SUPPORTING NOVICE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS’ CLASSROOM PRACTICES THROUGH AN ONLINE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This descriptive study examined novice early childhood teachers’ perceptions about their effectiveness in supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior. The study also examined the types of social and emotional challenges novice teachers perceive to be the most salient to their success as teachers and the solutions they found most helpful. Participation in an online community of practice was examined for its value as an induction and mentoring activity for novice early childhood teachers. The results indicated that all participants had taught or were currently teaching young children with challenging behavior. Participants described using recommended practices in their classrooms to support young children’s social and emotional competence and address challenging behavior. They reported that they worked in collaborative school settings where they received support from mentors, administrators, and colleagues. Participants reported that membership in the online community of practice was of value to them and they would recommend this experience to other novice early childhood teachers. Limitations of the study and implications for research and practice are discussed.
For my family
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The retention of novice teachers is a critical issue in the field of education. Those involved in teacher education, federal and state policy makers and school district administrators are acutely aware of the need to prepare, support, and retain novice teachers. Novice teachers are those who have graduated from a preservice teacher education programs and are moving from initial to permanent teacher certification. The term novice or beginning teacher typically describes teachers during the first three years of teaching (Berliner, 2004). The problem of retaining novice teachers has been documented in several studies and research reports (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001, 2003). Ingersoll (2001) found that a core issue at the root of school staffing problems is the “revolving door,” with large numbers of teachers leaving the profession. Some studies indicate that up to 50% of novice teachers leave the field within 5 years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

Researchers have used the term “stayers” to refer to teachers who remain teaching in their same school from one year to the next (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Johnson, Birkeland, Donaldson, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, & Peske, 2004; Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007). Keeping teachers employed at the same school has positive outcomes for students, families, and the community. Teachers who stay in their same school provide stability for students. They also reduce costs for schools and communities. Data from 2004-05 indicate that of the 3,214,900 public school teachers who were teaching during the 2003-04 school year, 84 percent remained at the same school (“stayers”), 8 percent moved to a different school (“movers”), and 8 percent left the profession (“leavers”) during the following year (Marvel et al., 2007). Public school teachers younger than 30 years old tend to be mobile. Of this age group,
about 15 percent left for another school, while 9 percent left teaching altogether (Marvel et al., 2007). These numbers indicate that about 16 percent of American public school teachers left their current school that year. Data indicate that 24 percent of younger public school teachers (under age 30) left their current school that year. Some teachers leave because of retirements; however Ingersoll (2001, 2003) and Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) in a series of studies about the teacher workforce found only about 27 percent of all those leaving teaching do so because of retirement.

Teacher stability is especially problematic for the field of special education. Lukens, Lyter, Fox, and Chandler (2004) found that teachers who are “stayers” tended to be male and teach in general education classrooms. They also found that younger teachers (under 30 years old) were least likely to remain teaching at their current school. These findings indicate that female special education teachers under age 30 are not as likely to “stay” in their initial teaching positions as their general education colleagues.

To assist in the retention of new teachers and help them move from preservice to practicing teacher, school districts (and other entities that provide professional development to educators) have designed induction programs. “Theoretically, induction programs are not additional training per se but are designed for teachers who have already completed basic training” (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 683). Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, and Yusko (1999) discussed the complexity of novice teacher induction:

- As a concept, induction can be defined as a phase in learning to teach, a process of enculturation, or a formal program for the support, development, and assessment of beginning teachers (p. 31).

School districts use induction programs for many purposes such as evaluation of novice teachers, advising novice teachers of district policies, and supporting professional growth.
Induction programs for novice teachers vary in their length and the number of activities available. They can be short (one orientation meeting) or long (lasting the first 2 or 3 years of the novice teacher’s career). Smith and Ingersoll (2004) describe common aspects of teacher induction programs:

Teacher induction can also involve a variety of elements - workshops, collaborations, support systems, orientation seminars, and especially mentoring. Mentoring is the personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers in schools (p. 683).

Research on the impact of induction and mentoring activities for novice teachers is quite varied and has yielded varied results, perhaps due to the different ways in which induction programs are designed. Some studies have shown that induction and mentoring activities can positively impact novice teacher retention (Flanagan & Fowler, 2010; Kelley, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), whereas others have not shown a strong relationship between induction and mentoring activities and teacher retention (Glazerman, Dolfin, Johnson, Bleeker, Isenberg, Lugo-Gil, Grider, & Britton, 2008; Isenberg, Glazerman, Bleeker, Johnson, Lugo-Gil, Grider, & Dolfin, 2009; Wechsler, Caspary, Humphrey, & Matsko, 2010). Overall there is a shortage of empirical research that can inform the field about which particular induction and mentoring activities are most salient and have the greatest impact for particular groups of novice teachers (Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, & Yusko, 1999; Lopez, Lash, Shaffner, Shields, & Wagner, 2004). For example, Sindelar, Brownell, & Billingsley (2010) described the need for an induction and mentoring research agenda specifically focused on special educators that would include: (a) studies of new special educators’ knowledge and practices; (b) the nature of relationships between mentors and mentees, (c) the use of e-mentoring and online professional communities of support, and (d) the work contexts that increase special educator’s retention in the field. There is also a need for an induction and mentoring research agenda that specifically
focuses on other particular groups of teachers such as early childhood (EC) and early childhood special education teachers (ECSE). The concerns and needs of EC and ECSE teachers are not specifically addressed in the current empirical literature. This is especially critical due to the increased numbers of novice teachers whose preservice training specifically prepares them to teach both typically developing young children and young children with disabilities as well as to the varied settings in which early childhood teachers work.

Due to legislative and philosophical changes in the past decade regarding the rights of all children to participate in child care, education, and recreational activities more young children with disabilities are being included with their typically developing peers in preschool settings across the U.S. (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005). As more young children with disabilities are included in preschool and kindergarten classrooms, there is a growing need to hire teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach young children with a wide range of developmental needs. To prepare teachers of young children to address this wide range of student abilities, blended EC and ECSE teacher preparation programs are becoming more prevalent in the U.S. (Stayton & McCollum, 2002; Stayton, Miller, & Dinnebeil, 2003).

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is recognized as a national leader in the creation of publicly funded early childhood programs for young children at risk and for young children with disabilities (ISBE, 2006). Most Illinois public school programs employ teachers who hold a Type 04 early childhood (EC) teaching certificate demonstrating their preparation to teach young children from birth through third grade. In addition to the Type 04 EC teacher certification ISBE grants an Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Approval that can be obtained by individuals who already hold an EC certificate. The ECSE Approval is obtained upon demonstrating that the teacher certification candidate has content in these four areas: (a)
methods for teaching young children with disabilities, (b) assessment of young children with disabilities, (c) language development for young children with disabilities, and (d) family and community relationships. A drawback to this form of blended certification is that teacher candidates are not required to complete any field experiences with young children with disabilities in order to obtain the ECSE Approval. This means that an EC and ECSE certified novice teacher can be assigned as the primary instructor for young children with disabilities without ever having taught young children with disabilities during her teacher preparation program.

According to the ISBE Directory of Approved Programs for the Preparation of Educational Personnel in Illinois Institutions of Higher Education (ISBE, 2010) there are 27 institutions of higher learning (colleges or universities) in Illinois that offer teacher preparation programs leading to EC teacher certification (Type 04). Of these 27 programs, 19 (70%) offer the ECSE course content that leads to the additional ECSE Approval. It is not known what specific field experiences most EC and ECSE novice teachers have completed that include teaching young children with disabilities prior to novice their first paid teaching position. There is no published research indicating how well graduates of EC/ECSE teacher education programs believe their teacher education program prepared them to teach young children with disabilities or what impact particular induction and mentoring activities have had upon their sense of competence and willingness to continue teaching.

Early childhood is a unique period in a child’s development (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). Teachers of young children play a critical role in intentionally choosing to teach important content and skills that will have the most impact upon children’s later school success. Novice EC and ECSE teachers need support to implement recommended
strategies and interventions that will “set the stage” for their students’ optimal development. For example, social and emotional development has been found to be a critical factor in a child’s ability to adjust to school (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000), and research has demonstrated that enhancing children’s social and emotional development during the early childhood years influences their later academic success (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Studies of novice teacher’s concerns have indicated that classroom management and teaching children with individual differences are major areas of concern (Colaric & Stapleton, 2004; Meister & Melnick, 2003; Melnick & Jenks, 2000; Veenman, 1984). Addressing young children’s challenging behavior and enhancing social and emotional competence should be a focus for all EC and ECSE teachers, and novice teacher induction and mentoring activities should include methods for enhancing this area of development.

The range of school-based support for early childhood programs is also an issue. Although many young children are enrolled in public school programs and other early childhood settings, these programs may or may not have the supports and services needed to assist novice EC and ECSE teachers to use recommended strategies that foster children’s optimal development.

The research on the impact of induction and mentoring programs on novice teachers’ sense of self efficacy, improvement in instructional practices, impact on student achievement, and commitment to teaching is varied, pointing to the need for continued empirical research on policies and programs that address those factors most critical to the improvement of teaching practices and student outcomes (Flanagan & Fowler, 2010; Glazerman et al., 2008; Isenberg et al., 2009; Lopez et al., 2004; Wechsler et al., 2010; Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005). School context or school climate (including school-based supports such as colleagues and teaching
resources) have been found to influence novice teachers’ sense of efficacy and teacher retention (Flanagan & Fowler, 2010; Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, Otis-Wilborn, Hou, & Garvan, 2009; Tait, 2008; Wechsler et al., 2010; Tschanne-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007; Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005). However, more empirical research specifically focused on the impact of school context on teaching efficacy and the retention of novice EC and ECSE teachers is needed.

A review of the empirical literature on novice teacher induction and mentoring programs revealed little empirical research concerning induction and mentoring activities that have included or been designed for novice EC and ECSE teachers. A promising induction practice that has been mentioned in the literature is the formation of a community of practice (Buysse, Wesley, & Able Boone, 2001; Gotto, Turnbull, Summers, & Blue-Banning, 2009; Johnson, 2001; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). Johnson (2001), in a survey of research involving online CoPs, describes virtual CoPs and points out their unique characteristics. CoPs have evolved from constructivism (Squire & Johnson, 2000). The problems addressed in CoPs are real-world problems in which different members of the group work together to solve problems. Experts may come from within or outside the group with the leader assuming the role of facilitator. The group’s goals are shared ones which increases members’ ownership and commitment to “situated learning.” Johnson (2001) states:

Communities of practice differ from traditional learning environments because the learning takes place in the actual situation, including the social environment. This means novices and experts, as well as novice movement to expertise, are important aspects of communities of practice (p. 51).
Most novice teachers are comfortable using technology to do research on topics of interest, participate in online classes, download podcasts, engage in instant messaging, and access social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) to communicate with others. During their teacher preparation program pre-service teachers are often introduced to web based professional resources such as TappedIn (Schlager, Fusco, & Schank, 1998), a virtual environment where teachers, administrators, and university faculty can create and/or participate in professional development activities including forming communities of practice. Participation in web based professional development activities allows teachers to gain knowledge and skills in a flexible, informal environment (Spicer & Dede, 2006) without incurring extra expenses for travel or substitute teachers. Developing virtual CoPs that engage novice and experienced teachers, university faculty, and other stakeholders within district or state-wide professional development activities may bring about more sustained collaboration and address educational issues or practices that are particularly salient to local district or state-wide identified needs (Schlager & Fusco, 2004).

Previous studies have not addressed factors that influence novice EC and ECSE teachers’ experiences with regard to addressing these teachers’ sense of competence (e.g. teacher preparation program courses, new teacher induction and mentoring activities, school context). Second, there is a need to conduct empirical research that investigates the usefulness of particular approaches to induction and mentoring activities as support for novice EC and ECSE teachers. Although there are partnerships between university teacher educators, school districts, and other stakeholders to offer induction and mentoring supports, there are very few descriptions in the literature of induction and mentoring programs specifically designed for novice EC and ECSE teachers (Davis & Higdon, 2008; McCormick & Brennan, 2001), whether offered by the
receiving district or by the university. Information from such studies can be used to improve EC and ECSE teacher education courses and field experiences. This information also can inform those involved in designing induction and mentoring activities about how to best support novice teachers as they begin their work in the field of EC and ECSE and engage in moving from novice to expert teachers.

This study investigated novice EC (first year through 3 years teaching experience) teacher’s knowledge, skills, and dispositions with regard to enhancing young children’s social and emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors. Our interest was in learning what practices novice EC teachers engage in to support young children’s learning and development, as well as whether the school context and/or other factors influenced their sense of efficacy and competency in teaching young children. Due to a review of the literature on novice teachers’ concerns and influences on their sense of efficacy, we hypothesized that the areas of classroom management and addressing young children’s challenging behaviors would be of high interest to novice EC teachers.

The recent studies linking the critical need to address young children’s challenging behaviors during the preschool and early grades also informed our decision to investigate teaching practices that focused on this area of children’s development. We also hypothesized that novice EC teachers may feel isolated and lack school-based supports (e.g., induction and mentoring activities specifically salient to their needs, collaborative and supportive colleagues and administrators, adequate teaching materials) and would not initiate contacts with their colleagues or administrators to assist them with addressing young children’s challenging behavior. In addition we hypothesized that increasing knowledge, resources, and skills to support young children’s social and emotional development and address challenging behavior would be
of high interest to novice EC teachers and that an online CoP designed and facilitated by a teacher educator with expertise in this area could be of value. We also were interested in examining the outcomes of membership in an online CoP that was created specifically for novice EC teachers who shared a common experience as graduates of the same teacher education program. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods were used to answer the following research questions:

1. How do novice teachers perceive their own effectiveness in supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior?
   
   (a) What types of social and emotional and behavioral challenges do novice teachers perceive to be the most salient to their success as teachers?

   (b) What solutions do they see as potentially helpful?

2. What factors do novice teachers perceive as influencing their practices and effectiveness with regard to supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior?

3. How does participation in an online CoP influence novice teacher’s sense of efficacy in supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior?
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This study examined questions related to novice EC teachers’ practices with regard to enhancing young children’s social and emotional development and addressing challenging behavior. The study also examined the value of membership in an online community of practice as an induction activity for novice EC teachers. This chapter includes a review of three main areas of the literature that are closely related to the research questions of interest: (a) influences on novice teachers’ sense of efficacy, (b) induction and mentoring support for novice EC teachers, and (c) studies of online communities of practice designed to support novice teachers. A summary of gaps in the literature is provided at the conclusion of the chapter.

Definition of Terms

In order to clearly understand terms such as induction, mentoring, and community of practice used in this review it is necessary to define them. It is common in the novice teacher literature to find the terms mentoring and induction used interchangeably yet it is important to distinguish these terms. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) describe new teacher induction programs as “...not additional training per se but designed to assist novice teachers move from their role as a preservice “student of teaching” to their new role as a “teacher of students” (p. 683). Induction programs can be designed to address a wide variety of needs. They may include “...workshops, collaborations, support systems, orientation seminars, and especially mentoring” (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 683).

Mentoring is widely used as part of new teacher induction programs. Mentoring occurs when a seasoned or veteran teacher is assigned to provide guidance, support, and advice to a
novice teacher (Gallacher, 1997; Wong, 2004). Often mentors are assigned to novice teachers by
the building administrator or the human resources officer of the school district. Some districts
have formal mentoring programs that are arranged by staff development coordinators or others
charged with designing continuing education for all employees; other districts contract with
professional staff development companies who design and implement induction programs in
multiple sites. Mentoring and induction programs described in the teacher education literature
(Fulton et al., 2005; Hawkey, 1997) highlight the variation in the types of activities, length of
time new teachers participate in induction and mentoring activities, training for those serving as
new teacher mentors, compensation for participation in these types of activities, and attention to
how new teachers and mentors are matched.

The formation of communities of practice that include novice and veteran teachers is one
format for providing induction and mentoring within schools, districts, and via web-based
platforms across the world (Koch & Fusco, 2008). “Communities of practice are groups of
people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their
knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2002, p.
4). According to Wenger et al. (2002), a community of practice (CoP) has the following
components: (a) the domain, (b) the community, and (c) the practice. The term domain refers to
the groups of people who have a shared domain of interest (e.g., teaching young children with
disabilities in an inclusive classroom or designing meaningful math curricula for secondary
students) and their commitment to the domain. Members form a community in which they share
information and assist each other through joint activities and discussions. The members learn and
interact together regularly but they may or may not work in the same setting on a daily basis. The
practice indicates that the members of a CoP are trying out their craft. They are practitioners
sharing their practices with one another and improving their own practices through learning from others within the community. They meet together and develop a set of shared stories and shared knowledge that informs their work. CoPs can advance their field through these shared insights, cases, and practices. CoPs may include both seasoned and novice participants, and are often facilitated by someone with leadership and a vision for what can emerge through the group’s shared knowledge.

Search Process

The literature search for this review included using the ERIC electronic data base, Wilson Select, and the Google search engine. Keywords and phrases used included novice teachers, teachers’ sense of efficacy, novice teachers’ concerns, communities of practice, and EC teachers’ induction and mentoring programs. The literature search in this review is limited to the years 1980-2010. A hand search was done of the following journals: Early Childhood Research Quarterly, The Journal of Early Intervention, Journal of Teacher Education, Teacher Education and Special Education, Topics in Early Childhood Education, and Review of Educational Research. The reference lists from articles and reports were used to search for other literature related to the topic. Relevant chapters in early childhood and early childhood special education personnel preparation books as well as scholarly books related to novice teacher induction and retention were reviewed. The next section in this review examines the variables that may influence novice teachers’ sense of efficacy. Building a sense of efficacy is critical to the retention and success of new teachers (Costa & Garmston, 2002). The retention and success of new teachers in turn results in better outcomes for student achievement (Ashton & Webb, 1986).
Influences on Novice Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy

“A teacher’s efficacy belief is a judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated” (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 783). The literature on teacher efficacy is extensive (Soodak & Podell, 1996). A strong sense of efficacy has been shown to impact teachers’ abilities to plan and organize (Allinder, 1994), to be open to new ideas and methodologies (Guskey, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988), and to be persistent as well as resilient when encountering difficulties in their classrooms. Teachers’ sense of efficacy has also been linked to better outcomes for students (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984) and to the referral of students for special education services (Soodak & Podell, 1993). Coladarci (1992) found that teachers with a greater sense of efficacy have a greater commitment to teaching. Efficacy may be most influenced early in learning to teach so the time spent in a teacher education program and the time during induction are critical to the development of teacher efficacy (Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005).

Recent studies have addressed influences on novice teacher’s sense of efficacy. Woolfolk Hoy and Spero (2005) compared novice teachers’ efficacy ratings obtained during their teacher education program (when they had support from their cohort, university faculty, and cooperating teachers) with efficacy ratings obtained at the end of their first year of teaching. All participants were graduate students enrolled in the same Master’s of Education initial certification program. Their teacher education program was described as a professional development school model where teacher education candidates took graduate courses and completed a year long school-based internship at the same time. The teacher education program focused on diversity and prepared teachers for work in urban settings. Data collection occurred across three phases: (a)
during the first quarter of the participants’ enrollment in the teacher education program, (b) the end of student teaching, and (c) the end of their first year of teaching. Three different measures of sense of efficacy were completed during each phase of data collection: (a) *Teacher Efficacy Scale* (Gibson & Dembo, 1984) adapted by Woolfolk and Hoy (1993), (b) *Bandura Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale* (Bandura, n.d.), and (c) *The Ohio State University (OSU) Teaching Confidence Scale* (Woolfolk Hoy & Spero). As a part of the final data collection at the end of their first year of teaching, the researchers also asked the novice teachers to provide background information about themselves (e.g., mastery ratings of their own success as compared to other first year teachers, their personal satisfaction with their own performance, the difficulty of their teaching assignment, and the socioeconomic level of their classroom). In addition, the novice teachers rated their access to school-based resources and supports (e.g., teaching resources provided, support from colleagues, administrators, parents, and community).

The study investigated (a) changes in this group of teacher candidates’ sense of efficacy during student teaching and their first year of teaching, (b) whether different measures of teachers’ sense of efficacy reveal similar patterns of change, and (c) possible factors in the first years of teaching that might be related to changes in efficacy (e.g., ratings of personal mastery, school, parent, and community variables). Fifty-three participants completed the first two phases of data collection (Phase 1 at the start of their teacher education program and Phase 2 at the end of their student teaching semester) but only 29 of the participants returned usable questionnaires at the end of their first year of teaching. Although a small sample, findings indicated that across those scales that specifically measured teacher efficacy, participants’ sense of efficacy rose during their teacher preparation program and at the end of their student teaching semester (i.e., when they had support from university faculty and cooperating teachers) but fell during their first
Woolfolk Hoy and Spero found that the positive changes in efficacy correlated with the participants’ perceived level of support during their first year of teaching; as perceptions of support increased so did the novice teachers’ sense of efficacy (supports included colleagues, administrators, parents, community, and the quality of teaching resources provided). Results also indicated that novice teachers working in higher SES classrooms “felt more supported and found their teaching assignment less difficult than teachers in lower SES classrooms” (p. 353). There was no decrease in the novice teachers’ ratings on the OSU Confidence Scale at the end of the first year of teaching. The authors found that the OSU Confidence Scale was not a true indicator of the novice teachers’ sense of efficacy, but was an indicator of the teachers’ confidence in their ability to use particular teaching strategies. Woolfolk Hoy and Spero reported the need for more studies with larger numbers of participants from different teacher education programs and geographic regions to learn what specific kind of support (e.g., mentoring support) is most helpful to novice teachers and how particular supports impact novice teachers’ efficacy beliefs. Additionally they called for studies that investigate specific school characteristics (e.g., extent of administrator support to novice teachers) that might positively influence a novice teachers’ sense of efficacy.

A study by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007) examined influences on novice and experienced teachers self-efficacy beliefs to determine if any differences could be found between these two groups of teachers. The researchers examined two sources of self-efficacy: (a) verbal persuasion in the form of interpersonal support from administrators, colleagues, parents, and the community, and (b) mastery experiences which they described “... as a sense of satisfaction with one’s past teaching successes” (p. 945). They also examined the school context and its relationship to novice and experienced teachers’ sense of self-efficacy. The key factors
they considered were school level and setting, teachers’ assessment of available teaching resources, and the quality of the school facilities. Participants (n = 255) were teachers who were graduate students at three state universities, teacher volunteers from two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school in the same states as the universities. The sample was divided into Novice Teachers (3 or less years of experience, n = 74), and Career Teachers (4 or more years of experience, n = 181). All participants completed the Teacher’s Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Participants also were asked to rate the quality of support they received (e.g., administrative, collegial, parent, and community support) and to rate their level of satisfaction with their own professional performance. The participants were teachers in either high school, middle school, or elementary grades.

The Career Teachers rated themselves significantly higher than the Novice Teachers on overall self-efficacy as well as on two of the subscales (Instructional Strategies subscale and the Classroom Management subscale). There was no significant difference between scores of the two groups on the Student Engagement subscale. The school contextual variable most related to for novice teachers sense of efficacy was the availability of teaching resources. Demographic variables (e.g., race, gender) were not found to be related to the self-efficacy beliefs of either novice or career teachers. The school’s geographic setting (urban, rural, suburban) also was not related to the self-efficacy beliefs of either group of teachers. Grade level was an influence on career teachers self-efficacy ratings, but not for novice teachers.

