and discard (Pamphilon, 1999). The experience of a story shared with a person was, in a profound sense, a joint product of these two people (Pamphilon, 1999). This level of analysis harkens back to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of co-constructed knowledge. The student intern and I created an understanding together through the interviews and focus groups.

The micro level focused on the oral dimension of the personal stories (Pamphilon, 1999). I did not overlook the importance of the emotions in which the intern communicated their stories. Data collected through oral storytelling, interviews, and the focus group demonstrated verbal indicators, such as pauses, the rate of response, and feelings inflected into the stories told and expression of ideas (Pamphilon, 1999). These

indicators added depth to the words and revealed more than merely the text alone. Tears and laughter were significant features in the conversations.

The meso level highlighted the student intern's unique stories and personal circumstances that informed their practice as a novice teacher. Each intern had their own story or narrative that documented their connection to ECE[2]. The meso level of analysis focused on themes that relate to the interns' unique pathway to the shared experience of the internship. It is in the meso level of analysis that I found topics of personal interpretations of support and engagement. Codes included relationships with the children in the classroom, student contribution in the classroom, professional development opportunities, and mentor support.

The macro level focused on terms, stories, and understandings the student intern shared in their connection to the teaching profession and issues that influenced the broader context of their life as a student. In this way, the macro level shed light on the relationship between an individual and society (Pamphilon, 1999). Information gained from the macro examination reflected the interns' level of commitment to maintaining their course of study to join the profession fully. The following codes existed at the macro level: the value of the work with children, classroom contributions, motivations to continue work as a scholar and educator, and professional development.

Ethical Consideration

Student participation in this study was voluntary. If the student decided not to participate or withdrew from the study at any time, there was no penalty whatsoever. Students had to be 18 years of age or older to participate. The interviews and focus group

discussion were audio recorded and transcribed. The interviews and discussion were not recorded without student permission. Students were notified of all ethical considerations with a written consent form. Students had clear instructions regarding ethical considerations of photographs taken. No photographs distinguishing specific individuals were released without explicit written consent of the photographer and identified person (Wang, 1999). Students followed the permission to photograph policies of TE. All children photographed at TE had a photographic release signed by the child's parent or guardian.

Trustworthiness

Social constructivists reject the notion that there is an objective reality. In fact, the goal of research is to understand the various social constructions of meaning and knowledge (Mertens, 2014). To address multiple perspectives, I used various methods of data collection to gain a coherent, comprehensive view of the student intern experience (Cope, 2014). Triangulation of data-collection techniques with field notes and memos, photographs, interviews, focus groups, and member checking increased the likelihood of trustworthiness (Langdon et al., 2014). Langdon et al. further explained photovoice achieved authenticity and credibility because the methodology relied on the participation of the target population whose photographs represented their lived experiences, and consistency was achieved by following a stable protocol (p. 23). The participants and facilitators of the photovoice study followed highly individualized paths. However, the use of interviews and the focus group created a community of learners. This community

of learners not only had the opportunity to embrace their practice but also participate in a chance to effect change.

Member checking was used to add to the trustworthiness of my analysis. Member checking involved the sharing of interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and the final report with the participants of the study (Mertler, 2014). Table 3 highlights the study timeline.

Timeline

Table 3.
ECE² project timeline and protocol

Procedure	Sequence	Action
Discuss photovoice study with Educare administration	July 9, 2018	• Met with Vicki Wolf, Chief Program Officer-Tulsa Educare, to explain photovoice study procedures and goals
Intern application process	July 20, 2018	• Handed out internship application to all incoming BTG students at scholars' orientation.
Intern section process	July 30 and August 3, 2018	• Scheduled interviews • Conducted interviews in conjunction with the Director of Scholarships at TCC DCD&E
Intern orientation	August 24, 2018	• Brad Sullivan, Assistant Director of Student Life, TCC conducted CPR/First Aid training • TE HR Dept. provided introductory information • Student interns registered for their background check fingerprint • Student interns registered for their CECPD account

Intern placement at E1	September 27, 2018	• Met with Vicki Wolf at TE to arrange internship schedule. TE had selected mentor teachers to facilitate interns.
Visited interns on-site	September-November 2018	• Visited interns weekly. These visits allowed opportunities to write field notes and memos.
Photovoice orientation with Mentor Teachers	September 20 and 27, 2018	• Met with mentor teachers to discuss goals of the photovoice study and to answer questions.
Sent bi-weekly surveys to mentor teachers and student interns	September 23- November 4, 2018	• Sent Survey Monkey survey to each mentor teacher and student intern for feedback
Photovoice orientation with Student Interns	September 28 and October 3, 2018	• Reserved meeting room at TCC West Campus • Met with interns to explain photovoice procedures and to answer questions.
Students collected photographs and upload photos to Dropbox	October 19- November 2, 2018	
Professional development	October 19, 2018	• Reserved meeting room • Melissa Schad, Education Specialist TCC, conducted Safe Infant Sleep Training • PD allowed opportunities to write field notes and memos.

Professional development	November 1 and 2 2018	• OU Seed Sowers Lecture Series • PD allowed opportunities to write field notes and memos
Scheduled and conducted individual interviews	November 9, 2018	• Reserve a room at Educare 1 and 2 • Emailed individual interns to remind them of the scheduled date and location of the interview
Scheduled and conducted focus group	November 16, 2018	• Reserve a room at Educare 1 • Emailed individual interns to remind them of the scheduled date and location of the focus group.
Analyzed Data	December 2018	• Transcribed audio recordings • Conducted qualitative analysis
Conducted member checking with interns	February 2019	• Reserved a room at Educare 1

CHAPTER 4

4 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The work of the early childhood adult educator involves interaction and collaboration with colleagues. Our professional responsibility to colleagues is to maintain positive and productive working relationships (Code of Ethical Conduct Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators, 2004, p. 4).

The purpose of my participatory action research study was to explore the impact of internships on early childhood education student attitudes towards persistence in their course of study. The information presented in this chapter is organized into three sections. Section one includes a review of data collection methods. Section two examines the critical findings related to each research question. The chapter concludes with a discussion of key findings.

Data Collection

It is at this point that I must acknowledge that my role in the study was not impartial, nor objective. As the researcher, I viewed my endeavor an act of "with," not "on" the interns and did not view the interns merely as objects or sources of data (Melrose, 2001). The affection and investment in my relationship with the interns was significant to me. Our relationship shifted as we moved through different phases of the research process. Initially, planning for the study was solely my responsibility. I was the principal investigator of the study; however, I was the outsider/observer to the TE setting. At the onset of the study, the interns were participants, but not equally invested in the process. As the interns became more integrated into the site of the study through their internship, their role in the study and subsequently our relationship, shifted. For example, as their knowledge and comfort at TE grew, so did their level of involvement. Their role transferred from participant to insider. My role then changed from outsider/observer to outsider/observer collaborating with insiders (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The change in our roles brought us together as collaborators. The interns were intimately connected with the study during the data collection and initial analysis of the data because of their insider status at the study site. To further complicate this matter, it also must be acknowledged that each intern, while insiders to the setting, had unique experiences and understanding of the experiences, highlighting that they can only speak to their truth, not a universal truth (Herr & Anderson, 2015). At this point in the study, the student interns and I integrated our understanding of the intern experience through a complex process of co-construction established through our relationship of researchers, participants, and

collaborators (White & Drew, 2011). During the interviews and focus group discussions, we shared, shaped, and created a collective understanding of the internship.

Observations

During the weekly observations, I spent 30-45 minutes observing the interns in the classroom. I used a semi-structured observation tool. The tool allowed for a standardized assessment (Appendix A), using the NAEYC Standards for Initial Early Childhood Professional Preparation skills to determine if the intern was exceeding the set standard, meeting the set standard, or had not yet met the set standard. While I completed the form for each intern, it was the anecdotal notes taken during this time that best served the study. The standardize portion of the observation did not yield useful information, as there were often categories that I was not able to observe during my time in the classroom. The anecdotal notes provided insight into specific behaviors and strategies used by the interns. These notes were later included for coding with the interview and focus group transcripts.

I am aware that the interns wanted to perform well when I visited, as they seemed "on" when I was in the room. I do not think they performed poorly when I was not there, only that they were very animated and intentional when I did visit. The mentor teachers provided feedback on bi-weekly surveys that attested to the fact that the interns were functioning well in the room. The interns and I talked after each observation. It was at these times I, and we discussed what happened in the room. I made recommendations for continued improvement. For instance, in my second classroom visit with Anna, I noted she was holding back, not engaging in the class when I felt she was capable of engaging.

When we met after the observation to talk, I mentioned to her that she was ready to participate and take part in the classroom activities. She told me that she was not familiar with the constructivist language used in the classroom and she was unsure of herself. She shared that the language she used with her children was very different from what she heard in the TE classroom. She was reluctant to initiate contact with the children, fearful that she would not communicate with the children correctly. I asked her for an example. She mentioned that in the classroom, a teacher would tell a child that they are going to pick them up before they did it. The teacher then would explain why they were doing it. She went on to say; the teacher may say, "I am going to take you off the chair, so you will be safe" and then remove the child from the chair. Anna recollected that when she was a single parent to her children, she did not give them the same opportunity to respond. She said, "If I needed them off the chair, I took them off the chair." She was thoughtful as she reflected on the difference between adult/child interactions found in the TE classroom and the interactions she had with her children. I assured Anna that she has the knowledge and skills to begin this work. We discussed strategies to help make her more comfortable with the language. I recommended close observation of the mentor teacher. She said she would try. The following week, she was much more engaged and appeared to be more relaxed in the classroom.

Photovoice

On September 19, 2018, I met with the interns to discuss the photovoice study. We discussed the ethics of taking photographs of others and went over the photovoice training guide (Appendix E). This meeting provided an opportunity to brainstorm, ask

questions, and clarify the goals of the study. A list of prompts was provided to the interns to clarify the goals of the photovoice study (Appendix D). Only two of the four interns were able to attend the training. I met individually with the other two interns the following week.

