

STUDENT AND SPONSOR-EDUCATOR RELATIONSHIPS
DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PRACTICUM

by

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ABSTRACT

The preparation of early childhood educators typically includes practicum experience, in which students work in community early childhood services side-by-side with agency staff in a manner similar to apprentices. Although practicum is widely considered to be critical in the preservice training, it is acknowledged that practicum experiences may have negative as well as positive effects on the students. Literature in the field has identified problem areas and proposed strategies to overcome the difficulties. One of the current approaches to improving the practicum experience is to consider the sponsor-educator (agency staff person) as a mentor to the student. However, little research has been conducted on the nature of the working relationship between the early childhood education (ECE) student and the sponsor-educator during practicum, in order to develop understanding of those elements that lead to success for the student.

An inquiry which followed a case study design with a phenomenological orientation was undertaken. The focus of the study was the working relationship between the ECE student and sponsor-educator during a practicum. Two cases (pairs of student-graduate and sponsor-educator) were studied, thus it was a multiple case study. Each participant and pair of participants was engaged in interviews to elicit descriptions of their perception of the working relationship. A focus group of all participants was held to review the preliminary data analysis and provide feedback. The goal of the inquiry was to discover and describe the components of a working relationship between a student and

sponsor-educator that contribute to successful learning experiences for the student in practicum.

From the inquiry themes relevant to the elements of the working relationship emerged. The themes are presented separately as: 1) themes from each pair of student-graduate and sponsor-educator, 2) themes common to both pairs or cases and 3) meta-themes of the elements of the working relationship. The first two are interpretations of the experience of the participants in the working relationship. The third are my interpretations of the elements which may offer some understanding of the significance of each to the effectiveness of the working relationship.

The meta-themes which emerged were then considered in the light of the ECE practicum experience and literature from the field in an attempt to better understand their significance. I then reflect on possible implications for ECE practica based on my interpretation of the participants' experience of the working relationship.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Research

This inquiry began several years ago, when as a practicum instructor, I strove to support early childhood education (ECE) students. Working with children is exciting and stimulating for these students. As a result they anticipate practicum for many weeks and months. Sometimes the experience fulfills their expectations; the student blossoms and is launched into a career well-prepared for the complexities and the challenges of the work. However, sometimes the practicum doesn't go well; the student flounders and the placement fails to come together in support of the student's learning. When students in the latter category graduate and continue in the field, it seems evident that the excitement, stimulation and quality of the preparation were not what they might have been.

These differences in the success of practicum were perplexing to me and in an attempt to understand those practicum that provide effective learning opportunities for the student, I undertook to study the working relationship between the student and the sponsor-educator in practicum settings. Further, because I was interested in the participants' views I decided to explore perceptions of the working relationship from both the student and the sponsor-educator experience. I wanted to discover and describe components of the working relationship between a student and sponsor-educator that contributed to successful learning experiences for the student in practicum. In order to obtain in-depth information about the nature of the relationship, I studied examples of

relationships which were exemplary in the view of the participants, and presumably instrumental in leading to the success of the student.

Chapter One: An Introduction to the Research provides an overview and a description of practicum, as well as presenting a summary of positive and negative aspects of practicum from previous research. It poses the problem of how to improve practicum for ECE students.

Chapter Two: Preparation for the Research Inquiry describes the preparation I undertook for the inquiry. It includes an overview of mentoring theory and supervision theory, and a summary comparison of some of the characteristics of the two theoretical bases. These theories provide the conceptual framework for the inquiry, and a basis of knowledge to support the understanding of information obtained in the study.

Chapter Three: Research Methods presents the approach taken in the inquiry. It explains the nature of case study and the reason for taking a phenomenological orientation in the study. Participant and case selection are described. The organizational context for each of the cases is addressed. Background information on the participants is included. The process of collecting data from individual and pair interviews is delineated, and the data analysis is described. The focus group meetings are explained, as well as the integration of information from the meetings into the data analysis.

Chapter Four: Analyzing the Case Studies: Themes within the Relationships introduces each of the cases in the study and reports the themes derived from the analysis of data. The themes are given meaning through the words of the participants themselves. A set of themes common to the two cases is presented.

Chapter Five: Interpretations: Considering Meta-themes through Theoretical

Lenses posits a pattern of those elements which are woven through the two cases. I draw on the theoretical bases of mentoring and supervision to support my understanding of the significance of each element, while using the words of the participants to give meaning to them.

Chapter Six: Reflections and Implications is a summary of the research inquiry as well as possible implications which arise from the study. Ideas and suggestions which might apply to similar situations and ways to improve practica for ECE students are discussed. Directions for further research on practicum are put forward. This chapter represents how I as an ECE instructor can best make use of the knowledge I have gained from the research.

Problem Statement

Practicum is widely recognized as a critical component in the preservice training of early childhood education (ECE) students. During practicum experiences, students work within community early childhood services side-by-side with agency staff who serve as models for practice and to whom the student is responsible (Brand, 1990; Collins, Kayser, & Tourse, 1994; Doxey, 1992a; Smith, 1990; Zeichner, 1990). "As the final step in a formal training program offering a certificate, degree, license, or credential, student teaching (practicum) completes a period during which exposure requires the synthesizing of all previous coursework, training, workshops, and background experience" (Machado & Botnarescue, 1993, p.2).

It is recognized that practicum experiences can have negative effects on ECE students as well as providing positive learning opportunities (Spodek, 1994). Problems in practicum have been identified as being the following: the lack of clarity of the roles and responsibilities of the sponsor-educator supervisors and the college instructors; the fact that although sponsor-educators have the most influence on students they are practice-oriented and tend to generalize about practice without a theoretical or research base; that in feedback sponsor-educators tend to give little explanation of practice (as opposed to discussion of the child); that there is a lack of exposure of students to teaching models that use rigorous analysis and collegiality; and, that the college instructors often fail to give adequate time to the students (Spodek, 1994). In some situations, where the student is a mature adult with previous work experience, the relationship between the student and the practicum supervisor is problematic, due to a sense of inequality on the part of the student and little validation of their previous experience (Mealyea, 1992) .

Personal experience as a college instructor in ECE has provided me with ample evidence of these problems described in the literature. In British Columbia community colleges, many ECE programs are nine to ten months in length. Provincial licensing requires that a large amount of theoretical content be included. All students must complete practicum as part of the training program. However, the short time frame tends to compress the theoretical and practical components. As a result, for many students the practicum fails to be the link between theory and practice, or the opportunity for the consolidation of competencies. Because the programs are short in duration it is crucial

that the time available be used effectively and that all efforts be made to have the learning experiences positive and long-lasting.

In attempting to overcome the difficulties and enhance the quality of the practicum experience for the student, various strategies have been suggested. For example, active involvement of students in reflective practice through evaluating skills, knowledge and attitudes is endorsed (Hoover, 1994; Zeichner, 1990). Having practicum sites accept their role as reflective and self-renewing institutions where students become socialized is recommended. As well, sponsor-educators require training and need to analyze their teaching supervision techniques (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988; Reid, 1994; Smith, 1990; Spodek, 1994). It is believed that an emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between knowledge and skill builds and enhances the link between higher education and training and thereby supports bridging theory and practice (Melton, 1995; Zeichner, 1990). Other proposals for improving the quality of the practicum include: enhancing student growth by developing supportive relationships with supervising teachers which include on-going coaching and consistent modeling (Smith, 1990); inclusion of specific practicum curriculum (Zeichner, 1990); focus on the goal of the student mastering effective teaching behaviours (Smith, 1990); and, the use of the practicum setting as the environment for a "cognitive apprenticeship" (Zeichner, 1990, p. 121) wherein the student is involved in authentic teaching activity (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Feiman-Nemser, Parker, & Zeichner, 1992).

In some ECE programs, attention has turned to the nature of the relationship between the student and the sponsor-educator and the use of the relationship as a catalyst

to enhance learning in the student. Provision of mentoring relationships for students has potential benefits. At the Ryerson Polytechnical Institute School of Early Childhood Education in Toronto, the field component has been redefined with the view that "...students should be involved in the active transformation and evaluation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions and that this can best be supported within a mentoring partnership involving faculty, field associates and students" (Doxey, 1992b, p.3). Within the field of early childhood education in general, discussion of the benefits of mentoring in preservice training as well as in professional development is increasingly common (Whitebook, Hnatiuk, & Bellm, 1994; Wood, 1994). However, the endorsement of mentoring is only one of the suggested ways of approaching the improvement of practicum experience for students.

The Value of the Study

Given the nature of the practicum and the inherent potential learning for the student it is important that the efficacy of the practicum be maximized. Therefore the focus of this study was to understand those elements within the student and sponsor-educator relationship that led to success for the student and use this understanding as a basis for making improvements to benefit student learning. Previous studies of ways to improve the practicum experience for ECE students have suggested the need to enhance the capacity of the student to develop greater understanding both of the practice being modeled by sponsor-educators and of their own knowledge, skills and attitudes. The link between the student's knowledge, skills and attitudes, and the understanding of practice

modeled is a critical one; one of the keys to creating and enhancing the link may be the working relationship between the student and the sponsor-educator. The working relationship is an element of practicum which has the capacity to be influenced by educational intervention. Therefore, the examination and description of how the relationship contributes to successful learning experiences for the student could provide insight into actual approaches or strategies for improving practicum.

This research explored two theoretical bases for the relationship between student and sponsor-educator, and examined in depth the working relationship between students and sponsor-educators during practicum. Because the field of early childhood education is composed predominantly of women, the relevance of the theory to women has been emphasized in reporting the study. Focusing the study on the working relationship between the student and sponsor-educator has illuminated and hopefully will lead to better understanding of the practicum experience for the student.

CHAPTER TWO

Preparation for the Research Inquiry

In preparation for the study of the working relationship between ECE students and sponsor-educators during practica, I investigated two theoretical bases: mentoring and supervision. I chose to study mentoring theory because of the increasingly common references to mentoring in the preparation of early childhood educators. On the other hand, field agency staff who work with college students in practicum have traditionally been referred to as supervisors, thus I also considered supervision theory. These theoretical perspectives provided a framework within which to examine the phenomenon of the working relationship. This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical bases and the significance of the theories in regard to ECE students in practicum.

Mentoring Theory

The Nature of Mentoring

The term mentor was derived "after Mentor, tutor of Telemachus in the *Odyssey* of Homer (fr. L., fr. Gk Mentor) 1: a close, trusted, and experienced counsellor or guide; 2: teacher, tutor, coach" (Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged (1964) in Porter, 1991, p. 46). Emerging from the story of Mentor in *The Odyssey* has come a definition for mentoring as "...the development of a leader through an individually delivered and intentional process that is supportive, nurturing, insightful, and protective" (Scott, 1992, p. 168). In current literature mentor often is used to refer to a male

(Jeruchim & Shapiro, 1992). A mentor is experienced in the field, and facilitates learning opportunities, as well as gives support and guidance to a less experienced person. The mentee or protégé is the person receiving the assistance of a mentor.

Benefits of Mentoring

Assistance to the mentee may take the form of career enhancement or psychological support (Ricks, Jamieson, & Rose, 1994). Psychosocial functions fulfilled by mentorship include the provision of role modeling, acceptance, confirmation, counselling and friendship, while career-related functions involve such aspects as sponsorship, exposure, visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Kram, 1983).

Numerous benefits of mentoring for the protege have been identified and include career advancement, particularly research collaboration in regard to academic careers, access to a role model, personal support, advice and information, values and ethics, technical knowledge, networking with professionals, professional development in relation to sense of direction and learning the subtleties of a profession, and personal identity (Burke & McKeen, 1990; Busch, 1985; Jeruchim & Shapiro, 1992; Scott, 1992; Speizer, 1981; Wright & Wright, 1987). Studies have also shown that successful managers in business derive more satisfaction from their career and work when they have had mentors (Roche, 1979). In business settings, it has been found that mentees are happier in their work, are more productive in their careers, are promoted more rapidly, are rated higher by their superiors and have their earnings increase faster (Busch, 1985).