Novice teachers’ satisfaction with their professional performance was related to support from parents and the community. The support from colleagues and community also made a contribution toward novice teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs. An unexpected finding was that self efficacy of neither novice nor career teachers was related to their administrator’s support.
Mastery experience (self-rating of their own teaching performance) was moderately related to TSES' ratings for both novice and career teachers, but more strongly related among the novice teachers. The Career Teachers’ sense of self-efficacy was less dependent on outside factors (colleagues, parents, community) than the novice teachers. The authors believe this could be due to novice teachers’ sense of efficacy being less established at the beginning of their career, making them more dependent on external sources of support. As teachers gain more mastery through years of practice they may become less reliant on external sources of support. The authors indicated that more research needs to be done to determine how to effectively support novice teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs during their pre-service and early years of teaching because of the relationship between teachers’ self-efficacy, student outcomes, and student attitudes. Teacher educators and school personnel need to attend to supporting novice teachers as their sense of efficacy may also determine their willingness to remain teaching (Coladarci, 1992).

Although it did not address supports related to enhancing self-efficacy, one study was found that specifically measured EC and ECSE teachers’ sense of efficacy to determine its influence on teachers’ perceptions and attitudes regarding the use of particular child focused interventions. Rheams and Bain (2005) examined the perceptions and attitudes of teachers toward social interaction interventions that have been identified as appropriate for supporting the social interactions of young children with disabilities. Participants were EC teachers (79 teachers who taught in inclusive kindergarten classrooms) and ECSE teachers (58 early childhood special education teachers who taught in self-contained preschool classrooms) representing 137 classrooms in a southeastern state. The authors were interested in what might interfere with teachers’ use of social interaction interventions with young children with
disabilities. The participants completed several different instruments that measured (a) their attitude toward inclusion, (b) experiences teaching young children with disabilities, (c) theoretical orientation, and (d) sense of efficacy. To measure teachers’ sense of efficacy the authors chose the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES)(Gibson & Dembo, 1984). The scale has been shown to load on two components: Component I (Personal Teaching Efficacy) and Component II (General Teaching Efficacy). Due to low reliability scores on Component II, Rheams and Bain only used the participants’ scores on Component I (Personal Teaching Efficacy) for data analysis. With regard to personal teaching efficacy, both groups of teachers (inclusive kindergarten teachers and ECSE self-contained class teachers) had high ratings and held similar positive beliefs about their personal teaching efficacy. There were no significant differences found between these two groups on their sense of personal teaching efficacy.

While there is a long history of the study of teachers’ sense of efficacy that includes the design and usefulness of measures (i.e., rating scales), as well as its influence on important issues (e.g., student outcomes, teacher retention), there were no empirical studies that specifically focused on EC novice teachers’ sense of efficacy, or supports for enhancing it. Only one empirical study included career EC and ECSE teachers’ sense of efficacy as a variable (Rheams & Bain, 2005). An investigation of novice EC teachers’ sense of efficacy and what types of school-based or other supports influence their sense of efficacy would be of interest to EC teacher educators and other individuals involved in the design and implementation of mentoring and induction activities. The following section will focus on the research literature investigating novice teachers concerns and addressing these concerns through mentoring and other induction activities.
Mentoring and Induction for Novice EC Teachers

Novice teachers’ concerns. Three major literature reviews have provided the field with information about novice teachers’ concerns as they move from teacher education programs into the first three years of teaching. Veenman (1984) completed the first of these reviews. His literature review covered eighty-three empirical studies. From these studies he ranked novice teachers’ top eight concerns: classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessment of student’s work, relationships with parents, organization of class work, insufficient materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual students.

The second major literature review on this topic was completed by Kagan (1992) and primarily focused on qualitative studies. Kagan’s review covered the empirical literature on “learning to teach” from 1987 to 1991 and included 40 studies (27 studies focused on preservice teachers; 13 focused on first year teachers). In her review Kagan found that “(a) first-year teachers used their growing knowledge of pupils and classrooms to reconstruct their images of self as teacher and (b) classroom and school contextual factors could affect the professional growth of novices” (p. 158). Kagan’s literature review also found that novice teachers were not able to connect the abstract theories presented in university courses and their experiences in their classrooms and that their earlier experiences in their own schooling (e.g., their interactions with teachers and authority figures) greatly affected their image of themselves as teachers. This image was found to be powerful and remained unchanged throughout their university preservice program.

A third review of the research was completed by Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1998). Their review included 97 studies all completed after 1990. The authors divided the studies into three major areas: (a) prior beliefs of beginning teachers, (b) teacher preparation
program interventions, and (c) the first year of teaching. The authors called for more rigorous and well designed studies that examine the process of learning to teach. The findings from the studies on the first year of teaching indicated a common theme of disconnection between what novice teachers had learned in their preservice program and the first year of teaching. The authors addressed the need for teacher education programs to make a stronger link between preservice teacher’s beliefs about teaching and the actual reality of teaching. Three recent studies have added to the empirical literature in the area of novice teachers’ concerns.

Meister and Jenks (2000) conducted eleven focus groups with forty-two non-tenured teachers (25 elementary and 17 secondary) teaching in a variety of geographic locations (urban, suburban, rural) across four states. They found that the greatest concern of these new teachers was not minor discipline issues, but the challenging behaviors and diverse needs of some individual students. The participants’ other concerns involved time constraints and work overload, and a lack of communication skills in addressing conflicts with parents and other adults in the school. Although many of the novice teachers recalled writing about and reflecting on their teaching practices during their preservice program they reflected only sporadically during their first year of teaching. Participants in this study included some kindergarten and primary grade teachers but the particular concerns of novice EC teachers were not separated from all of the participants. As a follow-up to this study Meister and Melnick (2003) surveyed 273 first and second year teachers representing 41 states. Sixty percent of the participants were elementary teachers, 13 percent were middle school teachers, and 27 percent were high school teachers. The participants represented districts located in several geographic areas (47 percent suburban, 39 percent rural and 18 percent urban). The survey results confirmed that one out of five beginning teachers felt unprepared in the area of classroom management especially in
handling disruptive students and students with special needs. Time management was again a concern and novice teachers did not feel prepared for the amount of organization and paperwork involved in teaching. In the area of parent involvement, 1 in 3 participants reported that they did not send messages home to parents and only 58% made it a point to contact students’ parents. The authors also reported that 1 in 4 participants did not feel well prepared by their student teaching experiences. Clearly the novice teachers in this study again confirmed that addressing students’ challenging behavior and teaching students with special needs were an area of concern for novice teachers. Once again the particular concerns of novice EC teachers could not be extrapolated from the research as the findings were summarized across all participants.

Colaric and Stapleton (2004), in a survey of novice elementary, middle, and secondary teachers in rural North Carolina (n = 225), found “classroom management/discipline” to be the greatest challenge/concern for new teachers (47.7%). Other significant areas of concern included planning and teaching to state standards (15.5%), meeting needs of students (13.6%), school policy/procedures (12.3%), lack of support/assistance (9.5%), time (8.6%), working with parents/staff (8.6%), and paperwork (8.2%). Five percent or less of the participants also identified the amount of work/responsibilities, lack of resources, obtaining certification/license, and planning for state assessments as challenges. In that same survey the novice teachers were asked where they went to get answers to their questions about the school rules, supplies, classroom management, etc. Respondents indicated they most often turned to experienced teachers (91%) in their schools, assigned mentor teacher (87.3%), administrator (72.4%), print resource (42.5%), and teacher at another school (38.9%). Colaric and Stapleton (2004) suggest developing resources outside the school setting that contain meaningful information for novice teachers such as an online database of cases that depict effective strategies for addressing
classroom management/discipline and include insights from experienced teachers. The authors did not specifically identify concerns of novice EC teachers as the survey results were reported for the entire group of participants.

In their report *Teacher Induction in Illinois: Evidence from the Illinois Teacher Study*, Klostermann, Presley, Peddle, Trott, and Bergeron (2003) present findings from phone interviews and follow up focus groups with two samples of certified teachers. One group included “Starters” (individuals initially certified to teach in school year 1999/2000 who were working as regular teachers in an Illinois public school during the 2000/2001 school year). The second group included “Stayers” (individuals certified to teach in school year 1994/95) who were described as regular teachers in an Illinois public school during the 1999/2000 and 2000/2001 school years. In this report the term “regular” teacher includes both general education as well as special education teachers. Each group had 400 participants with participation rates of 72% for Starters and 70% for Stayers. When asked about the adequacy of their undergrad studies and teacher preparation courses, over 80% from each group described their preparation as adequate or more than adequate in several areas: (a) how to work collaboratively, (b) knowledge of the subject matter that they were certified to teach, (c) overall readiness to teach, (d) knowledge of and practice in appropriate instructional techniques, and (e) knowledge of and practice in assessment techniques appropriate for the subject matter they were certified to teach. Their lowest ratings of adequacy (less than 70% of respondents) were given to three aspects of their teacher preparation courses: (a) how to work with students with special education needs, (b) how to implement the Illinois Learning Standards into lessons, and (c) how to use technology for professional and instructional purposes.
Sixty-five percent of Starters (who came of age with more access to technology while a college student) rated their teacher preparation for “how to use technology” as adequate or more than adequate as opposed to 53 percent of Stayers (who had less opportunity to access technology while a college student). The authors also noted that the Illinois Learning Standards were not in place when the Stayers were enrolled in their undergraduate program therefore influencing their adequacy rating on this item. The adequacy ratings on “how to work with students with special needs” did not show any difference between the Starters and the Stayers. Both groups rated this as an area in which they wanted more preparation. These findings indicate that although Illinois novice teachers (Starters) believed their undergraduate education had prepared them well, many do not feel adequately prepared to work with students with special needs and that further professional development in this area as well as in the use of technology for instructional and professional purposes was warranted. It is interesting to note that perceptions of limited competence by special education teachers are included in these findings although they have been specifically trained to teach students with special needs. Further analyses focused on responses of teachers who hold special education certification is needed to better understand the impact of special education personnel preparation on teachers’ perceptions of competence.

Studies about novice teachers’ concerns indicate that mentoring and induction activities should include a focus on classroom management issues, particularly teaching students with challenging behaviors and other special needs. Training and support for novice EC teachers is especially important due to recent studies (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Raver, 2002) that have shown the long term detrimental effects on child and family outcomes when young children’s challenging behavior is not addressed during preschool and early elementary school.
There is a critical need for novice EC teachers to engage in recommended practices that intentionally support young children’s social and emotional development and effectively address challenging behavior during the preschool and early elementary years.

Studies need to be designed that will inform the field specifically about novice EC teachers’ concerns and to learn about how best to address these concerns as they complete their teacher education program and begin their teaching careers. Understanding which induction activities have value in increasing novice EC teachers’ sense of efficacy, their rates of retention, and their impact on student learning and achievement are areas in need of further empirical study. The following section describes the varied results that have been obtained from the empirical literature concerning new teacher induction and mentoring.

**Induction and mentoring.** The overall goals of induction and mentoring are to help novice teachers acclimate to their new profession, improve their practices, and increase their willingness to continue to teach. Lopez et al., (2004) reviewed studies published between 1980-2002 that addressed the impact of beginning teacher induction programs on teacher quality and retention. They found that although there are many resources available on teacher induction there are few rigorous studies that examine the impact of induction on teacher quality and teacher retention. Most studies in this review were evaluations of specific induction programs. Lopez et al. reported that the “set of reviewed research is weak . . . making it difficult to assess, and draw conclusions about, the impact of teacher induction on beginning teacher quality and retention” (p. 7).

Kelley (2004) described a successful induction partnership, the Partners in Education Program (PIE) between the University of Colorado at Boulder (UCB) and six school districts. Kelley tracked 10 UCB teacher education cohorts (144 teachers who graduated from 1987-
1997) into their 5th year of teaching and found a 94% retention rate for those novice teachers who engaged in the PIE program. Teachers were employed at elementary and secondary schools in Colorado. The induction year components included (a) intensive mentoring, (b) cohort group networking, and (c) ongoing inquiry into practice that includes enrolling in 3 off campus graduate classes during the induction year. The group networking included twice monthly seminars in which the novice teachers and university faculty formed a face-to-face community of practice. The graduate courses included opportunities for the novice teachers to conduct a small classroom research project, engage in reflective writing about their teaching. In addition to the retention data, evaluation included yearly surveys and interviews with PIE program teachers and mentors, principals, classroom observations, and other program artifacts. Information obtained from yearly evaluations lead to program improvements. Kelley’s findings indicate that an intensive, high quality induction program that includes a partnership between university teacher educators and school districts can positively impact teacher retention.

The authors of a large multi-year randomized control study examining the effects of a comprehensive teacher induction program on new elementary teachers’ retention rates found that the comprehensive induction program had no effect on teacher retention nor did it help new teachers feel better prepared to teach (Glazerman et al., 2008; Grider, & Britton, 2008; Isenberg et al., 2009). In contrast, Flanagan & Fowler (2010) reported using the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data to examine which components of a comprehensive induction program are most likely to impact a teacher’s plans to remain in teaching. They included elementary and secondary teachers with 3 or fewer years of experience and found that novice teachers who receive even just two components of an induction program (e.g., administrator support and mentor teacher support) are more likely to remain teaching. Wechsler et al., (2010)
evaluated the Illinois State-Funded Mentoring and Induction Program, which took place in 39 funded sites from 2006-2010. They report that school context was the most critical factor associated with teacher retention in the same school and district and found that intensive mentoring and induction activities that focused on instruction impacted teacher-reported growth:

Teachers who received more intensive mentoring, whose induction had a strong focus on instruction, who received a variety of induction supports, and who worked in supportive school contexts reported greater improvement in their instructional practice. (Wechsler et al., 2010, p. ii)

The research literature concerning novice EC educators is scarce in terms of induction activities specifically designed to meet their professional development needs and the rate of retention for this particular group of teachers. Davis and Higdon (2008) described a school/university induction partnership that extended undergraduate’s teacher education program by one year. Novice primary grade teachers (n =5) working in public schools were assigned to an on-site mentor (released from classes) who provided modeling and coaching to the novice teachers in their classrooms. The novice teachers were all enrolled in a special program (Teacher Fellows Program) and taking courses toward their master’s degree. Their assigned mentors also received mentor training through the same university. A group of teachers who completed the same undergraduate teacher education program and also taught in primary grades in nearby public schools served as a control group (n = 5). They were not enrolled in the Teacher Fellows Program. These teachers received mentoring from a classroom teacher (assigned by their school district) who was not provided release time to visit the mentees classes but only met with them occasionally after school on an as needed basis. Although all of the novice primary teachers graduated at the same time from the same undergraduate teacher education program there were differences between the two groups in their use of effective classroom practices.
Teachers enrolled in the Teacher Fellows Program made more intentional and systematic decisions about their teaching. They also fostered more positive relationships with families than teachers who were in the control group. The university training and “just in time” support from the mentor/coaches helped improve the novice teachers’ classroom practices. This study by Davis and Higdon (2008) although focused on a small group of novice teachers provides a information about specific ways in which teacher educators can contribute to high quality mentoring and induction activities for novice EC teachers. More studies need to be undertaken to determine which combination of mentoring and induction activities most contribute to increasing novice EC teachers’ sense of efficacy and commitment to teaching.

The creation of communities of practice (CoPs) (both face-to-face and online) as groups in which novice and experienced teachers as well as teacher educators seek collegial support and inform one another about effective teaching practices presents a possible structure for providing induction and mentoring support to novice EC teachers. The following section focuses on the literature concerning online CoPs as a format for supporting the induction and mentoring of novice teachers.

**Online Communities of Practice**

The recent availability of personal computers and high speed Internet access via public schools and individuals’ homes has brought about a high interest in the use of technology to offer anytime/anywhere access to professional development opportunities for teachers. One technology-based professional development activity is to design and offer online networks or communities for teachers (Schlager et al., 1998). These online environments have been created for preservice, novice, and career teachers. The meaning and use of the term CoP for various
types of online networks and learning groups can be found in the empirical literature. There is still much debate about what is a virtual CoP and what characteristics must a CoP have in order to be called a CoP. Johnson (2001) notes that the predominant research methods pertaining to CoPs involve case studies. His survey of the literature on virtual CoPs provides several findings:
(a) communities of practice can exist within virtual communities using current technologies but in order for a CoP to evolve the members should have an underlying task-based learning need, (b) technical support and information about how to use the technology is necessary to ensure successful communication and collaboration, and (c) a lack of face-to-face contact in text-based communication can be helpful because it suppresses traditional group norm behavior but the question about the necessity of involving the members in some aspect of face-to-face contact still exists. Johnson discussed several limitations to forming a CoP within a virtual community: (a) high rates of membership withdrawal, (b) cultural differences, (c) superficial discussion content, (d) slow responses to other members of the community, and (e) uncertainty regarding the importance of face-to-face interactions to the formation of the community. Johnson concluded that none of the studies he reviewed were specifically designed for “the creation of a virtual community with a deliberate view towards a community of practice” (p. 56).

A professional community of practice (CoP) has been described as an ongoing source of professional development that could address multiple issues faced by EC and ECSE teachers and university teacher educators (Buysse et al., 2001; Wesley & Buysse, 2001). Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley (2003) noted that within a CoP “shared inquiry and learning center around issues, dilemmas, and ambiguity that emerge from actual situations in authentic practice settings as opposed to formal coursework that is content driven” (p. 267). In a CoP learning is a relationship-based activity occurring with the other CoP members who are engaged in similar
situations involving their teaching practices (Buysse et al., 2003). The empirical literature contains several studies that describe the inclusion of an online CoP as part of a pre-service teacher education program (Clarke, 2002; Fry, 2006; Hough, Smithey, & Evertson, 2004). The literature also contains descriptions of face-to-face CoPs providing positive support for novice teachers (Blair, 2008) however the studies chosen for review in this section focused upon online CoPs designed for novice teachers.

Researchers have described online CoPs or teacher networks as a relatively low cost format for providing induction and mentoring activities for novice teachers. The formation of online CoPs was intended to form collegial relationships between practicing and novice teachers that would encourage and facilitate teacher reflection and support new teachers as they learned to teach. The New Teacher Center (http://newteachercenter.org/index.php) and Tapped In (Schlager et al., 1998) are examples of professional development websites that host online CoPs for both novice and career teachers. Through these sites educators engage in online discussions about classroom practices, share resources, and expand their knowledge about teaching. CoPs hosted by these entities have members from across the U.S. and other countries. All CoP interactions occur in an online environment. As online professional development sites become more popular with teachers there is a need for CoP designers to investigate factors that influence teachers’ willingness to engage in online CoPs as well as the challenges and offline cultural influences that impact the design and sustainability of online CoPs (Baek & Schwen, 2006; Riverin & Stacey, 2008).

**Online CoPs and novice teachers.** An early study of a computer network for novice teachers demonstrated the possible value of designing online networks to support the induction of specific groups of new teachers. Merseth (1991) described an early computer-based network
of support for beginning teachers. The Beginning Teacher Computer Network (BTCN) at Harvard University was a multi-year project. Merseth’s study of this project included 39 participants (all first year middle and secondary school teachers living in different areas of Massachusetts). One university faculty member, two teacher-education program administrators, a graduate student tech assistant and occasional guest experts joined the study participants on the BTCN. Data was collected through mail surveys, computer message counts, and structured follow-up interviews. Results indicated that the beginning teachers found this network to be a source of moral support, reduced their feelings of isolation, and provided a convenient and safe, nonevaluative environment in which to share information. Merseth reported that the online network served as an “emotional support group rather than as a structured induction program offered by experienced university faculty and staff” (p. 145). The network operated early in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s and the author found that the constraints of the technology limited the participants’ abilities to share documents, lesson plans, etc. as well as the fact that the members were all first year teachers and may not have had enough mastery experiences and knowledge about teaching to share with one another since they were all at the beginning stage in their careers. Merseth did not use the label CoP to describe this online network designed for novice teachers.

Babinski, Jones, and DeWert (2001) and DeWert, Babinski, and Jones (2003) described the results of an online support community (the Lighthouse Project) that included 12 first year teachers (6 elementary, 5 middle school, 1 high school), four experienced mentor teachers, and eight university faculty members. All were volunteers associated with the same public university located in the southeastern U.S. The researchers reported that the project objectives were to: “(a) provide the opportunity for beginning teachers to engage in professional problem solving with
colleagues and mentors during their first year of teaching, (b) enable beginning teachers to work through their concerns and fears in a ‘safe’ (i.e., nonevaluative) environment, and (c) reduce the isolation beginning teachers experience” (Babinski et al., p. 153). The researchers held a face-to-face orientation, provided participants with laptops and information on accessing technical assistance, and discussed the structured problem solving model that was to be used when posting and responding to problems that were posed to the group. The novice teachers who were located in 12 different school districts across the same state, communicated asynchronously via an email list for sixth months (January-June). For the final 6 weeks of the project the online conversations were moved to a threaded discussion forum that provided an easier online format for reading complex discussions.

Data analysis involved both qualitative methods (content analysis of posted messages and responses) and quantitative analyses concerning the numbers of messages and responses posted by the groups serving the different roles within the online community. The authors noted that a major limitation of this study was the small, homogeneous sample. They found that the first year teachers were interested in discussing a wide range of topics. All group members had a high percentage of messages that were coded “fostering a sense of community,” indicating that everyone in the group assumed the role of offering support to others.

Babinski et al. also noted that novice teachers were more likely to post messages related to personal experiences while teacher education faculty were more likely to post messages that were categorized as “sharing knowledge.” Although the intent of the researchers was to have the members of the group encourage beginning teachers to use a structured problem solving model and engage in reflection, the experienced teachers and faculty members in the group relied more on “offering advice” rather than acting as a moderator or group facilitator. This may have had an
impact on the way the experienced teachers and teacher educators responded to the beginning teachers’ concerns. Instead of acting as a facilitator in order to encourage the novice teachers to use the established problem solving model, the experienced teachers and teacher educators gave advice on issues or provided the novice teachers with solutions.

DeWert et al. reported that the Lighthouse Project helped the novice teachers with the following areas: (a) increased emotional support, (b) decreased feelings of isolation, (c) increased confidence as teachers, more enthusiasm for work, increased reflection, ability to adopt a more critical perspective, and improved problem-solving skills. The authors concluded that this type of online community is beneficial and that designating a particular individual to act as a group moderator/facilitator could enhance novice teachers’ use of reflective problem solving strategies. Both of studies describing the results of the Lighthouse Project were authored by the designers of the online support community and did not include information about any external evaluation of the project. The university faculty involved in the design of the Lighthouse Project did not refer to it as a CoP or describe any features of the project that would indicate it met the definition of a CoP.