The students began photographing their intern experiences on October 19, 2018. This day was the second professional development opportunity for student interns. The training gave the interns the opportunity to take their first pictures. During the photovoice study, my level of interaction with the interns did not change. I continued to observe them in the TE classroom weekly. The final day of the photovoice study was the last, required professional development for the interns.

The University of Oklahoma Early Childhood Leadership Institute (ECLI) lecture and conference were held in Tulsa, OK on November 1 and 2, 2018. Four interns attended the free public lecture on November 1 as a requirement of the internship. As fate would have it, students from another organization, who had paid for the all-day conference on November 2, 2018, dropped out and I was offered the registrations for my student interns. I offered attendance at the all-day training to the four interns. Two accepted the offer, and two declined. This choice was a significant event for the two students who attended. It was three days later that one intern, who did not attend the all-day training, stepped out of the program due to life circumstances. These circumstances are addressed in chapter 5.

Interviews

November 9, 2018, after printing all the photographs that were uploaded to the Dropbox, I met individually with each intern to discuss the photographs. Each interview

was scheduled to last one hour. All the interviews lasted longer than one hour, the longest lasting one hour and 45 minutes. The interviews were pleasant, thoughtful, and reflective. The pictures provided the talking points using the questions prescribed by the SHOWED method of photovoice. During this time, the students and I laughed, cried, and had meaningful conversations. Often our conversations moved from thoughtful to light-hearted and back again. In Anna's interview, she reflected on a picture she took with a fellow intern and her admiration and affection for Becca (Figure 4). When I asked Anna, "So, what do you see here?" She laughed, responding, "A young white girl and an old black woman!" We both laughed at that, but then she reflected, "She's so um...I don't know...she's...I don't know. I'd like to meet her parents. She's beyond her age." She continued by saying, "she's just special. And I had to capture that, because I know she's gonna be doing something big too, I'm gonna be like "You remember me?"

Figure 4.
Photo Interns

Focus Group Discussion

On November 16, 2018, the three interns and I met to discuss their photographs as a group. I mounted their selected photos on photo boards and displayed the boards in our meeting room. I gave the interns time to explore each other's boards and ask questions of each other. They were excited to share their stories with someone who understood. Exchanging ideas within the group of interns rather than just between individuals, opened Vygotsky's representation of sociocultural understanding to include the experience created within the social space of the group (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012). I observed their enthusiasm for each other and their excitement when they could say, "me too!" I continued my investigation by asking, "Why did you take that picture? What did you want to capture? How does this photo tell the story of a student intern?" The questions and responses that came from the group discussion reinforced the information gained in the individual interviews.

Bi-weekly Surveys

The interns and their mentor teachers received bi-weekly surveys during October and November of 2018. The surveys were emailed using Survey Monkey. The surveys consisted of five questions on a three-point Likert scale. While the surveys were designed to take one minute to complete, the intern participation was sporadic (Figure 5), however the mentor teachers responded more frequently than the interns (Figure 6).

The mentors' survey addressed questions like those found on the classroom observation tool, featuring from the NAEYC Standards for Initial Early Childhood Professional Preparation. The responses from the mentors always showed that the interns were meeting the standard. The mentors would also occasionally include comments that

suggested the interns were adjusting well to their role in the classroom. Lauren's mentor commented, saying "She is doing great. She is new to the classroom, but she is always willing to learn and grow." And Anna's mentor commented in the final survey that she was taking initiative, "Doing great with taking initiative. Even starts teeth brushing without being prompted."

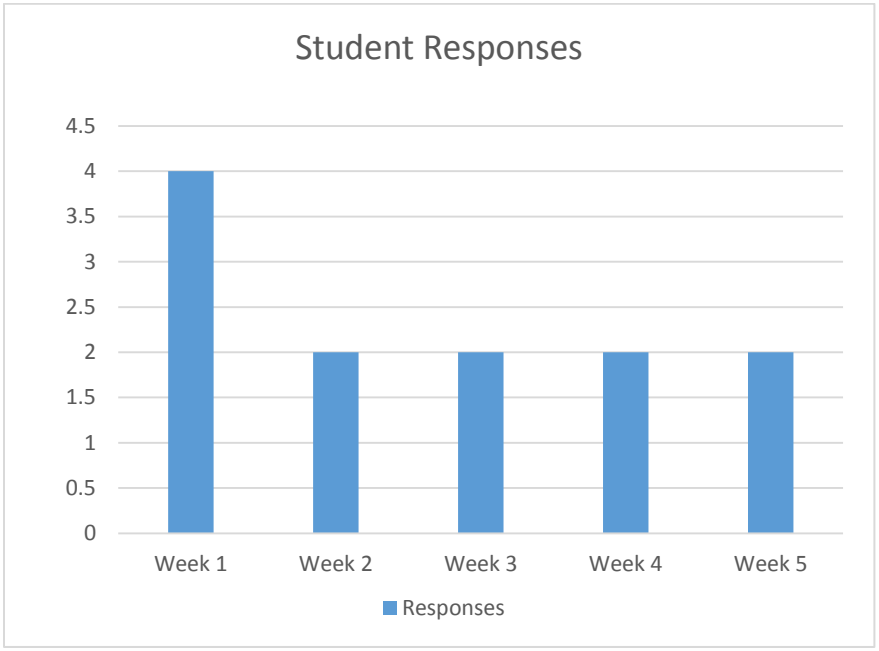

Figure 5.
Student survey response rate

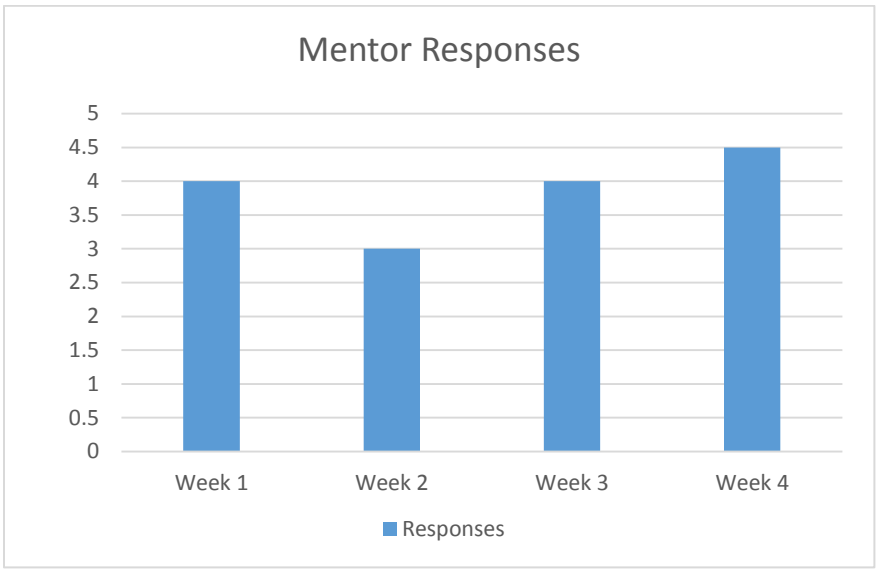

Figure 6.
Mentor survey response rate

Study Findings

Research questions organize the study findings. The questions addressed in the study are;

RQ1: What actions do ECE^2 students perceive as supportive in their role as interns?

RQ2: What experiences do ECE^2 student interns perceive as valuable in the Educare classroom?

RQ3: What practices motivate ECE^2 student interns to persist in their course of study?

Within each question, the zoom method of analysis was used to examine the data. The zoom model that I describe below was initially created as a response to the challenge of interpretative authority often found in research (Pamphilon, 1999). This method is in keeping with the understanding of PAR, which is a shared endeavor.

The interactional level of understanding in the zoom model is in response to the overall, collaborative experience which featured the interaction between me and the interns. The micro level of analysis highlighted the emotional aspects of storytelling. Pauses, crying, and laughter all added to the emotional experience of relaying the stories. The meso level of analysis reflected the unique experiences and history of each student intern. At this level in vivo coding was appropriate, as it used quotes and short phrases from the actual language found in the interviews and focus group discussion (Saldaña, 2016). The macro level of analysis included individual experiences, used to revealed cohort similarities (Pamphilon, 1999). Pattern coding was used at the macro level. This coding strategy allowed me to pull together material from different sources into more meaningful units of analysis (Saldaña, 2016). I used a broader brush and moved individual units of data from pictures, interviews, observations, and the focus group discussion into groups that let me attribute meaning. Therefore, individual experiences, actions, and practices become part of the broader understanding of the internship (Charmaz, 2014). The pictures, interviews, focus group discussion, and observations documented in this study became "examples of the interrelationships fundamental to human development, where mind and matter, language and thought, external and inner speech, nature and culture, and social and individual processes in the construction of knowledge" (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996, p. 195).

It is important to attribute meaning to the keywords found in the research questions. Attaching meaning to experiences, actions, and practices proved to be an essential understanding of the outcome of the data. I found myself in need of a single source of

definitions, due to the comparison of terms. For this reason, an online dictionary was used to define the key terms found in the research questions. These definitions were used to analyze and understand data. For this study, actions are defined as the fact or process of doing something, typically to achieve an aim (Google Dictionary online, n.d.). Experiences are defined as events or occurrences that leave an impression on someone (Google Dictionary online, n.d.). Moreover, finally, practices are defined as the actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method (Google Dictionary online, n.d.). While there is subtle overlap in the definitions, utilizing the zoom process of analysis helped to clarify the connections and distinctions of each question. This understanding of levels recognized that the terms are not discrete units or opposites, but are in fact in a relationship, intricately and intrinsically linked (Pamphilon, 1999).