A number of benefits to the mentor are evidenced as well, such as professional/career development, networking, personal identity (Wright & Wright, 1987), emotional satisfaction, technical assistance and psychological well-being, rejuvenation and creativity (Burke & McKeen, 1990; Busch, 1985). Mentors benefit in terms of "...emotional satisfaction, technical assistance and psychological well-being, growth of the mentor's reputation and rejuvenation and creativity" (Busch, 1985, p. 258).

Factors Affecting Success of Mentoring Programs

Factors which affect the success of mentoring include whether the program is formal or informal, and the personal characteristics of the mentee. A study comparing formal with informal mentorships concludes that "...protégés involved in informal mentorships reported more career-related support from mentors than protégés in formal mentorships" (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992, p. 630) as well as higher salaries. In situations where the mentor is assigned (formal mentorship) protégés reported receiving limited career functions but beneficial psychosocial outcomes such as feelings of acceptance and confirmation, a forum for exploring personal and professional dilemmas, and beneficial feedback from the assigned mentor (Noe, 1988b, p. 473).

Informal mentorships appear to be based more on interpersonal factors in which the individuals have a degree of affinity towards each other. Benefits of self-selection of mentors (informal mentorship) include the fact that individuals may seek a mentor with a more similar personality and interests which leads to a more compatible and productive relationship, and that freedom of choice may encourage participation in mentoring relationships by those who balk at compulsory involvement (Scott, 1992).

It was found that there may be differences between formal and informal programs in that the process of initiating the relationship may constrain the potential benefits of a mentorship. If the formal relationship is begun with a sense of obligation and forced participation there may be less benefit to the mentee because of a sense of being pressured into a relationship rather than an individual choice of relationship.

Management of a formal mentoring program should instill a climate of mutual interest and participation without obligating or intimidating participation ... accomplished by carefully outlining mentoring relationships and not promising specific benefits from participation or disadvantages from not participating. Once an organization has identified people interested in a formal mentorship, care must be exercised in the matching of protégés and mentors.

(Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992, p.634)

In formal mentoring programs it is important that the culture for mentoring be developed (Cunningham, 1994; Terrell, Hassess, & Duggar, 1992).

Personal factors of the mentee related to the success of mentoring include high level of job involvement and career planning activity, internal locus of control and the valuing of relationships with supervisors and peers at work (Noe, 1988a). A study concluded that mentees influence the amount of mentoring they receive.

Specifically, individuals with internal loci of control and high self-monitoring and emotional stability were more likely to initiate and therefore to receive mentoring. Additionally, mentoring received was related to both career attainment and

perceived career success, and career attainment also influenced perceived career success" (Turban & Dougherty, 1994, p. 698).

Disadvantages and Difficulties of Mentoring

Barriers to the success of mentoring may be systemic in nature in that the environment within which the mentoring occurs may not support the growth of the individuals (Daloz, 1987). Specific conditions under which the mentoring relationship might be damaging to the individuals involved have been identified as: "(a) the mentor may lose power or influence, (b) the protégé may be limited to one person's perspective, (c) the mentor could leave the organization, (d) the male mentor may want sexual favours from the female protégé, and (e) the protégé could become attached to a poor mentor" (Wright & Wright, 1987, p. 206).

The Mentoring Relationship

Two dominant perspectives on the nature of the mentoring relationship are developmental theory and transformational theory.

Developmental theory.

The functions of mentoring have been organized into two broad areas: career functions and psychosocial functions. Career functions include sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments; while psychosocial functions involve role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counselling and friendship. "While career functions serve, primarily, to aid advancement up the hierarchy of an organization, psychosocial functions affect each individual on a personal level by building self-worth

both inside and outside the organization. Together these functions enable individuals to address the challenges of each career stage" (Kram & Isabella, 1985, p. 23). Kram (1985) contends that the best approximation of a mentor relationship is when a hierarchical relationship (within an organizational hierarchy) provides all of the noted functions.

Kram's study (1985) involved examining the nature of the mentoring relationship between junior and senior managers within the context of adult developmental theory and organizational theory. She concluded that the relationships are themselves developmental, varying in length from three to five years and that there are four predictable phases: initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition. Initiation usually occurs over a six month to one year period and the relationship begins to have significance for both individuals. In the cultivation phase (two to five years), the career and psychosocial functions provided are expanded to a maximum. The separation, over a period of six months to two years, occurs after a change in the structural role relationship and the emotional experience of the relationship. During redefinition, either the individuals resume a relationship with more peer like characteristics or the relationship is terminated (Kram, 1983). Progression through these phases is affected by the developmental issues of each individual and further complicated by the organizational environment within which the mentoring relationship exists.

Transformational theory.

Transformational theory contends that the changes brought about through learning affect an individual and have a significant impact on subsequent experiences in life.

Mezirow (1991) proposes that people think in terms of meaning schemes which become

habitual expectations or assumptions about the way they expect things to be. These assumptions lead to perspectives on life. Often a conflict or dilemma leads one to a way of thinking and being through a process of self-reflection. When a person changes a basic assumption there is often a chain reaction and other assumptions change as well, thus subsequent life experiences are affected and a new world view emerges (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow, 1994; Tennant, 1993).

Other basic tenets of transformational learning include the following three constructs: the constructivist notion that meaning exists within ourselves, rather than in external forms; the process of conscientization within an individual achieved through praxis (a process of action and reflection); and, the concept that "...development is facilitated by a relationship between teachers and their students" (Merriam, 1993, p. 49). Constructivist theory holds that an individual constructs understanding of experiences because she makes meaning from within herself, as opposed to passive absorption of the meaning of experiences from others. Praxis is the basis of reflective practice, and requires ability for critical self-reflection as an individual reflects on and analyzes her actions, and then adapts her thinking and skills. The resulting increasing awareness of the relationship between one's thinking and actions leads through conscientization to increasing ability to take responsibility for self. Thirdly, the concept that relationship between students and teachers has the capacity to enhance development is similar to the notion of relationship as a catalyst for change.

Daloz (1987), in examining the changes that occur in adult learners returning to educational settings, considers the shifts from the perspective of developmental levels and

stages, and discusses spiral-like change. Adult learning experiences are seen to have transformational power. He claims that most adults re-enter education with an attitude of dualism (the world is seen in terms of rights and wrongs) combined with multiplicity (diversity and uncertainty are considered as being legitimate), and move gradually into contextual relativism (orientation and personal commitment within a relativistic world).

As they (students) find it safe to let go of their self-evident ways of making meaning, discover the considerable limitations of common sense, and begin to risk seeing through the eyes of other people, other cultures, other times, they will begin to construct a world first of multiple opinions but eventually-and more importantly-of multiple ways of arriving at those opinions. The discovery that things can be related, that connections can be made rather than truths found, begins to dawn, and the world is reborn on a whole new level. In short, our students begin to think about thought itself. It is this recognition that lays the groundwork for the critical shift from multiplicity to contextualism...

(Daloz, 1987, p. 83)

Daloz emphasizes the importance of the mentor building a trusting relationship between the mentor and the mentee, and the mentor providing role modeling. He discusses three distinct ways in which mentors provide a mirror which expands self-awareness and promotes the change: supporting, challenging and providing vision. Daloz (1987) explains that support and challenge must be provided in balance in order to facilitate the shift of thinking to that of contextual relativism. Through strong role

modeling the mentor provides vision in regard to the sort of person the mentee desires to emulate.

Mentoring as it Relates to Women

The issue of cross-sex mentoring and whether women benefit more from women as mentors has received considerable attention (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Jeruchim & Shapiro, 1992; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Noe, 1988b; Scott, 1992; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). There are advantages to both same-sex and cross-sex mentoring for women (Brass, 1985; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Fitt & Newton, 1981; Lean, 1983). Women in business and academic settings often have more difficulty obtaining a woman mentor, primarily because fewer women exist in management levels of business and academia (Bowen, 1986; Noe, 1988b; Ragins, 1989). In business situations it may be desirable to employ dual mentoring in which the female mentee works with both female and male mentors (Scott, 1992). Within business and institutional settings, the presence of gender stereotypes may have a strong negative effect on the career success of women and limit the benefits of mentoring to psychosocial functions (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992; Tepper, Brown, & Hunt, 1993).

Feminist perspectives suggest considering the uniqueness of women and emphasize the importance of re-valuing women's experience (Briskin, 1994; Merriam, 1993).

Theories of adult development that consider characteristics of women and women's ways of constructing knowledge provide insight into the particular needs of women within mentoring relationships and the ethos of relationships between women. Relationship

issues are extremely significant to women throughout their life and have a strong influence on personal and professional development (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Daloz, 1987; Gilligan, 1982; Jeruchim & Shapiro, 1992). Perspectives on life situations as well as the choices and decisions made within complex circumstances are affected by women's perceptions of relationship issues. The development of subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge (separate and connected knowing) and constructed knowledge (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) in women support their evolution through levels of responsibility to self and others.

By demonstrating so powerfully the profound importance of a sense of connectedness with and responsibility for others as well as oneself, she (Gilligan) has affirmed for women the value and legitimacy of a way of being that has traditionally been undervalued, and she has reminded men that growth toward full humanity includes acknowledgement of our own needs to care, nurture, and retain connectedness with others. (Daloz, 1987, p. 135)

The sense of responsibility to and connectedness between people are important elements of mentoring relationships. Relationships with these components are helpful and valuable to women especially in situations where they are more vulnerable, such as that of becoming an adult student.

Women being mentored by women tend to view the mentor's life style and values as being significant to their own professional development, thus female mentors present strong potential for demonstrating that competent and achieving women have successful

personal lives (Gilbert, 1985; Gilbert & Rossman, 1992; Ragins & McFarlin, 1990). In addition, female mentors are more likely than males to encourage and create an environment of supervision which allows for the empowerment of trainees through the processes of mutuality and enhancement (Gilbert & Rossman, 1992). Thus in the field of early childhood education, where females represent the majority of staff and almost all sponsor-educators are women, building on the inherent presence and potential of women as supervisors has great if not unending potential.

Summary of Mentoring Theory

Mentoring has been shown to have a number of benefits for the mentee and the mentor. The mentoring relationship may be viewed from a developmental perspective or a transformational perspective. In both views the relationship is key to the mentee in that it is the catalyst which supports change in the individual. The establishment of trust is particularly important, followed by support, change and providing vision (Daloz, 1987). Acceptance, confirmation, counselling and friendship are seen as fundamental elements. The importance of the mentor as a role model is emphasized. It has been shown that personal characteristics of the mentee affect the success of mentoring. Of particular importance are a high level of job involvement, internal locus of control, the valuing of relationships with supervisors and peer at work, and high self-monitoring and emotional stability. Informal mentoring appears to be more successful than formal mentoring.

The mentoring relationship may have crucial relevance for women as women place value on and are strongly influenced by relationships. Ethical decision-making on the part

of women is affected by their perceptions of relationship issues. With the evolution of procedural and constructed knowledge, women develop responsibility for self and others, while their values reflect the consideration of self in response to others (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Women mentors have a potentially strong impact on mentees, because they tend to support empowerment of mentees, and because the women mentees tend to place substantial value on the career role modelling of the mentors. In regard to women mentees, there is dramatic potential for the mentoring relationship to facilitate the emergence of "contextual relativism" (Daloz, 1987) in which the individual begins to find many ways to view issues and make decisions.