Teachers Learning in Networked Communities (TLINC) (Metiri Group, 2009) is an ongoing project undertaken by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) designed to “retain teachers by engaging them in networked professional learning communities beginning during their teacher preparation years and extending to their induction years and beyond” (p.3). The pilot for this project, originally funded by Microsoft, focused on designing virtual networks linking university teacher educators, their recent graduates (novice teachers), and the school districts that employ the novice teachers. The project is now funded by a grant from the Fund for Post Secondary Improvement (FIPSE) and is evaluated by an outside
evaluation team (Metiri Group) that are not part of the TLINC project. In the 2008-2009 TLINC evaluation report the project directors indicated that online communities had been established at all three funded university sites (University of Memphis, University of Colorado at Denver, and the University of Washington) and in one school district with plans to increase collaborative networks with more school districts. Online networks (hosted by TappedIn) are now part of all three universities’ teacher education programs and extend into their graduates’ first years of teaching. The pilot evaluation results showed that engaging the members in the online networks when they were teacher education candidates resulted in a higher likelihood of the graduates remaining in the online networks as novice teachers. In 2009 there were 1,083 registered TLINC online network members. In addition to the goal of increasing the retention of novice teachers who graduate from these universities, another proposed project outcome is to use information from participants (faculty, teacher candidates, novice teachers, and career teachers) to build knowledge together as a CoP and improve teaching in those school districts that collaborate with each of the three universities. The TLINC project proposes to use both online CoPs and authentic teacher education to bridge the gaps between theory and practice. The following statements describe the unique aspect of the TLINC program.

Virtual communities of practice can augment these traditional communities by providing alternate forms of communication, supporting interaction across distance and time, and bringing together solo practitioners who may not have communities at their site, (e.g., art or physical education teachers at the elementary level may be the only one at their school). TLINC differs from previous virtual communities of practice for teachers in that it is built through the joint planning of the higher education institutions and the districts that employ their graduates. (p. 6).

The use of online CoPs to support novice teachers and career teachers is emerging and evolving. Herrington, Herrington, Kervin, and Ferry (2006) described the design of an online CoP for beginning teachers, however they have not reported any statistics about its use or value.
to novice teachers. The few studies that examined online CoPs for novice teachers are descriptive studies reported by the university faculty involved in the design and maintenance of the online CoP. No experimental or quasi-experimental studies concerning participation or outcomes of online CoPs were found. Additionally, no empirical studies were found that focused on the value of an online CoP designed specifically for novice EC teachers.

Discussion

This review of the literature reveals several findings with regard to supporting novice EC teachers. Although there are several studies investigating novice teachers’ concerns there were no studies that specifically addressed novice EC teachers’ concerns and their unique situations. Due to the unique situations of some novice EC teachers (e.g., being the only Pre-K teacher in a public school) some novice teachers may be isolated from other professionals due to geographical location, lack of school-based supports and little or no access to meaningful induction and mentoring activities that meet their unique needs (Kardos & Johnson, 2007). There is a lack of empirical evidence regarding which specific types of induction and mentoring activities are most beneficial to novice EC educators as they move from initial to permanent certification.

Recent studies have demonstrated that enhancing young children’s social and emotional development is critical to their later success in school and quality of life (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Raver, 2002; Raver & Knitzer, 2002; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000; Zins et al., 2004), but there is a lack of research concerning whether novice EC teachers intentionally engage in recommended practices when addressing this important developmental area and whether they have the support from administrators and colleagues to engage in
recommended practices (DEC, 1998; Sandall et al., 2005; Smith, 2003; Zeanah, Stafford, Nagle, & Rice, 2005). Research indicates that most novice teachers are concerned with classroom management and teaching children with challenging behavior or other special needs, that they often feel isolated, may not have access to specialists or colleagues who can assist them in their school, and may or may not have an assigned mentor to support them (Griffin et al., 2009; Otis-Wilborn, Hou, & Garvan, 2009; Hawkey, 1997; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Kardos & Johnson, 2007; Meister & Melnick, 2003; Onafowora, 2004; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wong, 2004). It is not clear from the current empirical literature if these same concerns are shared by novice EC teachers. There is a lack of studies that investigate novice EC teachers’ specific concerns and successful methods to support them in the use of recommended practices as they move from novice teacher to career teacher.

The empirical literature on the success of induction and mentoring is varied in terms of its impact on the retention of novice teachers, however school context has been shown to strongly influence novice teachers’ sense of efficacy and their willingness to continue to teach (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007; Wechsler et al., 2010). None of the empirical literature described mentoring and induction activities specifically designed for novice EC teachers. Forming a CoP that includes members from various stakeholder groups (teacher education faculty, preservice teachers, career teachers, parents, etc.) has been described as a format for providing professional development, generating new knowledge, and addressing issues of research to practice within the field of EC and ECSE (Buysee, Wesley, & Able-Boone, 2001; Buysee et al., 2003; Cashman, Linehan, & Rosser, 2007). The development of online teacher networks and online CoPs as virtual communities for providing “anytime, anywhere” induction and mentoring support activities for novice teachers has grown with teachers’
increased access to personal computers and high speed Internet connections in schools and homes (DeWert et al., 2003; Fusco et al., 1998; Metiri Group, 2009; Spicer & Dede, 2006). An online CoP that includes guest experts, novice teachers, and university teacher educators may be a format to create a system of support to address novice EC teachers’ concerns and enhance their sense of efficacy. As online CoPs become more accessible to all novice teachers there is a need to critically examine the specific formats of online CoPs and their value to novice EC teachers (Baek & Schwen, 2006; Riverin & Stacey, 2008).

Limitations of the Review

This review has several limitations. The review mainly included studies or reports published by U.S. researchers. Most of the studies reviewed were program descriptions and were reported by university faculty involved in designing and implementing the programs. Also, the journals and reports cited in this review focused on studies of preservice, novice and/or career classroom teachers and did not include studies of other professionals in related fields (e.g., speech pathologists, psychologists).

Implications for Research

Federal legislators and policy makers are increasingly recognizing the importance of EC education and therefore are increasing the number of publicly funded EC classrooms. It is critical that publicly funded EC programs be designed and implemented to provide high quality education for young children, especially those who are at-risk and those with disabilities. Young children who qualify for early intervention programs need teachers who have a strong sense of efficacy and engage in recommended practices that enhance students’ cognitive, motor, and
affective development. Empirical research has shown that high quality EC programs can result in positive outcomes for children through later success in school and the community (Raver, 2002; Raver & Knitzer, 2002).

Induction and mentoring activities that specifically support novice EC teachers in their use of recommended classroom practices are needed. The proposed study will address a gap in the research literature by investigating factors that novice EC teachers describe as supporting their use of recommended practices to enhance young children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior. The study will also investigate the value of an online CoP specifically designed to address the concerns and needs of novice EC teachers. Learning about specific aspects of teacher education program components and induction and mentoring activities that most contribute to novice teachers’ sense of efficacy can provide information to teacher educators, policy makers, and administrators who design and implement teacher preparation, induction, and mentoring programs.
Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions: (a) How do novice early childhood teachers perceive their own effectiveness in supporting young children’s social-emotional development and addressing challenging behavior?, (b) What factors do novice early childhood teachers perceive as influencing their practices and effectiveness with regard to supporting young children’s social-emotional development and addressing challenging behavior? and (c) How does participation in an online community of practice (CoP) influence novice early childhood teachers’ sense of efficacy in supporting young children’s social-emotional development and addressing challenging behavior? A mixed-method design was used in which findings from written questionnaires, notes from two face-to-face CoP meetings, initial and final telephone interviews, and transcripts of fourteen online CoP discussions (see Appendix B for protocols) were combined to provide a rich understanding of a group of novice early childhood teachers’ supports, concerns, and growth as beginning practitioners (Caracelli & Greene, 1997). Greene, Benjamin, and Goodyear (2001) describe four reasons for employing mixed-method designs: (a) enhanced validity and credibility of inferences, (b) greater comprehensiveness of findings, (c) more insightful understandings, and (d) increased value consciousness and diversity. The purpose for using a mixed-method component design in the current study is to seek “...elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from the other method” and to examine “...overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated understanding of that phenomenon” (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989, p. 258).
Participants

Participant recruitment took place from April through September, 2009. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. The researcher limited participation to graduates of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) Early Childhood (EC) undergraduate teacher education program to ensure that participants had a common set of experiences during their undergraduate pre-service training program. The UIUC is a selective public university where the middle 50% of students admitted as freshmen to the College of Education (COE) are ranked in the upper 20% of their high school class and score 25-28 on the ACT. The EC Bachelor of Science Program focuses on preparing teachers for preschool, kindergarten, and the early primary grades (one through three). All graduates of this program qualify for the State of Illinois EC teaching certificate (Type 04) with the early childhood special education (ECSE) letter of approval. By limiting the sample to UIUC EC program graduates, participants shared a common understanding with regard to theory, methods, and practices for educating young children.

Any EC undergraduates who remained at UIUC for a fifth year and completed a masters degree in the Department of Special Education ECSE masters program were not invited to participate in the study as they would have an extra year of supervised practicum experiences with young children with disabilities and taken additional special education courses. Participants who obtained masters degrees (not focused on ECSE) were allowed to participate in the study. EC teacher education program graduates from the years 2005-2009 were targeted for this study in order to create an online CoP that was targeted to young teachers within the novice to advanced beginner stages of teacher development (Berliner, 2004).
In April, 2009 the researcher sent personal e-mails to the 2009 UIUC EC cohort (n = 33) inviting them to participate in the study. Eight EC 2009 graduates responded by providing contact information (i.e., home and personal email addresses). Names of EC graduates from 2005-2008 were obtained from commencement program lists on file in the UIUC COE Dean’s office and in the Department of Special Education. EC graduates from the 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2009 EC cohorts were familiar with the researcher as an instructor for one of the required ECSE courses taken during their teacher education program.

In order to obtain current school district contact information for the 2005-2008 graduates the researcher submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Public Information Officer, Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) requesting names and school addresses (2007-2008 academic year) for teachers holding the initial IL Type 04 certification and ECSE approval. Initial certification is issued to teachers with less than 4 years of teaching experience in Illinois public schools. Upon approval of this request, the ISBE Public Information Officer sent the researcher the requested list. The researcher searched the ISBE initial certification list for names and school contact information for the 2005-2008 UIUC EC teacher education program graduates. A total of 34 EC teacher education program graduates from 2005-2008 were on this list. Most EC graduates’ school email addresses were obtained by searching individual public school web site staff listings. After obtaining school contact information from the web sites, the researcher sent the recruitment flier which included the researcher’s contact information (see Appendix A) via both email (if email address was known) and U.S. mail for the 34 UIUC EC teacher education program graduates from 2005-2008 and to the personal e-mails and home addresses of the eight 2009 graduates who indicated interest in the study (total recruitment fliers sent n = 42).
Upon receiving the recruitment flier, interested novice teachers contacted the researcher via email. A description of the study and participation requirements were sent via email attachment. Upon receiving the flier some EC graduates contacted other UIUC cohort members (not found on the ISBE certification contact list) to inform them about the study. By September 2009 a total of twelve UIUC EC graduates (2005-2009) indicated willingness to participate in the study. Three individuals could not fulfill all study components and therefore were not involved in the study. These individuals had previous commitments (e.g., enrollment in graduate school; social commitments) for fall, 2009 that precluded them from completing all study components. A total of 9 novice EC teachers participated in the study. All participants were mailed a copy of the consent form cover letter, the consent form, and a stamped envelope to return the consent form to the researcher (see Appendix B). Participants signed two other consent forms during the CoP initial face-to-face meeting: (a) Novice EC Teachers Online CoP Group Policies and (b) Novice EC Teachers Research Study Participant Contract (see Appendix C).

Table 1 presents demographic information about the participants. All but one participant (Cara) taught in suburban school districts located in the metropolitan Chicago area. Seven participants taught in either Pre-K or Pre-K/ECSE blended classrooms. Laura’s morning preschool class was the only Pre-K program that required families to pay tuition. All other Pre-K classes and Pre-K/ECSE classes were state-funded programs. Cara (kindergarten teacher) and Tina (third/fourth grade teacher) taught in traditional elementary school classrooms. Lisa and Marta taught in state-funded Pre-K classrooms specifically designed for students who were English Language Learners (ELLs). Several other participants indicated they taught some children who were ELLs as well. Julie, Jim, and Nora also served as case managers for the children with disabilities enrolled in their classrooms. As case managers they were responsible
for managing the paperwork and attending meetings involving student’s Individual Education Programs (IEPs). Julie and Jim had both completed masters degrees at different universities (not at UIUC) since graduating from their undergraduate pre-service program.

Table 2 contains the most recent demographic information about the participants’ school districts retrieved from the Interactive Illinois School Report Card (2009) web site (http://iirc.niu.edu/). Each school district offering a state-funded Pre-K program determines its own eligibility criteria that children and families must meet in order to qualify for enrollment in the program. For the most part children who are eligible for state-funded Pre-K programs are from families who have one or more stress factors (e.g., limited financial resources, parents with limited education, etc.) Julie, Anna, and Marta, taught in school districts that had less economic and cultural diversity than the other participants, however as Pre-K teachers they taught young children whose developmental issues or family circumstances met their school district’s criteria for risk factors that could impact the child’s future academic achievement.
Table 1

*Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Yrs. Teaching</th>
<th>Yrs. Position</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>SPED Case Manager</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Euro-A</td>
<td>Pre-K &amp; ECSE (blended)</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>MA (C &amp; I)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Euro-A</td>
<td>Pre-K (a.m.) K-5 Life Skills* &amp; Drama (p.m.)</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asian-A</td>
<td>Pre-K (ELL)</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Euro-A</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Euro-A</td>
<td>Pre-K &amp; ECSE (blended)</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>MS (Adm. &amp; Leadership)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Pre-K (Spanish Speakers)</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Euro-A</td>
<td>Tuition-based Preschool (a.m.)/ECSE (p.m.)</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Euro-A</td>
<td>Pre-K &amp; ECSE (blended)</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Euro-A</td>
<td>Third/Fourth Grade</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *Anna taught a class titled Life Skills (character and social skills to students in grades K-5 each afternoon). She also taught one section of drama to first and second graders.*
## Table 2

### School District Student Demographics (Interactive Illinois Report Card 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Geographic Location</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African-American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Multiracial</th>
<th>*LEP</th>
<th>Low Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>71.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>Small Urban</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>92.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. * Limited English Proficient (LEP) students are students who have been found to be eligible for bilingual education.
Study participants received the following incentives during the study: (a) two professional books of their choice, (b) light refreshments at each face-to-face meeting, (c) mileage reimbursement for driving round trip to the initial face-to-face meeting held at UIUC in Champaign, IL, and (d) a $200.00 honorarium for completing all study components.

**Instruments**

The following instruments were used to collect data for this study: (a) the *Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Initial Telephone Interview* (Laumann, 2007), (b) the *Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Questionnaire* (Laumann, 2007), (c) the *Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES)* (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001), and (d) the *Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Final Telephone Interview* (Laumann, 2007).

**Teacher’s sense of efficacy.** All CoP members in the current study completed the *Teacher’s Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES)* (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) (see Appendix D). This scale was developed to provide a valid measure of teacher efficacy. The authors indicate that a scale addressing teacher efficacy “must assess both personal competence and an analysis of the task in terms of the resources and constraints in particular teaching contexts” (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, p. 795). Originally titled the *Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES)* this scale is based upon several published scales found in the empirical literature (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 1981) and an unpublished scale used by Bandura (n.d.) in studies of teacher efficacy. In developing the scale, items were selected by Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and students enrolled in a graduate seminar on self-efficacy in the Department of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University. The group selected 23 items from the Bandura (1997) scale and then generated an additional 19 items that describe significant
tasks of teaching not represented by the Bandura scale (e.g., assessment, adjusting the lesson to individual student needs, dealing with learning difficulties, repairing student misconceptions, motivating student engagement and interest). The OSTES contains a 9-point scale for each item (1- nothing, 3-very little, 5-some influence, 7-quite a bit, and 9-a great deal). The OSTES was subsequently examined in three separate studies (for further details about these studies see Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

These studies resulted in subsequent revisions to the scale that included changing several items, developing long and short forms of the scale, examination of factor structure, reliability and validity, and using the scale with both pre-service and in-service teachers. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy stated that findings from these studies indicate that the 24 item OSTES scale measures three distinct factors: (a) efficacy for instructional strategies; (b) efficacy for classroom management; and (c) efficacy for student engagement. Reliability scores for the teacher efficacy subscales were .91 for instruction, .90 for management, and .87 for engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, p. 799). The authors found that the results of correlations of the OSTES and other existing scales assessing teacher efficacy indicate that the strongest correlations are “with other scales that assess personal teaching efficacy . . . the results of these analyses indicate that the OSTES could be considered reasonably valid and reliable” (p. 801).

**Demographic information.** The *Novice Early Childhood Teacher’s Questionnaire* (Laumann, 2007) (see Appendix E) was designed to provide descriptive data about topics such as participants’ age, number of years teaching, amount of time students with challenging behavior are included in their classroom, teachers’ sense of competence regarding teaching young children with challenging behavior and specific types of challenging behavior they encounter. This questionnaire also provided information regarding those components of their undergraduate
teacher education program (e.g., course work, field experiences, or supervision meetings) teachers believe most prepared them to engage in classroom practices that support young children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior.

**Initial and final interview protocols.** In addition to the above instruments the researcher developed an initial and final telephone interview protocol for this study (see Appendix F). The initial telephone interview provided more detailed information about CoP participants’ classroom settings, student characteristics, their engagement in induction and mentoring activities, and other resources and supports available to them as novice teachers. The initial interview included a question asking each participant to set three goals for themselves with regard to enhancing children’s social emotional competence and to describe any strategies and resources they planned to use to help them attain their goals. Additional questions focused on participants’ contributions to and expectations for participating in the online CoP.

A final telephone interview (see Appendix F) was designed to gather data about participants’ ratings on achieving the three goals they had set for themselves during the initial interview with regard to enhancing their students’ social emotional competence. Participants also were asked to describe any strategies and resources they found helpful to them this school year as they sought to address these goals. The final telephone interview included additional questions soliciting participants’ feedback regarding their experiences as members of the online CoP and satisfaction with the online CoP facilitator (also the researcher). The *Novice Early Childhood Teacher’s Questionnaire* (Laumann, 2007) and the initial and final telephone interview protocols were developed following a review of the empirical literature on teacher induction and mentoring activities and the literature on evidence-based practices for addressing young children’s social emotional development.
Other Data Sources

Meeting notes. The initial CoP face-to-face meeting agenda and notes (Appendix G) and final CoP face-to-face meeting agenda and notes (Appendix H) were additional data sources. The researcher used the agendas and meeting notes meetings to further examine participants’ goals, expectations, and outcomes for the online CoP. Meeting notes were summarized and examined for themes, ideas, and recommendations for the development of future online CoPs for novice EC teachers.

Online chat transcripts. Online CoP chat transcripts served as another data source. The transcripts provided information about topics that were most salient to the participants as well as how the CoP members engaged in interactions using the online format. The online chat transcripts also provided the facilitator with information about individual CoP members’ participation.

Facilitator/Researcher’s journal. The CoP facilitator/researcher maintained a journal to record personal reflections about the online CoP and the dual roles she held during the study. The facilitator/researcher’s journal entries served as another data source regarding the online CoP.

Procedures

Pilot study. In February, 2008 several instruments were pilot tested with 4 novice early childhood teachers (1-3 years of teaching experience) who did not participate in the present study. Pilot study participants were recruited through colleagues in other states who either teach courses or coordinate blended EC/ECSE preparation programs. Graduates of blended EC/ECSE teacher education programs typically obtain dual certification in EC and ECSE and teach in
inclusive early childhood classrooms in public school districts or private agencies. Pilot study participants completed and returned the *Novice Early Childhood Teacher’s Questionnaire* (Laumann, 2007) and the *Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES)* (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Pilot participants also returned a written feedback form indicating the amount of time it took them to complete each protocol and any changes they would suggest to the format of the protocols. Each pilot study participant also completed the initial telephone interview with the principal investigator. Following the initial telephone interview, the principal investigator asked each participant for any other feedback about the written questionnaires and/or telephone interview protocol. Pilot study participants did not recommend any significant changes to the written questionnaires or telephone interview items. Each pilot study participant received a $20.00 gift certificate to Barnes and Noble Bookstores in appreciation for their participation.

**Study timeline.** Data collection and analysis took place between September 2009 and April 2010. Table 3 includes dates, data sources, and purposes for data collection. The researcher collected and organized the data unless otherwise specified in the narrative.
Table 3

*Data Collection 2009-2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date(s)</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/09-10/09</td>
<td>Initial phone interviews</td>
<td>Participants describe classroom settings, teaching practices, school resources, and mentoring and induction experiences; set personal goals for supporting children’s social emotional competence; describe expectations and contributions to CoP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/17/09</td>
<td>Initial face-to-face meeting notes</td>
<td>Participants set CoP goals and meeting dates/times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demographic Questionnaire</td>
<td>Obtain written information about participants and their programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>TSES</em> (first administration)</td>
<td>Measure of participants’ sense of efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/9-3/10</td>
<td>Online CoP chats (n = 14)</td>
<td>Engage in discussions of practice, share knowledge, support, and experiences; examine novice EC teachers’ issues and concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/6/10</td>
<td>Final face-to-face meeting notes</td>
<td>Evaluate progress on CoP goals; discuss positive and negative experiences as members of online CoP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>TSES</em> (second administration)</td>
<td>Measure any changes in participants’ sense of efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/10- 4/10</td>
<td>Final phone interviews</td>
<td>Participants rate progress on personal goals, describe positive and negative aspects of the CoP; feedback about the facilitator’s role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

Initial Interviews. The researcher mailed each potential participant a consent form and a stamped self-addressed return envelope (see Appendix A). Upon return of the signed consent form, an initial telephone interview was scheduled. Initial phone interviews (see Appendix B) took approximately 30-40 minutes and were conducted by the researcher. The initial interview served as a way to become more informed about each participant’s current teaching position, ages and types of students they teach, experiences with induction and mentoring activities, personal goals for enhancing students’ social and emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior and to learn about the participant’s expectations for and contributions to the online CoP.

Completing the initial telephone interviews prior to the face-to-face meeting gave the researcher an opportunity to explain the purpose of a CoP and learn about any previous experiences participants may have had as a CoP member. None of the participants reported prior experience as a CoP member. During initial telephone interviews participants discussed reasons why beginning EC teachers would belong to a CoP, what they hoped to gain from being involved in the online CoP (personal benefits) and what they hoped to contribute to the CoP. The researcher also asked participants to describe any goals or benefits they had for themselves with regard to enhancing young children’s social emotional competence.

The initial telephone interview also gave participants an opportunity to ask the researcher any questions they had about participating in the study. All telephone interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. As a member check, the researcher sent the transcribed interviews (via e-mail attachment) to the participants in order to verify the accuracy of their responses and approve the transcript prior to data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
Participants had 72 hours to make any edits and return the transcript. If no edits were received then the transcript was approved (passive approval) for data analysis. Two participants returned their interviews with minor edits. At the end of the initial phone interview the researcher asked the participant to email her the title of a professional book so she could order it for them to receive at the initial face-to-face meeting.

**Initial face-to-face meeting.** Face-to-face meetings allow participants personal contact with the other group members of an online community (Clift, Mullen, Levin, & Larson, 2001) and additional opportunities to discuss topics of interest and group logistics such as online CoP meeting times. The researcher and the 9 participants met for the initial face-to-face meeting on Saturday, October 17, 2009 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m in the Department of Special Education located at the UIUC COE (see Appendix G). An ECSE graduate student served as a note taker during the meeting. The researcher provided light refreshments.