RQ1: What actions do ECE^2 students perceive as supportive in their role as interns?

The key finding- Relationships with the mentor teachers provide a significant source of support for the ECE^2 interns.

Research question one explored actions the interns believed to be supportive. While actions have been defined as the fact or process of doing something, typically to achieve an aim, the definition of support narrows the outcome to actions that provided encouragement or emotional help (Google Dictionary online, n.d.). The definition of support made the interactions very specific.

Relationships noted between the interns and their mentor teachers were found across the interviews and focus group discussions, as well as in the classroom observations. The intern/ mentor arrangement set the stage for each to develop a meaningful relationship

with another person (Kuh, 2008). Ideally, the internships put students in the company of mentors who share interests and are committed to seeing that students succeed (Kuh, 2008).

Critical actions found in the relationship included skill attainment by the intern, but also enhanced personal connection. Lauren expressed a strong connection with the mentor teachers in her room. Lauren was assigned one mentor teacher. However, she quickly became part of the teaching team in the room and viewed both the lead teacher and assistant teacher as sources of support (Figure 7). She shared, "I don't know the word for it but like, they are a huge help. Like I can go to them about really anything." Her strong emotional connection to her teaching team was evident, “I love, like I love them to death, like, I do. Like, so I say, I will always, I'm gonna come work with them.”

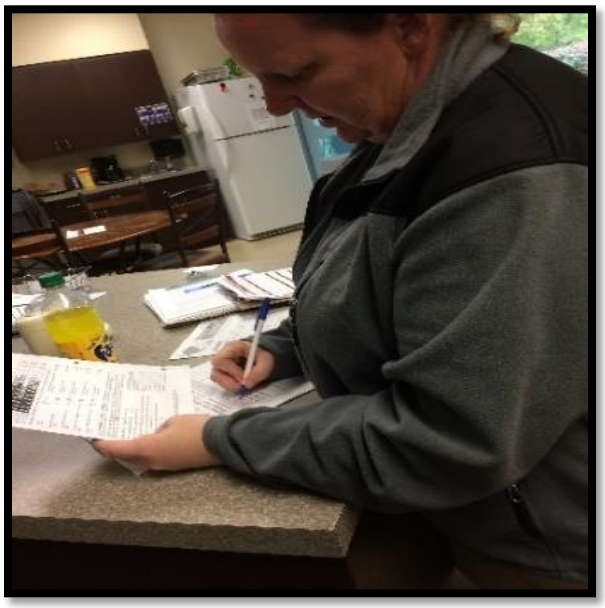

Figure 7.
Mentor teacher

Lauren's mentor teachers were intentional in their interactions, exposing her to the responsibilities and expectations required of a teacher in the classroom. However, the

communications were not limited to activities in the school. The actions extended beyond the classroom to include home visits and employee training. They also included discussions about how they made classroom decisions and how they planned for the children. Lauren gained knowledge, not by just watching the mentors, but by intentional instruction and feedback, "She's showing me how to do an ASQ. Because if I come to work here, I will need to know how to do these things, how stuff works, and all of that good stuff. It's wonderful. Like she helps me out so much. It's like like I was telling her the other day, it's like she know when to step in, when not when to fall back." (Figure 8).

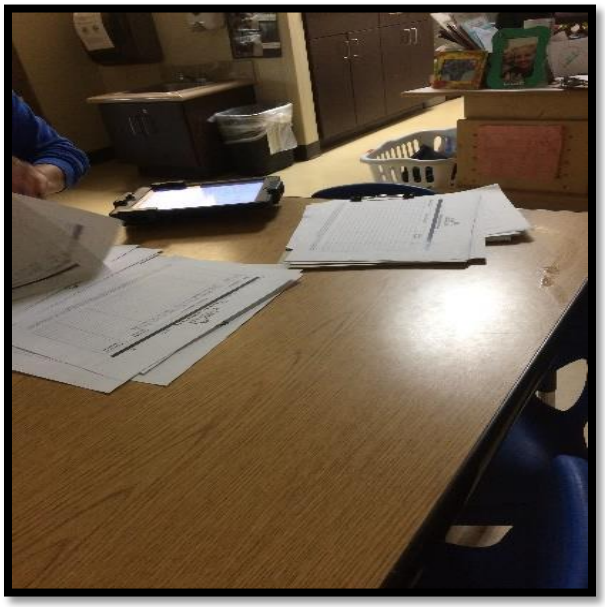

Figure 8.
Classroom paperwork

Becca's mentor teacher also took time to talk with her about strategies for the classroom. Their interaction was intentional and supportive. Social constructivist theory supports the understanding that the internship can provide a way for students to experience significant actions, learning by example that they can relate to on an emotional or cognitive level (Powell & Kalina, 2009). I noted on my first visit to the

classroom that the mentor teacher took the time to give Becca direction and then support for managing a crying baby. Becca was rocking a crying child. The mentor teacher recommended that Becca hold the baby differently. Becca followed the direction of the mentor teacher. Later when the baby began to cry again, Becca moved to a new location in the room. When the mentor teacher noticed, she said, "You read my mind. I was going to suggest you move to a new location. Good job!" Becca smiled with the acknowledgment that she had made an appropriate choice for the child.

Becca expressed admiration and gratitude for the interactions she had with her mentor teacher. “But I've been in situations where our lead, who's amazing. Um, she will not reprimand me, but say you know, in this situation, you said this. What might've worked a little better for you was if you would have said this instead of this. And just slightly tweaking the words. And then, like a few days later, if I like, instead of saying it the way I normally would've, I remembered, like you know, remember what she said? I'm gonna try to do it this that way. And then she'll come up to me later and say by the way, that was really good. I'm really proud of you. You did great. That was awesome. That was perfect.” By linking new experiences to prior ones, the mentor was able to guide Becca’s understanding of her current workplace activities in personally meaningful ways (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012).

The ability to learn in the supportive environment is evident from remarks made by the mentor teachers as well. Becca's mentor teacher shared, "Becca takes a positive approach to guidance and coaching and takes suggestions very well. She is still very much in the learning process, but I have confidence that she will meet her goals and be

successful in her chosen career. She is always happy around the children, and they swarm around her!" and "Becca is doing fabulous. … Becca is very interested in the work and has taught us some cute rhymes and things; she has great potential! I'm excited to continue to work with her." Moreover, much like Lauren's relationship with her teaching team, Becca's relationship moved beyond skill acquisition and guidance in the classroom, to a more meaningful connection.

Becca shared, "They're in our suite …And um, they asked me if I wanted to have some, like homemade apple pie, and I was like, "Yes! Who says no to that?" Um, I just thought it was really sweet. But um, I thought it was, you know, it-it was very concrete, it was something I could capture with a picture. When you can't really capture like the camaraderie between people." (Figure 9). The effects of support in the classroom are not isolated in the classroom. The support from the mentors can nurture relationships that eventually can lead to persistence. Lauren and Becca, who felt connected to their teaching team, spoke of membership in the classroom community, and how that membership encouraged them to persist (Tinto, 2017).

Figure 9.
Homemade apple pie

In contrast to the relationship formed between Lauren and Becca with their mentor teachers, Anna had a very different experience. The mentor teacher assigned to mentor Anna exhibited behaviors in her teaching practice that were consistent with the NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation. She used Conscience Discipline to guide the children's behavior positively. The mentor was prepared and professional in the room. She was affectionate and connected to the children. However, she made no effort to connect with Anna and guide her learning. Anna was left to navigate the room on her own, watching the mentor for indicators of best practice.

Anna described her experience this way, "I've learned some new language and am more able to use my voice now. I did not have prior experience in the classroom, so I felt incompetent. I took some time to observe and learn. In the beginning, I felt like I was being pushed into a position without training. I learned a lot from the lead teacher, I just wish she would have been more verbal in instructing me. I learned from listening and watching. I am an older student and I believe people think that I should automatically know what to do."

Anna acknowledged that she was reluctant to initiate conversations and action in the room. "I think that I was holding back and because the teaching is different. You know, they handle the children different from what I ... how I was raised or how I raised my children, so- That was difficult." Anna was not prepared to navigate the classroom independently. Vygotsky suggested that it was the mentor teacher's responsibility to lead the intern through the zone of proximal development (Haines, 2003). As Anna proceeded

through the zone of proximal development, her mentor should have initially provided direct support and guidance. However, as she became more competent in the room, the mentor could gradually lessen her advice (Haines, 2003). While all of the mentors provided a role model for best practice, the absence of intentional guidance was perceived as a limitation. The mentors recognized as supportive, fostered the full development of the intern's potential skills by giving feedback on observed classroom actions, often going further and acting as a friend, counselor, and cheerleader (Haines, 2003).

The mentor teachers were a significant source of support for the interns. Meaningful support offered by the mentors extended far beyond acting as a good role model. Role modeling was an essential element of the relationship, but several other factors were required for the intern to recognize the actions as supportive. The actions the interns viewed as supportive included intentional instruction, counsel, and friendship.

RQ2: What experiences do ECE^2 student interns perceive as valuable in the Educare classroom?

The key finding- Interactions with the children are valuable experiences for ECE^2 interns.

Research question two examined experiences in the TE classroom that the interns viewed as valuable. Again, experiences in this study are defined as events or occurrences that leave an impression on someone, and value is determined as one's judgment of what is important in life (Google Dictionary online, n.d.). The valuable experiences noted by the interns overwhelmingly focused on interactions with the children in the classroom.

The valuable interactions within the TE classrooms fell into two related categories, emotional connections, and learning experiences. The two categories are hard to separate. Social constructivism supports the understanding that when students, interns and children, engaged in activities that create satisfying relationships, it had a significant impact on what they learned (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

The valuable learning experiences in the classroom reflected both the child and the interns' learning. It is important to note that learners actively influenced the learning environment, just as learning environments actively influenced the learners (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012). Meaning, the child and intern shared the mutual benefit of learning opportunities in the classroom. As the child learned, so did the intern. As the zoom method of analysis suggests, the two experiences are not separate experiences, but intertwined, exploring shared meanings as they related to individual experiences (Pamphilon, 1999).