Transformational theory, which describes shifts in perspective through the experience of being a student, is highly relevant to the situation of students in ECE programs. During ECE training, educators expect students to make rapid change in their thinking, skills and often attitudes. Students enter training with little experience in the field or understanding of the theoretical bases of early childhood work. Over a period of nine to ten months they must acquire both a theoretical base and experience, and demonstrate a wide variety of competencies. The degree of change experienced by many of the students who are successful in the program is comparable to a transformation resulting from a rapid change in thinking, skills, and attitude.

Supervision Theory

Management theory provides a number of approaches to the supervision of employees. Current theory relating to supervision incorporates the concept of underlying standards (Jarrett & VanVugt, 1994), which include personal development, respect, mutual benefits, confidentiality, continuity, clarity, foreknowledge, productivity, timeline, universality, objectivity and documentation (Jarrett & VanVugt, 1994). Similarly, Ralph (1993) describes a construct of underlying principles which includes constructivism, collaboration and commitment. Constructivism involves “knowing” as a developmental process through which participants interactively engage in creating personal meaning. Collaboration is seen as a bonding composed of collegiality, cooperation and constructive confrontation that grows among participants as partners seek to achieve supervisory goals. And commitment is necessary in regard to professional competence and to the virtue of nurturing/caring (Ralph, 1993).

Role of the Supervisor

Primary aspects of the role of the supervisor are: model, educator, coach/trainer, counsellor, confronter, sponsor, observer, facilitator and assessor (Garfat, 1992; Jarrett & VanVugt, 1994; Ralph, 1993; Smith, 1990; Stuck, 1992). Strong ability in human relations and communications skills are critical qualities of effective supervision.

Supervision which promotes personal growth, and is encouraging and empowering to the employee has been identified as important to the degree of job satisfaction of social service workers, and relevant to the retention of workers in the job (Stuck, 1992). In a

study of burnout among child care workers (Manlove, 1993), it was found that those with higher levels of work role conflict and work role ambiguity were significantly more likely to experience burn out. Work supervisors who provide clear job descriptions which clarified work responsibilities lead to reduction of conflict and ambiguity about work roles.

In addition, directors who offer guidelines to staff for prioritizing tasks and responsibilities could help staff to better deal with the inevitable competing demands on their time. By improving communication and coordination among co-workers, team-building workshops may help to reduce conflict and ambiguity about work roles while increasing staff commitment to a program.

(Manlove, 1993, p. 515)

Functions of the supervisory role include establishing supportive structures, of which regularly scheduled meetings obtain highest priority (Jarrett & VanVugt, 1994; Parsons, 1991). Documentation of work performance, in regard to both day-to-day information and formal job evaluation, is noted as being important to both supervisors and supervisees (Garfat, 1992; Jarrett & VanVugt, 1994; Smith, 1990). Feedback provided by the supervisor to the supervisee is supportive and/or corrective (Carr, 1993; Garfat, 1992; Hogges, 1992; Jarrett & VanVugt, 1994; Krein, 1990; Neugebauer, 1992; Ralph, 1993), and includes the identification of the supervisee strengths and interests. Assisting the supervisee in developing and working toward goals for improvement/expansion of work performance is an important function (Carr, 1993; Jarrett & VanVugt, 1994).

A particular approach to supervision, the structured process supervision (SPS) model, "integrates compatible features and uses practical ideas from each of the

management theories...and from human service traditions and philosophy" (Jarrett & VanVugt, 1994, p. 17). Structured process supervision (SPS) describes an approach to expectations-based performance appraisal, with the use of a Personal Performance Plan to aid documentation of the employee's job responsibilities, objectives, indicators, time frame, and evaluative comments (Jarrett & Van Vugt, 1994).

Within management theory the purpose of supervision of staff includes ensuring that the efforts of staff members are aligned with the efforts of the team and the goals of the organization, and that the level of performance of the individual is adequate to the expectations of the job and the standards of the organization (Jarrett & VanVugt, 1994). An important element of the assurance that the individual's job performance is consistent with the standards and goals of the organization is the aspect of the correction of poor performance. Corrective feedback is used to clearly communicate about the nature of the problem behaviours and expectations for change. Progressive discipline may be implemented in order to ensure that necessary improvement in job performance occurs.

Individual Characteristics and Styles

It is important that the individual characteristics and level of functioning of the supervisee be considered and that supervision, in order to be effective, respond to the individual being supervised. Garfat (1992) discusses individual characteristics of both supervisor and supervisee as being attitudes, expectations, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, skills and behaviours; and supervisory styles as being evaluative judgmental, unidirected, avoidance, proportional participatory and mutual participatory. Zeece (1991) refers to

both the temperament of child care workers (adventurous worker, responsible worker, intuitive thinking worker, intuitive feeling worker), and the developmental stages of workers (Stage I: survival; Stage II: consolidation; Stage III: renewal; Stage IV: maturity).

Ralph (1993), in discussing contextual supervision, presents a model for supervision which "...emphasizes individuals' self-development and...follows an interactive process in determining the fit of development level with supervisory style" (Ralph, 1993, p. 289). Supervision leadership styles are categorized as being directing, coaching, supporting and self-regulating. A process is described for matching supervisor style with supervisee readiness stages ranging from "eager novice" to "peak performer" (Ralph, 1993, p. 287). Familiarity with the model for matching supervisor style with supervisee readiness would assist supervisors in reframing their own misinterpretation of supervisee's lack of skill or confidence as being resistance or stubbornness. Supervisors might be then be enabled to determine and address legitimate problems to be resolved during the supervisory process (Ralph, 1993). Ralph's model (1993) is more fully developed than some others and may hold potential for the matching of the sponsor-educator style to the developmental level and needs of the ECE student in practicum.

Supervision as it Relates to Women

Literature on leadership style and gender provides insight regarding supervision by women. In studies of organizations, women did not differ from men in terms of being more interpersonally-oriented than task-oriented (Eagly & Johnson, 1990), however in

other situations women did show more inclination towards an interpersonal orientation (e.g. understanding another's feelings and intentions) (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Women also were more likely to lead with a more democratic and participative style as opposed to an autocratic and directive style (Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

In the study of achievement satisfaction in leadership, it was found that the greatest satisfaction for women "...derives from the intrinsic satisfaction of task accomplishment, the vicarious satisfaction of assisting others reach their goals, and from exerting influence through positions of power and authority" (Offermann & Beil, 1992, p. 19). This study indicates that for women, competitive achievement does not lead to satisfaction, nor does establishing social relations for personal benefit. Women show an inclination toward nurturance of fellow workers and a valuing of relationships (Offermann & Beil, 1992).

Summary of Supervision Theory

Supervision theory provides a view of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Elements of the relationship are teaching, coaching, counselling, confronting, sponsoring, observing, facilitating and assessing. The supervisor is often, but not necessarily, a role model for the supervisee. Emphasis is placed on the development by the supervisor of supportive structures (i.e. regular meetings), documentation of work performance, feedback, and support for the supervisee to work towards goals for improvement. Goals for improved work performance by the individual are closely tied to the standards and goals of the organization, particularly with the increasing thrust towards quality assurance and accountability within service systems (Jarrett & Van Vugt, 1994).

The premise of supervision theory is that by engaging in a supervisory relationship and activities, job performance and satisfaction can be improved, with subsequent benefit to both the organization and the individual.

The review of supervision theory in child and youth care literature has shown in some cases an allowance for the individual characteristics of the supervisee and suggested approaches which are more effective supervisory responses to the individual. ECE students have individual needs and differences. Approaches which address the individuality may be helpful to the student.

In the application of supervision theory to women, it has been shown that women as supervisors/leaders tend to have a more democratic and participative style than men. Women achieve satisfaction from task accomplishment, assisting others in meeting goals and in nurturing of fellow workers. The great majority of ECE sponsor-educators are women. The implications of the preference of women as supervisors to a democratic and participatory style means that the sponsor-educators are likely to encourage cooperation and partnerships with students rather than a boss/employee type of power imbalance.

The work of field agency staff with ECE students in practica has often been referred to as supervision. College ECE instructors tend to emphasize with sponsor-educators the importance of regular meetings with students, documentation of work performance, feedback and evaluation. As well, agency staff are frequently called “supervisors”.

Comparison of the Characteristics of Mentoring and Supervision

Although the relationship between the protégé and the experienced person has similarities in both the perspectives of mentoring and supervision a number of differences are evident.

- It appears that mentoring often takes a less formal, more spontaneous and self-chosen form than supervision. Some studies have shown that formal, assigned mentoring programs are less effective than informal, self-chosen mentoring. Supervisory relationships tend to be formally assigned and established. In ECE practica, students are usually assigned to early childhood settings by college instructors who consider a number of factors (i.e., location of residence and setting, type and schedule of program, skill level of student, style of sponsor-educator, etc.). Often the placement is made based more upon the ability of the student to afford travel to a location than anything else. Thus the matches frequently have the nature of being assigned and formal rather than informal.
- The amount and regularity of time spent together appears to vary in mentoring relationships, while in supervisory relationships frequent and regular meeting time is expected in order for the supervision to be effective.
- Mentoring literature provides little or no reference to documentation of work performance by the mentor, while supervision specifically establishes the expectation of documentation. Many ECE practica are structured such that the sponsor-educator provides input into evaluation of students. College instructors usually assign grades.

- Formal performance evaluation is not mentioned in mentoring literature; supervision literature has considerable emphasis placed on evaluation, provides models for performance appraisal, and discusses the need for correcting poor performance and the use of progressive discipline. ECE students in practicum are evaluated and usually receive grades. When performance is unsatisfactory, corrective measures are often taken. Post-secondary institutions utilize several progressive discipline approaches.
- Mentoring theory includes the concept of the challenging of the mentee by the mentor (Daloz, 1987). The intent is to increase self awareness and encourage the mentee to develop greater insight, with the result being improved work performance. However, the challenging appears to more focussed on provoking/enhancing personal insight and self-understanding which will presumably enable the individual to realize how to make changes for her or himself. In contrast, the management perspective of a supervisory relationship involves challenging, assessing and setting parameters for change in work performance for the benefit of the organization.

Because the success of the ECE student in practicum is closely related to personal motivation and attitude, assisting the student to increase self-understanding and personal insight would be beneficial. The combination of awareness of self and insight could enhance the capacity for self-reflection, which in turn enables one to learn from previous experience and take initiative and risk in new situations. The student who is able to meet challenges, find ways to improve her/his knowledge and skills, and change attitudes will likely experience greater learning and a higher degree of success in the practicum, according to the literature.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methods

My interest in doing this study was to develop an understanding of a contemporary phenomena within its' real-life context. In this case the phenomena was the working relationship between the ECE student and the agency staff person (the sponsor-educator) in a practicum setting. The theoretical perspective from which I approached the study is similar to Kathy Kram (1985) in that I have considered the relationships within the existing context, the practicum within the early childhood setting, and obtained descriptive accounts of personal experience through a qualitative approach.

Qualitative research helps conduct 'inquiry from the inside' (Evered & Louis, 1980) and, in the interpretative tradition (Morgan & Smircich, 1980), it relies heavily on interpretation of data provided by the personal accounts of research participants. The researcher and research participant must have a mutual desire to learn, high trust, and self-disclosure, as well as the opportunity for confidential and systematic exploration of issues (Argyris, 1970).

(Kram, 1985, p. 210)

The inquiry followed a case study design with a phenomenological orientation. In case study research, theory building is part of the design work, thus the descriptions of the theory of mentoring and of supervising as a conceptual framework were fundamental to the study. The case study is expected to be descriptive and explanatory. In an explanatory case study, the objective is to "pose competing explanations for the same set

of events and to indicate how such explanations may apply to other situations" (Yin, 1989, p. 16). Phenomenological inquiry focuses on the lived experience of the participants and examines how individuals make phenomena meaningful (University of Victoria, FHSD425 Course Manual); in this situation the participants had extensive opportunities to express views on their working relationships during practicum and reflect on their understandings of the experiences. The words of the participants were used throughout the data analysis.