A tech support person familiar with the *Illinois New Teacher Collaborative (INTC)* (see [http://intc.uiuc.edu/](http://intc.uiuc.edu/)) web site was present during the meeting to assist participants in selecting a password and practice logging on to the INTC web site (this was the host web site for the online CoP chats). The tech support person arranged for access to several laptop computers and answered participants’ questions while they learned to navigate INTC web site features. The INTC web site incorporates a web-based learning management system called Moodle (see [http://moodle.org](http://moodle.org)) to house online groups and communities.

Several CoP participants were already familiar with Moodle as an online course management system used by instructors at UIUC. Also, the CoP participants signed a contract regarding appropriate online behavior while using the INTC web site (Appendix C). During this meeting CoP participants and the researcher set group goals for the CoP. The CoP group goals
established a collaborative understanding about the outcomes for the CoP (Gotto, Turnbull, Summers, & Blue-Banning, 2009). Establishing group goals allowed all participants to collectively discuss their vision for the CoP and what they hoped to gain as well as what they could contribute as a group member.

Participants selected 14 dates to engage in hour long online CoP discussions beginning October 2009 and ending March 2010. In recognition of the group’s busy schedules, the online CoP members agreed to participate in 12 of the 14 synchronous online chat sessions. CoP members could also participate asynchronously by posting a question or other kinds of information on the INTC Moodle site “News Forum” or on the “Online Community Stuff” section of the site.

Participants completed the first administration of the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) and signed UIUC forms related to mileage reimbursement and payments. Participants who had given their professional book request to the researcher received their first professional book during the initial face-to-face meetings. Other participants received their book either through the mail or one participant waited and received both professional books at the final face-to-face meeting.

**Online CoP chat sessions.** The online discussions were scheduled for one hour from 8:30-9:30 p.m. on Mondays utilizing the INTC Moodle site chat function. In addition to practicing during the initial face-to-face meeting, all participants were familiar with using online chat features through experiences with social media that incorporate chat functions (e.g., AIM, Facebook,). There were no audio capabilities so all chats were conducted through typing. The purpose of the one hour online chats were to provide an opportunity for participants to form a CoP through sharing “… a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and come
together regularly to learn how to do it better” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). The online CoP also served as a problem-solving group and a safe place to seek help with specific classroom practices, efficiencies, and other issues of importance to novice EC teachers (DeWert, Babinski, & Jones, 2003).

CoP online synchronous chat sessions began with members’ greeting one another followed by either a participant or facilitator initiated topic. The facilitator made sure to greet each member as they came into the chat session. She also would initiate conversation by asking a question. Some weeks the facilitator would state, “Does anyone have something to air?” This was a way to open the chat session to anyone who had an issue that they wanted to discuss. Some members opened the chat session by directly asking another member to update the group about a previous issue and how it was resolved. Members responded online to each other’s questions, ideas, statements, and experiences. Online CoP chat sessions lasted for one hour (8:30-9:30 p.m.) on fourteen Mondays between October 2009 and March 2010. To end the sessions on time the facilitator usually reminded the group that the chat session was ending. Members could continue to chat if they wished but the “official” CoP chat session ended by 9:30 p.m. The facilitator was very sensitive to the time the novice teachers were giving to the online CoP and wanted to ensure that no members felt they were being asked to do more than what was originally stated in the participant contract. Researchers have reported that when questioned about decreased participation in an online CoP teachers responded that a lack of time impacted their decision to end their participation in an online teacher network or CoP (Baek & Schwen, 2006; Riverin & Stacey, 2008).
Members could post information on the CoP “News Forum” or on the online “Community Stuff” at any time (asynchronously). A copy of such a post would automatically be sent to all participants and the researcher (facilitator) via email.

Guest experts were invited to join the CoP on two occasions following participants’ requests for information about a particular topic. In response to participants’ concerns for information about teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) the researcher invited two UIUC adjunct professors with expertise in bilingual education to participate in a chat session. On another evening Julie invited the Behavior Analyst from her school to be a guest following a CoP discussion on behavior management and suggestions from the group about inviting a guest expert. Inviting guest experts to join the CoP added opportunities for participants to ask targeted questions and learn about specific resources in the areas of teaching ELLs and applied behavior analysis.

**Final face-to-face-meeting.** The final face-to-face meeting took place March 6, 2010 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Illinois Resource Center (IRC) (www.thecenterweb.org) located in Arlington Heights, Illinois. One of the CoP participants and her supervisor hosted the final CoP gathering in a meeting room at the IRC. The IRC was conveniently located for 8 of the 9 participants. The researcher and one CoP participant who lives near UIUC drove together to and from the IRC.

The final meeting provided CoP participants with an opportunity to bring closure to the online discussions and: (a) review progress on the CoP group goals, (b) give the CoP facilitator feedback about the process, and (c) suggest improvements for the formation and maintenance of future online novice EC teachers CoPs (see Appendix H). The final face-to-face meeting provided a forum for participants to exchange contact information and discuss professional
issues. During the final meeting participants also completed the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) for a second time. The researcher audio recorded the group discussion that took place during the meeting and used this recording to type summary notes. Light refreshments were served during the meeting and eight participants received a second professional book of his/her choice. One participant received both of her professional books during this meeting.

**Final telephone interviews.** A final telephone interview (see Appendix F) was completed with each participant during March and April 2010. The final interviews were conducted by an ECSE masters student to ensure that participants felt comfortable openly discussing any positive and negative experiences they had as members of the online CoP. The graduate student (interviewer) conducted a practice interview with an ECSE master’s student. The practice interview was recorded, sent to, and reviewed by the researcher. CoP participants’ first names and email addresses were given to the ECSE graduate student who then scheduled and completed the final telephone interviews.

Final telephone interview protocols were emailed to each participant to enable them to prepare for the interview and rate themselves on achieving the personal goals they selected with regard to supporting children’s social emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior. The ECSE graduate student digitally recorded each final telephone interview. The recordings were saved and sent as audio files to a paid transcriber. To ensure accuracy and provide a member check, the ECSE graduate student then sent each participant (via email) a transcript of their final telephone interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participants were asked review the transcript, clarify responses, and add any additional information if needed. Participants had 72 hours to respond with any needed corrections (passive consent). Upon
participant approval the ECSE graduate student sent each final interview transcript to the researcher for data analysis.

**Facilitator role.** The facilitator for the novice early childhood teachers online CoP was also the researcher for this study and a former course instructor for all but one CoP participant. The researcher kept a journal throughout the study and recorded personal reflections about holding multiple roles within the study. As CoP facilitator she was a contributing member of the online CoP and yet also engaged in examining the value of an online CoP as a format for researchers/teacher educators and practitioners to engage in sustained dialogue and reflections about practice (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003). Excerpts from the facilitator/researcher’s journal provided details about the process of designing and facilitating an online CoP.

**Data Analysis**

**Quantitative analysis.** Information collected through the *Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Questionnaire* (Laumann, 2007) and data from both administrations of the *TSES* were entered into SPSS (18.0) for statistical analysis. All responses to the open-ended items on the initial and final telephone interviews were reviewed and summarized into tables by the researcher. Composite and subscale means for both administrations of the *TSES* were computed.

**Qualitative analysis.** Transcripts from the 14 online CoP chat sessions were analyzed using content analysis procedures described by Johnson and LaMontagne (1993). The researcher read and re-read each transcript several times developing a set of initial codes with examples from the transcripts (code book). The researcher and her advisor met several times to compare coded transcripts and refine the examples used in the code book. The code book and three different online chat transcripts (containing highlighted segments) were shared with an
independent coder (an EC researcher who was unfamiliar with the CoP participants) for reliability purposes. The researcher trained the outside researcher to use the codes. After the researcher and the independent coder finished coding 15% of the online transcripts, the researcher computed inter-rater reliability by applying the formula “number of agreements/total number of agreements + disagreements” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 64). The researcher and independent coder then met together to discuss any discrepancies until consensus was reached. The researcher further collapsed several smaller subcategories of codes into major themes citing participants’ statements as examples of each theme. The purpose of the qualitative analysis was to report on broader themes that emerged from the novice early childhood teachers online CoP chat sessions, rather than focus on frequencies of responses. Table 4 illustrates the connections between the research questions, data sources, and data analyses.
Table 4

**Research Questions, Data Sources, and Data Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) What types of social emotional and behavioral challenges do novice EC teachers perceive to be the most salient to their success as teachers?</td>
<td><em>Novice EC Teachers’ Questionnaire</em> (Laumann, 2007)</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics about participants’ years teaching, types of challenging behaviors, pre-service education; sense of competency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) What solutions do they see as potentially helpful?</td>
<td>Initial Telephone Interview Protocols</td>
<td>Content Analysis/Summaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What factors do novice ECE teachers perceive as influencing their practices and effectiveness with regard to supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior?</td>
<td><em>Novice EC Teachers’ Questionnaire</em> (Laumann, 2007)</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics about participants’ years teaching, types of challenging behaviors, pre-service education; sense of competency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial and Final Telephone Interviews</td>
<td>Content Analysis/Summaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online CoP Transcripts</td>
<td>Content Analysis/Emerging Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How does participation in an online community of practice influence novice teachers’ sense of efficacy in supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing young children’s challenging behavior?</td>
<td><em>Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES)</em></td>
<td>Composite and subscale mean ratings (post-CoP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online CoP Transcripts</td>
<td>Content Analysis/Emerging Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial and Final Face-to-Face CoP (Questions for participants)</td>
<td>Initial and Final Face-to-Face CoP Meeting Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Final Telephone Interview</td>
<td>Content Analysis/Summaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher/Facilitator’s Journal</td>
<td>Content Summary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4

Results

The results section of this mixed methods study is organized around three main research questions with quantitative and qualitative data presented together as they complement one another. Quantitative results include information about children’s behaviors, school-based supports, and participants’ mean composite and subscale scores on both administrations of the TSES. Differences between mean composite and subscale scores on the TSES obtained on Time 1 (October 2009) and Time 2 (March 2010) are included for each participant. Qualitative data are described by categories and themes that emerged from multiple readings of initial and final telephone interview transcripts, online CoP chat sessions, and summary notes from initial and final face-to-face meetings with participants. Additional data included excerpts from the CoP facilitator/researcher’s journal.

Effectiveness in Supporting Young Children’s Social Emotional Development

The first research question focused on how beginning early childhood teachers perceive their own effectiveness in supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior. In order to address this question it was necessary to learn about the types of social emotional and behavioral challenges participants encountered in their classrooms and which ones made it difficult for them to feel successful in their teaching. Once these contextual data were gathered, it was possible to study teachers’ effectiveness in supporting young children’s social emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior.

Types of social emotional and behavioral challenges. In initial phone interviews and written responses to the demographic questionnaire it became clear that all participants (n = 9,
100%) had experience teaching children with challenging behavior either currently or in the past. Participants were asked (see item eight of the Novice Early Childhood Teachers Questionnaire, Appendix E) to indicate the extent to which particular challenging behaviors occurred in their classroom and to rate (in order of importance) the three behaviors that made it most difficult to feel successful in their teaching. Participants’ responses are presented below.

Table 5

Participants’ Report of Types and Frequency of Children’s Challenging Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>**Most difficult to feel success</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not following directions</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurting others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tantrums</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whining</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate language</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Disrespectful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Unwilling to work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Behavioral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Distracting behavior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking things from others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destroy property</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurting self</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurting adults</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running out of room</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *indicates challenging behavior added by a participant. ** One participant did not assign a rating to the challenging behaviors that made her feel least successful.

Some participants added challenging behaviors not originally listed on the questionnaire (e.g., disrespectful, unwilling to work, behavioral, and distracting behavior) that impacted their feelings of success in their classroom. To provide a richer description of the kinds of challenging behaviors participants encountered in their classroom, the researcher asked teachers to describe
children who consistently engaged in challenging behavior. During the initial interviews, Jim described teaching children who are extremely active as challenging for him.

I have some students; they’re not physically able to sit down for 3 minutes. They have to keep moving around. That challenges me. Challenging behavior can be anything you want it to be.

Marta described the following child as someone who challenges her.

He is just very active. He has a lot of energy and he also tries to get our attention through negative behavior such as not really coming to sit during circle time when everybody else does; just taking a little bit longer so we notice he is not there . . . yelling out in the middle of the hallway or running; and I think he does it because he wants that attention from us.

During these initial interviews, participants also described the following behaviors as challenging to them: shouting, name calling, abuse of classroom materials, rudeness, and violent behavior. Interview responses confirmed that all study participants had taught or were currently teaching in classrooms with children who engaged in a variety of challenging behaviors.

Helpful solutions. Given that all participants were currently teaching or had taught young children with social emotional and behavioral challenges, it was important to learn which solutions to problem behaviors they found helpful. During initial interviews, the researcher asked participants to describe any strategies and/or methods they used in their classroom to support social emotional development. The researcher read the participants’ interview responses several times and coded the responses. The researcher gave the codes (and definitions) and the participants’ responses to another early childhood researcher (unfamiliar with the participants) to independently code the data. The researcher and independent coder then met and discussed any differences until consensus was reached. Major categories that emerged included:

(a) intentionally teach social skills (“in the moment” when it is needed and/or during planned activities/lessons), (b) implement district/school-wide behavior support plan, (c) embed
opportunities for independence and choice-making, and (d) form positive relationships with children and parents.

Themes and representative quotes of participants’ responses from initial telephone interviews illustrating each category are presented in Table 6. Seven teachers (78%) described using strategies that fit the category “embed independence and choice-making into routines or environmental arrangement” and six teachers (67%) described intentionally teaching social skills either “in the moment” as needed and/or in planned classroom activities/lessons. Five teachers (56%) described strategies that fit the category “form positive relationships with children and parents” while three teachers (33%) reported implementing strategies that were part of a district/school-wide required behavior management plan (PBIS).
### Table 6

*Participants’ Reports: Strategies Used to Support Young Children’s Social and Emotional Development (Initial Interviews)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intentionally teach social skills (“in the moment” and/or during planned activities or lessons)</td>
<td>“It’s like now at the beginning of the year, mostly what we’re dealing with and working with and working with the kids, a lot of them are English Language Learners (ELL), we do a lot of little scripts. We say, ‘Good morning and they have to say, ‘Good morning’ back.” (Anna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement district/school-wide behavior support plan</td>
<td>“I promote a lot of positive behavior. We have Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) school-wide and have done a great job implementing it. . . I understand about how positive reinforcement and just how focusing on that really does work with kids.” (Cara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embed opportunities for independence and choice-making</td>
<td>“We have their picture to put up in each area [learning center] so they know when an area is full or when it’s open for them to play in. We’re working on developing a little independence. It just sort of comes naturally.” (Nora)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form positive relationships with children and parents</td>
<td>“I tell every child that they’re a piece of the puzzle. We talk about it at great length at the beginning of the year that if one person isn’t there, a part of our puzzle is missing—each person really matters.” (Tina)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During initial interviews participants were also asked to describe strategies that they found successful when addressing young children’s challenging behaviors. Responses were coded and eight strategies emerged. The results are presented in Table 7.

Six (67%) teachers reported using two strategies: (a) remove child from group or situation and (b) provide positive reinforcement. Five (56%) teachers reported utilizing concrete reminders and supports. Four teachers (44%) reported that they review expectations and rules as a strategy to address challenging behavior. Four teachers (44%) reported involving a child’s parents when addressing challenging behavior. Three different teachers (33%) reported having removed preferred activities or materials and having implemented an individual behavior plan for a child. Two teachers (22%) reported using strategies that proactively addressed children’s needs such as seating a child close to the teacher or talking individually with the child.

It is interesting that the four teachers who described using strategies fitting the category “involve parents” varied in how they involved the children’s parents in addressing challenging behavior. Lisa described how she typically involved a child’s parent in addressing challenging behavior, feeling that it was important that the parent be informed about the challenging behavior so it can be discussed with the child at home. Lisa stated:

Also, if I notice a behavior right from the beginning I tell the parents right away so they can talk about it at home.

Marta described how she involved a parent in addressing a child’s challenging behavior. In this instance Marta discussed a child’s individual behavior plan with the child’s parent before implementing it:

I talked to his [child’s] mom about it before we started it [individual behavior plan] and she said it seemed like a good idea.
Even though 4 teachers reported involving parents as a strategy for addressing challenging behavior, their views about what role the parents have and how to involve them differed.

The strategy of removing a child from the situation varied depending on the age of the child.

Tina, described removing a child from the group as a more punitive strategy than those teachers who described using this strategy in kindergarten or preschool settings. Tina stated:

I’ve definitely hit some roadblocks. I sent a few to kindergarten because they were acting like kindergarteners. Let me tell you the behavior snapped right back up.

Anna described removing a child from the group:

So it’s good that there are two adults and enough time and not such a strong academic curriculum so that we can if something is happening, one of us can take a child aside and we usually just sit down together and talk about—“Let’s think about what happened. Would you like to know why we have taken you over here? What should you do the next time?”—things like that.
Table 7

Participants’ Reports: Strategies Used to Address Challenging Behavior (Initial Interview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review expectations and rules</td>
<td>“I think I try going through the rules every couple of days or every time I see the kids need it just so they remember that there are certain behaviors that are not allowed at school.” (Marta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete reminders or supports</td>
<td>“Occasionally with some kids, I’ve used a reflection sheet where they draw a picture of what they were doing. It has a frowning face and a smiley face that says, ‘This is what I should have been doing.’ Just depending—for some of them it’s better with the visual and things like that.” (Anna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove child from group or situation</td>
<td>“I do some timeouts—I don’t call it timeout—I just say, ‘Go away from the group.’” (Cara)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide positive reinforcement</td>
<td>“I try to use positive reinforcement whenever I can and I found out that as much as I want to use it all the time, sometimes it’s hard.” (Marta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve parents</td>
<td>“The minute I see a behavior I feel is going to escalate I immediately get in contact with the parents. This is something I’ve been wanting to do is to use parents a little more effectively and also having the children call their parents when they’ve done something well.” (Tina)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove preferred activities or materials</td>
<td>“They know my expectations. They know that I verbally told them if they take away my teaching time then I take away their recess or art.” (Tina)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual behavior plan</td>
<td>“I also actually did this for a week with one boy who was having a lot of trouble keeping hands to himself and I did a sticker chart. If at circle time he didn’t hit or push friends . . . he would get a sticker. It only took a week and it was fine.” (Laura)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactively attend to children’s needs</td>
<td>“Even if it’s a child that’s having a really rough day I might ask them if they need a hug or need to talk about anything—give them the opportunity to get my undivided attention in a positive way rather than acting out to get it in a negative way.” (Jim)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Sense of efficacy and competence.** Efficacy was measured using two administrations of the *TSES* (pre and post CoP). Mean composite (Table 6) and subscale ratings (Tables 7, 8, 9) on the *TSES* indicate participants rated themselves average to above average (*TSES* average rating = 5.0; highest rating = 9.0) on both administrations of the *TSES*.

Table 8

*TSES Composite Means*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Pre-CoP M</th>
<th>Post-CoP M</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>7.33</td>
<td>+1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>6.79</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>+0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>+0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>6.83</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>+0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>+1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>6.92</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>+0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>7.42</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>+0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>7.96</td>
<td>+0.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eight participants (89%) had greater mean composite ratings on the final *TSES* as compared to the initial administration of the *TSES*. Interestingly, number of years of teaching experience did not appear to impact participants’ self-efficacy ratings. For instance Nora had less than one year of teaching experience however she had the highest mean composite rating on the initial administration of the *TSES* (7.42). The highest mean composite rating (7.96) on the *TSES* post-CoP was obtained by Tina, another first year teacher.
The TSES is composed of three subscales: (a) Instructional Strategies, (b) Student Engagement, and (c) Classroom Management. Participant mean ratings on the Instructional Strategies (IS) subscale are presented in Table 9. Seven participants (78%) increased their mean rating on the IS subscale between initial and final administrations of the TSES. Nora, one of the least experienced teachers, obtained the highest mean rating on this subscale at the final administration of the TSES.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Pre-CoP M</th>
<th>Post-CoP M</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>+1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td>+1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>+0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>+0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>+1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>+1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>8.38</td>
<td>+0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>8.13</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants’ mean ratings on the Student Engagement (SE) subscale are shown in Table 10. Participants’ mean ratings on this subscale showed the least amount of change between pre and post CoP administrations. All participants obtained above average mean ratings on the SE subscale indicating that all participants had a strong sense of efficacy regarding their ability to engage students.
Table 10

*TSES Subscale Means: Student Engagement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Pre-CoP M</th>
<th>Post-CoP M</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>+1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>+0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>+0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>+0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>+0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>8.25</td>
<td>+1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants’ mean ratings on the *TSES* Classroom Management (CM) subscale are displayed in Table 11. Seven participants (78%) had a higher mean rating on the CM at the final *TSES* administration with all participants displaying mean ratings either at or above average on this subscale at the final *TSES* administration. Marta had the largest increase in her mean rating between the initial (5.13) and final (6.57) administrations of the *TSES* on this subscale.
Participants’ TSES scores indicated they all had a strong sense of efficacy. None of the scores changed significantly between Pre and Post CoP administrations of the TSES. The group’s highest mean ratings were on the SE subscale indicating they held strong beliefs about their ability to engage children in learning tasks and take proactive measures to solve problems they may encounter in their teaching. The number of years of teaching experience did not appear to influence participants’ TSES scores indicating that for this group of novice teachers their sense of efficacy did not depend on the amount of time they had spent as a classroom teacher.

During the initial face-to-face meeting in October 2009 all participants completed the Novice Early Childhood Teachers Questionnaire. An item on the questionnaire required participants to rate their sense of competency with regard to addressing challenging behavior.
Eight participants (89%) rated themselves “somewhat competent” while one participant (11%) indicated that he felt “very competent” in this area at the beginning of the study. Participants who rated themselves “somewhat competent” had mean scores ranging from 5.13 to 7.13 on the CM subscale of the TSES at the initial administration. Results shown in Table 12 compare participants’ rating of their sense of competency to their TSES Classroom Management subscale mean ratings at both initial and final TSES administration.

Table 12

*Sense of Competency in Supporting Young Children’s Social Emotional Development and Addressing Challenging Behavior*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>October Competency</th>
<th>TSES (Pre-CoP) (CM)</th>
<th>March Competency</th>
<th>TSES (Post-CoP) (CM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *rating was “between somewhat and very competent.” TSES (CM): Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (Classroom Management subscale)*
The participant who rated himself as “very competent” had the highest mean score (7.25) on the *TSES* CM subscale at initial administration. What is interesting in the post-CoP CM scores is that the three participants with the highest CM subscale scores did not all rate themselves as very competent in engaging in classroom practices to promote children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior. This may indicate that a teacher’s strong sense of efficacy (i.e., willingness to take action) regarding her classroom management skills may not translate to feelings of competence in addressing challenging behavior.

During final telephone interviews (March/April 2010) participants were again asked about their sense of competency supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior. Six participants (67%) continued to rate themselves “somewhat competent” unchanged from the initial interview. Jim who rated himself “very competent” at the beginning of the study continued to rate himself “very competent” at the conclusion of the study. Lisa changed her rating from “somewhat competent” at the beginning of the study to “very competent” at the end of the study. A third participant, Anna changed her rating slightly from the beginning to the end of the study. None of the first year teachers rated themselves as “very competent” at either the beginning or conclusion of the study.