There was a sense of wonder and joy in the interviews and focus group discussion that accompanied the photographs featuring the child's learning, indicated by moments of laughter and reflection. Often these experiences were revelations or new understandings of child development that had not occurred to the interns before. A connection was made between the child's behavior and the learning that was happening in the classroom. Anna shared, "Before I would be the one saying, "They're just playing in water." But as I watch them, and this is ... I don't know if this was the second or first time I watched them. I think I've seen them play in the water at least three times and I noticed that they were learning to share, um, uh, they were learning to, um ... They were filling up the containers

and pouring it out. And they were learning some things." The intern made a connection between the value of planning for the children and the benefit experienced by the child with the activity (Figure 10). As instructed in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct, our interns witnessed educational experiences to help them better understand and plan activities for the optimal development of the children (Code of Ethical Conduct Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators, 2004).

Figure 10.
Water play

This thought process carried further, as Anna expressed a new understanding of lesson planning, noting the progression of activities for the children and the response from the children (Figure 11). “The day before, she had a box of leaves that they had went outside, and colored the ... And they had an art project where they took those old leaves and dipped them in paint and put it on paper to see the different designs that it would make on paper. Then she followed it with teaching them ... She read the book about leaves and

then she had them rake the leaves. But I, I just thought it was just amazing that they were ... I tried to picture myself ... In their little people thinking, they were really working."

Figure 11.
Leaves

The thrill of witnessing a child's learning as part of a well-designed, thoughtful lesson was equal to witnessing development that was initiated by the child and predictable. The awe and amazement of child development were evident in Becca's experience with a child walking for the first time. She explained, "I left one day and he was barely walking if you held his hands. When I came back he was walking by himself and it had just been like one day. One day later, he was just going for it and I was shocked. I was in awe. I didn't realize how quickly that happened. Oh yeah, and it was very....I was proud of him, even though I didn't really have anything to do it. But I was like, oh, that's my kid, yes!" This experience provided a sense of connection for Becca. She realize, though it was not her achievement, she felt attached regardless (Figure 12).

Figure 12.
Walking for the first time

In the TE schools, learning opportunities were created to foster mutual learning experiences. A shared experience connected Anna to the children in her class in a unique way (Figure 13). A community safari visited the school. The children were hesitant to touch the animals when Anna decided it would be a learning experience for her as well. "I was screaming (laughs). Then I was like, "No, I can't let the littles see," so I was ... Never. Never touched, never held, never probably ever would have done it if the littles weren't there and in that ... I ... It was, it was a good experience, because the reason I did it because I wanted the kids to see. I wanted them to experience, you know-To be excited. I was excited. And it was just the energy in the room. I did it for the littles."

Figure 13.
Intern with snakes

Whether intentionally create or found merely in the moment, the interns connected the learning experiences to affective experiences. The everyday moments in the classroom that may seem ordinary to an outsider were unique to the interns. Becca captured the children outside playing one day. "The kids came out, and they were excited by all the leaves everywhere. So they started scooping them up and throwing them up in the air and screaming and running around and lying down, then making, like, angels or whatever. Um ... well, being around those kids makes me happy." (Figure 14). The learning moments often elicited strong emotional reactions. As suggested by sociocultural theory, you cannot separate the two domains. The interns navigated the TE classroom using valuable experiences to connect the affective, as well as the cognitive parts of self (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

Figure 14.
Outside play

As expected, the interns were able to provide comfort to the children. These moments were powerful connecting experiences. Becca was thoughtful and paused several times in describing her connection with this child, “Well, when you're holding your baby,… especially when they're not spitting up on you or kicking or screaming or crying, it ... it's just really peaceful, even if all the kids around you are just running around, screaming and crying, just that bond that you have with the child. That whole squishy ball of warmth.” (Figure 15).

Figure 15.
Holding a baby

Alternatively, the time that Becca was able to help a child that was hurt. "Um, it made me ... I think someone knocked into her on accident. Cause they were running, they looked behind them and then ran into her. And then she started crying. And so, I picked her up, um, well I let her climb onto my back. Um, and knowing that I could get her from crying to being this happy ...That was a great feeling and it was like, "Oh, this is why I do this." (Figure 15).

Figure 16.
Happy children

The emotional connections were bidirectional between the child and the intern. As it was somewhat unexpected how often the interns reported gaining a sense of calm or comfort from the children, rather than being the ones to provide support (Figure 17). Lauren shared, "Malia's the one who first asked me to help her and then Cabo asked could he join in. And Malia was like, "Yeah." So, he joined in and... That makes me feel like welcome, you know what I mean?"

Figure 17.
Welcome play

Anna had a similar experience when a child provided comfort to her (Figure 18). She expressed her affection for one child, the first in the room to greet her, saying, “the first day, I was so nervous going into the classroom because it was my first time being in a classroom, in that setting. And he came up to me and wanted a hug. He, he was the first one to come up to me. Oh, it just makes me wanna just continue doing ... Being in the classroom.”

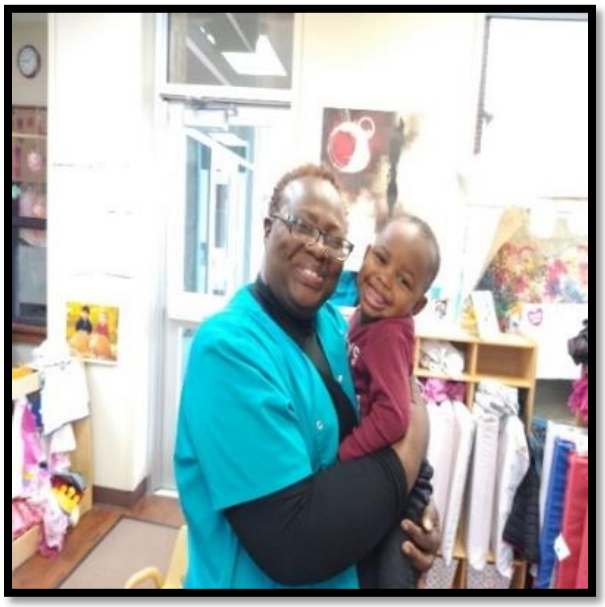

Figure 18.
Classroom hug

Experiences shared with the children in the TE classroom were valuable to the interns. The valuable experiences stimulated a cognitive and affective response and fostered a sense of connection. When students find something or someone worthwhile to connect with in postsecondary educational experiences, they are more likely to persist and achieve their educational goals (Kuh, 2006). It was difficult for Lauren to put into words her feelings for the children but simply stated, "Like, have fun. Like, I just, I just think, I don't know. I don't know if it 'cuz I love doing this... I don't know, it's just, these kids, they- I love [them].”

RQ3: What practices motivate ECE^2 student interns to persist in their course of study?

Key findings: Practices that recognize the ECE^2 interns as part of the profession encourage persistence.

Practices are the actual application or use of an idea, belief, or method, while persistence is defined as "the quality that allows someone to continue in pursuit of a goal even when challenges arise" (Tinto, 2017, p. 2). As explained in chapter one, community college students tend to encounter similar challenges, making the practices used in the internship relevant to persistence. The internship had required practices for the interns in their unique role. The interns agreed to these requirements as part of their internship application. At the time of planning, I had not tied these practices directly to persistence.

All the interns reacted strongly to the opportunities that recognized them as part of the profession—much more so than I had anticipated. My hope for these practices was much more mundane. They served a practical purpose of needs; a need for a skill or information or a need to be identified on the work site. Something more profound happened. The intern's responses suggested that these practices were a significant motivator to persist in their course of study. A sense of self-efficacy appeared where it had not appeared before. This emerging sense of self-efficacy influenced how the interns addressed the new goals, tasks, and challenges set before them when asked to perform the required practices (Tinto, 2017).

The internship program had three professional development opportunities scheduled for the fall semester. On August 24, 2018, the student interns attended Heartsaver Infant/Child/Adult CPR and First Aid training. The second training was Safe Infant Sleep. This training was offered on October 19, 2018, on the TCC West Campus. It is advantageous for the interns to have this training as part of their CECPD portfolio, as employers will require it before employment. This professional development opportunity

occurred on the start date of the photovoice study. The second photographed professional development opportunity was the University of Oklahoma ECLI. This is an annual conference in Tulsa. This training consisted of a free public lecture on Thursday, November 1st and an all-day training on November 2nd. Four interns attended the public lecture on Thursday as part of their required professional development obligation for the internship. Because we were offered free admission to the full day training, two interns attended, while two interns declined. The all-day training was not required but proved to be a significant event for Lauren and Anna.

The required training for Safe Infant Sleep was conducted at the TCC West Campus and was led by professionals in our program (Figure 19). The location and the personnel present were familiar to the interns. The interns were aware that this credential was a requirement for their potential employment. Lauren was quick to note the value of this credential. “I mean I know how to safely put a baby to sleep. Yeah. But, I mean now I legitimately know...what to do, and I have a certificate. So I'm moving on up the ladder. It pushes me to keep going.” By explicitly linking the training of the interns to future expectations of practice, the internship supported the transfer of knowledge (Dornan et al. 2011).

Figure 19.
Safe Infant Sleep training

Anna noted the group dynamic in training. Group recognition became a reoccurring theme found in the opportunities to connect or be recognized as a part of the profession. "It was my first infant CPR class. I was learning with a group of students and professionals because the head of the CDC [TCC Child Development Center] was in that class." The interns began to see themselves as part of a larger group, the profession of early care providers. While the CPR class and Safe Infant Sleep training provided necessary skills and shared experiences, the OU ECLI elicited strong emotions and the desire become part of the professional community. The interns connected this desire to their need to persist in their studies.