Case study is described as a study of a "bounded system" (Stake, 1988, p. 258). The unity and wholeness of the system are kept intact but the attention of the study is focused on those aspects relevant to the particular research issue chosen. The task of the researcher is to set the boundaries, search out issues and themes, then re-adjust boundaries as the case is gradually revealed. The design of the study may be altered after the initial phase as information emerges (Yin, 1989). In this research, case study was an appropriate methodology because the relationship between an ECE student and sponsor-educator is naturally bounded in terms of reason for the relationship, and by the nature of the length and duration of the practicum. The focus of this study was the working relationship between the student and sponsor-educator which leads to successful learning experiences for the student in ECE practicum. Two cases (pairs of student-graduate and sponsor-educator) were studied, thus it was a multiple case study.

The multiple case study design may be used to present a more compelling argument than single case study. In the multiple case study each case is a study and serves a specific purpose. Each case selected represented an exemplary case of a relationship between a student-graduate and a sponsor-educator during practicum. In multiple case

study of two or three cases, "each case must be carefully selected so that it ...predicts similar results (a literal replication)" (Yin, 1989, p. 53). When the observations are similar within the same time period, "synchronic reliability" exists, in which "observations are consistent with respect to the particular features of interest to the observer" (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 42).

Theoretical or construct validity (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Yin, 1989) can be established through the comparison of observations/ results of the study with theoretical paradigms presented as the foundation for the study. In this study I have made use of the theoretical bases of mentoring and supervision in developing understanding of the phenomenon.

Participant Selection

My work position as an ECE instructor within a community college setting provided a starting point for access to past students, agency settings and case study choices. Each academic year, the ECE program utilizes approximately 20 different sites for practicum placement, with 20-25 students being placed with staff sponsor-educators. During the 1994-95 year I was away from the college on educational leave, thus I did not personally instruct or work with the students in the ECE program or with the sponsor-educators in the agency settings. In order to maximize objectivity during the study I obtained cases from the group of student-graduates and sponsor-educators of 1994-95. Because the primary purpose of the study was to develop an understanding of relationships between students and sponsor-educators, I located two relationship pairs.

In order to locate the pairs for the case studies, I sent letters to 15 graduates of the 1994-95 ECE class, inquiring as to their interest in participating in the study. I chose not to send letters to two of the graduates because they had relocated to communities distant from the Kootenays and it would have been difficult to arrange interviews and meetings had they been interested in participating in the study. One of the letters was returned to me because the graduate had moved and a forwarding address was not available.

The letter (Appendix A) stated that I was looking for past students who had an especially good working relationship with the sponsor-educator during a block practicum in the 1994-95 year, outlined the study in general, and asked the person to respond by completing and returning an enclosed form if he/she believed the practicum working relationship to be particularly helpful and if interested in participating in the study. The form requested contact information for themselves and the sponsor-educator.

I received two completed forms from graduate-students with contact information for both themselves and the sponsor-educator, within a few days of the return date suggested on the form. Several weeks later I received one additional response but since I had already confirmed the participation of the first two respondents I phoned the third graduate, thanked her and explained that the study participants had already been selected. After receiving the forms I telephoned each of the sponsor-educators identified, briefly explained the nature of the study to them and that I would send them a letter (Appendix A) requesting their participation in the study, as well as requesting information regarding the nature of the relationship between the student-graduate and sponsor-educator. Each sponsor-educator completed and returned the questionnaire (Appendix B).

After the sponsor-educators agreed to participate in the study, I telephoned the graduates and explained the process I had followed in contacting the sponsor-educators. I sent them each a student-graduate questionnaire requesting information regarding the nature of the relationship between themselves and the sponsor-educator (Appendix B). After each of the graduates completed and returned the questionnaire interview dates were set.

Ethical Considerations

Because the study accumulated information about individuals, each participant signed a consent form for participation. All individuals were informed they could withdraw from the study at any time and that information would be kept confidential. Support was obtained from Selkirk College administration for doing the research under the auspices of the college (letter attached to application for research involving human subjects). The Certificate of Approval for the research was confirmed as of September 28, 1995 (project no. 239-95), by the Committee on Research and Other Activities Involving Human Subjects, University of Victoria.

In telephone conversations I explained to each of the participants the confidential nature of the study, what would be done with the information collected, and the informed consent form (Appendix C) which would be available for their signature at the first interview.

Information Provided Prior to the Study

The cases for the study were chosen based on the participants' view of their experience of the working relationship as being exemplary. The nature of the working

relationship was determined by using a questionnaire the items of which were based on the mentoring and supervision theory described in the conceptual framework. This was done to ensure that the participants could speak to the phenomena in question. "The framework needs to state the conditions under which a particular phenomenon is likely to be found (a literal replication) as well as the conditions when it is not likely to be found (a theoretical replication)" (Yin, 1989, p. 54).

The information provided in the questionnaires from the student-graduate and sponsor-educator in Case One (S-G#1 and S-E#1) was consistent. Both described the type of assistance provided by the sponsor-educator as being supportive, a good listener, honest, and helpful. Both individuals described the student as being energetic, eager/enthusiastic, and hard working/reliable/steady.

The individuals in Case Two (S-G#2 and S-E#2) described the relationship as respectful. The sponsor-educator is described by both as having the perspective that individuals learn from each other. They both described the student as being eager and open to learning.

The written responses from the two individuals in each pair connote an openness and reciprocal balance in the working relationship and satisfied me that these were experienced as working relationships that contributed to successful learning experiences for the student.

The Organizational Context

The practicum for each of the students occurred in an early childhood setting which provides service to groups of at least 10 children between the ages of two-and-a-

half to five years. One of the services was a private nursery school program operated by the owner and her daughter. The other service was a non-profit group day care centre with a staff of six. The staff of both facilities are licensed early childhood educators. Both of these settings provided practicum experiences for several early childhood education students from the college during the 1994-95 year. The programs provided by both services offered a variety of developmentally-oriented social and learning activities for the group of children, i.e. group activities including music, language arts, discussions, movement, physical challenges, creative art activities, constructive play, games, etc.

Procedures

When the participation of each of the members of the two teams had been confirmed, I established interview schedules and began interviews. Although I originally intended to examine their written records (student journal, sponsor-educator performance appraisal forms, and instructor evaluation summaries) I decided that I would have more pertinent information from the interviews and focus group meeting. I determined that the written information would be difficult to incorporate into the data analysis because it recorded the individual experience whereas the interview information was focused on and allowed for reflection on their working relationship.

Data Collection

Data was collected from two initial interview sources: individual interviews with each of the participants of the student-graduate and sponsor-educator pair, and interviews

with each pair. Data was collected in the form of tape recordings of the interviews. Each taped interview with research participants (four individuals and two pairs) was transcribed.

Through the interview process, trust and openness was established and information about the daily life-situation during the practicum was readily obtained. I followed the model of the ethnographic interview, which "is characterized by careful and receptive listening, open-ended queries, and extensive probing ...and reflects a generalized curiosity about the situation of the other, and sets of question develop as the researcher spends more time in the setting and the company of the other" (Dietz, Prus, & Shaffir, 1994, p.22). The information from the initial interviews was used to refine questions for follow-up interviews. Subsequent interviews with the student-graduates further deepened the relationship and elicited more extensive information, and tested emergent views of their working relationship.

The Interview Process

Physical Context.

Each of the student-graduates was interviewed in a one-hour session, in a place of their choice. One of the individuals, S-G#1, chose to come to my office at the college for the interview. The office is private, small and institutional. The other student-graduate, S-G#2, was first interviewed in the staff room at the day care centre where she had completed the practicum. Although we were the only people in the room, at one point a staff person entered the room briefly. The sponsor-educator with whom the student-graduate had worked was not present on the day of the interview. The follow-up interview with the second student occurred in her home.

The pairs interview for Case One was held in the playroom of the nursery school program after children and other staff had left for the day. The pairs interview with Case Two occurred in the same staff room at the day care centre of the practicum. In each case, other people were not present.

The Individual Interviews.

The initial interview was open-ended, in that the student-graduate was asked for factual information, opinions and feelings (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Yin, 1989). Following the first student-graduate interview, the pair sponsor-educator was interviewed in a similar manner. This process was repeated for the second practicum pair.

Information from the initial interviews was examined prior to determining the questions for the follow-up interviews for the student-graduates. Because in the initial interview with one of the student-graduates, the sound on the last section of audiotape was confounded by construction work and a malfunction of the tape recorder, I chose to repeat some of the initial interview questions at the beginning of the follow-up interview.

The Individual Interview Process.

Before beginning the interviews I developed an outline of questions based on the literature review of mentoring and supervision theory, and met with a past graduate of the ECE program whom I had instructed in practicum two years previously. The graduate had on several occasions expressed to me her belief that the support and help of her sponsor-educator had been the critical factor in her final practicum being highly successful. When we talked it was possible for me to understand better ways of framing questions in

order to give me information about the working relationship between them. I also received feedback from the members of my thesis committee on the questions and interviewing tips. By the time I began the interviews, the questions had gone through several revisions.

For the student-graduates the questions were:

Tell me about your relationship in working with _____ during the practicum.

Describe differences between this relationship and other working relationships with sponsor educators during other practica.

How did you spend the time with the sponsor educator during the practicum?

Was there significance in the amount and type of time you spent together?

Has the relationship between you continued, if so how; and, how has the relationship changed over time?

In terms of your learning experiences, describe the most important features of this relationship.

Are the working and learning relationship connected, and if so, how?

What did you or your sponsor educator contribute to this being such a successful practicum?

The following questions were used in the sponsor-educator interviews:

Tell me about your working relationship with _____ during the practicum.

Describe differences between this relationship and other working relationships with students during other practica.

How did you spend the time with the student during the practicum?

Was there significance in the amount and type of time you spent together?

Has the relationship between you continued, if so how; and, how has the relationship changed over time?

In terms of learning experiences for the student, talk about the most important features in the relationship she had with you.

Are the working and learning relationship connected, and if so, how?

What did you or the student do that helped this be such a successful practicum?

The first question, asking the person to describe the relationship, was purposely easy to answer, as the same question had appeared on the questionnaire, and the person had already begun to think about how to respond. In my responses to comments and explanations, I often paraphrased, then asked for more in-depth information. This approach increased openness and trust with the individual. Each person seemed to quickly become willing to describe the intricacies and intimacies of her experiences.

In the follow-up interviews with the student-graduates, my purpose was firstly to clarify information which seemed unclear in the original interview, for example the section of poor tape quality on one interview and probe for information related to mentoring and supervision theory. Questions asked of both student-graduates were as follows:

Describe a situation in which you felt you had made a mistake. What helped you learn from the situation?

What part did the written records/evaluations play in the learning situation for you?

Give an example of how ____ helped you analyze a situation.

Contrast the learning and working relationship with _____ to the learning and working relationship with other sponsor-educators.

How did initial impressions you had of working with _____ change? How did you know it had changed? How long did it take?

How did your experience with _____ attach you to the role of early childhood educator?

I found that by the time we discussed the last question there was a mutual sense that the topic of the relationship experience had been thoroughly discussed by the individuals.

The Pairs Interview Process.