In summary, data addressing research question number one revealed that participants used a variety of strategies to support young children’s social emotional competence and address challenging behavior. Many of the strategies they described are recommended practices in the fields of EC and ECSE. Participants reported they felt either somewhat or very competent in supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior. Participants’ mean composite and subscale ratings on the *TSES* indicated
they had an average to above average sense of efficacy. Number of years of teaching experience did not appear to be a factor in the participants’ sense of efficacy.

**Influences on Practices and Effectiveness**

The second research question addressed factors that beginning early childhood teachers perceived as influencing their practices and effectiveness with regard to supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior. Data from the *Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Questionnaire* (Appendix E) and the *Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Initial Telephone Interview* (Appendix F) were used to answer this question as well as to provide descriptive information about this group of novice teachers. A discussion of the following factors and their influences on participants’ practices and effectiveness will be presented, including excerpts taken from initial interview transcripts: (a) pre-service teacher preparation, (b) working conditions, (c) general supports, (d) resources and supports that address challenging behavior, (e) mentors, and (f) induction activities and other professional development. The six factors emerged from the research literature concerning issues that impact novice teachers’ sense of competency and their commitment to remaining in the field (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2004; Klostermann et al., 2003).

**Pre-service teacher preparation.** Responses on item 9 on the *Beginning Early Childhood Teachers’ Questionnaire* highlighted aspects of participants’ teacher education program that prepared them to support young children’s social emotional competence and address challenging behavior. Four participants (44%) reported that field-based experiences prepared them to engage in classroom practices that enhance children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior. Three additional participants (33%) indicated a
combination of field-based experiences and discussions with their university practicum supervisor most prepared them to use classroom practices that enhance young children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior. One participant (11%) indicated that all three components (courses, field-based experiences, and discussions with university supervisors) prepared her to engage in classroom practices that enhance young children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior. One participant did not respond to this item.

**Working conditions.** In terms of overall working conditions (e.g., access to supplies, materials, copy paper, etc.) at the time of the initial interviews, seven participants (78%) reported their working conditions as “excellent” while two participants (22%) reported their working conditions as “adequate.” It is important to note that these responses reflect working conditions in October 2009. As the school year progressed severe financial problems in the State of Illinois impacted working conditions in each participant’s school district, but especially participants who were teaching in state funded Pre-K programs. Resources for salaries, classroom supplies and materials became scarce in some school districts during the 2009-2010 school year. One participant described difficulty obtaining supplies.

Because we are a fairly new school in the district and because of the funding for our classrooms, there were issues sometimes about getting the supplies I needed. Even now, I’m working with about only four colors of construction paper, very few bottles of glue (which) I got last week actually and I’m grateful to have that much.

Due to declining fiscal resources some state funded Pre-K programs in Illinois were forced to close. The impact of this funding crisis on working conditions for those participants employed in state funded Pre-K and Pre-K/ECSE blended programs (67%) was a recurring topic during several online CoP chats. This unique financial situation was stressful for CoP
participants, although they continued to stay employed at their schools through the end of the
school year and all nine participants expressed a desire to remain in the field.

**General support.** Novice teachers have reported feeling isolated in their schools, unsure about how they will be perceived if they seek help from colleagues and administrators (Johnson, et al., 2004; Kardos & Johnson, 2007). During initial telephone interviews participants in this study reported several sources of general support. They reported turning to a number of colleagues for assistance with logistical or curricular issues (e.g., questions about school policies, ideas for classroom activities or lessons). The most frequently mentioned sources of general support were (a) principal/administrator (78%), (b) experienced paraprofessional (78%), and (c) colleagues (e.g., other teachers, specialists, parent coordinator) (78%) in their school. Two participants (22%) reported that they received general support from their curriculum director. Laura described a positive relationship with her principal who was also new to her school during the 2009-10 academic year.

What’s been nice is that my principal is also new this year so I think we’ve kind of had that bond of we’re both just starting. She’s not a new principal but she’s new to the district and everything. I’ve met with her a lot. We just kind of talk very well, because we did the district orientation together . . . It’s kind of helped me in coming to her for things.

**Resources to address challenging behavior.** During initial interviews participants reported using a variety of resources to help them address children’s challenging behaviors. All participants reported they relied on colleagues at their school. These colleagues included other teachers as well as specialists. The resources and supports that participants have used or would use to specifically assist them in addressing children’s challenging behavior are presented in below.
Table 13

*Resources for Addressing Challenging Behavior (Initial Interview)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Colleagues at School</em></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Materials (e.g., books, articles, texts)</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal/Administrator</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s Parents</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s Former Teacher</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Internet Discussion Forum</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Resource Center</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Teachers (not employed in school or district)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Colleagues included other teachers, behavior analysts, therapists, assistant teachers, social workers, and parent coordinators

Two participants responded that they had a behavior analyst on staff at their schools that they could use as consultants about children’s challenging behavior. Julie stated:

> I’ve used other educators, co-workers. There’s the PALS teacher (the Behavior Analyst); I go to her a lot—always so helpful... She’s usually the first person I go to when I have a challenging behavior.

**Mentors.** Eight participants (89%) reported they were assigned a mentor during their first year of teaching. Six of these participants with assigned mentors stated that they had a positive relationship with their mentor while the other two participants indicated they did not have a positive mentor-mentee relationship. The two participants who did not have positive relationships with their mentors indicated it had more to do with personality differences and not with their mentor’s professional skills. Six of the participants who were assigned a mentor
(75%) indicated their mentor had knowledge and skills in EC, ECSE, or taught the same grade level while the other two participants with assigned mentors indicated their mentor was not EC or ECSE trained. Laura described a very positive relationship with her assigned mentor.

I actually do have a mentor. . . . My mentor is a special education teacher in my building. We meet every Thursday during our planning period just to talk about things, share ideas, and what not. They [the district] give us a binder and book of checklists to monitor progress about using your mentor to the best of your ability. That’s been fantastic.

Marta described a close relationship with her mentor, an experienced EC teacher.

I do have an assigned mentor. She’s been a preschool teacher at the district for about 16 years which means she has all of the experience that I will hopefully someday have and she actually started this . . . Preschool for All program with Spanish speaking students . . . so having her as my mentor has been amazing because she has not only given me support on a day-to-day basis but also lesson plans and ideas.

Julie reported having a difficult relationship with her assigned mentor, an experienced teacher at her school.

. . . My mentor and I didn’t have a specific meeting time; it was kind of more or less if you had a question she was someone to come to. But I don’t feel like I had a positive relationship with her. I still don’t . . . I just don’t feel she’s a very positive person.

Cara, a first year Kindergarten teacher, met her mentor for the first time when she unexpectedly arrived in her classroom to observe her teach at the beginning of the school year. This mentor is a retired teacher who mentors all new teachers across all grade levels in her district. Nora, a Pre-K/ECSE teacher, was the only participant with less than one year of experience who did not have an assigned mentor, however she met regularly with her principal and a speech/language therapist to discuss any problems.

When asked about any training their mentors may have received to help them in this role, five participants (63%) indicated they were “unsure” if their mentor had any specific
training to support new teachers. Three participants who had assigned mentors (38%) indicated their mentors did receive mentor training.

**Induction activities.** During initial interviews all 9 participants reported being involved in one or more induction activities. Most district level induction activities were designed for new teachers to learn about district policies and curricula, prepare for district events (e.g., conducting parent/teacher conferences), and to meet other new teachers. For example Nora described induction activities specifically planned for new teachers as well as professional development activities offered to all staff in her district.

I don’t have a one-to-one mentor but they [the district] are providing us [first year teachers] with a new teacher program district-wide where we have meetings once or twice a month and we have a book to read about the district and their belief system and all the integration and stuff they do in the district . . . every other Wednesday we have early dismissal for professional development meetings and we have a lot of institute days where we have conferences . . . held in the district and we can go to other ones [conferences].

Likewise, Tina described district level induction meetings covering topics mostly related to curriculum.

I have a series of meetings over the next two years with other new teachers in the district. It’s led by a series of literacy coaches, math coaches, and our curriculum director, different kinds of topical meetings . . . so far they’ve been really helpful.

Three participants, teaching Pre-K or Pre-K/ECSE classes, talked about how they had participated in state-wide conferences and/or regional workshops specifically designed for educators of young children (e.g., *StarNet* or *Illinois Resource Center (IRC)* workshops, *Sharing A Vision Conference*, *State-wide Kindergarten Conference*, *Creative Curriculum* (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002), *I-TEACHe* training (http://i-teache.org/www/index.php) and the *Center for the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)* (www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel). These professional development opportunities were open to all
teachers and therapists (beginning or experienced) employed in state-funded Pre-K and ECSE programs.

With regard to induction activities specifically focused on social emotional development, two participants indicated that they had attended CSEFEL training and the Creative Curriculum workshops focused on promoting young children’s social emotional development. Participants reported that they had been involved in other types of professional development opportunities such as seminars concerning Hear Our Cry: Boys in Crisis (Slocumb, 2004), poverty issues, crisis intervention training, and an online professional development web site, PD360 (http://www.schoolimprovement.com/pd360-info.cfm).

Data addressing research question two described many positive factors that influenced participants’ practices and effectiveness as beginning teachers. Most participants identified their pre-service teacher education field experiences or a combination of their field experiences and discussions with their university supervisor as preparing them to support young children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior. Participants described their current working conditions as either adequate or excellent although this did change for some CoP participants as the school year progressed. All but one participant reported having an assigned mentor during the first year of teaching and most participants described having a positive relationship with their mentor. Participants reported positive benefits from attending district sponsored induction meetings and/or professional development activities outside the district that were specifically designed for EC and ECSE practitioners.

Participants reported receiving general types of support from their administrators and colleagues indicating they had regular contact with other staff members in their school. All participants reported that they had sought or would be comfortable seeking support from
colleagues (e.g., behavior analyst, other teachers, social worker) to assist them in addressing children’s challenging behavior. These results indicate that most participants had access to a number of resources and supports and that they were open to collaboration with the other professionals in their building.

**Online Community of Practice (CoP)**

The third research question addressed how participation in an online CoP led by the researcher influenced beginning early childhood teacher’s sense of efficacy in supporting young children’s social and emotional development and addressing challenging behavior. The online CoP, developed for this study, was designed to investigate its feasibility and value as an induction activity for novice teachers. Based upon a search of the empirical literature that found classroom management and addressing students’ behaviors as critical concerns for novice teachers (Klostermann et al., 2003; Meister & Jenks, 2000; Melnick & Meister, 2003; Veenman, 1984) the researcher anticipated that the novice EC teachers’ online CoP would be focused on sharing information and resources to support young children’s social and emotional development and address children’s challenging behavior.

**Reasons to join the CoP.** During the initial telephone interviews participants reported several reasons for why it may be important for beginning EC teachers to belong to a CoP: (a) issues of isolation (e.g., no colleagues to talk to), (b) hearing others’ ideas, (c) talking about frustrations, and (d) staying connected with others at your level [other new teachers]. Laura described her desire to access support from other novice teachers.

It’s a way to stay connected to people who are at your level because I’m the youngest by a few years in my school, so it’s all veteran teachers . . . I figure it’s a good way to connect and you’re probably having the same anxieties and experiences.
Contributions to the CoP. Prior to the start of the CoP, participants discussed several contributions they could make to the CoP: (a) providing a specific or unique perspective, (b) offering ideas, information, resources, and strategies, (c) sharing classroom experiences, and (d) offering support to others. Marta explained her personal contribution to the CoP.

. . . maybe a different perspective on how to see things. I know being [a] Spanish Speaking teacher and working with the population that I do work with is sometimes different than what other teachers do in classrooms, and sometimes I can give a different view of things so I’m willing to share that.

Personal benefits. During initial interviews participants discussed what they hoped to gain from participating in the online CoP. Participants described benefits that focused on: (a) learning new ideas, strategies, and getting advice about handling difficult situations, (b) feeling supported by others in similar situations, and (c) talking to other new teachers from different schools. During final interviews (March/April 2010) participants were reminded of the potential benefits they had described in the initial interviews and asked to rate how well these had been met. Sixteen out of seventeen (94%) personal benefits were described as “achieved” (see Appendix I).

CoP chat themes. Transcripts for each online CoP chat session (n = 14) were downloaded for coding. During initial data analysis 21 original codes were used to sort participants’ comments (see Appendix J). As data analysis progressed 7 major themes emerged from these codes. These themes and corresponding descriptions are presented in Table 14.
Table 14

*Community of Practice (CoP) Chat Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide resources, strategies, and information</td>
<td>Shared ideas, materials, resources, teaching strategies, useful websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share information about their school or program</td>
<td>How things are done in their school (e.g., team meetings, parent/teacher conferences, transition policies, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek information or advice about a topic or issue</td>
<td>Topics included assessment/curriculum, social/emotional strategies, challenging behavior, parent issues, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General comments related to teaching</td>
<td>Comments about general topics (e.g. academic demands placed on young children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions/concerns/beliefs about teaching</td>
<td>Shared emotions and beliefs about teaching; personal concerns about difficult situations they encountered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide emotional/personal support/appreciation</td>
<td>Expressed support, compliments, and appreciation to other CoP members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistical/technology issues in CoP</td>
<td>Comments or questions about computer issues, Moodle site, online chats, final meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During each chat session participants spent much of the time providing resources, strategies, ideas, and information to one another. For instance, Tina stated:

> For my RtI meetings I have kept a log of challenging behaviors for the students daily, samples of work, and strategies I have used thus far.
Some participants were adept at incorporating resources through web addresses into the synchronous chat session. Laura shared a web site that contained information about an upcoming iTEACHe workshop.

The Palm Pilots aren’t free . . . but the classes and workshops are. One minute I’ll get the [web] site. But the Palm Pilots aren’t completely necessary; you can enter in stuff [child assessment data] on your own.

Participants frequently shared information about their school or program. Often they described practices or policies adopted by their school or district as examples of “how things work” in their setting. For example, during a discussion about supervising teacher assistants Anna reported:

They [teacher assistants] have a union in my district . . . I was a part time teacher, part time assistant last year and I did not get a job description.

Also, Julie stated:

We [Pre-K/ECSE program] have monthly parent workshops on specific topics as well as a parent book club.

Members of the CoP sought information or advice about many topics and often used the CoP to ask their peers for information. Several members of the CoP were teaching children who were English Language Learners (ELLs). Learning more about teaching ELLs and working with their parents was of interest to several CoP members. This was a topic during several online chats. For example, Anna asked the CoP:

How can you encourage kids who speak the same language to speak it to each other? Mine don’t seem to know they can speak to each other.

Also, Tina asked:

Do you know any studies about retaining students who are ELLs?
CoP members also sought information about assessments, curricula, and the use of technology in recording and storing child data. Jim wondered about hand held devices that support a particular software program that some CoP members were using in their classrooms.

Jim: Can you use an iPhone or iPod with it [I-TEACHe]?

A benefit of belonging to an online CoP where the members had common knowledge and shared experiences was that members could discuss a strategy, curriculum, or approach and rest assured that everyone was already familiar with it. For example, all CoP members had learned to implement a particular teaching strategy (The Project Approach) while they were students at UIUC, all CoP members understood what she meant when Lisa asked, “I’m debating [about] participating in the Kohl’s Children’s Museum Early Connections Project. Does anyone have experience with that [program]?”

Another topic that was discussed during online chats was supporting children’s social emotional development and teaching children with challenging behavior. For example, Julie invited the Behavior Analyst from her school to be a guest expert during one of the online chat sessions. Also, Lisa had a student with selective mutism and wanted more information about this disability. Lisa asked:

I have a child with selective mutism. What are some strategies that I can use to help her and also any resources to learn more about selective muteness?

CoP members also sought information about collaborating with colleagues, communicating with parents, and professional issues. Due to financial problems in many school districts several members inquired about teaching positions in other districts. A portion of the online chats from sessions #8 through #14 focused on the job market and Pre-K services in Illinois.
Chat transcripts revealed that CoP members made general comments related to teaching. Some of these comments reflected an individual participant’s views about teaching young children. For example, Cara shared her thoughts about what she enjoyed about teaching kindergarten.

Getting to know the students and seeing them grow with what I’m teaching them; having that moment when they are actually quiet, working, learning, and being successful with something that I taught.

Some participants shared their emotions, concerns, and beliefs about teaching. A few disclosed that they felt overwhelmed at certain times (e.g., preparing for parent conferences). Chat sessions included discussions about difficult relationships with colleagues or a child’s parent. For instance, Nora described her frustration with the principal’s expectations for maintaining child assessment data without computer support.

We don’t have any computer system for assessment right now other than progress reports each trimester . . . we do it all written in binders—also very stressful.

Positive events and emotions were also shared between participants of the CoP. An example of this was when Jim hosted Dr. Jean, a special visitor, to his district.

Jim: I get to take Dr. Jean to lunch tomorrow!

Marta: That is very exciting!

Anna: NO WAY! How cool, you lucky person!

The CoP members provided emotional or personal support to one another. One example is a comment Tina made regarding Nora’s detailed preparations for a new child transitioning to her class.

Tina: She [new child] already seems like a part of the class and she hasn’t come yet! You’re already doing great!
CoP members often made appreciative and supportive statements regarding ideas or information members shared with the group. And, it was not uncommon for the online chats to include humor and some light-hearted teasing as well.

During the chat sessions participants periodically commented about technology problems (e.g., fading Internet connections, slow computers) and logistical issues (e.g., chat session dates, face-to-face meeting plans, etc.). The researcher also used chat sessions to remind participants about submitting questions for guest experts, posting to the Discussion Forum, and other topics. An example of a technology issue was when Tina was not online one evening and Nora reported:

I just received a text from Tina that she has no Internet right now so she is not going to make it FYI!

Most group logistics were handled by the CoP facilitator. She did most of the posting to the Discussion Forum, reminded members about dates for chat sessions, and served as the time keeper. In the following transcript excerpt the facilitator is bringing closure to an online chat session when she states:

It’s 9:30-- next week we have a break for MLK holiday. If you want me to scan/make copies I can do so. Just send me stuff. Also, feel free to post to this website. Anyone can post information or send it to me and I’ll post.

The major themes that emerged from the online CoP chat sessions demonstrate that CoP members discussed a variety of topics with one another. The chat transcripts revealed that this group of novice EC teachers and the facilitator provided not only information and resources but also emotional support, encouragement, and appreciation for one another.

An interesting finding is that although all CoP participants had reported teaching young children with challenging behavior, this was not a dominant topic of conversation during the chat sessions.
The research literature on novice teachers indicates that classroom management and addressing children’s challenging behavior can be particularly difficult for novice teachers. Additionally, supporting young children’s social emotional competence during their early years of schooling is critical to their later school success and academic outcomes. The researcher was especially interested to learn what goals participants set for themselves in order to intentionally focus on this critical area and which supports and resources they relied on to assist them in achieving their goals. The next section examines participants’ goals and outcomes and addresses their responses to the third research question regarding the influence of the online CoP on their sense of efficacy in the area of supporting social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior.

**Enhancing Children’s Social Emotional Competence: Resources and Supports**

During the initial telephone interview (October 2009) the researcher asked each participant to list (in order of importance) three goals they had for themselves with regard to enhancing children’s social emotional competence. Most participants described three goals, however Cara and Marta had only two goals each resulting in a total of 25 goals. During final interviews participants were reminded of these goals and asked to rate their progress toward attaining them (1= not attained, 2= still working on it, and 3= attained). Results are displayed in Table 15.
Table 15

*Participant Goals and Ratings: Enhancing Social Emotional Competence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>1. Better understand the characteristics of three and four year olds; where they’re at with respect to their education and their social development.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. To take step back—learn to figure out more what caused the behavior (antecedent) and what I can do to change it.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Our school is implementing PBIS; I’d like to see that become more part of my classroom environment and see what effect that has.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>1. Try to really know the families and have a trusting relationship.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Try to find new things or look for something that makes things easier on the kids if they’re having a hard time to get out of it.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Be more aware of my own emotions—take my emotions out of the situation to help me understand the kids better and not get upset when there are challenging behaviors.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>1. Helping the children become more independent problem solvers by modeling the options for them.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Helping them [children] utilize their environment more to get them to go more to each other; consciously, intentionally set up so they are more likely going to other people.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Providing more print, visual environmental cues and role-playing; increasing their social emotional vocabulary.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>1. To better understand why and to give the reasons behind some challenging behavior. Whether it’s attention from me or from the kids—to be able to pinpoint so I could better figure out how to change it.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Getting faster at helping. Sometimes I think there’s a sort of delay for me to process it [social emotional issues] and figure out what to do because I just don’t know. Getting that so I can react and feel comfortable doing it and not second guessing myself.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. <em>(Participant did not set a third goal)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>1. I want kids to want to go to school, want to learn, and feel safe.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Building community in the classroom, you not only want the children in your classroom to help themselves but help each other as well.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. To be more reflective about your own practices analyzing if what you did was the best way and if it worked or didn’t work.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>1. Help all the children try to communicate their feelings especially with each other.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. For a couple of students who are still having a hard time interacting with the rest, to feel comfortable enough in the classroom to even play with one or two friends or try to initiate play instead of using me to help them find a group.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. <em>(Participant did not set a third goal)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>1. Noticing the students’ needs and where they’re at developmentally.</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. To push more small group time . . . to have their [children’s] voices heard more in a close group . . . to have more conversations.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. I want students to be understanding in terms of discipline and classroom management, why it’s happening, to be comfortable and understand and agree with it.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>1. Improve my abilities to work individually with kids, to better differentiate and get the practice with it.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Getting the children to work together more and get more partner-like activities.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Give them [children] more of a wide range of experiences to broaden their knowledge through different cultural aspects.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>1. Have children find something they can succeed in and praise that and facilitate that.</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. For children to become a little more tolerant, to do things for others to show that they can have gratification.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. For children to become a little more open to the differences in others.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Rating Scale: 1 = not attained, 2 = still working on it, 3 = attained*
All participants reported their goals had been “attained” or they were “still working on it” (two goals were rated 2.5). Achieving professional goals can be attributed to both internal (sense of efficacy and competence) and external conditions (e.g., resources and supports). Some participants reported that the goals they set were long term goals that they would continue to work on and therefore it was not surprising that they were not “achieved” during the duration of the study.

The researcher summarized the participants’ reports of barriers or challenges to working on their goals and these categories emerged: (a) time constraints (e.g., children attend school half day in Pre-K settings; no set time to meet with colleagues, district expectations that take time away from teaching), (b) meeting the wide range of children’s individual needs, (c) family or parents’ circumstances (e.g., implementing strategies at home), (d) adjusting to sense of control over situations with children, (e) adjusting to new students entering throughout the school year, and (f) hesitation or uncertainty about the right questions to ask colleagues.

Participants’ reports regarding resources and supports for addressing these goals are shown in Table 16. Seven of the nine participants mentioned the online CoP as one of the resources they found most helpful in working on their goals, while six participants mentioned the online CoP as one of the factors that influenced their sense of competence with regard to supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior.
Table 16

*Resources for Addressing Goals and Influences on Sense of Competency (Final Interviews)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource/Factor</th>
<th>Resource (% participants)</th>
<th>Influenced competence (% participants)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Community</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Colleagues</em></td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal/Administrator</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Experience</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles/Books</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Analyst</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Coordinator</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Former Teacher</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *Colleagues* included other teachers and support staff at school.