On the evening of November 1, 2018, the interns and I gathered at the Tulsa campus of the University of Oklahoma for the public lecture. Before the lecture began, even before Lauren entered the building, upon arriving at the free public lecture, Lauren was overcome with emotion. She shared, “It made me so excited. Like I was so excited

because I've never been to nothing like that before, so once I was there I was like, oh! I just, I don't know. It was just so overwhelming. My emotions, like now." At this point of the interview, both Lauren and I began to cry. It was a powerful experience for both of us. She connected her experience at the conference to her plans to persist. She shared,

> I ... 'cause my background I came from. I came from a place of people that didn't even think I would graduate high school, so it's like- Yeah. People told me that. So I was bad. Believe it or not, I was that kid that you just wanted to wrap it up, arms around my throat. But yeah, I came a long way. That's another reason why. Because I came a long way, so- ... And I'm ready to graduate. To show people that I've made it farther than anybody would expect. Even myself. Which is why I want to get the bachelors. Go on and do it. So that's why I've really been thinking like I might just go on and do it, and after that conference at... I was just like, oh, this is making me so excited!

Lauren began to believe she could accomplish her academic goals (Figure 20). Connecting her goals to the experiences of the conference provided a sense of self-efficacy that had not been present before. For Lauren, the effects of past experiences on how she perceived herself provided limited options, but her capacity to envision herself in a new light, opened the door to new possibilities for her life (Tinto, 2017).

Figure 20.
Intern ECLI

Anna was equally emotional when discussing her inclusion in the ECLI and how that motivated her to continue her education. She explained, “Felt like I was a part of something special that morning. … It was just special. Yeah, like, I got to be in a room full of educators. I'm gonna try to catch as many conferences as I can.”

Both interns went further to express their desire to not only further their education but to be part of a conference organizer. Lauren shared that she had a vision of presenting at a conference, "It's so funny because I pictured (laughs) ... I pictured Anna up there talking and then we clapping (claps) to get her down, and I'm coming up like Ah! (Claps) Like it was so awesome." While Lauren has visions of presenting at a conference, Anna could see herself working behind the scene, organizing an event, "I wanna be in background and involved in putting something together like that, I want to be part of that.. 'cause at one point, um, um, one the lady, mentioned, the names of everyone that helped put it

together. So yeah, I want my name to be called." Both comments suggest that inclusion in the professional community was a strong motivator for the interns. They could see a future for themselves beyond students and classroom educators. They extended that thinking to include being leaders of the profession (Figure 21).

Figure 21.
Lecture hall ECLI

Whereas all interns attended the free public lecture on November 1, 2018, only two interns accepted the offer to attend the all-day training on November 2, 2018. The all-day training had a profound effect on both interns. It was at the all-day training that I realized a community of practice was emerging amongst the interns. There was a connection to the others attending the conference and those presenting the conference. To clarify, a community of practice is more than a group of people. "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 2011, p.1).

At the ECLI, Anna and Lauren began to find their membership in a professional community of practice. This role was a membership that they had not envisioned for themselves before. They saw that a professional career was possible and connection with others in the community of practice would influence how they proceed. As the interns worked to construct a new sense of identity, as well as gain knowledge and skills, it was apparent that they appreciated any offer to help connect this new experience to their personal career goals (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012).

Both Lauren and Anna paid attention at the conference to the representation of the NAEYC local affiliate information table. OKAEYC served as another connection to the community of practice. The professional community of practice found in early childhood includes a network created to offer support and provide connections with each other (Wenger, 2011). The local NAEYC affiliate is designed to do just that (Figure 22). The realization of their purpose was a revelation for Lauren, "I can get set up with other knowledgeable-knowledgeable people, and they can help me understand stuff that I don't understand- in this field?" Anna had already attended a local affiliate meeting and had this response when I asked her about the organization "I am going to join. It's only $30. Join and, and talk about it."

Figure 22.
OKAECY table

The interns expressed the value of being a part of the community they experienced at the conference. This reaction was in part due to the value of the information presented, and their opportunity to use that knowledge. However, more significantly, being included in the professional community of practice was a powerful motivator (Figure 23). Anna explained, "Ohh, me being a part of that community. I guess it's a... it's a dream of mine, is to feel that I'm in. And (cough) the early childhood leadership institute. I just, hmm. I dunno I just felt, hmm I felt good being in that group. Representation of that group was found in the simplicity of her name tag, [gesturing to her nametag from the event] “but that was my name Mm-hmm (affirmative) I was there.”

Figure 23.
Keynote speaker, Dr. Mary Louise Hemmeter, and Intern at the ECLI

I was struck by the power of simple artifacts of membership to serve as significant symbols of membership in our developing community of practice. Not only did the interns find affiliation with others at the conference meaningful, but also noted how the connection with the internship was powerful. Lauren became emotional when discussing the smock she wears to identify herself as an intern at TE, "But this right here, [gestures toward her intern smock] it, it, I-it keeps me going because I've never worked the job. So by me having this, having to put this on every, almost every day...it just keeps me motivated so that I... ...I have something to go, go to. But it's majorly like, I got this internship, like I really want to graduate now."

Connecting with other educators helped to create an identity for the interns that had not been dreamt of before. A new sense of self-efficacy emerged that provided a buffer against previously held doubts. Tinto (2017) assured us that self-efficacy is not fixed, but flexible. Attending professional development events gave the interns entry into the

profession. Moreover, even simple practices, such as wearing a name tag or work smock, that identified them as members of the professional community, provided powerful inspiration for persistence.

Discussion

"Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in the process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor" (Wenger, 2011. p. 1). The interns became members of the communities of practice within the TE classrooms through their relationships with the mentor teachers and children and found themselves members of a larger community of practice in the profession as they participated in professional development activities. Membership in the communities of practice were found to be supportive, valuable, and encouraged persistence.

In addition to the communities found at TE and within the profession, the interns developed a community of practice unto themselves. They developed a shared collection of resources: events, narratives, and strategies, problem-solving techniques— essentially, the internship became a shared practice (Wenger, 2011). Artifacts of this community were visible through photographs, interviews, and focus group discussions. The investment of time and sustained interaction across the study made this possible.

It must be noted that forming a community of practice was not the original intent of the study. In fact, communities of practice cannot be formed, only facilitated (Roberts, 2006). The structure of the internship, in addition to the structure of the research study, helped to facilitate the interns' community of practice. The interns' role as the insider-collaborator in the study uniquely positioned them create a shared vison of the internship

experience. “Communities of practice enable practitioners to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need, recognizing that, given the proper structure, they are in the best position to do this” (Wenger 2004, p. 4). The research, in addition to the internship, became a connecting experience. These activities put interns in situations that fundamentally demanded they interact with me and their peers about important issues that extended over the course of the semester (Kuh, 2008). The factors that drew the interns into a community of practice allowed me to become a member of the community as well.

Our internship community of practice included members of differing status in terms of experience, age, personality, and so on (Roberts, 2006). But even with these differences, we shared an identity as a community (Wenger, 2008). From shared intern and research experiences, similar professional interests and experiences, the interns and I created an identity apart from other students and other employees at TE. The collective study made inclusion valuable, because the interns and I invested our identities in being part of a vibrant, unique community (Wenger, 2008). As one of our many shared activities, our community of practice attended the OU Seed Sower lecture together in November 2018 (Figure 24). When asked what she saw in the group photo, Anna stated, "Look, but the expression. I see growth, I see diversity. Wow. I see the doctor. Wow, it was just special. It's neat, it's really neat. Oh wow...inclusion."

Figure 24.
Research community of practice

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Early childhood adult educators have extensive knowledge, expertise, and education and often have a profound impact on the field of early childhood education in their communities. Because of this leadership role they have responsibilities to community, society, and the field of early childhood education above and beyond what is expected of those who work in programs serving young children (Code of Ethical Conduct Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators, 2004, p. 5).

The purpose of my participatory action research study was to explore the impact of internships on early childhood education student attitudes towards persistence in their course of study. During my 13 years in the community college system, working with novice teachers, I have seen students struggle to complete their degree or certificate programs. As is true for many community college students, the students in the TCC DCD&E face challenges, such as financial hardship, weak academic preparation, and significant family and work obligations. Studies have shown a lack of persistence in community college students is a national trend and high impact practices have been identified to combat the barriers faced by students (CCCSE, 2012). Internships have been identified as a high impact practice associated with student success. The internship enabled me to structure opportunities for the interns to apply and practice newly developed skills and understanding (CCCSE, 2014). Learning, persistence, and accomplishment in college were connected to the intern's active engagement with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter they were studying

(CCCSE, 2012). In addition to the practical application of skills in the workplace, our collaborative problem solving in the context of the internship set the stage for us to develop a meaningful relationship with each other (Kuh, 2008).

This chapter is divided into five sections. Section one is the lessons learned. This section includes realizations and understandings that I gained through the research process. Section two addresses the limitations of the study. I understand that my context is unique, and these factors may make replication of the findings difficult in another setting. Sections three addresses implications for practice. I have learned valuable lessons that will inform future practice and actions in my work. Section four reviews implications for research. Critical steps in the action research process include developing an action plan for future cycles, and reflecting on the process (Mertler, 2011).Changes and improvements learned in this cycle of research will inform future cycles. Also, section five contains final thoughts on the research process.

Lessons Learned

This study has been a personal journey for me. I learned several lessons that will shape my vision and attitudes towards my students and program for years to come. The first lesson learned is simple, yet profound; I learned that I can conduct relevant and significant research.

The action research (AR) model provided a blueprint of research that is meticulous, yet flexible as Mertler (2013) states, “Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by those with a direct, vested interest in the teaching and learning process in a

particular setting; it is a truly systematic inquiry into one's own practice"(p. 38). I was able to design a study that was targeted specifically to my practice, my students, and my program. The ability to tailor the study allowed me to be very intentional in the questions I asked and the methods I employed to answer the questions. With a significant framework provided by AR and rigorous foundation provided by theory, I am confident in the findings and impact the study will make.