The interview of each pair unit (student-graduate and sponsor-educator) was conducted in a more structured manner after initial information was considered, and was more focused so that corroboration of information might be sought (Yin, 1989). My planning for the joint sponsor-educator and student-graduate interviews involved listening several times to the tapes of the first interviews, then identifying issues or situations to question with both people together. I developed a set of questions for the joint interviews, and when the interview was in progress I placed the question set on the table where each person could easily see it, so that each one might more easily maintain focus when the other person was talking. The questions were as follows:

What do each of you believe to be the most valuable characteristics of the relationship between you?

Each of you please describe what you believe the other to have brought to the practicum.

Think of an example in which the student made a mistake and discuss the situation as closely as you can to what you did at the time.

How did the relationship between you support the student in developing understanding of her knowledge, skills and attitudes?

Talk about the emergence of the identity of early childhood educator in the student.

What do you think it is important for me to know in the setting up of practicum situations for students?

The first two questions were intended as a repeat of earlier individual discussions, and to give each person an opportunity to hear some of the positive feedback that had been a strong thread throughout the individual interviews with me. This beginning to the interview helped to re-establish the trusting atmosphere that had been strong during the practicum itself. As well as obtaining information to questions, I was attempting to glimpse the way the two communicated with each other, so the interview was an opportunity for me to observe the relationship in action.

With the pair interviews, the interview process was complete. I had sufficient information to begin the process of analysis in earnest. I did however, return to the study participants at a later date in order to obtain their input on the data analysis. Following my completion of initial analysis of the data, a focus group session was held with the participants in order to discuss emerging information and to acquire feedback.

The focus group was held with myself and three of the four original participants present. One person was not able to attend because of illness. An additional attendee

acted as an observer and recorder. One week after the focus group meeting, I met with the absent participant to obtain her input.

The purpose of this group session was to demonstrate rigor through establishing credibility of the interpretation of the data. The involvement of the study participants in the group session ensured that the descriptions were faithful to their experience. As well, data findings must be salient to the data, and by involving the study participants in examining the data findings, there was additional assurance that this was the case.

Working with the Data

The data analysis was conducted using a thematic coding procedure which identifies emerging patterns of information. I examined the interview transcripts for “common themes shared among the participants...themes that constitute a common thread” (Tesch, 1987, p. 233). The analysis of the results followed "replication logic" (Yin, 1989, p. 53) and examined information across as well as within cases.

In order to identify the themes from the interviews, I first noted and numbered the meaning units for each of the six transcripts. Words of the participant were used as much as possible to develop meaning units, which are “short statements that capture the meaning of short parts of the data...each complete phrase should encompass one complete thought...” (FHSD425 Course Manual, 1995, p. 265). The use of meaning units as a coding method is consistent with phenomenology. Preliminary themes, representing components of the relationship, were then developed for each individual and each pair from each transcript.

Meaning units were identified from the text of the interview for the preliminary themes generated by that interview, in order to determine whether there were data to support the themes. Once meaning units were analyzed for each interview they were cross-referenced by reviewing themes from the other interviews in the case.

I next examined meaning units and themes for theme clusters for the individuals and pair within each case. After this I had two sets of theme clusters, one from each case study set. I then compared the two sets, and derived one set of themes which represented the working relationship for both case studies.

The Focus Group Meeting

I began the focus group by giving an overview of the data collection and analysis. I reviewed the preliminary themes identified for each individual and pair, and provided each person with their themes written on small cards, and their interview transcript with the meaning units recorded alongside the text. Each person reviewed her own sets of themes and looked briefly at the transcript and meaning units. The two pairs worked separately to cluster the themes from the three interviews (student-graduate, sponsor-educator, and pair) and develop a set of themes for their case. I took the place of the absent sponsor-educator to make up the pair with the student-graduate. After each pair was satisfied with the set of themes for themselves, the two pairs worked together to generate a set of common themes from the pairs themes. There was discussion about the subtleties of meaning and intention during the process. After the pairs had completed their work, I shared with them the sets of pair themes and common themes that I had generated from the data. We compared the themes generated by the pairs with the themes I had

generated and found many similarities. The same process was followed with the absent sponsor educator in a meeting one week later. I took the place of the absent student-graduate in the later meeting.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analyzing the Case Studies: Themes within the Relationships

Introducing the Cases

Case One participants were a sponsor-educator (S-E#1) who graduated from the ECE program at Selkirk College eight years ago, and a mature student (S-G#1) who entered the program in the fall of 1994. Since graduation, the sponsor-educator had worked in group day care and nursery school settings with a variety of staff sizes. She had supervised several ECE students from the college. She completed the ECE post-basic Special Needs certificate several years ago. S-E#1 was widely experienced in a variety of other work settings as well child care. At the time of the study she was owner/operator of a licensed nursery school program, and she employed a staff assistant.

S-G#1, the student-graduate, also had a variety of other jobs before entering the ECE program. These two people appear to have made a positive and lasting impression on each other the very first time the student attended the nursery school program as an observer, as the following comments demonstrate:

S-E#1: *Well I think really from just walking in the door, she didn't give you the impression that she was a student as nervous or apprehensive, or you know, she kind of just walks in and she has that easy look about her and relaxed and I think the children have it too you know because they took to her as soon as they saw her. She has that bright hair and she always wears a bright pin or bright earrings, you know she's just so alive I guess, and I think that's nice too and it's nice for the practicum teacher because she feels so at ease right away, you know.*

S-G#1: *Oh, the day that I went to visit just to see what the playschool was before I ever made a decision that I would go there because it was half days...So when I arrived, she welcomed me to her class and she said 'this is S-G#1 she will be coming to visit us', and she introduced me to every parent that walked through that door and introduced me as a student from Selkirk College but she said 'she*

will be my sidekick for the month...’, and I thought ‘wow!’ because no one else had ever introduced me to the parents that had come to the door...I thought ‘wow I haven’t even made this decision and already she is very comfortable and is very welcoming, and this is incredible, these children are so lucky to be so loved and so, like just so allowed to be who they want to be in her place’. I was just overwhelmed with the welcome that she gave me it was really great.

In Case Two the sponsor-educator (S-E#2) had graduated from the ECE program at Selkirk College four years ago, and had also worked in large group day care programs, and with young children with special needs. She completed the ECE post-basic Special Needs certificate and has been working in an integrated group program for three years. The student-graduate (S-G#2), had worked in a variety of places, and was experienced as an adult student. The starting point for the relationship between these two was dramatically different from that of the pair in Case One. S-G#2 explains:

S-G#2: Well, at first it started out a little bit cold because S-E#2 is really reserved person and so am I, and I tried to get some information from her concerning a couple children with special needs and she pretty much didn’t refuse to give me the information but she was very evasive about the question and I didn’t really get an answer, and I was a bit upset about that and I wondered whether I wanted to pursue the relationship at all and I talked a little bit about it with my instructor, and she persuaded me to give it a second try and I thought that it would be good to pursue this and not walk away from the whole thing and I’m really glad that I did because it turned out that S-E#2 and I had a really good relationship. I understand why at that point she refused to give me too much answers about my question and I respect her position and her attitude about that. She was very professional and that was one thing I really liked about S-E#2 and that’s why she didn’t answer my question at first, she takes her job very seriously, and she’s very earnest in doing it.

While Case One might in some ways be considered to be a fortunate combination of people who immediately responded to each other, Case Two required a period of several days for the relationship to “gel”.

N.B. INT refers to interviewer

INT: *How did the initial impressions with S-E#2 change and how did you know those impressions had changed?*

S-G#2: *I knew that they had changed because I started to feel a lot more comfortable and at ease and looking forward to going to my practicum and to go to work in the morning, looking forward to it and the feeling of comfort and ease. My first impression was 'I'm not going to get any cooperation here, she doesn't communicate much and it's going to be a thing where she's going to stand back and judge me on it and I'm going to make a fool of myself on a regular basis'. That was my first impression and I tried to initiate a discussion on a specific topic with S-E#2 at the first time I ever met her and she was very reluctant to go into it so I really thought that this woman wasn't interested in talking much about things or maybe she wasn't even interested in having a student but it quickly wasn't the case at all. I think it was only a matter of days before I realized that, no she was very interested in talking and she was very happy to have the student...*

Analysis Reveals

The purpose of the study was to discover and describe the components of a working relationship between a student and sponsor-educator that contribute to successful learning experiences for the student in practicum. Examination of the information provided by the student-graduates and sponsor-educators suggested a framework of elements on which their working relationship was constructed.

Case One

The common themes or elements from interviews for Case One were: **frequent communication, open and honest communication, comfort and support, respect and equality, constructive criticism, autonomy, and working together and learning together.**

Frequent communication referred to the amount and regularity of talking between the two participants as they worked with children, had breaks together, reviewed and planned, and debriefed at the end of the day.

S-G#1: *...I was always there a half an hour early...and then that time we would get the activity set for the day and then we would discuss suggestions for the day and things to expect from the children...At the end of the day too, cleaning up and then we would also have time to sit and talk and discuss these little things when we were cleaning up the toys, about what went on during the day. So I had a lot of communication with her before and after the class.*

Open and honest communication appeared in the Case One data in many forms. Critical elements of the quality of the communication between the two are the frankness and honesty with which the two were able to talk, and the importance they both placed on the communication.

S-G#1: *...I never had reason to be defensive either, so it was helpful that way and we were very comfortable and open and honest with one another and I knew every day that we did talk S-E# I was telling me truthfully how she felt about what I had done, and really telling me things that would help not just talking because we had to talk but because it was something that she has experience from and can pass that experience on to me and that's being helpful.*

INT: *Sounds like you had a real belief that her motivation was to be helpful to you, that she was really wanting to help you.*

S-G#1: *Yeah, well she expressed that to me and how comfortable I felt and how welcoming she was to me, you know I really felt like I was her equal and not her student. She's very open and honest to me and very helpful and she respected me as a teacher and helped with and gave me her knowledge of the children...*

Comfort and support were evident throughout the comments of both individuals about their working relationship. In talking about their relationship they often used words such as: "supportive"; "caring"; "helping"; "harmony"; "awareness"; "comfortable"; "easy"; "she brought and I brought".

S-E#1: *We were totally at ease with each other.*

S-G#1: *I've never been in a practicum where I had the communication I had with S-E#1 and the comfort level that I had where I could totally be myself and feel that any question I asked was not stupid and it would always be respected and answered with respect and be helpful. I've never felt that, I think I had a very unique experience I feel very fortunate that I did get to be here.*

S-E#1: *...she knew what was going on all the time. And I think the same for me too, to always support her, to always know where she was and what she was doing, noticing whether she needed me or just me to sit with the group of children if she was having difficulty, just so they knew I was there I would settle them down, even though I didn't have to say anything, you know, just go sit there with them would be enough. That would sort of give her some support and she would feel confident and carry on.*

The two spoke often about **respect and equality** in their relationship. They referred to the trust and respect they both had, their acceptance of each other, the value they each placed on the other, and the general feelings of respect, equality, safety and warmth in the relationship.

S-G#1: *...I was treated as a very important person there and when decisions were made about the next day's crafts or the next day's art project, or PE project or whatever, she always included me. It wasn't just 'you're the student and I will just decide what's going to be and I will just let you know this is what we're doing', she said, 'well, what do you think, should we do this, or should we do this or do you have any ideas?'. And I just became her sidekick, it was really great.*

Constructive criticism was discussed by these two as being critical to S-G#1's learning within the day-to-day experiences. It was a factor that provoked her awareness of her learning and was built upon the components of open and honest communication, comfort and support, and respect and equality.