For example, Nora listed the resources she relied on to help her address her goals.

> I felt the most helpful were the other teachers in my building, my principal, some of the workshops I’ve been to and definitely the online community.

Marta described collaboration with teachers, parents, and CoP participants as resources.

> I definitely used other teachers in my school. I also used the online community whenever I was having problems. Just to bounce ideas off of them and get suggestions from them, but I think mostly a lot of teachers in the school and parents as well. Just working and cooperating with their parents really helped too.

CoP participants also spoke about collaborating with their colleagues (other teachers) and also named specialists in their school (e.g., Behavior Analyst, parent coordinator) as individuals who most contributed to their sense of competence in the area of social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior. Six participants (67%) included the online CoP as one of the factors that influenced their sense of competence.

Seven participants indicated they felt their membership in the online CoP enhanced their sense of efficacy with regard to supporting young children’s social emotional development and
addressing challenging behaviors. For example, Marta described how belonging to the online CoP enhanced her sense of efficacy.

Just by talking to everybody else and hearing what they were doing in their own [classroom], or what they were trying to do, really encouraged me to do the same. It made me realize that I do have the power to change these things . . .

Two participants responded rather vaguely (e.g., “I think so,” “A little bit”) when asked about their membership in the online CoP and its influence on their sense of efficacy. Similarly, Anna explained her response (“I think so”) to this question by stating:

I think it has at least given me a few more ideas. I don’t know if there were like five problems and I used to only be able to solve three of them . . . I didn’t solve any more . . . but it [online CoP] has at least given a few more ideas from different people of things I could try before asking someone else.

Six participants indicated their membership in the online CoP enhanced their sense of efficacy in other aspects of their teaching practice while two participants were less enthusiastic in their responses (“I think so,” “Yes and No”). Nora, who provided a positive response about her experience stated:

I feel like overall it [online CoP] has really opened me up to a lot wider range of topics. Having guest speakers talk about different types of issues has helped me figure out other information in the classroom from kids with special needs who are still developing and anything from like organizing to teaching has been really helpful.

Also, Tina explained her less than enthusiastic response.

I gained a lot of different ideas. The biggest problem was the fact that a lot of people were teaching very young children so a lot of the ideas I couldn’t necessarily apply them to my teaching. In some sense I did take some of the ideas and kind of turn them into how it would work for my classroom—especially working with parents.
Evaluating the Online CoP

Participants evaluated their experiences as a member of the novice EC teachers online CoP. Participants were involved in evaluating the CoP on two occasions: (a) in a group discussion led by the researcher during the final face-to-face meeting and (b) during a final telephone interview conducted by an ECSE graduate student. The final interview protocol included questions to provide the researcher with information about participants’ perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the online CoP (see Appendix F). Evaluative data was collected in both the group and individual formats in order to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the CoP from multiple perspectives. Participants’ responses to these questions are summarized below. A summary of the meeting notes from the final face-to-face meeting also includes an evaluation of the online CoP (see Appendix H).

Positive experiences. The following quotes are taken from the final telephone interviews. CoP members highlighted some of their positive experiences in the group. Marta appreciated feeling comfortable speaking up in the online CoP:

I’m a very quiet person to begin with and the chat sessions really helped so that I could speak up a little easier about certain things. I wasn’t out there on the spot whereas if it was in a room all together.

Tina reported that participating in the CoP helped her reflect on her theory of teaching:

I kind of got hit with a very real-world, quick transition, really didn’t have time to prepare. I caught myself being really impatient and then coming into the group I felt my foundation was. I kind of came in being negative, but maybe realistic and then was able to kind of see back to the roots of what my true theory of teaching was so that changed.

Anna appreciated that the CoP participants were all young teachers who could share experiences with one another and build a sense of community:

I would have loved having it my first year. After college it is like that sense of community goes away. It was really nice to be back in what felt a little like a college
setting where there were younger people who were unsure of what was going on and we could all talk about our experiences. I really liked that.

Jim, although a more experienced member of the CoP, still found value in participating in the CoP:

I was one of the more experienced teachers in the online community of practice. I was able to give suggestions but at the same time. . . I still have questions and things I want to learn better. I also had a lot of learning to do myself. I was in there trying to participate and better my own craft.

**Negative experiences.** Some aspects of the online community were problematic for participants. For example, one participant reported that it was difficult to follow discussions when guest experts were involved because of having to scroll down to follow the conversation. Another participant reported that she did not have much to contribute if the conversation was about something she was not involved with or had no ideas to share. She felt like she was letting others down during the online chats:

I think there were a few times where the discussion revolved around something that I didn’t necessarily have anything to contribute . . . like we were talking about paraprofessionals or ELL kids which I did not currently have in my classroom . . . I wasn’t able to participate and felt like maybe I was letting people down or something because I didn’t have anything to contribute.

CoP members also indicated at times it was difficult to follow the conversations due to the number of people commenting at the same time.

**Recommendations for improvement.** CoP participants were asked to offer suggestions for future online CoPs. The following are recommendations that were discussed during the final face-to-face meeting and final interviews:

- Decide on a pre-determined list of topics to go to if no one brings an issue for discussion. Members could then enter the CoP prepared if there was a specific topic to be discussed.
- Have a mid-point face-to-face meeting rather than just at the beginning and end of the group.
• Meet for the entire school year (i.e., August through June)

• Include more participants who reflect the range of EC grade levels (preschool through third grade).

• Keep the size small (no more than 12 people) to enable participants to more easily follow the conversation.

• Continue to offer professional books as incentives (instead of a children’s book) for participating; this was greatly appreciated.

• Periodically invite additional guest speakers or professionals for this is helpful to keep the topics more focused.

**Recommendations for the facilitator.** Participants were asked to offer suggestions about the facilitator’s role. Two recommendations were made to the facilitator (a) invite guests to join the CoP to address topics members want to know about, and (b) keep a list of topics that may be of interest to novice teachers and use the topics when no one has an issue or concern to discuss.

**Recommend to other novice EC teachers.** All nine participants indicated they would recommend the online CoP to other beginning EC teachers. Reasons to recommend the CoP to new teachers included: (a) it is a good opportunity to network with other people, (b) participants can speak freely about students and issues with people outside their school district, (c) it is helpful to have someone who knows what you are going through, (d) it is beneficial to participate in a CoP during the first year of teaching, (e) the online CoP is especially helpful to teachers who are the only EC teacher in their building or district for it provides support, (f) teachers should consider participating in an online CoP up to the first four years of teaching for they can use it as an outlet for discussions with other teachers, (g) the CoP does not take up too much of your time, and (h) participants learned about a wealth of resources that an individual might not find on his/her own. Results from the final interviews indicate that participants
believed the online CoP was a valuable activity and should be offered to other novice EC teachers in the future.

**CoP group goals.** During the final face-to-face meeting the facilitator led the participants in a discussion to evaluate their progress on the CoP group goals that were generated at the initial face-to-face meeting in October 2009. Each goal is stated followed by a summary of the feedback shared by CoP members.

*Goal 1. To educate one another to become better teachers by sharing resources and working through specific problems and struggles in our daily practice.*

Participants agreed that the group shared many resources and ideas during every chat session. Participants pointed out that even at the final face-to-face meeting a member brought a resource to share with everyone. During many online chat session members brought specific problems or situations to the CoP and the group engaged in brainstorming to help generate solutions to address the problem or situation.

*Goal 2. To become more knowledgeable and skilled at teaching diverse students (e.g., students with disabilities and/or children who are English Language Learners) and to learn how to communicate effectively with diverse families and communities.*

The group appreciated the guest experts and the resources that were generated around the topic of teaching English Language Learners. This was also true of the guest expert on applied behavior analysis. Participants reported that it was hard with the guest speakers to get all of their questions addressed and to read everything the experts were responding to during the chat sessions. One participant indicated that she appreciated knowing the CoP was there this year in helping her teach students with special needs. Participants also shared that they appreciated receiving resources to give families that were available in more than one language.
Goal 3. To provide support to one another by sharing day-to-day strategies and improve efficiencies (e.g., completing paperwork, holding parent/teacher conferences, etc.) in order to manage particularly difficult crunch times during the school year.

The participants agreed that CoP members exchanged ideas about managing efficiencies. Participants found it very helpful when members shared ideas about managing parent/teacher conferences. Participants also stated that they liked to hear from all the different members of the CoP because they represented different schools and programs. One participant, who taught third/fourth grade recommended inviting more teachers into the CoP who teach at the primary grade level because of the unique issues that she experienced this year.

Goal 4. To build a network of colleagues who share a set of similar beliefs about teaching young children in order to provide one another with information and ideas for professional development, possible job opportunities, access to resources, and other topics of interest.

CoP participants engaged in networking during the chat sessions and during the final face-to-face meeting. Some participants liked that all of the CoP members had graduated from the same teacher education program, as they had been exposed to the same educational theories and methods while others thought it would have been beneficial to have CoP members who were graduates of other teacher education programs.

During the final face-to-face meeting the participants reviewed a list of characteristics of a CoP (see Appendix H) and discussed whether the novice EC teachers online CoP reflected any of those characteristics. Participants reported that their online CoP reflected the following characteristics:

- New ideas were generated
• It connected people who might never know each other

• Participants learned new information and shared it with colleagues outside the CoP

• Members were all at the same stage of teaching and life (all learning and making mistakes together)

• It provided an extra resource for gaining new information

Results from the final interviews and summary notes from the final face-to-face meeting indicate that the participants saw value in belonging to the online CoP. Members reported that CoP group goals were achieved and the online community reflected the characteristics of a CoP as defined in the literature. While participants offered several ideas for improvements to the online CoP, they also stated that they would recommend joining an online CoP to other novice EC teachers.

**Researcher/Facilitator’s Journal**

As part of the data collection I kept a journal to record my thoughts and feelings during the study. I had multiple roles in this study as a researcher and the online CoP facilitator. I had also been a course instructor for eight participants during their teacher education program. As I reviewed my journal entries it was clear that my initial concerns were about the success of the online CoP. So at the same time that I was working to build a successful online CoP, I was also investigating whether it was a valuable induction activity for novice EC teachers. I was aware of the possibility that all of the participants could drop out of the study, that it might be difficult to engage participants in the online chats, and then I would not have any data to analyze. I focused on collaborating with the CoP participants in the design of an online community that would be relevant and meaningful for them. I had no formal training to facilitate an online CoP. I did
consult a manual (Gotto et al., 2008) and a checklist (Winton & Ferris, 2009) to guide me in
developing and evaluating the CoP.

I began to feel more confident in my role as a facilitator and looked forward to the
Monday night online CoP chats. The chats were lively and always interesting for me. During the
weeks we did not meet online I looked for ways to support the participants through finding
articles or resources that might be of interest. I was surprised at the variety of topics we
discussed and the issues that were most salient to this group. Our discussions have already
impacted my work as a teacher educator. I experienced what Buysse, et al., (2003) described as
learning together in a socially constructed context.

I learned how important it is to wait and allow others to respond rather than control the
discussion or topic. I learned about the generosity of these novice teachers as they openly shared
ideas, resources, and strategies. I found that technology can be an amazing learning tool as it
brings people together to learn from one another across geographic boundaries, but it can also
be a hindrance to community building when it fails to work correctly.

When this study began my concern was whether we could form a CoP due to our former
relationships as students and instructor, however I came to believe that our shared history
allowed us to more easily communicate with one another. I am grateful to have had this
opportunity to learn about how to conduct research and about creating an online community.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that while all nine participants encountered similar
issues that all new EC teachers experience (e.g., teaching young children who engage in
challenging behavior) they reported many positive factors that contributed to helping them feel
successful as new teachers. Participants described using a variety of strategies (many of them recommended practices) to support young children’s social emotional competence and address challenging behaviors in their classroom.

Participants obtained average to above average mean composite ratings on the TSES and on the TSES subscales during both administrations of the scale indicating they have an average to above average sense of efficacy with regard to teaching. Higher mean ratings on the TSES did not seem to be influenced by a participant’s years of teaching experience. Participants reported the following positive factors that contributed to their effectiveness in supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior: (a) adequate or excellent working conditions, (b) general support from colleagues and administrators, (c) positive relationships with mentors, and (d) participation in district sponsored induction and/or other professional development activities.

Participants reported several resources or supports (e.g., colleagues, principal, etc.) as influences on helping them attain or continue to work on goals to improve their practices and effectiveness with regard to supporting young children’s social emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior. Participants also described school-based supports and the online CoP as factors that influenced their sense of competency with regard to enhancing children’s social emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior.

The participants engaged in online chat sessions that encompassed a variety of topics. The majority of chat conversations were focused on sharing ideas, strategies, and resources. All participants remained members of the online CoP for the duration of the study. The online CoP discussions included both professional and personal kinds of support. Although addressing children’s challenging behavior was not a dominant topic during the online chat sessions, seven
participants reported that the online CoP influenced their sense of efficacy in supporting young children’s social emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior.
Chapter 5
Discussion

The empirical literature regarding induction and mentoring activities that support novice EC teachers is very scarce. This study investigated the value of participation in an online novice EC teachers’ CoP as an induction and mentoring activity specifically designed for EC teachers. Novice EC teachers’ perceptions about their effectiveness in supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior also were examined. Additionally, practices novice EC teachers report using in their classroom to support children’s social emotional development and address challenging behaviors were investigated. Finally, the researcher was interested in exploring factors novice EC teachers reported as supportive influences on their practices and effectiveness as teachers (e.g., assigned one-to-one mentors, participation in induction activities, collaboration with colleagues, etc.).

Three primary issues emerged from the data that will be discussed: (a) the importance of school-based factors in supporting novice EC teachers to engage in recommended practices that enhance young children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior, (b) the benefits and challenges of creating and sustaining an online CoP as a format for novice EC teachers’ learning and support, and (c) the role of the teacher educator within an online CoP for novice teachers. The limitations of the study, implications for practice, and ideas for future research are also addressed.

The Importance of School-Based Factors for Supporting Novice Teachers

Studies of new teachers have reported that classroom management and teaching students with challenging behavior are difficult practices to master often causing novice teachers to feel
less confident and effective in their teaching (Colaric & Stapleton, 2004; Johnson et al., 2004; Klostermann et al., 2003; Meister & Jenks, 2000; Meister & Melnick, 2003; Onafowora, 2004; Veenman, 1984; Wideen et al., 1998). In one survey study, data from large numbers of EC teachers (n = 500) indicated that their greatest training need was learning to address children’s challenging behavior (Hemmeter, Corso, & Cheatham, 2006). Based on these studies, the researcher anticipated that the CoP participants would indicate that this was an area of great need for them and that the online chats would primarily focus on how to address children’s challenging behavior. Surprisingly, the results found in the current study differed somewhat from the descriptions of novice teachers’ concerns and issues that are found in the empirical literature.

Online conversations by CoP members did not predominately focus on how to address children’s challenging behavior. While this topic did emerge on occasion, and a guest expert with expertise in applied behavior analysis joined the CoP for one chat session, it did not dominate the online CoP conversations. Two factors may have contributed to this: (a) participants’ use of recommended practices that support young children’s social emotional competence and prevent challenging behavior (i.e., preventive classroom practices) and (b) school-based resources and supports that assisted CoP participants in addressing children’s challenging behavior.

**Supportive classroom practices.** During initial interviews all participants described using various recommended practices to support young children’s social emotional competence and prevent challenging behavior (DEC, 1998; Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003; Sandall et al., 2005). These classroom practices (e.g., building relationships with children, families, and colleagues, arranging environmental supports, and teaching social-emotional strategies) have been shown to minimize the incidences of children’s challenging behavior which
can in turn influence children’s later academic success (Raver & Knitzer, 2005). CoP participants’ use of these preventive practices may have minimized occurrences of challenging behaviors, therefore making this topic less salient.

Content on preventive practices, supporting young children’s social emotional development, and addressing challenging behavior are typically a part of EC pre-service education programs and opportunities to practice these strategies occur during field placements. Finding high quality inclusive field placements for pre-service teachers to practice the skills needed to address challenging behavior can be problematic. In a recent study Hemmeter, Santos, and Ostrosky (2008) found that EC teacher educators reported that their graduates were well prepared in practices aimed at supporting children’s social emotional development but less prepared to effectively address young children’s challenging behavior. The EC teacher educators reported that one of the barriers to training pre-service EC teachers to effectively address young children’s persistent challenging behavior is a lack of field placements that include young children with challenging behavior. This finding is of interest because the novice EC teachers in the present study reported that their field placements or the combination of field placements and conversations with their university supervisors most prepared them to support young children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior. The importance that the 9 novice teachers who participated in the current study placed on their pre-service field placements should be of critical interest to teacher educators. In light of the difficulty in finding these types of placements, teacher educators and university supervisors should incorporate multiple opportunities for pre-service EC teachers to engage in problem solving and planning individual behavior programs that incorporate data-based decision making to address children’s challenging
behavior (e.g., use of case studies and online modules that incorporate video clips of children engaged in challenging behavior).

**Collaborative schools.** Participants in this study described school-based supports and resources that they used to assist them when addressing children’s challenging behavior. These school-based supports included other teachers, mentors, behavior specialists, paraprofessionals, and administrators whom they could turn to for assistance with children’s challenging behaviors. Providing school-based resources creates a collaborative school climate that in turn fosters the induction and retention of novice teachers (Griffin et al., 2009; Johnson & Birkland, 2003; Johnson et al., 2004; Wechsler et al., 2010).

When there is an intentional emphasis on mentors, other teachers, and administrators forming meaningful relationships with novice teachers, the school context reflects what Pugach and Johnson (2002) describe as a collaborative school. Collaborative schools are characterized by a school culture where the staff engages in collaborative problem-solving to meet the academic and social emotional needs of all students. Teaching in a school where the climate promotes teaming and collaborative problem-solving permits all staff, including new teachers, to ask questions and seek help in a safe, supportive atmosphere. This type of school climate is in contrast to descriptions by new teachers that emphasize feelings of isolation or fear about seeking assistance from colleagues (Johnson et al., 2004; Kardos & Johnson, 2007; Merseth, 1991).

In contrast to those studies that included novice teachers who expressed feelings of isolation or fear about asking colleagues for assistance the participants in the current study received support from several school-based sources including administrators (who are critical to creating a school culture that supports the successful induction of new teachers). School context
has been shown to be a powerful factor in the success of new teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Griffin et al., 2009). Wechsler and colleagues (2010) examined the effects of new teacher induction programs in 39 Illinois school districts and found, “The most powerful influences on beginning teachers’ success are the conditions and circumstances of the school in which they teach,” (p.i.). School context includes principal leadership and support, the teaching environment, the teacher professional community, and the availability of materials. All participants in the current study reported that they sought and received support from various colleagues and administrators.

Participants’ sense of efficacy as measured by the TSES was in the average to above average range on both administrations of the TSES. This finding is in contrast to reports in the literature about novice teachers’ lowered sense of efficacy as they leave the supportive environment of student teaching and encounter a less than ideal vision of themselves as teachers due to “the realities and complexities of the teaching task” (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007; Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005). The many school-based supports and positive school context may have positively influenced CoP participants’ sense of efficacy (Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005). It would be interesting to investigate further whether the novice teachers who volunteered for this study did so because they had a strong sense of efficacy, making them more willing to seek out new ideas, resources, and be more committed to teaching (Coladarci, 1992).

**School-wide behavior supports.** Three participants in this study were employed in schools that had either adopted or were in the process of adopting a school-wide behavior support system (PBIS) and described incorporating PBIS strategies and interventions into their classroom practices (Sugai & Horner, 2002). These participants positively spoke about working in a school that had a school-wide PBIS structure. A school-wide context where teachers,
children, parents, and support staff agree on common expectations for students’ behavior and consistently use positive prevention strategies may provide new teachers with more time and energy to devote toward other aspects of teaching (e.g., developing curriculum, differentiating instruction, planning engaging projects). Without the PBIS structure and supports this time and energy would otherwise be spent on classroom management (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Some CoP participants raised concerns about implementing PBIS (which is typically implemented with school-age students) with younger children. Fox and Hemmeter (2009) addressed the challenges to adapting PBIS for programs that serve young children (e.g., Head Start, public Pre-K, and child care). They describe a process to implement program-wide PBS at the preschool level, and present examples of programs that adapted PBIS to meet the developmental needs of young children and families. The combination of a collaborative school that also adopts a school-wide system of behavior support (e.g., PBIS) could be a powerful contributor to the successful induction and retention of novice EC teachers.

Benefits and Challenges of an Online CoP

A primary impetus for this study was the researcher’s interest in the feasibility and value of offering an online CoP as an induction activity for novice EC teachers in Illinois. The online CoP was developed as a result of learning about the usefulness and purpose for forming CoPs (and online CoPs) in EC, ECSE and other fields (Babinski et al., 2001; Buysee et al., 2001; Buysee et al., 2003; Johnson, 2001; Klecka, Cheng, & Clift, 2004; Wenger, Scott, & McDermott, 2002). During a search of the relevant literature the researcher found only two reports describing induction activities specifically designed for new EC teachers (Davis & Higdon, 2008; McCormick & Brennan, 2001), making a study about the formation of an online CoP an
important contribution to the research literature on mentoring and induction activities for EC teachers.

**Benefits.** There were many benefits to forming and facilitating an online CoP with novice EC teachers. Although all participants were currently or had previously been involved in various forms of mentoring and induction activities, the online CoP was a unique format where novice EC teachers could exchange information and advice about teaching young children with other novice EC teachers, as well as seek and provide emotional support to each other across geographical boundaries (Klecka et al., 2004; Merseth, 1991). The study participants viewed belonging to this professional network of EC colleagues (the online CoP) as a benefit and some participants indicated they looked forward to the weekly online chat sessions.

The online CoP provided the researcher with a clearer understanding about issues and problems of practice that novice EC teachers encounter in their daily work with children, colleagues, and families and it influenced her own practice as a teacher educator. Many CoP members taught young children who were learning English but felt unsure about developmental expectations for these learners and which instructional strategies they should use with them. Although this topic is frequently discussed in the news, it became very clear during CoP chat sessions (including one with guest experts on bilingual education) that the researcher needed to infuse more content about recommended strategies for teaching young ELLs into course work to better prepare future EC teachers to address the needs of this diverse group of children (Espinosa, 2010; Tabors, 2008). The researcher’s own strengths and limitations on the topic of ELLs became evident during the online chats.

Technology is profoundly impacting teacher education and a benefit to forming the online CoP was to further investigate using technology to provide induction activities for novice
teachers (Babinski et al., 2001; DeWert et al., 2003; Herrington, Herrington, Kervin, & Ferry, 2006; Metiri Group, 2009). The use of technology in pre-service teacher education and professional development for practicing teachers is becoming ever more prevalent as researchers examine various types and functions for incorporating technology into pre and in-service learning activities (Schlager & Fusco, 2004). Some recent examples of using technology from the teacher education and professional development literature demonstrate the range of applications: (a) communication via email exchanges between pre-service teachers and practicum supervisors to increase the use of particular teaching strategies during field experiences (Barton & Wolery, 2007), (b) the use of polycoms to remotely observe and supervise pre-service teacher candidates in their practica settings (Dymond, Renzaglia, Halle, Chadsey, & Bentz, 2008), and (c) the effect of teachers’ participation in an online professional development course focused on improving students’ outcomes (Frey & Sass, 2009).