The second lesson learned, my students have valuable insights. I just need to ask. If AR provided the structure of my research, participatory action research (PAR) provided the heart. To understand the needs of the students in my program, it was imperative to include the voices of my students. The narrative and visual strategies used in this research study were collaborative and all findings and meaning were generated with, not for, the interns, in hopes of extending the findings beyond these interns (White & Drew, 2011). Stepping back from a position of authority and ceding that control to my students was thrilling. They assumed the role of research collaborators with confidence. I was amazed by their enthusiasm and passion. They have documented their journey and provided insights that will assist other students' journeys. The students were not only capable of acting as collaborators in the study; they entered the workforce situation, found a purpose and role in the classroom community, and created a vision for themselves as professional caregivers and educators.

The third lesson learned, the professional community of early childhood educators is ready, willing, and able to accept the interns into the profession. Experiences with the interns highlighted the willingness of current professionals to mentor, guide, and network

with the interns to shepherd them into the profession. The interns began to see themselves as emerging professionals; it was my role to connect them with the appropriate resources.

The fourth lesson learned, at the culminating point, it was clear, my obligation was to my students, but with a higher purpose. This purpose was always the care, wellbeing, and education of young children. While I know this, the process of asking significant questions about teacher preparation and finding answers to those question has brought this understanding to the forefront of my practice. My research was guided and supported by the Code of Ethical Conduct Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators. The code of conduct provided a focal point in each phase of the study. And while it served as the guide for my work with adult learners, it is excellent care of children that is the ultimate goal:

> We shall make the welfare of children the deciding factor in our decisions regarding our work with adult learners. We shall not participate in or overlook practices (in our students, colleagues, institutions, agencies, or practicum settings) that are harmful to children. This principle has precedence over all others in the Supplement (Code of Ethical Conduct Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators, 2004, p.5).

Discussion of limitations

What may be viewed as a limitation by some, can be considered a strength in action research, as Herr & Anderson (2015, p. 121) remind us, "Unlike traditional research, action research produces knowledge grounded in local realities that are also useful to

local participants." This study was conducted in a particular context with a sample population that was purposefully selected. The findings of the study may be difficult to replicate in another context. The interns in this study were recruited from a pool of students who had already been accepted on the BTG Scholarship established at TCC. The benefit of the scholarship provided 100% tuition, fees, and books for the students. The students were only responsible for a $10 copay for each credit hour taken. There was a significant reduction in the financial obligation the students assumed to be in the TCC DCD&E program. In addition to the benefits of the scholarship offered through the GKFF, the foundation also assumed the responsibility of paying the interns $11 an hour, for up to 15 hours a week. Again, relieving the financial stress that affects many community college students.

Replicating the level of financial support the ECE[2] interns received could be a significant challenge. Even within the Educare Network, there are no other examples of financial support that imitate the financial support provided by GKFF to community college students. As noted in the CCSSE 2012 data, 49% of community college students report that a lack of financial means is a reason to withdraw from class or college. Lack of financial support is seen as a significant factor in student departure from school. The financial support from GKFF relieves the student of the financial burden of college, as well as provides a financial stipend for participation in the internship.

Beyond the student interns' financial support at TCC, they conducted their internship at TE—a state of the art, well-designed and well-funded early learning center. The center is founded in best practice, and all decisions are research informed. Meaning, TE

provided the ideal learning environment for the children and the interns. TE maintains a standard of practice that is difficult to find elsewhere. TE meets all Department of Human Services' standards, Early Head Start Performance Standards, and NAEYC accreditation criteria. The interns learned in an environment that was well-resourced, well-trained, and well-staffed. Replicating this type of learning environment for interns could be a challenge.

The size of the pool was a strength in this participatory action research study, however may be difficult to replicate in another program and could be viewed as a limitation in traditional research. Four students were initially recruited for the study. Working with a small group of students allowed me the opportunity to spend a great deal of time with each student, establishing a personal relationship that may be difficult to replicate in a larger group. Because of the close working relationship between me and the interns, I am sure that my perceptions of the workforce and profession were apparent to the students. However, this was not a primary consideration in the study, as it was expected and intentional to encourage all collaborators to express their views and understandings.

There must be an acknowledgment that even with the benefit of financial relief and workforce development in a supportive community, there were life factors that exceeded the benefits the program offered. If the purpose of the study was to explore the impact of student internships and student persistence, the loss of one intern during the study indicates a limitation in that assumption. The fourth intern, Kelly, was an active participant in the internship and study until the second week in November. Kelly came through the foster care system as a child and had not lived with a birth parent since the

age of 13. After aging out of the foster care system at the age of 18, Kelly reestablished a relationship with her birth mother. She had been living with her birth mother and sister for two years. In November of 2018, the tumultuous relationship with her mother reached a point in which Kelly believed her only option would be to move out and establish her own residence. It was also at this time that Kelly discovered that she was pregnant. The father of the expected child was not supportive, and Kelly found herself living in a shelter for domestic violence victims. She dropped her classes and the internship.

While the internship was not significant enough to guard against such life circumstances, Kelly and I have maintained contact. She found an apartment, a job, and has re-enrolled in classes for the spring semester. I check in with her frequently and have every hope she will fulfill her dream of becoming a teacher. While Kelly was not able to persist in the internship or classes in the fall semester, she did reenroll and did not drop her studies completely. She exhibited persistence in the face of significant challenges. I hope that the relationships established during her time in the internship acted as an encouragement to continue and as a buffer against the inclination to drop out. Though Kelly did not persist in the internship and fall classes, she is an example of complexities of student retention. Though the process of student retention is not necessarily the opposite of student departure, there is an ever more sophisticated understanding of the complex web of actions shaping student departure and persistence. (Tinto, 2006). Retention in my study was exemplified by students remaining in TCC's DCD&E, and to this end, Kelly was a success.

Implications for Practice

My work with student interns will continue in the future. I am encouraged by the findings and feel that the goal of retaining students in their course of study and training highly qualified teachers for the workforce is attainable. The power of community and relationships was evident throughout the study. I will be more intentional to include occasions for relationship building into the internship. These events will be in addition to the professional development pieces of training. This type of social programming can be used to connect the interns with their peers and mentor teachers at their school site. It would be helpful to have all the interns placed at one school site and to introduce the students to their mentor teachers before the beginning of the internship, as recommended by Anna. Anna shared, "Mm-hmm (affirmative) because I went into, the first day I went in I introduced myself and you know, went...I, you know...we never had a one on one conversation." Thus, I plan to recommend that all interns in the fall 2019 cohort be assigned to the same school site to facilitate community building. This arrangement can offer opportunities to share experiences and arrange training, socials, and collaborative sessions.

In addition to placement at the same school location, I have requested an Honors' section of a program entry level class be offered on the fall 2019 course schedule. This class would be reserved for ECE^2 interns. By having a designated course for all the interns to take together, I could begin to foster the intern community of practice. The course will be designated an Honors section to allow for the internship to be part of the course requirement. "Honors curricula provide opportunities for honors students to

endeavor challenges beyond what traditional undergraduate curricula provide" (Cognard-Black & Savage, 2016, p. 93). This definition is in line with the expectation of exposure to a community of practice, internship, research opportunity.

I will reassess the tool used in the student observations. The tool created for this study included items that were hard to capture in a 30-45-minute observation, mainly if the student is in the classroom at the same time each day. For example, one item on the tool included; "Uses self-reflection to evaluate instruction." If the student is involved in the classroom activities each morning when I visit, they may not have the opportunity to be reflective at that time. A standardized tool can help give the students concrete examples of expected behavior. However, an observation tool that contains behaviors that are observable at the time of my visits will provide better, more useful feedback to the interns. I will also reassess the use of the bi-weekly feedback survey emailed to the students and mentor teachers. Participation in the survey was low for the interns and the mentor teachers always indicted positive feedback. I think perhaps, interns and mentors were reluctant to give any negative feedback on the survey. Possibly more personal meetings will encourage productive conversations and more honest assessment of the classroom climate and intern progress.

The photovoice methodology used in the study promoted three goals: enable people to record and reflect on their communities' strengths and weakness; facilitate critical conversations about the identified issues through small and large discussions; and foster advocacy to instigate change (Wang, 1998). Goals one and two were accomplished during the study. It is my objective to continue this work with the interns to promote

change and conversations around the study findings. The interns and I submitted a proposal that was accepted for presentation at the International Infant Toddler Conference in Tulsa OK on April 11, 2019. We will discuss the methodology of the photovoice study and the findings of our study. We will also meet with the Chief Academic Officer at TCC on April 19, 2019 to share our thoughts on student internships is in the academic setting. Also, finally, we will meet with the Executive Director of TE and the Human Resources Director at TE to share our findings on April 5, 2019. The interns will be intimately involved in the preparation and delivery at each opportunity to advocate for change to strengthen the student intern process. Not scheduled yet, but my goal is to include intern presentations at the TCC Board of Regents' and the Tulsa Educare Board of Directors' meetings in June.

Implications for Research

Looking forward to the next cycle of research, the next cohort of interns, there are changes I will make to improve the internship experience and the research process. Making changes at this point and asking, "What would I do differently?" puts the action in action research (Metler, 2014). Reflecting on the findings and outcomes from the process, my first focus will be providing more extensive support to the mentor teachers. It was clear from the findings that the mentors were a critical point of contact and learning for the interns. However, the mentors were not trained or even fully informed of practices that were expected to nurture the intern. Vygotsky places the responsibility of guiding the novice intern through the zone of proximal development squarely on the shoulders of the

more knowledgeable mentor (Vygotsky, 1978). Because of this, the mentors need to be trained and nurtured in their role, just as the interns are nurtured in their role in the classroom. Moreover, to further support the intern/mentor relationship, there must be time designated every week for thoughtful conversations between the mentor and intern. This type of conversation will not happen unless it is intentionally built into the process and the intern's time in the classroom.