INT: *...How did the relationship between you support S-G#1 in developing an understanding of knowledge, skills and attitudes?...Knowledge, skills and attitudes is sort of the core of the learning that we talk about in the practicum. How did the relationship between you support that?*

S-G#1: *I'm not quite sure I'm understanding. How did our relationship build my skills?*
Pause

S-E#1: *I think constructive criticism really. If you don't really have that respect and basic trust in somebody, either student or instructor, then it's very hard to give positive observation or criticism if you like, to somebody, because they could immediately be taken aback by that, or get all defensive or they can use it and say 'this is really helpful'. And I think if you don't have a basic trust and respect for somebody it's very hard to accept that kind of stuff and go somewhere with it because you don't get defensive, and S-G#1 never did get defensive. There was lots of stuff we talked about and pointers that S-G#1 needed and she kind of accepted everything as more information and stuff that would help her rather than be taken aback and be defensive. ...*

S-G#1: *Well just the mannerism you would tell me too, and say this is something to think about, this is something to try next time, I didn't have any reason to be defensive either, because it was all helpful and it was all given to me in a positive manner and was never to be that wrong...*

The **autonomy** within the relationship was fundamental to taking responsibility for self, and showing initiative and interest. S-G#1 spoke of her sense of autonomy and freedom within the relationship, becoming empowered, and her desire to learn. S-E#1 referred to the student's interest, maturity, taking responsibility for herself and also of her own willingness to invest special efforts to help because of S-G#1's interest and initiative.

S-G#1: *...I knew that because of our relationship, the connection between the two of us that I could always be me and there wasn't, I wasn't expected to do something magical and be something I wasn't. So I had no fear to be with her and to be comfortable with her...*

S-E#1: *...She was like an empty vase when she came. Sometimes a student is like, some of them are half full of sand and you can only put so much information into them and then I think as a teacher you don't put so much information in because you can see it isn't going all the way down, it isn't going any further. With S-G#1 it was such a joy because you could - she never learned enough and there were always question and you know, I think it's such a delight when you get a student like that that you really feel, oh god, here's one that's going to be a really good teacher and you can't tell them enough, or explain or give them enough.*

INT: *So it makes you actually want to work harder to do this when that happens?*

S-E#1: *Oh yes, and you find yourself thinking, I used to try and think of all kinds of examples because it's fine to explain something and say 'this will work if you do it this way' but you need to come up with the examples of how things would work or what happened, or you know, and I used to constantly be racking my brains of examples I could give her when she came the next time to explain what I was telling her so she really did attach some significance to it. Because I find that*

examples or things like that make me remember things too, if a situation comes up you can say 'oh gosh, I remember having trouble with this sort of thing', it just kind of gives you a little bit of an edge sometimes when you need it.

The **working together and learning together** aspect of the relationship was revealed in the comments about problem solving, understanding through talking, willingness to explain, the working together supporting change in S-G#1, purposeful watching to learn by S-G#1, working side-by-side, and desire to learn. The following excerpt from discussion with the two of them illustrates how all of these elements intertwined to form working together and learning together:

INT: *Initially when it was happening and he was jumping on the puzzles and you thought what you needed to do was to stop him now,... and S-E#1 would redirect him, were you aware of what S-E#1 was doing with the redirection? (Yes) And so what was going through your head at that point?*

S-G#1: *Well I was taking note of what she was doing at that point because she knew him and I didn't know him all that well, 'okay this was a good way of learning what to do with this child when something like this is happening'...*

S-E#1: *...he was a child that could lose it completely, I mean he would turn all the chairs over, he would sweep everything off of there...we had another little boy called S at the same time...and they used to push each other's buttons like nothing...some days you walked on eggs...As careful as you are, and I would say to S-G#1 sometimes you've just got to jump in, and there is no right time or wrong time to do it...so they were very hard work.*

INT: *...So if S-E#1 redirected and you observed what was going on,...then when the children left would you approach and ask about that?*

S-E#1: *...we sort of had a burning desire as soon as the class was over to talk about things...When anything like that did happen the adrenaline would be pumping and it's something you needed to talk about, it just wasn't a little incident that went by in the day...*

INT: *...So going on from what you've already said about the situation with that child think about how your understanding about the practice being modeled was increased...*

S-G#1: *Well seeing the positive effects of it I was able to say okay this works with this child, so therefore if I was to try that or if the situation arose again that would be a good place for me to go with the child to redirect, or to ...remove him to something else. So seeing the way that S-E#1 worked with the children, and seeing his response to her, and seeing how she's calm when she's working with him and not letting herself get flustered and that with him, he took what she said seriously and responded to her positively. So it was seeing the effects of what was*

going on that were really good learning tools, that I could say 'okay that works so I'm gonna remember that, I'll try that with him'...like putting the whole puzzle together...S-E#1 did this with him and this worked, why did that work...and being able to talk about it everyday...

Case Two

Examination of the data from Case Two, revealed a second set of themes which represented their experience of the working relationship. The themes which evolved through data analysis and the focus group session included: **open and clear communication; frequent communication; how readiness is demonstrated in the student; setting up a non-threatening atmosphere; constructive criticism; and working together to support learning.**

Frequent communication was essentially the same component as the frequent communication described by the Case One participants. The individuals in Case Two talked about how much they talked together, and the significance of the large amount of talking together.

S-G#2: ...We talked a lot then while we were caring for the children and, you know, making observations as we were working and then our breaks were together so we talked a lot during our breaks. Then we made special time as well, we had appointments like, I can't remember, I think it was once a week where we took time off together besides our break, beside work time to sit down here and go over the week. I think it was the end of the week evaluation that we had four to do and to go over the week and to discuss the next weeks' plans, and so that's how we spent the time. In the playground we talked, at naptime, every time we could.

Open and clear communication also had a very similar definition to that of Case One. As well as the openness and clarity, specific effort being put into the communication was important to the relationship of S-E#2 and S-G#2:

S-E#2: (evaluation) Yeah it was all laid out and that I took the time to do it. It usually takes a couple of hours to get through the whole form and to get all the points

down, and she expressed that that was important to her, but in my opinion the most important thing is that verbal feedback that you're getting on a daily basis. I think most of it was reflected in the written stuff anyway...but the verbal would be more, there would be more in it, she'd be getting more information, there would be more going on there.

The theme of **how readiness is demonstrated in the student**, as described by these two included elements of the personal readiness of the student, responsibility, initiative and self-acceptance, self-reflection, and willingness to work and learn. Autonomy was evident throughout the discussion of these elements. S-E#2 commented on S-G#2's readiness:

S-E#2: Just generally her competencies were really high right from the start, so for me it left little doubt that she would succeed. There's students that can come in and you can pinpoint from day one there's going to be trouble, that they're not quite catching on to the subtlest hints of what's going on, or their heart's not in it, their head's not in it, you can tell right away. And with S-G#2 she was there and you can tell that she was aware of what was going on, she knew how to react to situations, she wasn't afraid to step in or step back or whatever was appropriate.

S-G#2 further explained her demonstration of responsibility, initiative, self-acceptance and self-reflection:

S-G#2:...Then I realized well it's part of my responsibility and those sort of things I should be able to do and to learn and so it was more of an acceptance of 'well it's a mistake and it's okay and nobody is blaming me and nobody is angry at me and there is no need to for me to be angry at anybody. So that part of me, acceptance of having made a mistake and just not judging myself for it, and accepting it and everything was a big part of the learning you know and accepting in the lesson, and that's what happened.

Willingness to work and learn was emphasized by S-G#2 in the following:

INT: *What did you or S-E#2 contribute to this being such a successful practicum?*

S-G#2: I think both of us it was our willingness, willingness to learn, to do the work, I think that my asset is not to take criticism if the person would be open as far as my experience or lack of experience in my ideas and the way they are sometimes too utopic or not based in reality. I need the more experience to realize that my

things don't always work. I just think it's more work and I just think it's a more openness of mind as far as criticism and willingness to learn but still feeling valuing my work anyways... I think S-E#2 is just her willingness to teach and her willingness to show in her care and her openness too.

As noted earlier the readiness of the student was important to S-E#2. Readiness of the student as she entered the practicum was the basis for the ability to engage in a working relationship with responsibility, initiative and self-reflection. Autonomy within the relationship provided the springboard for the demonstration of responsibility for self, initiative and self-reflection, as shown by the following excerpt:

S-G#2: Oh no she never said do this or do that, never once during the practicum did she say do this or do that, she always suggested or asked me...or I would check with her 'what do you think about this idea?'...

INT: So it sounds like very constructive guidance without being prescriptive but more like the kind, bringing things to your attention so then you can think about what sort of action you should be taking or felt comfortable taking. Sort of come up with your own ideas around it.

S-G#2: Yes, that was good, it shows very respectful of letting me do my work, do the work I had to do and giving me responsibility and initiative, letting me take initiative. But then I also always checked with her and so I think that she probably felt safe too, that I wouldn't go off and do some crazy thing because I always checked and made sure ... so I think it's cooperation there. The mutual respect is important because if I never asked her she might have been afraid of letting me ...a little looser.

When S-E#2 and S-G#2 discussed the data together, they titled a cluster of information as meaning to them **setting up a non-threatening atmosphere**. This designation includes feelings of ease, respect, empathy, equality, comfort, enjoyment, caring, safety, trust, being supported, lack of fear, and openness to making mistakes on the part of the sponsor-educator. The following excerpt captures the elements of ease, respect, equality and comfort:

INT: What do each of you believe to be the important characteristics of the relationship between you?

S-G#2: *The first thing is the respect for each other and the respect that I felt coming from S-E#2 so that I was able to feel comfortable talking to her, comfortable to try things and to express my opinions and I learned a lot because of that comfort level and that allowance because she respected me and had confidence in me. She allowed me to do things and to try things and not only watching her all the time.*

S-E#2: *I think my answer...is that there was a respect between us that was easy to come by because S-G#2 had a lot of experience. She knew what she was doing and I think she understood what the workload was in a centre like this or in daycare period.*

S-G#2 talked about her sense of safety and comfort in the relationship with S-E#2:

S-G#2: *...She really put a big effort into communicating and I really enjoyed that, I felt respected. And I felt that she cared and it made me comfortable to discuss things with her and how did she feel about that, and I didn't feel like that with a lot of other sponsor teachers. I felt that where I was at it was a place of more knowledge almost or more intellectual, bringing theory into the practice. ...I had a lot of theory. So sometimes I was afraid to approach them (sponsor teachers) with things because I didn't want to sound like a know-it-all or I'm better than or whatever, but with S-E#2 that never happened because she was very open ...*

The openness to making mistakes on the part of the sponsor-educator had particular significance for the student, as is evidenced by S-G#2's comments:

S-G#2: *...she was very human, and honest how she felt that sometimes she was losing it or she was, didn't know what to do or say or respond and she wasn't afraid of, of letting that be seen, like she wouldn't try to mask it, she was very honest with that and we would just smile at each other or she would...raise her eyes...or show me some body language that...she didn't have all the answers and sometimes nothing works and that's okay too.*

As in Case One, **constructive criticism** was a critical factor in the relationship of Case Two. Within Case Two, constructive criticism was built upon open and clear communication, autonomy and setting up a non-threatening atmosphere. The student emphasized the importance of the sponsor-educator having the ability to criticize:

S-G#2: *(S-E#2) remembering special circumstances, when you did this, being very specific...so and so responded this way because of this, you could have done this instead...And it really helped because it ...showed me how the theory works in practice or doesn't work, or my mistake in theory had consequences in practice.*

How if I wasn't authoritative at some times...the children would take over and would run rampant...and things like that, being very specific. Very direct... not being afraid of who you criticize that's very important, a lot of sponsor teachers are afraid to say to a student...to me that is a mistake...They're encouraging and you want to be positive and you don't know how to criticize constructively, and then a lot of students...take it very personally...