The novice EC teachers’ online CoP only used a few features of the Moodle site (e.g., the “News Forum,” “Online Community Stuff,” and the online synchronous chat) but future studies utilizing online CoPs might include many more of Moodle’s capabilities. For instance members could upload video clips of their classrooms in order to discuss aspects of instruction, provide one another with visual examples of successful class projects, and visually share ideas for materials and strategies. As new technologies develop, opportunities for increased types of virtual interactions will continue to expand the range of activities that could be incorporated into an online CoP.

**Challenges.** The greatest challenge to creating and facilitating an online CoP was the time and attention that the facilitator needs to invest in order for it to be successful. The key to a successful CoP rests with the skills of the facilitator (Cashman, Linehan, & Rosser, 2007; Gotto
et al., 2009). Facilitators spend time connecting with the CoP members both in synchronous chat sessions, and through posting information to the web site, searching for resources to share, inviting guest experts, following up with members who may have missed a chat session, and helping members trouble shoot technology issues. In an ongoing CoP a facilitator also recruits new members in order to keep the CoP active. Facilitating the online CoP in the current study was not particularly time consuming in that the chats were only one hour per week and the size of the CoP was small. The length and number of online meetings and the type of technology used should be considered in order to manage the facilitator’s time commitment.

Another challenge is the size of an online CoP when synchronous chat sessions are part of the CoP framework. At times it was difficult for the researcher to facilitate nine members chatting at the same time, bringing in members who were not engaged in the discussion, and making sure guest experts were able to enter the chats and could respond to the members’ questions. Hosting the online CoP on Moodle was helpful to addressing some challenges because all online chats were saved so members could return and read the transcripts at a later time.

The use of synchronous chat sessions for the majority of interactions among the CoP members impacted the depth of the conversations about teaching practices. In order for the CoP members to engage in more reflective and deeper conversations about their concerns and the high and low points that occur with the first years of learning to teach, the CoP facilitator would need to more critically shape the conversation by incorporating other forms of online communication (e.g., the use of headphones and microphones) for sustained discussions around a question, concern, or case study that would elicit deeper conversations. Cashman, Linehan, and Rosser (2007) indicate that the CoP facilitator must be able to not only organize or bring the CoP members together, but to oversee the products and work output of the CoP as well.
The CoP members’ technology problems also interfered at times with full participation in the online chats. Some members had difficulty with Internet connections and some had computer problems that caused them to “leave” during a chat session. At times it was not clear to the facilitator if the participants were still online or if they had technology issues and were trying to re-join the chat session. These challenges would not exist with a CoP that only met in a face-to-face format.

Finally, another challenge for the researcher was making decisions about the amount of time the CoP needed to meet (e.g., face-to-face and/or online) in order for the members to trust each other enough to share information about complex situations or experiences in their practice (Buysse et al., 2001). More frequent and lengthier face-to-face and online chat sessions may encourage CoP members to engage in deeper conversations and to develop new knowledge and products that could be shared with the field. Recent studies investigating the issues that impact teachers’ membership in professional online communities found several barriers: (a) lack of access, (b) lack of time, (c) lack of technology support, (d) lack of input (e) lack of reflection with other teachers about practices, (f) isolated working culture, (g) preferences for face-to-face interactions, (h) mistrust of the institution sponsoring the professional online community (Baek & Schwen, 2006; Riverin & Stacey, 2008). These challenges are presented not as discouragements but as relevant issues for teacher educators or others involved in new teacher induction to thoughtfully address in designing and implementing an online CoP as an induction activity.

**Multiple Roles: Researcher, Facilitator, and Course Instructor**

The researcher kept a journal throughout this study to write about and reflect on the multiple roles that she held throughout this study. Journal entries included concerns about
recruiting enough participants, keeping participants engaged in the CoP, communicating with participants during the online chat sessions, and the learning process for facilitating an online CoP. The researcher had been the instructor for an ECSE class that all EC majors completed during their senior year at UIUC (8 of the 9 CoP participants had this class). The role of past course instructor held possible positive implications for the success of the CoP (e.g., most participants already knew the primary investigator) or negative implications (e.g., participants’ fear of saying something in direct opposition to the beliefs and practices espoused by the instructor). The researcher was concerned about issues of power between instructors and students hoping that their previous relationship as students and teacher would not negatively impact participants’ ability to form a CoP and openly discuss issues that were important to them as novice EC teachers. The researcher intentionally engaged the CoP members in decisions about the structure of the CoP (including topics), meeting time, and dates for chat sessions and the final meeting. Remarkably, participants appeared to openly discuss issues, problems, and concerns they were having in their classrooms and never referred to the facilitator as a course instructor during the duration of this study.

As the CoP facilitator the researcher was conscious about not appearing to be the group expert, but to be an active listener and guide (Babinski et al., 2001; Palinscar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford, & Brown, 1998). At times it was hard not to provide “solutions” or interject suggestions about how to “fix” a problem rather than allow CoP members to collaboratively problem solve with one another. The researcher typically provided encouraging comments, emotional support, or asked questions for clarification during online chats. At times, she reminded participants of recommended or evidence-based practices (e.g., the importance of using valid and reliable assessments when making decisions about children’s progress). The researcher
wanted topics to evolve from the CoP as “a joint enterprise” (Wenger, 1998) and not resemble a course syllabus with weekly content for members to prepare and discuss.

The researcher wanted participants to remain active in the CoP so flexibility and creating a climate where members shared ownership were important. The researcher posted most of the information on the Moodle site. This may have been due to the multiple roles she played in the CoP which put her more “in charge” of the site. Considering the unique circumstances surrounding the design of the online CoP in this study, several participants did assume leadership within the CoP (e.g., inviting a guest expert to join the group, offering to host the final face-to-face meeting). In an online CoP the facilitator must consciously invite the members to engage in shared decision-making about topics, meetings, and other logistics and remain open to the members’ needs and situations outside of the CoP (Baek & Schwen, 2006).

Two documents were especially helpful to the facilitator during this study. The Community of Practice Development Manual (Gotto et al., 2009) provided information about the process involved in the development of a large online CoP for families of individuals with disabilities. The second document, Communities of Practice Indicators Worksheet (Winton & Ferris, 2008), was valuable in informing the researcher about which indicators of a CoP fit this particular online CoP and which were not met. These documents informed the researcher about what a CoP should “do” or “be” as opposed to other types of groups. According to the Community of Practice Indicators Worksheet (Winton & Ferris, 2008) the novice EC teachers online CoP met several indicators in the areas of (a) joint enterprise, (b) diverse membership, (c) mutuality/sense of community, (d) sharing and exchanging knowledge, and (e) reflection. Indicators that were not met were: (a) members assist in running the CoP, (b) members receive coaching or mentoring from other members of the community, (c) new members join the CoP,
(d) the CoP extends beyond the current time/place/members, and (e) the level of activity of the CoP ebbs and flows over time. Further exploration of qualities deemed to be important for a facilitator of a successful online CoP (e.g., one that meets all of the checklist indicators) should be pursued in future research.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that must be addressed. The small sample size and the fact that all the participants lived in the same state impact generality. Also, TSES and interview results are based on participants’ self-report. Other artifacts such as videos or notes from field-based observations of participants as they interacted with children in their classrooms were not examined. In addition, information from other important stakeholders (e.g., administrators, colleagues, children’s parents) about participants’ support of young children’s social emotional development or the practices they engage in to address challenging behavior were not examined.

Limitations also include the possibility of participants’ providing socially desirable responses on the TSES, during interviews, and in face-to-face meetings. Eight participants knew the researcher as a course instructor and this familiarity may have influenced their responses. All participants received two professional books (of their choice) and a $200.00 honorarium for participating in the study. These incentives could have impacted their retention as members of the online CoP, positive responses to questions concerning their experiences in the online CoP, and positive feedback regarding the facilitator’s role in the online CoP. These limitations should be taken into consideration when evaluating the findings from this study.
Implications for Practice

The results of this study indicate that novice EC teachers are provided with mentoring and induction activities in their workplace. The participants in this study described working in collaborative school contexts where they relied on resources and supports in their school such as other teachers, specialists, mentors, and administrators. They differed from novice teachers in other studies who feared asking for help from colleagues at their school (Johnson et al., 2004; Merseth, 1991). Beginning EC teachers in Illinois are currently experiencing stress due to state budget problems and school district reductions in teaching personnel. The state has not paid money owed to school districts during 2009-2010 so Pre-K teachers’ positions (which are largely funded by state grants) are not guaranteed for the 2010-2011 school year. The current state budget includes a 16% reduction in funds ($48 million) for Preschool for All, the state sponsored early childhood block grant program that funds Pre-K programs and infant and toddler services. Several Pre-K programs closed this year and there may be more closures in the next school year (Ounce of Prevention Fund, 2010). The participants in this study were all committed to teaching but some employed in Pre-K classrooms were actively seeking positions in early childhood special education, kindergarten or primary classrooms as they anticipated possible job cuts.

Facilitating an online CoP for novice EC teachers could be one way for teacher educators to continue to support novice teachers as they encounter new situations (ones they may not have had experience with during their teacher education program) with young children with disabilities and/or challenging behavior in their classrooms. Sharing emotional support, resources, and strategies can assist novice EC teachers as they transition into the profession (Hough, Smithey & Evertson, 2004; Klecka et al., 2004; Metiri Group, 2009; Schlager et al., 1998). An online CoP specifically tailored toward novice EC teachers can provide a different
type of induction activity from those offered by a school district that must serve a diverse group of new employees.

The novice EC teachers all remained members of the online CoP for the duration of this study. Clearly the online CoP met a need for them or they would not have continued to participate for 14 weeks. Offering a variety of options (one-to-one mentors, induction meetings, online CoP, face-to-face CoP) to specifically support new EC teachers at the beginning of their teaching career has the potential to positively impact the quality of education young children receive during their critical first years of schooling. This can in turn result in positive outcomes for children as they continue in school and community programs.

**Implications for Research**

The use of technology in teacher education and in professional development for practicing teachers is rapidly changing the work of teacher educators (Barton & Wolery, 2007; Dymond et al., 2008; Frey, 2009; Sindelar et al., 2010). Students now enter higher education using technology on a daily basis for social networking, online chats, courses, and collaboration on projects through shared documents posted on the web. Some teachers are receiving their entire teaching degrees through online coursework (Sindelar et al., 2010). As teacher educators and professional development providers use more forms of technology in delivering content (e.g., podcasts, webinars) there will be a need for research to examine what methods are most efficient and effective in supporting novice teachers as they progress through their beginning years of teaching. Research needs to address how to create “communities” through online technology that will allow novice teachers to feel supported as they learn to teach. Other studies could examine the role of the CoP facilitator, the ideal number and format of CoP meetings, and
the value of using tools like the Communities of Practice Indicators Worksheet (Winton & Ferris, 2008) as factors that influence the success of an online CoP. Pairing CoP discussions classroom observations as novice EC teachers interact with young children will provide more information about practices that participants use to support young children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior. CoP members could post video clips of their classroom and students in order to present visual as well as written descriptions of situations they encounter. CoP members could then provide feedback, ideas, resources, and strategies to assist colleagues in the groups. Researchers could examine changes in the use of evidence-based practices that occur in teachers’ classrooms as a result of CoP discussions that include classroom videos.

Finally future research could compare a control group of beginning EC teachers who engage in traditional induction and mentoring activities offered by their school district with an intervention group that participates in an online CoP as an additional induction activity. This comparison could assess the value of the online CoP to novice EC teachers.

Conclusion

The nine novice EC teachers who participated in this study reported that they had taught or were teaching young children with challenging behavior. They reported using recommended practices in their classrooms to promote children’s social emotional competence. Participants indicated that they relied on school based resources and supports to assist them in addressing children’s challenging behaviors. All participants reported they found value in belonging to the online CoP implemented in the current study. More research is needed to examine and to
investigate the creative use of technology to enhance mentoring and induction activities specifically tailored for novice EC teachers.
References


Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer

Department of Special Education

Beginning Early Childhood Teacher Research Study

Building Competence and Supporting Beginning Early Childhood Teachers

- Are you a certified early childhood teacher with less than five years of classroom experience?
- Are you interested in increasing your knowledge and skills regarding how to enhance young children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior?
- Are you interested in participating in an online discussion group with other beginning early childhood teachers?
- Enrollment in the study is free and stipends are available for participants who complete all study requirements.

If you are a beginning teacher interested in learning more about enrolling in this study please contact:

Bernadette Laumann          phone: 217.244.3551          e-mail: blaumann@illinois.edu
Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

Dear ,

I am very excited that you will be participating in the UIUC Beginning Early Childhood Teacher Research Study. I appreciate your willingness to contribute your knowledge and experiences regarding teaching young children. I also believe that you will benefit from the knowledge and support from other beginning teachers as we discuss topics of interest in the online discussion group and at the two face-to-face meetings. It is my hope that all the participants and the children they teach will derive professional and personal benefits from participating in this study.

I have enclosed a participant consent form for you to sign and mail back to me in the stamped, addressed envelope. This consent form is required in order to participate in research through the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Please call (217.244.3551) or send me an email: blaumann@illinois.edu if you have any questions about the consent form or the research study.

Sincerely,

Bernie Laumann
Participant Consent Form

Department of Special Education
College of Education
288 Education Building, MC-708
1310 South Sixth Street
Champaign, Illinois  61820

Sept., 2009

Dear Educator,

This research study conducted by Dr. Micki Ostrosky, Professor in Early Childhood Special Education, and Ms. Bernadette Laumann, Instructor in the Department of Special Education, is designed to learn more specifically about how to support novice early childhood teachers in their efforts to enhance young children’s social emotional development and address challenging behavior. Dr. Ostrosky has been a member of the University of Illinois faculty for several years. She is engaged in research, teaching, and service activities that support the preparation of future teachers and the professional development of current teachers of young children with disabilities and their families. You may read more information about Dr. Ostrosky on her web site: http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/frp/o/ostrosky.

We are inviting you to participate in this particular research project which is part of Ms. Laumann’s doctoral dissertation. In this project, you will be expected to participate in all of the following tasks:

1) Complete and return 2 written questionnaires during fall, 2009. The approximate time for completing all written questionnaires is 40 minutes. These questionnaires will be updated during spring, 2010.

2) Complete an initial and final telephone interview. Each telephone interview will take approximately 30 minutes. The telephone interviews will be audio-taped.

3) Attend two face-to-face group meetings to be held at the University of Illinois College of Education in Champaign, IL. These meetings will be held on a Saturday and will take approximately 3 hours. One meeting will take place during Fall, 2009 at the University of Illinois College of Education in Champaign, IL and the other meeting will take place in Spring, 2010 either in Champaign, IL or at another location convenient to the online discussion group participants.

4) Participate in an online beginning teacher discussion group that focuses on the topic of developing young children’s social emotional competence and other topics of interest to the group participants. The online discussion group will meet via the Internet for one hour once a week for 12 weeks. You will be asked to sign an additional confidentiality agreement clarifying professional conduct for the online discussion group.

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Participant Consent Form

You will be given a stipend of $200.00 and two professional books upon completion of all of the above participant tasks. A light meal will be served during the two face-to-face group meetings. You will also be reimbursed for gas mileage for the two face-to-face meetings.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary, and we do not anticipate any risk greater than what is experienced in normal life. You are free to withdraw at any time and for any reason without penalty. You are also free to refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Your choice to participate or not in this research project will not impact your job or your relationship with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The risks associated with participating in this study are no greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily professional life. Individual participants may benefit from the activities in this study and others in the field (e.g., teacher educators, administrators, professional development personnel, and other beginning teachers and their students) may benefit from the information that results from this research study. We also hope that you will enjoy the opportunities for professional interactions with colleagues.

Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation of this research. Pseudonyms will be used for any identifying information in the dissemination of the research results.

You will receive a copy of the research results after this project is completed, should you request one. All information obtained from this research project will be kept strictly secure and confidential. Results from this research may be included in an academic paper, journal article, and/or conference presentation, but no identifying information will be included in any dissemination of the research.

Please indicate below whether you give your consent to participate in this project. You will be given a copy of this form for your own files. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Ms. Bernadette Laumann by telephone (217) 244-3551 or by e-mail at blaumann@illinois.edu. You may also contact Dr. Micki Ostrosky by telephone (217) 333-0260 or e-mail at ostrosky@illinois.edu or Ms. Anne S. Robertson by telephone at (217) 333-3023 or by e-mail at arobrtsn@illinois.edu at the Office of School University Research Relations for any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Sincerely,

Bernadette Laumann, Ed.M. Micki Ostrosky, Ph.D.
Participant Consent Form

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____________________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________

I understand that the two telephone interviews will be audio-taped for transcription only and that no identifying information will be contained in the written transcripts.

Signature: _____________________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________

I understand that transcriptions of the online discussion group will be printed solely for the purpose of this research study. No identifying information will be used in the dissemination of the research results of this project during presentations at professional meetings or in journal articles.

Signature: _____________________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Please indicate below if you would like to receive a written copy of the research results.

_______ Yes, I would like a written copy of the research results.

_______ No, I am not interested in receiving a copy of the results.
Appendix C

Online Community of Practice Policies

Online Community of Practice Policies

Adapted from the Novice Teacher Support Project-Electronic Mentoring User’s Policy

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

All members of the Novice Early Childhood Teachers Research Project are required to adhere to the online discussion group policies. These policies are designed to ensure confidentiality for the students, families, and colleagues of the discussion group members.

1. To preserve the confidentiality and privacy of group participants, message texts may not be shared or used as documentation for any reason. Usernames and passwords are unique and may not be shared. Sharing user names and passwords directly violates the privacy of the relationships among project participants. A breach in the security of the online discussion group may result in restricted access to this group.

2. Refrain from posting any personal information about oneself or others. This includes addresses, phone numbers, Social Security numbers, students’ names, their families’ names, colleagues’ names or schools’ names in messages posted to the website or during online discussions. Participants are reminded that, although the site is password protected, confidential information should not be shared in this space.

3. Conversations in the online discussion group are accessible to all the members. Participants are reminded that any online medium can never be deemed completely private. The risk to participants

4. Weekly online discussions will be facilitated by Ms. Laumann, the primary researcher. The views of the facilitator and the participants in this environment do not represent those of the University of Illinois or any of its partner organizations.

5. Participants must take responsibility for what they post to the online discussion group. Users participate at their own risk.

6. Explicit language that is obscene, racist, or sexist is not allowed. The researchers reserve the right to remove any posting that is off-subject, hateful, harassing, abusive, or deemed inappropriate by the facilitator. Online activity interpreted as stalking is prohibited, and such activity will be reported to the appropriate authorities.

7. The online discussion texts and postings will be saved and used as data for this research project. Names will not be used in order to preserve confidentiality of participants. Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw from participating at any time without penalty.
Online Community of Practice Policies

8. Refusal to participate in this research project in no way impacts your current or future teaching position(s) or your relationship with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. If you have any questions about the online discussion group, please contact the primary researcher and online discussion facilitator, Ms. Bernadette Laumann at 217/244-3551 or blaumann@illinois.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research project, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217/333-2670 (collect calls are accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

9. By posting to the online discussion group you agree to the conditions of the users’ policy. Enforcement of the terms of use is at the discretion of Dr. Ostrosky and Ms. Laumann.

Please read the following statements and indicate your acceptance of these guidelines by signing below:

I have read and understand the importance of adhering to the Novice Early Childhood Teachers Online Discussion Group Policies. This includes the importance of maintaining confidentiality for the students, families, colleagues, and fellow members of the online discussion group.

I am aware that the weekly online discussions will be saved and printed for use as data in this research project.

Signature: _______________________________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________________________
Online Community of Practice Policies

Department of Special Education
College of Education
288 Education Building, MC-708
1310 South Sixth Street
Champaign, Illinois  61820

Novice Early Childhood Teachers Online Community of Practice Participant Contract

I ________________________________ understand that as a member of the Beginning
(Participant’s Name)
Early Childhood Teachers Internet-based discussion group I am expected to:

Log on to the Novice Early Childhood Teachers Moodle web site at the agreed upon time
for one hour each week for 12 weeks.

Engage in meaningful discussion and positive support of my fellow group members
around the topic of enhancing young children’s social emotional development, addressing
challenging behavior, and other topics of interest to the group.

Maintain confidentiality by not using identifying information when discussing specific
families, children, or colleagues during telephone interviews, Internet-based, and face-to-
face meetings with the researcher and any other research project participants.

Attend and participate in two face-to-face meetings to be held at the UIUC College of
Education or in another convenient location with the other members of the discussion
group and the researcher.

I understand that if I do not fulfill all of the above obligations I will not be eligible for the
$200.00 stipend and two professional resource books that are offered to the Internet-based
discussion group members.

I will contact the researcher via phone or e-mail if I have any questions throughout this project. I
am aware that I may withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. I will receive a copy
of this signed contract as verification that I agree to fulfill the research participant requirements
as stated in this document.

________________________                                          ______________________________
(Participant’s Signature)                                                                                (Primary researcher’s signature)

_______________________________                                                           _______________________________
(Date)                 (Date)
Appendix D

Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale
(Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001)

Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Beliefs</th>
<th>How Much Can You Do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well on school work?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Beliefs</th>
<th>How Much Can You Do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. How much can you do to improve the Understanding of a student who is failing?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire lesson?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. How well can you respond to defiant students?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Questionnaire

By completing this questionnaire you will help me learn more about beginning early childhood teachers and their classroom practices. Please select the answer that is most appropriate for you. In the open-ended responses provide as much detail as you feel comfortable sharing. All the information you provide in this questionnaire is confidential. Feel free to skip any items that you do not feel comfortable answering.

Section I. Demographic Information

1. What is your age? ____________

2. Indicate all teacher certifications you currently hold:
   - Type 04 (Early Childhood Ed) with Early Childhood Special Education Approval
   - Type 03 (Elementary Education)
   - Learning and Behavior Specialist 1 (Special Education)
   - Other (please specify): ________________________________________________

3. Please indicate the extent to which young children with challenging behavior are included in your classroom:
   - Children with challenging behavior spend most (50% or more) of their school day in my classroom with children who are typically developing
   - Children with challenging behavior are taught in the same building; however they spend less than 50% of their school day in my classroom with children who are typically developing
   - Children with challenging behavior are served in a separate classroom or other setting and do not spend any part of their school day in my classroom with children who are typically developing
   - All of the children in my classroom engage in challenging behavior
   - Other (please describe): ________________________________________________

4. Are you a case manager for any children with IEPs?
   - Yes
   - No
Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Questionnaire

5. How many years have you worked in early childhood settings?
   □ Less than one year
   □ 1-2 years
   □ 2 or more years

6. How many years have you worked in your current teaching position?
   □ Less than one year
   □ 1-2 years
   □ 2-3 years
   □ 3-4 years
   □ 4 or more years

Section II. Teaching Children with Challenging Behavior

7. How competent do you feel addressing children’s challenging behavior in your classroom?
   □ Not at all competent
   □ Somewhat competent
   □ Very competent
8. Indicate the extent to which each of the following behaviors occurs in your classroom. List any additional behaviors that are not listed in the table. Then in the last column check the three behaviors that occur most frequently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Check the three behaviors that make it most difficult for you to feel successful in your teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurting other children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurting adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurting self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tantrums</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destruction of property</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not following directions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whining</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking things away from other children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running out of classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others: please list</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Hemmeter & Corso, 2005)
Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Questionnaire

9. Indicate which of the following components of your undergraduate teacher education program you believe prepared you to engage in classroom practices that enhance young children’s social emotional competence and address children’s challenging behavior (check all that apply).