To improve the interns' time in the classroom and to support their experiences with the children in the classroom, it would be valuable to have the interns spend the first week or first two weeks in the classroom observing the classroom community. The interns need to learn the teachers and children in the room, and it is important to learn the rituals and practices of the classroom. Using thoughtful conversations with the teacher during this time will allow the intern time to prepare and know their environment before being expected to interact in the room in a meaningful way. I would recommend that the intern and teacher select a classroom practice that the intern is responsible for during their time in the room. This task can be as simple as assuming the responsibility of reading a book at circle time, or taking the children outside to play, or leading a song before lunch. These moments can support the interns' belief that they are accepted as a legitimate part of the classroom (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012).

Improvements for the next cycle of research turn to the professional development opportunities for the interns. I will continue with the events used in the past cycle of research, as they proved to be valuable, but will include membership to the NAEYC local affiliate OKAEYC in the next cycle. The connection made between the interns and the

OKAEYC representative at the OU ECLI was significant. I had not considered this connection to the profession before and now realize this is a significant relationship to nurture. I will advocate having the membership fee covered by the BTG scholarship and will plan to attend the local meetings with the interns to make introductions to other community members.

Implications for the Field

I offered implications for the field with a bit of hesitation. While participatory action research is designed to inform local settings and individual practice, there are implications that may be able to inform others who wish to create internship programs within their academic programs. Recommendations for success in forming a strong internship program begins with a strong community partnership. The relationship between TCC and TE has a long history of reciprocal support and programming. To attend to the challenges of the internship, both programs committed to respectful, constant communication (Jordan, Kleinsasser, & Roe, 2014). Finding avenues for shared leadership or contributions can lead to such partnerships. Members of TE serve on the TCC DCD&E advisory board and serve as adjunct professors. I serve as an advisor on the TE advisory board. Trust was established and it was clear that there were shared and separate paths to further the goals of each institution and program. The internship program serves both institutions. The larger context goal of creating a sustainable, clear pathway to the profession supports the mission of TE, while the local context of meeting the needs of TCC students is achieved with

In the academic setting, organization and collaborative support from within my institution made this study possible and I suspect would be a key element in other settings, as well. Creating a network of support allowed me to relinquish certain aspects of the internship to those who have access to resource beyond the scope of my faculty position. Our academic program worked closely with advisement, finical aid, scholarships, and registration. All of these entities played a role in the success of the internship program. We were able to approach problems from multiple perspectives. It was helpful to know that instead of looking for one right answer, we were all looking for improvement and solutions. "When a diverse group of individuals interact together to solve a problem, it sets in motion a process of innovation in which improvements build on improvements." (Jordan, Kleinsasser, & Roe, 2014, p. 425).

Closing Thoughts

Reflecting on the research process, I must look back before I look forward. The first cycle of the internships began in the fall of 2016 and included three interns placed at TE. There was no financial support, no regular interaction with professional development, and no on-sight observations made by me. However, two of the three interns in that cycle are now successful, full-time employees at TE. One graduated from TCC in December of 2018. The other will graduate in May 2019. The internship was a useful innovation but needed improvement. Fast forward two years from the first cycle to the third cycle, professional development has been added to the internship, on-sight observation has been added, and all interns are now part of the BTG scholarship program. The three interns featured in this study are positioned to be hired by TE in the summer of 2019. Every

cycle has presented new challenges and new successes; however, I see a healthy future for the internship program and success for the interns. Becca explained that from her internship experience, she has a vision for her career. “Even everything I try to remember. I mean I'm just going to remember how happy I was, I'm going to have pictures that I might have been able to take, um... connections, but… I definitely think that Educare or someplace very similar is going to be where, where I spend my career.” I am hopeful for the future of our profession and the ability to build and sustain a highly qualified early care workforce.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI STRUCTURED OBSERVATION TOOL

Observer Name				
Intern Name				
Observation Site				
Observation Date				
RQ1	Uses instructional strategies to actively engage children. (NAEYC Standard 1: Child development, Standard 4: Using DAP, Standard 6: Professionalism)	Met	Approaching	Not Met Yet
	Observed outcomes			
	Notes on process & interactions			
RQ1	Assists children in connecting subject matter to everyday life. (NAEYC Standard 1: Child development, Standard 4: Using DAP, Standard 6: professionalism)	Met	Approaching	Not Met Yet
	Observed outcomes			
	Notes on process & Interactions			
RQ1	Collaborates with children, parents, colleagues, administrators, and supervisors. (NAEYC Standard 1: Child development, Standard 2: Family & Community, Standard 4: Using DAP, Standard 6: Professionalism)	Met	Approaching	Not Met Yet

	Observed outcomes			
	Notes on process & interactions			
RQ2	Is receptive to constructive criticism from the mentor teacher, supervisor, and administrators and incorporates feedback. (NAEYC Standard 6: Professionalism)	Met	Approaching	Not Met Yet
	Observed outcomes			
	Notes on process & interactions			
RQ2	Responds to positive, collaborative mentor teacher interactions. (NAEYC Standard 1: Child development, Standard 4: Using DAP, Standard 6: Professionalism)	Met	Approaching	Not Met Yet
	Observed outcomes			
	Notes on process & interactions			

RQ3	Presents self in a professional manner in terms of appearance, attitude, attire, and conduct. (NAEYC Standard 6: Professionalism)	Met	Approaching	Not Met Yet
	Observed outcomes			
	Notes on process & interactions			
RQ3	Demonstrates confidence and poise when managing the classroom environment. (NAEYC Standard 6: Professionalism)	Met	Approaching	Not Met Yet
	Observed outcomes			
	Notes on process & interactions			
RQ3	Uses self-reflection to evaluate instruction. (NAEYC Standard 4: Using DAP, Standard 6: Professionalism)	Met	Approaching	Not Met Yet
	Observed outcomes			
	Notes on process & interactions			

Follow-up Questions

Question	Context

APPENDIX B

BI WEEKLY MENTOR SURVEY

1. The student intern arrived on time
2. The student was prepared and dressed appropriately
3. The student smiled and made eye contact with the children
4. The student spoke clearly with appropriate language
5. The student took initiative, with guiding suggestions from the mentor teacher

Additional comments

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APPENDIX C

BI WEEKLY STUDENT SURVEY

1. I felt comfortable in the classroom this week
2. I felt supported in the classroom this week
3. I was engaged in the classroom this week
4. I felt connected to others on my teaching team this week
5. I felt confident this week
6. Additional comments

APPENDIX D

STUDENT PHOTOVOICE PROMPTS

1. What accomplishment made you proud this week?
2. What is something you tried in your classroom this week for the first time? How did it go?
3. What is something you found particularly frustrating this week?
4. What is something you would change about this week if you could?
5. Who was the most supportive to you at Educare this week? How was this person supportive?
6. What has caused you the most stress this week?
7. When was a time this week that you felt joyful and/or inspired about the work that you do?
8. In what ways were you helpful to your colleagues this week?
9. What was the most valuable thing you learned this week?
10. What part of the school day is your favorite? Why?

APPENDIX E

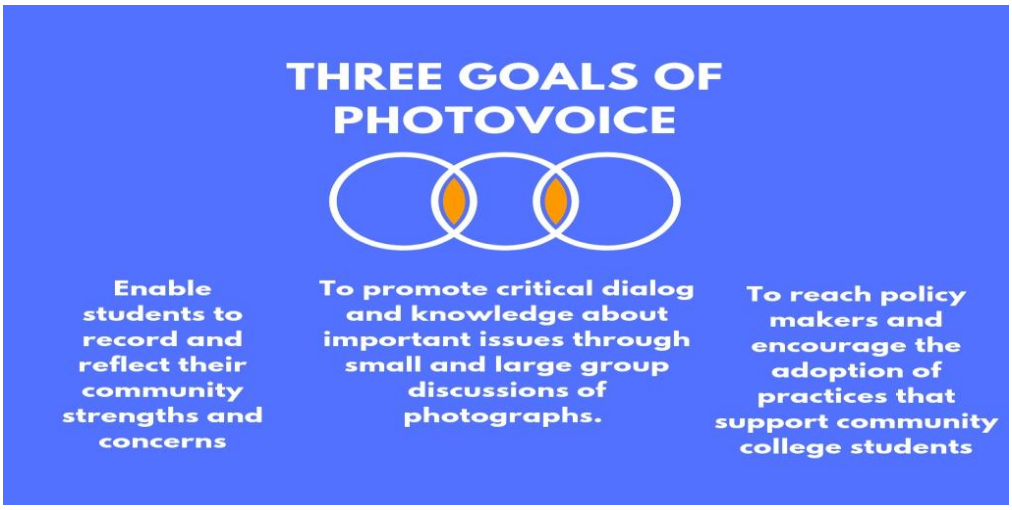
PHOTOVOICE TRAINING GUIDE

Facilitators Training Guide for Tulsa Community College ECE2 Internship Photovoice Project

This toolkit is based on The Facilitator's Toolkit for a Photovoice Project from United for Prevention in Passaic County Sponsored by: NJDMHAS (n.d.)

BACKGROUND -What is photovoice?

Photovoice is a participatory action research methodology created by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris in the early 1990's where "people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique" (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). According to Wang and Burris (1997), photovoice provides the opportunity for community members to creatively document their concerns and simultaneously act as "catalysts for change" (p. 369). Additionally, it ignites interest about important topics that are relevant within a community and allows a community to express themselves through photography. Photovoice breaks past language and traditional communication barriers that often prevent members of a group from expressing their concerns.