S-E#2 provided a graphic example of how S-G#2 communicated her desire for criticism:

S-E#2: *...she was reading through one of my reports and she said 'well I must be doing something wrong' but then I said 'well do you really want to hear that?' and she said "I don't have any problem whatsoever", so that sort of lessened that sort of tension...and so we hit those points...So it is kinda neat to have her say 'go for it because I can take it', you know, 'I'm not insecure about myself, so you tell me I'm doing something (and) I'm going to use it to make myself even better'.*

Working together to support learning as a component in the relationship

blended elements of cooperation, blending theory and practice, working side-by-side, demonstrating skills to emphasize use, professional attitudes, opportunities, and supporting development of skills. The following excerpt from the transcript provides an example:

S-G#2: *I remember S-E#2 reading a story but I don't think she was purposely modeling a certain skill for me she was just doing her job, and I just picked on how she was going over the story so slowly, reading the words slowly...and I remembered that the next time I read a story and I imitated that behavior and it worked...It happened during the whole practicum that S-E#2 would model things for me...at one point we were playing in the front room and you asked a certain child to do something because I was trying to prepare something...and she purposely asked a child to do this so that I could watch and observe and take notes...*

INT: *...S-E#2, I'm curious how aware you were at the time of some of these things that you were modeling so that S-G#2 could observe the modeling. Like how high in your awareness level would that be?*

S-E#2: *Well I think basically I'm on red alert when I have a student because I want them to come out and feel like they've got something out of it, so it's great for the educators to sharpen their skills...One of S-G#2's goals was to be more assertive with the kids and get attention, so when I would make a goal for myself to be really clear with the kids and make sure I was getting it so that it was laid out properly for her...If something happened and I just wanted to confirm with S-G#2 that she did understand what was going on or like if she caught everything that happened, (I would approach her) and just talk it over.*

INT: *S-G#2, (How) did that process of discussing with you what S-E#2 was doing in the modeling help you understand the modeling?*

S-G#2:*It reinforces it and it makes it clearer and it also helps me remember it, it kind of puts it back inside, just verbalizing it, 'I was doing this and did you hear that, and did you see, pinpointing things and did you notice a child's reaction?'...And also it's important for the person who is modeling to make sure that the student has caught it and is actually being aware because if I'm not aware there's an opportunity being wasted there and the student needs to be more observant about what's going on.*

INT: *It's kind of like tossing a ball up in the air and this is the catching it.*

S-G#2:*The catching it, yeah...it's nice for the person who caught it, 'did you see me throw that ball?' and for the person who threw it to know that the other person caught it and to hear her say that so it's a reinforcement as well. It encourages both people to keep going.*

In Case Two, the student emphasized the importance of the sponsor-educator's ability to discuss theory and literature, both in terms of her knowledge and of her experience in the field. This opportunity to actively blend theory and practice made a difference to the way S-G#2 communicated with S-E#2, in that S-G#2 felt an openness on S-E#2's part to her queries and desire for understanding, and was not intimidated by S-G#2's interest in theory:

S-G#2:*...She really put in a big effort into communicating and I really enjoyed that, I felt really respected. And, I felt that she cared and it made me comfortable to discuss things with her and how did she feel about that, and I didn't feel like that with a lot of other sponsor teachers. I felt that where I was at it was a place of more knowledge almost or more intellectual, bringing theory into the practice. I didn't have that much practical experience but I had a lot of theory, more sometimes than the other sponsor teachers because they had been out of school for so long and I was more recently sent to school and the books and everything and I had a lot of theory, so sometimes I was afraid to approach them with things because I didn't want to sound like a know-it-all or I'm better than or whatever. But with S-E#2 that never happened because she was very open and I think she still reads...so she has still has the theory background, it is still very fresh in her. I never had that feeling, I could always come to her and say 'well I read this and what do you think of that' and since then she also had the practical experience that really helped too because she take in theory and then in practice do it.*

Case One and Case Two had many similarities with each having it's own flavour of working relationship. Case One seems to have had a strong element of natural compatibility between the two; whereas the Case Two relationship apparently provided a place for analysis on the part of both individuals.

In considering the themes which have emerged from the two cases, it was possible to extract a further set of themes which apply to both cases. These common themes included:

- frequent communication
- open, clear, purposeful communication
- autonomy which leads to responsibility for self, self-reflection, and taking initiative
- working together to support learning
- constructive criticism
- comfort and support
- respect and equality
- safe and non-threatening atmosphere

Analysis of the common themes will lead to an unveiling of the meta-themes, the major aspects and dimensions of the phenomena of the working relationship.

CHAPTER FIVE

Interpretations: Considering Meta-themes through Theoretical Lenses

This study has considered what some student-graduates and sponsor-educators consider to be the essential elements of their working relationship which led to successful experiences for the students in ECE practicum. Data from each of the two case studies, composed of a sponsor-educator and student-graduate pair, were analyzed and themes derived for each case. Subsequently, the themes from the two cases were compared and examined, and a set of themes common to the two cases developed. In the experience of analysis a pattern of meta-themes emerged. These meta-themes were not explicitly stated by the participants, but rather emerged from the themes of the two cases as I examined and re-examined the data.

Meta-themes of the elements of the working relationship present in successful learning experiences for students in ECE practicum:

- **Being together and sharing experiences**
- **Talking together throughout the day**
 - **Autonomy and sense of self**
- **Safe and non-threatening atmosphere**
 - **Making meaning of experiences**

This chapter identifies and discusses each of the meta-themes derived from the study data within the context of ECE practice, and examines whether the theories of mentoring and supervision inform the meta-themes.

The practice of early childhood education involves continuous human contact throughout the day between adults and children. The well-being of each person is dependent on the interactions of all. The nature of the practice is defined in the following manner: “Early childhood educators are responsible for the children in their care. They create environments for children that are safe, secure and supportive of good health in the broadest sense. They design programs that provide children with opportunities to develop physically, socially, emotionally, morally, spiritually, cognitively and creatively. A healthy environment for children is one in which each child’s self-esteem is enhanced, play is encouraged and a warm, loving atmosphere is maintained. ...Caring is at the core of early childhood education...Being cared for and cared about is consistently communicated to all children.” (Code of Ethics, Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia, 1995, p. 5-7). During the practicum the ECE student integrates and consolidates theoretical and practical learning and demonstrates the ability to undertake the role and responsibilities of the early childhood educator.

Being Together and Sharing Experiences

The practicum involves a student working side-by-side with an experienced practitioner. Being together is the crux of the practical work. The being together makes it possible to cooperate, be helpful, show a desire to learn, to purposefully watch to learn,

and to model and demonstrate skills. During the side-by-side work the individuals have opportunities to cooperate and be helpful to each other. They share in the experiences with each other and learn through the use of a wide variety of approaches to working with children.

Student-graduate #1 explained the working arrangement in Case One:

S-G#1: I taught alongside her, I observed her, she observed me, we worked together, sort of like a partnership...she sometimes would have four children and I would have four children in the same room but at different ends of the room... We'd both work with all eight children on the same project so I'd be assisting her sometimes.

The sponsor-educator in Case One explained how she and the student related to each other as they worked side-by-side during each day:

S-E#1: ...more than the teacher and the student it was more like an assistant teacher and a teacher relationship.. You felt that she was there in a supportive way where I think with the students you feel that you were supporting them all the time. I actually felt in a lot of instances that I kind of had back up, that I knew she knew what was going, so if I gave her you know just signals with the eyes or made a statement not particularly to anybody I knew she would pick it up right away and act on it.

Because young children by nature function from qualitatively different developmental perspectives than adults, the work is complex. Adults must learn to quickly assess situations and utilize skills and approaches accumulated from a depth of experience. In order for the student to be provided with the wealth of experience necessary to be effective in the work, she must be exposed through saturation and seasoning. The student-graduate in Case Two talked about the importance to her of working beside her sponsor-educator continuously:

S-G#2: ...you have to work with the person because all kinds of stuff happens that is unplanned that are learning situations that are not planned and incredible opportunities, and it puts a human aspect to it because not everything works and not everything is perfect and the children are not predictable they are

unpredictable sometimes, and all their unique characteristics. So when you put the theory into practice and you work together with it then the learning is more concrete and it's more in-depth, ..and you learn a lot more...

Through the sharing of experiences, the student has numerous opportunities to purposefully watch the sponsor-educator to learn skills and approaches to the many unique situations presented by individuals and combinations of young children. By observing multiple interactions between children and adults, the student has opportunities to begin gathering ideas to enhance theoretical knowledge, and thus has information in mind when assessing situations and deciding on a course of action.

Learning through modeling requires that the student have opportunities to observe and imitate skills. Improvements to the quality of practicum such as that proposed by Smith (1990), which involve on-going coaching and consistent modeling have as a basic premise the assumption that the student and sponsor-educator will be together. In this study it was evident that modeling was of importance to both the student and the sponsor-educator. An example of how S-E#2 used modeling of skills throughout the day to help the student learn is evident in the following excerpt:

INT: *So you're pretty aware, like when you're reading a story you're aware that you're modeling those skills around story presentation. So after you do the modeling do you do anything with the student specifically to work on the student's understanding of the modeling?*

S-E#2: *Well one of S-G#2's goals was to be more assertive with the kids and get attention, so when I would make a goal for myself to be really clear with the kids and make sure I was getting it so that it was laid out properly for her...So that I wasn't being authoritarian and (was) finding ways to get that attention and to feed the kids interest.*

INT: *So you were actually aware of S-G#2's goals and you were trying to do things that were supportive to her achieving her goals because you would be providing opportunities there that would do those things for her. Were there any times when you did something, like when you asked this child to do something when you knew S-G#2 wanted to watch it, that after it was over you actually approached S-G#2 to*

talk about it, to explain what you did in the modeling, to explain your thinking, anything like that?

S-E#2: *I'm pretty sure. If something happened and I just wanted to confirm with S-G#2 that she did understand what was going on or like if she caught everything that happened, and just talk it over...*

In considering mentoring theory, the influence of the mentor on the protégé is strong. Modeling is a recognized aspect of the mentor role (Kram, 1985; Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992). Early in the development of a person, modeling is more specific and literal (Daloz, 1987). An individual learning and mastering new skills is drawn to an experienced person who is able to demonstrate the skills to them, and the experienced person has the capacity to fill the need of the learner (Daloz, 1987). On the other hand, experienced practitioners often have a sense that they want and need to pass on the skills and learning they have acquired to others, so the learner fills this need in the practitioner (Daloz, 1987). The comments of the sponsor educators regarding the recognition of their abilities and expertise by the students and the receptiveness of the students to their attempts to model skills, illustrated the importance to them of being able to fill the need in the student.

S-E#2: *Well I think basically I'm on red alert when I have a student because I want them to come out and feel like they've got something out of it, so it's great for the educators to sharpen their skills. Say pay attention a bit more, so that they're sharper, because somebody wants to learn something. Like see, if you've been in the field for a few years there must be something there.*

INT: *So can you imagine what it would be like trying to model for a student, especially this difficult kind of stuff, and not talking about it?*

S-E#1: *No I can't. Because even S-G#1 who was very receptive and watched everything, and picked up all the clues and all the pointers and things, and this isn't a good time to say anything about what's going on now, just by a look, you know, if we were talking about another student who wasn't receptive then you could model your head off and get absolutely nowhere.*

Insight into the importance to the study participants being together throughout the day has been implied in the mentoring literature and may be strengthened by considering some feminist perspectives. The evidence that relationship issues are extremely significant to women throughout their lives and have a strong influence on personal and professional development (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Daloz, 1987; Gilligan, 1982; Jeruchim & Shapiro, 1992), suggests the significance of actually being together most of the time in that women may be more open to learning when they are functioning within a familiar relationship. The following discussion from Case One illustrated how the familiar relationship was the stimulus for learning:

INT: *It sounds like it was a really mutual thing, this challenging that was going, it was stimulating for you. And maybe that's not there in lots of practicum relationships.*

S-G#1 *No I don't think it is. I've seen a number where there wasn't that challenge...That didn't happen with S-E#1 because everything flowed together and it all related...*

The student in Case Two expressed her empowerment through the familiar working relationship:

S-G#2: *...I learned so much because of her attitude and willingness to teach and help, the way she did it...I felt empowered because I was learning and the things...we were doing were working and my interactions with the children were growing more in depth. I felt more in control and more meaningful and more purposeful and everything.*

In this study the students emphasized the importance of being with the sponsor-educator and sharing experiences throughout the day. Opportunities for modeling and on-going coaching are then continuous. The mentor role has a strong element of modeling, and within mentoring theory the importance of modeling for both individuals is described.