☐ Courses (readings, lectures, activities, and assignments) that included strategies for enhancing young children’s social emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior

☐ Field-based experiences (e.g. practicum, student teaching) where cooperating professionals modeled strategies for enhancing young children’s social emotional behavior and addressing challenging behavior

☐ Discussions with college/university supervisors (e.g., practicum supervisor) about strategies for enhancing young children’s social emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior

☐ Other (please describe): ______________________________________

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.
Appendix F
Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Telephone Interviews

Novice Early Childhood Teachers’
Initial Telephone Interview

Thank you for participating in this telephone interview. This initial interview will help me better understand the types of classrooms where beginning early childhood teachers are currently teaching. The interview provides an opportunity for me to learn in-depth information about you as a beginning early childhood professional, your current practices with regard to supporting children’s social emotional development, and the types of support you are receiving in your school or district with regard to addressing children’s challenging behavior.

I am audio-taping our conversation. The audio-tape will be transcribed by me. All of your responses will be kept confidential. I will email you a copy of the transcript for you to add any additional information that you believe needs to be included or to further clarify any statements you made during our phone conversation. You will then have 72 hours to make any changes to the transcript and return it to me. If I do not hear from you within those 72 hours I will assume that you have no corrections and approve of the transcript. You may refuse to answer any questions during this interview. Do you have any questions? Do I have your approval to proceed with audio-taping this interview?

******************************************************************************

1. Describe your current classroom.

   a). Number of adults assigned to classroom (e.g., paraprofessional, volunteers, university students, support staff, etc.).
Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Telephone Interviews

b). Type of program (e.g., Pre-K., Early Childhood Special Education Program, Inclusive program, Kindergarten class, First grade, etc.).
c). Number and age range of children enrolled in your classroom.

2. Describe the general working conditions at your school or program (e.g., classroom supplies, materials, access to copy machines, administrative or other types of support available for staff members).

*probe: Would you describe the working conditions as excellent, adequate, or inadequate?

3. Some beginning teachers are engaged in a “system of induction that includes a network of supports, people, and processes that are all focused on assuring that novice teachers become effective in their work” (Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005, p. 4). The system of induction helps the beginning teacher progress from the role of a student teacher to a professional teacher. One very common induction activity is for schools or school districts to assign a one-to-one mentor (an experienced teacher) to each beginning teacher. If you have an assigned mentor please describe your relationship with your mentor.

3a) If you have a mentor describe his/her training and any training or experience he/she has had that you believe prepared him/her to be a mentor to a beginning early childhood teacher.

3b) Are there other professionals who support you in your new role as an early childhood teacher? If so, describe these professionals and their role in supporting you as a teacher.

4. Other induction activities for new teachers include attending new teacher workshops, meetings, or seminars either through your district or another source of professional development (e.g., Regional Office of Education, StarNet, NAEYC or DEC conferences, on-line teacher web sites, etc.). Please tell me about any experiences you have had with these types of induction activities.

   a) Have any of these induction activities specifically addressed supporting young children’s social emotional development? If so, please describe the activity(ies).

   b) Have any of these activities specifically addressed teaching young children with challenging behavior? If so, please describe the activity(ies).
Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Telephone Interviews

During the next part of this interview I will be asking you to reflect on your current teaching practices with regard to children’s social and emotional development.

5. Describe any particular strategies and/or methods you currently use in your classroom to support the social emotional development of your students.

6. Describe any particular strategies and/or methods you currently use in your classroom to address children’s challenging behavior.

7. a). Are there any children in your classroom who consistently engage in challenging behavior?

b). If yes, please describe them.

8. What strategies or methods have you found to be successful in addressing these challenging behaviors?

9. Describe any resources you have used or would use to assist you in addressing a student’s challenging behavior. (Let interviewee respond first and if they do not have any response use this prompt: “These resources could be consulting with a mentor teacher or another staff member, books, articles, web cites, etc.”)

10. What are three goals you have for yourself this year with regard to enhancing children’s social emotional competence?

11. Are these goals listed in the order of their importance to you?

12 a). If not, how would you rank order them from most to least important?

b). You have indicated the supports and resources you plan to use in order to assist you in addressing these goals. Which of these supports and resources do you believe will be the most helpful to you as you work on achieving your goals?
Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Telephone Interviews

You indicated that you are willing to participate in an on-line discussion group of novice early childhood teachers that would share information and support one another with regard to enhancing the development of young children’s social emotional skills, addressing challenging behavior and other issues that may impact teaching practices. I would like to ask you a few questions about participating in this group. In essence this on-line group will be a community of practice. Community of practices are “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and come together regularly to learn how to do it better” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p.4).

13. Have you ever participated in a community of practice or other similar group?

14. What do you believe are the most important reasons for beginning early childhood teachers to participate in an on-line community of practice?

15. What do you hope to gain from participating in this group?

16. What do you hope to contribute to this group?

17. What questions do you have about participating in the on-line community of practice?

18. Is there any other information you would like to share about your expectations for the on-line community of practice?
Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Telephone Interviews

I have some demographic information that I would like to gather from you. You may choose not to answer any of these items. I am asking about this information in order to better describe the participants in this study. Your responses will be confidential.

1. How would you describe your cultural and linguistic background (e.g., African-American, Latina/o, European-American, Asian-American, other. . .)?

2. What is the geographic location of your current classroom (e.g., urban, suburban, rural)?

************************************************************************

Now I need to verify your email address in order to send you a transcript of our conversation. (Write address here to make sure spelling is correct). When you receive the transcript you can add more information to your responses and/or note that everything we discussed was accurately transcribed. If you do not return the transcript or contact me about making changes to your responses within 72 hours, I will assume that you are satisfied with your responses to the interview questions as they appear on the transcript. Is there anything further you want to add to this interview?

Thank you for completing this telephone interview. I look forward to seeing you on Oct. 17th.
Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Final Telephone Interview

Thank you for participating in this final telephone interview. This final interview will help the primary investigator learn about what impact your participation in the on-line community of practice for beginning teachers had upon your classroom practices. The primary investigator is also very interested in what other supports and resources you believe were important in helping you attain your goals this year with regard to promoting children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior. I am audio-taping our conversation and it will later be transcribed by a professional transcriber. You will be sent a copy of the transcript in order to add any additional information that you believe needs to be included or to further clarify any statements you made during our phone conversation. You may refuse to answer any questions during this interview. Do I have your approval to proceed with audio-taping this interview?

Let’s review the 3 goals you had listed last fall as priorities for you this year in order to support your students’ social emotional competence and to address students’ challenging behaviors. (Read goals to the participant and have them rate each goal (1, 2, 3).

1). How well do you believe you have achieved these goals so far? (Read goals to interviewee).

Please give one rating to each goal: 1 (not attained), 2 (still working on it), or 3 (attained).

a) Goal #1:

Rating:  1   2   3

b) Goal #2:

Rating:  1   2   3
Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Telephone Interviews

c) Goal #3:

Rating: 1 2 3

2). What resources and supports do you believe were most helpful to you in working on these goals this school year? (e.g., resources can be other professionals in your school, administrators, workshops, books, mentor teacher, online community, etc.)

3). Describe any specific examples of how you were able to use those resources and supports to assist you in accomplishing these goals.

4). Describe any barriers or challenges you encountered that may have hindered you from achieving these goals.

5). Please share any other information you believe would be helpful to understanding your experiences this year as you worked toward achieving these goals.

6). How would you describe your current level of competence with regard to engaging in classroom practices that enhance young children’s social emotional competence and address children’s challenging behavior (Circle one)

    Not at all competent    Somewhat competent    Very competent
7). Describe those factor(s) (e.g., a mentor, support personnel, workshops, classroom experiences, colleagues, online community etc.) you believe have had the most influence during this school year on your current sense of competence with regard to supporting young children’s social and emotional development and addressing challenging behavior?

*******************************************************************

Now I would like you to specifically discuss your experiences as a member of the online community of practice. A community of practice is a “group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and come together regularly to learn how to do it better”(Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p.4). Your candid responses to these items will help to improve future online professional development opportunities for other beginning early childhood teachers.

8). During the initial interview last fall you indicated you hoped to gain the following from participating in the online community of practice (read this to the participant)

How well do you believe these have been achieved? (1=not achieved, 2= somewhat achieved, 3=achieved) (Circle one)

a) Rating:  

1  2  3

b) Rating:  

1  2  3
9). Describe your positive experiences as a result of participating in the online community of practice.

10). Has participating in the online community resulted in enhancing your sense of efficacy in supporting young children’s social emotional development and addressing challenging behavior?

10. (a). If yes, please describe.

11). Has participating in the online community resulted in enhancing your sense of efficacy in any other aspect of your teaching practice?

11.(a). If yes, please describe.

12). Describe your negative experiences as a result of participating in the online community of practice.

13). What (if any) specific changes would you recommend for improving future online communities of practice with beginning early childhood teachers? (e.g., format, number of online chats, length of chat sessions, number of members, incentives for participating in the online community, etc.)
Novice Early Childhood Teachers’ Telephone Interviews

14). What (if any) specific changes would you recommend with regard to the role of the online facilitator? (e.g., length and format of face to face meetings, sharing leadership with the members, providing positive support and resources, inviting guests to the community, etc.)

15). Would you recommend participating in an online community of practice to other novice early childhood teachers? Why or why not?

16). Please share any other information you believe would be helpful in understanding your particular experiences as a member of the novice early childhood teachers’ online community of practice.

********************************************************************

Now I need to verify your address in order to send you a transcript of our conversation.

Email:

When you receive the transcript you can add more information to your responses and/or note that everything we discussed was accurately transcribed. If you do not return the transcript or contact me about making changes to your responses within 72 hours, I will assume that you are satisfied with your responses to the interview questions as they appear on the transcript.

Do you have any questions for me about the transcripts or any other part of the study?

Is there anything you want to add about participating in the online community of practice?

Thank you again for completing this telephone interview and participating in the study.
Appendix G

Online Community of Practice Face-to-Face Meetings

Online Community of Practice Initial Face-to-Face Meeting

Oct. 17, 2009

Agenda

1. Meet and Greet

2. Review Agenda (add anything?)

   Complete Questionnaires

   Log on to IL New Teacher Collaborative Website

3. What is a Community of Practice?

   Mission/Goals/Outcomes

   Logistics: format/dates/times/topics/guest experts/resources/final meeting?

4. UIUC forms (Vendor, Honorarium, INTC on-line, contract)

5. Wrap-up/professional books
Online Community of Practice Face-to-Face Meetings

*Initial Face-to-Face Meeting Summary Notes*

*Oct. 17, 2009*

1. Scott helped members log into INTC site and practice using Moodle; They will upload their own photos to the Moodle site when they get home.

Completed Demographic Questionnaire and TSES

2. Decided on the following meeting time: 8:30-9:30 p.m. (Mondays)

Meeting dates: 10/19, 10/26, 11/2, 11/9, 11/16, 12/7, 12/14, 1/4, 1/11, 1/25, 2/1, 2/8, 2/22, 3/1

3. Discussed CoP values/vision

Community of Practice Handout

What do we value? What’s our vision for this group?
- Educating each other to be better educators
- Sharing resources
- Working through struggles without bias
- Network of knowing people (i.e. for moves)
- Having people in the same boat as opposed to various people in your district
- Shared philosophy that you got at UIUC (common language)
- Share day-to-day strategies
- Working with different types of parents and communities
- Efficiency – how to deal during crunch times
- Share experiences/strategies with kids in SPED or ELL

4. Set CoP Group Goals

a) To educate one another to become better teachers by sharing resources and working through specific problems and struggles in our daily practice
b) To become more knowledgeable and skilled at teaching diverse students (e.g., children with disabilities and/or children who are English Language Learners) and to learn how to communicate effectively with diverse families and communities.
c) To provide support to one another by sharing day-to-day strategies and improve efficiencies (e.g., completing paperwork, holding
Online Community of Practice Face-to-Face Meetings

parent/teacher conferences, etc.) in order to manage particularly difficult crunch times during the school year.

d) To build a network of colleagues who share a set of similar beliefs about teaching young children in order to provide one another with information and ideas for professional development, possible job opportunities, access to resources, and other topics of interest.

5. Completed UIUC forms (Consent forms, honorarium form, vendor form)

6. Distributed professional books; received requests from those who had not sent in a book request
Online Community of Practice Face-to-Face Meetings

Online Community of Practice Final Face-to-Face Meeting Agenda

Location: The Center

March 6, 2010

(11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.)

1. Greetings/Ice Breaker

2. Complete Paper Work (TSES; UIUC Honorarium forms)

3. Discuss CoP Goals (How well did we attain our goals?)

4. Community of Practice Characteristics (Did we meet the criteria for a CoP?)

5. Future online CoP’s for Beginning EC Teachers: What to keep/not keep?

6. Any issues or concerns to discuss?

7. Wrap-up
Online Community of Practice Face-to-Face Meetings

*Online Community of Practice Group Goals Evaluation*

1. To educate one another to become better teachers by sharing resources and working through specific problems and struggles in our daily practice.

2. To become more knowledgeable and skilled at teaching diverse students (e.g., children with disabilities and/or children who are English Language Learners) and to learn how to communicate effectively with diverse families and communities.

3. To provide support to one another by sharing day-to-day strategies and improve efficiencies (e.g., completing paperwork, holding parent/teacher conferences, etc.) in order to manage particularly difficult crunch times during the school year.

4. To build a network of colleagues who share a set of similar beliefs about teaching young children in order to provide one another with information and ideas for professional development, possible job opportunities, access to resources, and other topics of interest.

Questions about achieving group goals:

1. How well did we meet our goals?

2. How well did we address any specific problems or struggles in daily practice?

3. What aspects of the online community were supportive?

4. What else would have been helpful for the group to do in order to address these goals?

5. What else as a facilitator could I do in order to help the group address these goals?
Online Community of Practice Face-to-Face Meetings

What is a Community of Practice?

“*A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis*” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4).

- Connect people who might otherwise not be connected
- Provide a shared context for people to communicate and share info.
- Enable dialogue between people who have an interest in solving the same or similar problems
- Stimulate learning by serving as a vehicle for communication, mentoring, coaching, or self-reflection
- Capture and diffuse existing knowledge (experiential knowledge)
- Encourage free flow of ideas and info.
- Generate new knowledge and share it with others

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways are we a community of practice?

2. Future online communities: What to keep/not keep?
   - No. of meetings (online and face-to-face)?
   - Tech issues/platform?
   - No. of members?
   - Incentives?
   - Guest experts?
   - All UIUC graduates or open to others?
   - No. of yrs. teaching?
   - Other?
All participants attended the final meeting. The researcher recorded the group discussion.

Honorarium forms were completed and professional books were distributed to those who had sent their request before the meeting.

The handout with the CoP group goals was distributed. The members discussed how well the group goals were met and what group goals were not met.

Goal 1: The members agreed that many resources were shared during the online chats and via email. Sometimes it was hard to post resources to the Discussion Forum. A member shared a resource during the final face-to-face meeting.

Goal 2: The members shared knowledge about teaching specific children (e.g., young ELLs). Guest speakers were invited to the group and shared expertise and resources. A Behavior Analyst was invited to the group and shared ideas and resources about applied behavior analysis. It was helpful to hear about other people’s experiences.

Goal 3: The members shared ideas for improving efficiencies (paper work and planning for parent conferences, transitions for new children, etc.). Members could pick and chose topics—not formal like other district meetings. It was helpful to discuss parent conference ideas.

Goal 4: The members shared information about their programs. The members shared information with each other about professional development opportunities. Members learned about other schools and procedures. The CoP connected people who otherwise would not be connected.

The members gave the facilitator feedback about her role in the group:

- Facilitator got the conversation rolling; not formal

Suggestions for improvement:

- Start earlier in the year (Aug.) and continue meeting until to end of the year (June)
Online Community of Practice Face-to-Face Meetings

- have a face to face meeting in the middle of the school year
- bring in more guests (maybe one per month)
- include more primary grade teachers
- have a set of topics; can prepare ahead of time to discuss
- it would be interesting to visit the different schools
- people who went to other universities could be guests or have a mix of people from different universities
- hard to ask questions to guest speakers; maybe have them answer ahead of time on video and post it

6. Things to keep for future CoP:
   - keep the group small
   - keep the CoP flexible—don’t have to be involved in every session (coming to 12 of 14 allowed for flexibility)
   - good to take breaks (not meet every week); group chose the dates to meet
   - saved online chats; like to go back and read them
   - professional books were nice (instead of classroom materials)
   - reimbursement for mileage
   - liked that everyone was young; new to teaching; making mistakes together
   - keep it UIUC graduates

7. The members discussed other issues and concerns they were currently having in their schools and discussed possible resources to use to address them.
## Appendix H

### Benefits to Participating in an Online Community of Practice

*Benefits to Participating in an Online Community of Practice (Initial and Final Interviews)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Final Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>1. Knowing there is somebody else out there going through the same thing you are; you don’t feel like you’re alone.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Because there are so many different people you’re going to get different experiences, different perspectives, and you can listen to what they have and decide what would work best for you from the suggestions that you get.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>1. Getting new ideas.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. It’s some of the people I went to college with so it will be nice to reconnect and see how things are going with them and how they feel about teaching—a sense of community.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>1. Getting other peoples’ opinions, other teachers, you always want to collaborate with people . . . support them.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Just to learn, learn new strategies, learn what other teachers are going through.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>1. Just more background, more ideas. It’s good for teachers to keep always learning and to draw me out.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. To make me think more about my kids and what I’m doing for them and how I can help them.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: 1 = not achieved, 2 = somewhat achieved, 3 = achieved*
## Benefits to Participating in an Online Community of Practice (Initial and Final Interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Final Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>1. I hope to get better at what I do. I like to be reflective of myself and make sure that What I’m doing is not necessarily the best way but it is working. To make sure that I’m doing things that are helping the students.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. It’s good to hear that other people are having some of the same challenges I have.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>1. I hope that I can meet some more people that are going through the same things that I’m going through.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. To have support and have somebody to go to when I need help or suggestions on how to make my teaching better or my classroom better.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>1. To stay connected with people that are at your level . . . you’re probably having the same anxieties and experiences.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. To gain ideas from new teachers and what they’re doing in their buildings and what they’ve found from other teachers they work with; just relating to one another.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>1. To receive some advice and other situations that other people are having and how they’re handling it.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>1. I really hope that I will be able to learn different techniques, to talk, kind of have an outlet or pool of people from different places all around; talking to other teachers.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. I’m hoping to gain feedback and hopefully to give somebody else ideas, give ideas away.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* 1 = not achieved, 2 = somewhat achieved, 3 = achieved
Appendix I

Online Community of Practice Chat Session Codes

1. Providing emotional/personal support
2. Providing a specific resource (web site, book, workshop, person, curriculum, assessment)
3. Providing a specific strategy or idea (may include evaluation info. on the strategy)
4. Seeking info. managing efficiencies (p/t conf., team mtgs.)
5. Seeking info. specific child focused (disability, behavior, ELL, etc.)
6. Seeking info. assessment or curriculum focused
7. Seeking info. social/emotional strategies
8. Seeking info. challenging behavior (general)
9. Seeking info. parent issues
10. Seeking info. ELL & their families
11. Seeking or providing info. working with a colleague
12. Comments/seeking info. professional issues (i.e., RIF, budget cuts, new positions, job fairs/openings, grad programs, ESL certification, etc.)
13. General comments or questions (non teaching related; i.e. staying healthy)
14. General comments or questions (teaching related, general parent related, child absences, teacher/child ratios, etc.)
15. Sharing emotions/concerns/beliefs about teaching and learning
16. Seeking emotional support for self
17. Venting
18. Sharing info. about their particular program or school (how things work; includes demographic info., parent involvement programs, policies, etc.)
19. Comments about teacher preparation program and their preparedness to teach
20. Expressing appreciation (gratitude/complimenting/appreciating other members’ contributions)
21. Comments/Questions about online CoP issues (e.g., tech issues, computer problems, Moodle issues, internet connection, CoP goals, logistics, discussion forum, face to face meeting, etc.)
Online Community of Practice Chat Session Codes

*Online Community of Practice Chat Sessions: Themes, Sub-Codes, and Representative Quotes*

(Major themes and sub-codes are in bold)

1. **Provide Resources, Strategies, and information**
   - There are different web sites that are examples of fluency; Tumblebooks.com
   - It may help to have your administrator work with you to set up meeting protocols.

2. **Share Information About School or Program (includes policies, procedures)**
   - We have forms to fill out for a student that we believe needs interventions. Then we meet with our grade level teams and discuss an appropriate intervention, THEN we have to implement it for 8 weeks and get 6 data points, THEN we revisit.
   - Well, our district is trying to get us to use RtI, and we had been researching different approaches, but R&R [Recognition and Response] had ideas, but no data backing it yet.

3. **Seeking Information or Advice About a Topic or Issue (see sub-codes below)**
   a) **Assessment/Curriculum**
      - What kinds of things are on the checklist?
      - What all do you include in your portfolios?

   b) **Social Emotional Strategies & Challenging Behavior**
      - Do any of your schools use PBIS?
      - Is it wrong or frowned upon to have specific behavior management plans for certain children?

   c) **Student Focus** (specific and general; children with disabilities; English Language Learners)
      - Do you know any studies about retaining students who are ELL?
      - Do you think that teaching it in both languages would confuse them?

   d) **Collaborating with Colleagues**
      (includes supervising paraprofessionals, collaboration with specialists and other colleagues)
      - Do you have a clear defined job description for your assistants by your district?
      - Does the speech therapist do pull out?

   e) **Parents**
      (includes parent/teacher conferences; communication with parents)
Online Community of Practice Chat Session Codes

- Any advice for a new teacher about parent conferences?
- What about parents who are challenging but also aggressive?

f) Professional Issues
- On a side note if anyone knows any openings then please let me know; I’m starting the job search early.
- Is there a difference in getting your masters in bilingual ed, ESL, and ELL?

4. General Comments Related to Teaching
- I know that I appreciate a good Pre-K program! It’s always push, push, push for higher levels. And they’re losing the opportunity to build their social skills.
- We are their first look into school.

5. Emotions/Concerns/Beliefs about Teaching
- I feel the same. I have a lot of support in my school but from the district I feel like we are the forgotten school.
- So what do I do? I just try the best that I can and know that preschool is all about exposure. Well, let’s try to talk about this next time.

6. Provide Emotional/Personal Support/Appreciation
- That must be frustrating!
- Thank you for the ideas! I will use them and let you know how it goes.

7. Logistical/Technology Issues in CoP
- I’m working with computer delays so bear with me.
- Do you have Internet at home now?