Why does it work?

Photovoice is unique in that it brings community members together to discuss and act on critical issues presented through photographs and narratives. Participants are active contributors throughout all phases of the photovoice project.

Photovoice is a highly customizable community-based intervention. After creation of the photos and narratives, it is important to present them in multiple venues around the community; the more exposure the project receives, the more likely it will affect change in the community. If working with a large group of people, it may be easier to have multiple trainings and processing sessions to accommodate the different schedules of participants.

When is it appropriate to use?

Photovoice is an excellent tool to use when there is a need to create awareness around a certain issue or concern, and can be particularly helpful when the issue of concern is one that is traditionally difficult to address or discuss.

ELEMENTS OF A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

1. Photographs – Participants capture images that mean something to them, regarding specific project topics.

2. Narratives – After discussing the photos, the photographer writes up a short narrative to along with each picture, using the SHOWeD method (explained later in this toolkit). This narrative helps the image deliver a clear message.

INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

1. Project Manager (Debbie Deibert, faculty member) – This person is responsible for overseeing the project process, including time management, funding, and the specific project topic.

2. Facilitators (mentor teachers) – Facilitators help participants accurately reflect the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the community they are serving without introducing bias.

3. Participants – Participants are members of the community who want to help raise awareness and promote local change. Photovoice participants take the photos and provide the narratives that will be displayed to the community.

Recommended Materials

• Cameras

• Pens/pencils

• Computer

• Printer

• Consent forms

• Voice recorders (to review information afterwards)

• Photo display board (used for exhibitions)

Ethical Considerations

The concept of a photovoice project is simple and may seem harmless, but there are several ethical considerations that need to be addressed prior to and during a photovoice project.

1. Obtain Informed Consent – Consent must be given for participation (from adults and minors), to utilize photographs for exhibits and promotional purposes, to take pictures of people and/or private homes or businesses, and for consent of people identified in photographs. Students will only photograph children at Educare that have a photo release on file with Tulsa Educare.

ASK YOURSELF? Is it invading someone's privacy?

Consent Needed

•Taking a picture of someone who is recognizable (faces, tattoos, or markings)

•Taking a picture minors (under 18 years)-Educare photo release

•Taking a picture of personal belongings and/or personal property

2. Protect Participants – Participants must refrain from entering dangerous spaces/situations to complete the project. Think not only about danger in terms of

physical harm, but also in emotional harm, harm to an individual's reputation, or potential financial harm, among others.

ASK YOURSELF? Will it harm me or others? Is it dangerous?

3. Protect the Community – It is important to protect others by abstaining from taking pictures that may harm the reputation, safety, or individual liberty-of another.

ASK YOURSELF? Will it put a person's employment, status in the community, etc...? In jeopardy?

4. False Light – It is necessary to make sure that situations in the community are reflected accurately. Necessary steps must be taken to accurately portray the community and to avoid taking photographs of images that could be taken out of context.

ASK YOURSELF? Is it truthful? Does it accurately represent the situation?

Consent NOT Needed

•Taking a picture of public figures

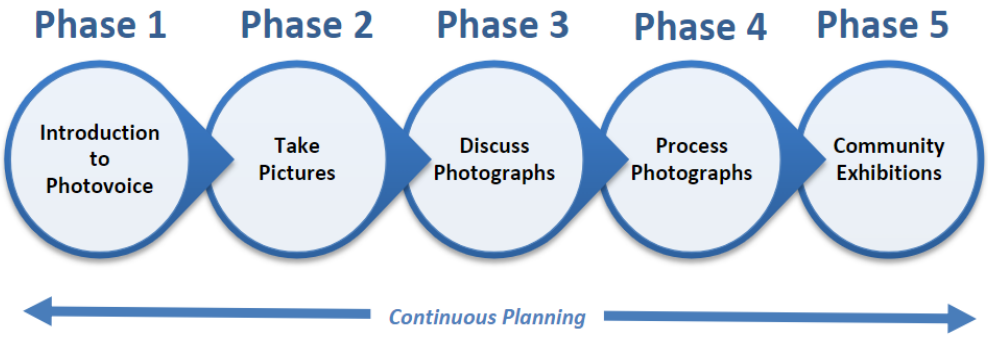
•Taking a picture of the environment or public settings

•Taking a picture of people who cannot be specifically identified

HOW TO UTILIZE PHOTOVOICE

Process Overview

Photovoice is much more than simply taking a photo and telling a story about the photo. Photovoice is a community engagement process in which participants are introduced to photovoice and trained in its use before photos are taken. After photographs have been taken, participants reassemble for a group processing session or sessions. Finally, the group collectively decides how to leverage the photovoice project to encourage and enact change within the community through the exhibition of the completed photovoice stories. This process is displayed in the following figure.



CONTINUOUS PLANNING: (July-December 2018)

Before Implementation – Identify staff roles, participants, dates and times for project

implementation, convenient meeting locations, identify stakeholders and community exhibition locations. Make sure to think about what each phase is going to look like before getting right into it. For example, for phase four, think about the financial resources available to print the photographs taken in this photovoice project. Also, consider using incentives to encourage participation and show appreciation for the time participants dedicate on the photovoice project.

It is important to obtain parental consent from any minors who will be participating in the photovoice project. Any photographed minor will have an Educare parental photo release.

During Implementation (October 2018) – Identify and resolve any issues or concerns before moving forward with the project. Once the community exhibition details have been finalized, start promoting the events and invite key community leaders.

After Implementation – In keeping with the PAR model, identify successful and unsuccessful aspects of the project and modify accordingly for future projects. Explore other forms of community displays (e.g., professional presentations, local presentations, and publications) to keep the discussion of the critical issue active.

PHASE 1: Introduction to Photovoice (September 28, 2018, 2 hours)

Icebreaker Activity – Have participants introduce themselves to each other, because they will be working together in discussing their photos and the community issue later in the project.

Introduce Photovoice – Introduce the concept and benefits of photovoice and explain how this project can have a positive effect on a community.

Introduce the Project – Introduce the topic and timeline for the project. Discuss what is expected from the participants, ethical considerations, and how to obtain informed consent.

Introduce Photography Concepts – Provide a short tutorial on how to use the chosen camera for the photovoice project. Next, provide handouts of "Photography Tips".

PHASE 2: Taking the Photos (October 19-November 1, 2018 2 weeks)

Encourage participants to take this time between group meetings to explore their community and to capture photographs that accurately represent the student/internship experience.

★*All participants must release the rights to the photos they take for them to be used for the photovoice project. Photography subjects must give their consent to be photographed if they or their property can be identified.*

PHASE 3: Discuss Photographs (Week of November 5, 2018)

Introduce the SHOWeD Method – Facilitator conduct individual interviews with participants using the SHOWeD method to elicit the meaning behind their photos. The

interview will include the SHOWeD questions. Standardized by Wang (1999), photovoice studies typically follow the SHOWeD process for analyzing photographs. The five questions involved in this process are (1) what do you see here? (2) What is happening? (3) How does this affect our lives? (4) Why does this strength or weakness exist? (5) What can we do about it? (Wang, 1999). The SHOWeD questions will serve as baseline questions. However, it must be noted, that a social constructivist perspective suggests that research questions not be definitively established before the study begins, but instead start with a goal that allows the inquiries to evolve and change as the investigation progresses (Mertens, 2014). Interview questions may be added or refined during the interview process. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed using Rev Transcription service.

PHASE 4: Focus Group Discussion (November 16, 2018)

Each participant will select and share favorite photos they want to share. Make sure that the participants are answering the questions from the SHOWeD method, as it is a guide to help them express what they really want to say with their photographs. The focus group discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed using Rev Transcription service.

PHASE 5: Community Exhibitions (Spring and Summer of 2019)

Set up, display, and discuss the project with community members. Remember, the goal is to bring awareness about the critical issue to the community, so be sure to invite the appropriate community members, such as policymakers and other stakeholders who can bring about environmental and policy change.

Photovoice orientation	**September 2018**	· **Reserve meeting room**
Students collect photographs	**October 2018**	
Students upload photos to Dropbox	**October 2018**	
Professional Development	**November 2018**	· **OU Seed Sowers Lecture Series**
Schedule and conduct individual interviews	**November 2018**	· **Reserve a room at Educare**
Schedule and conduct focus group	**November 2018**	· **Reserve a room at Educare**

Photography Tips

What are you taking a picture of?

Do you have a clear idea of what you want your image to say? Before cell phones and

digital cameras, one would have been limited to 24 images on a single roll of film. That means you would only have 24 opportunities to showcase what you are trying to say. How many times do you retake a picture before finding the right photo?

Does it stand out?

When taking a picture of a small object or a singular object among many it is important to focus on the main message. Is your photograph telling the same story that you are seeing?

Color makes a difference.

Color is a key player in taking a powerful photograph as colors often relate to one's emotions. Red can be interpreted as passion either in a loving or negative way, whereas the lack of color may also help express your message.

All about perspective.

Naturally we take a picture from the angle we are looking but consider looking at the world from a different perspective. Children see the world from the ground up, and birds from the sky down, try holding your camera at different levels and angles to see the world a little differently.

Rule of thirds.

To get someone's attention through photography you must make sure that the photos are interesting out of context, meaning that it is visually pleasing even without knowing the story behind it. Try using the rule of thirds to make an image more appealing. Instead of lining up your main subject directly in the middle of the photograph, imagine that there are these lines over the top of your picture. Try placing your subject where the lines intersect.

PHOTO BY PHOEBE DESANTIS

Reference

Facilitator's Toolkit for a Photovoice Project (Photovoice Toolkit). (n.d.). Retrieved June 21, 2018, from United for Prevention in Passaic County Sponsored by: NJDMHAS website: https://www.wpunj.edu/uppc/.../UPinPC Photovoice Facilitator Toolkit Final.pdf

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