For students at the point of being novices, the duration and intensity of the modeling is important, as is the amount of talking together that is possible during the day.

Talking Together Throughout the Day

In ECE practice the quality of human interaction is dependent upon the communication between adults and children. Talking is important from the perspective of socializing a student to the ECE environment, and is also necessary for the student to develop understanding of the work. Previous studies have suggested that practicum experiences be improved by having practicum sites accept their role as reflective and self-renewing institutions where students become socialized, and by training sponsor-educators to analyze their teaching supervision technique (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988; Reid, 1994; Smith, 1990; Spodek, 1994).

For the participants in the study it was essential to have talking times throughout the work day, utilize as many spontaneous moments to dialogue as possible, and also to have more formal meeting times. The significance of the talking is evident in the amount that occurred each day and in the emphasis placed on the talking by the participants.

The student in Case One commented on the frequency of talking throughout the day and importance to her of being able to talk often.

S-G#1: ...first thing in the morning (we talked) when I got there...and then that time we would get the activity set for the day and then we would discuss suggestions for the day and things to expect from the children,...and at the end of the day too, cleaning up and then we would also have time to sit and talk and discuss these little things...about what went on during the day. ...So I got to discuss things right away with her rather than wait until a day later. So it was very meaningful the time that I did spend with her because we would discuss right when it was going on, so I wouldn't forget about it, or we could deal with the issue right away. So it was helpful because then I could move on to something else...

S-E#2 commented about the extensiveness of the talking between her and S-G#2 and showed how the talking was instrumental to building trust in the relationship, with the trusting relationship being the foundation for supporting the learning of the student.

S-E#2: One on one I guess it would be on our breaks, otherwise it would be just catching moments away from the kids... So it was more when we had the times, alone, which happens say when the kids are napping. That would be another time we would take the opportunity to go through things, say that when we were in the art room everything that is going on, then we would review that, so we're constantly checking on each other about what was going on. And she would express if it was really difficult for her and I would express the same if I had a really hard group or something wasn't going right or talk about what would make it better, what approach would work better. Sometimes we had no idea but you know, so it was just we would just keep rolling ideas all the time.

In discussing the development of trust between students and advisors, Daloz (1987) emphasizes the essential nature of listening well on the part of the advisor. It seems obvious that listening depends on talking, and for the student, many opportunities to talk with the sponsor-educator hastens the process of engendering trust. Open conversation is the link that connects the people. The initial trust that the student has in the experienced practitioner is based on the authority of the role. However, after the sense of awe held by the student for the other begins to diminish, the trust needs nourishment through continued talking and increasing sharing between, or mutuality (Daloz, 1987).

S-E#1 and S-G#1 provided evidence of mutuality as they talked about the communication between them:

INT: ...each of you talk about what you believe to be the most valuable characteristics of the relationship between you. ...

S-G#1: I believe the communication among the two of us and how open we were with one another helped to make it a comfortable relationship that we could be ourselves in and know that the other person was there to listen.

S-E#1: I think so too. And also, a very similar interest between us. I think I mentioned before that we both saw things and then we'd wait and after the class was over to

say this happened or that happened. And I think that's quite unusual actually to see with a student. And that was there really from the beginning.

INT: *So it's some kind of a connection. When you say that your face lights up, it's like this was a really neat, exciting kind of experience.*

S-E#1: *I think it was.*

S-G#1: *Yeah, I think there was a total connection there when you and I communicated. There was never anything awkward about it.*

S-E#1: *No. I think we were totally at ease with each other.*

It seems that the quality of the communication between the two is a demonstration of the connectedness in the relationship. Daloz's term, "two person hothouse" (Daloz, 1987, p. 221) seems an appropriate one in describing this communication.

As Daloz (1987) describes, it is through talk that the mentor helps the student engage with different perspectives, as the mentor tries to understand the student's thoughts and raises questions. Mentoring theory enhances the understanding of the necessity of talking within these two relationships and how the talking led to trust and mutuality.

Talking between two people, with careful listening to each other is necessary for women who are at the point of "constructed knowledge", according to Belenky et al (1986). As a woman constructs knowledge, she is able to hear the views and perspectives of others without interfering with her ability to be aware of her own views and perspectives. In this study both the student and the sponsor-educator had the ability to express themselves and listen to the other, and learn through the process. Daloz's concept of "contextual relativism" (Daloz, 1987) has similar elements to "constructed knowledge" in that the learner becomes more able to take into account a variety of points of view and then is able to see various ways of arriving at perspectives.

An element that stands out in the talking and communication in both of the cases of the study is the special effort that was put into the communication by the sponsor-educators, and the students' appreciation of the effort invested. One sponsor-educator spent long periods of time after the student had left for the day trying to think of examples and illustrations which she could share the next day to enhance the student's learning about particular situations. The other sponsor-educator invested her own time to carefully and thoroughly complete written evaluations and then made a point of discussing the information in detail. The student found this person to be the only sponsor-educator who had exhibited such interest and who took her role so seriously. Again, mentoring theory supports understanding of the significance of the effort invested in communication and the resulting build-up of trust within each of the relationships.

Autonomy and Sense of Self

In the ECE practicum both the student and the sponsor-educator require autonomy and a sense of self in order for the facilitation of change within the student. In order to develop skills in working with children a person must practise the skills with children. A student needs the confidence and desire to practise, willingness to take initiative and try new things, and the ability to reflect on one's actions and take responsibility for self. Student/sponsor-educator relationships that acted as a catalyst for change were those that allowed the individual independence and freedom to evolve through experiencing. S-G#1 explained the effect that a sense of autonomy had on her self-esteem and self-confidence:

S-G#1: *...I think I brought the same person to every practicum but I don't think I came out the same person from every practicum.*

INT: *Talk about that a little bit more, how is that different for you?*

S-G#1: *I came out with a very positive image of myself when I came out of (this) practicum because of the feedback I got from S-E#1... I felt very confident about myself and I didn't have any doubts that I wasn't able to do something or tackle something or I didn't have any fears of these eight children sitting in front of me in circle, like I didn't have that fear anymore because I knew I had that support of S-E#1 all the time, ... and that was a big thing for me to know that there was always somebody there that you could lean on. ... I knew that because of our relationship, the connection between the two of us that I could always be me and there wasn't, I wasn't expected to do something magical and be something I wasn't. So I had no fear to be with her and to be comfortable with her whereas in other practicums I did have fears that this didn't work and I didn't feel supported the way that I did with S-E#1.*

S-G#1 went on to explain that she had space to discuss issues when she was ready:

S-G#1: *...or to talk about some things, when I was ready to talk about, cleaned up, or whatever, or we were just sitting at the table or it was, I could talk the next morning. There was lots of room.*

INT: *So low pressure in terms of talking.*

S-G#1: *Which was very comfortable, it's hard to be stressed out,...*

The student in Case Two also talked about her increasing acceptance of herself and her sense of personal responsibility as she grew in confidence and autonomy:

S-G#2: *...Then I realized well it's part of my responsibility and those sort of things I should be able to do and to learn and so it was more of an acceptance of well it's a mistake and it's okay and nobody is blaming me and nobody is angry at me and there is no need for me to be angry at anybody. So that part of me, acceptance of having made a mistake and just not judging myself for it, and accepting it and everything was a big part of the learning you know and accepting in the lesson.*

For the ECE students in these practica the taking of risks led to increased opportunities to learn and to change. S-E##1, in the following comments reflected on her observation of S-G#1's demonstration of self-reflection and the resultant changes in S-G#1 as she began to try new skills after she had thought through the situation.

INT: ... I'm just wondering how the actual relationship with you was helping her in that situation (when S-G#1 was uncertain if she was doing the right thing and then needed to talk about what she'd done).

S-E#1: Well, I think she was mature enough to recognize her own limitations when she started and then to be able to recognize her own strengths too, through basically watching the role playing and practising herself. Sometimes she would go home and you know talk to her mom, and try these things out, and I think that takes some doing too because really sometimes the students can jump into a situation and tell the children to do this and that... it's hard for students as well because they kind of feel right away like a barrier comes down because they think they might say the wrong thing. She was able to stand off from things and kind of think about what she was going to say, she didn't just jump in and say it. I think the most of the credit or all of the credit really has to go to S-G#1 because she kind of regulated herself just by watching, listening, asking questions and deciding for self when her time was right.

S-G#2, the student in Case Two talked about the attitude of the sponsor-educator toward her as being supportive of her sense of autonomy and her taking risks through attempting new experiences.

S-G#2: ...it shows very respectful of letting me do my work, do the work I had to do and giving me responsibility and initiative, letting me take initiative. But then I also always checked with her and so I think that she probably felt safe too, and I wouldn't go off and do some crazy thing because I always checked and made sure 'will this be safe', or 'what do you think of this idea' so I think it's a cooperation there. The mutual respect is important because if I never asked her she might have been afraid of letting me...a little looser.

Reflective practice, in which the student is actively involved in evaluating skills, knowledge and attitudes is considered to be a way to improve the quality of the practicum experience (Hoover, 1994; Zeichner, 1990). Transformative experiences include self-reflection to the point of self-doubt, which leads to further self-analysis and to a shift in the way of viewing self. S-G#2 talked about changes in her view of self through the opportunities she encountered during the year and how in this final practicum the positive experience was critical in confirming change within herself.

S-G#2: It's really important to have good experiences like this because it reconciles you to this job. As an interim educator, it made me want to be one, because you know I had my doubts all the time, and I think a lot of people do and I had enough negative experiences during my year at school with all these practicums and observations, I had some difficult ones, ones that made me think 'gee I don't think this is the right field for me, I'm going to change'. My first observation I almost wanted to quit everything. And then I went somewhere else and it got better, ...and it got really good, and I ...can handle it, I like this, this is good work, I love doing this, this is the way I want it to be.

In this study students needed confidence and the independence to attempt change, as well as the assurance of freedom and opportunity from the sponsor-educator. In order for the shift into “contextual relativism” to occur, self-reflection is essential, and the student must be given freedom and encouragement to develop her own opinions, perspectives and ways of being. An individual is supported in the movement to orienting and committing self within a relativistic world by confirmation of worth, a sense of being valued and accepted (Daloz, 1987). Because the students were building the ability for self-reflection they were better able to take responsibility for self within the relationship with the sponsor-educator and to take initiative and risks. They were able to view themselves from more than one perspective, orient themselves within the environment and thus meet challenges as they arose. The sense of equality and autonomy they both felt gave them freedom and encouragement to develop personal opinions and perspectives, and in turn to take initiative and risks. It seems they were moving towards “contextual relativism”.

Sponsor-educators in this study expressed the importance to them of a practicum student quickly demonstrating confidence and beginning skills with children. When the sponsor-educators were able to observe these aspects very early in the practicum they in

turn were able to relate to the student with more respect, equality and faith that the student had the potential to learn effectively in the setting.

Safe and Non-threatening Atmosphere

Healthy environments for children are those in which children are cared for and cared about. In the practicum the student also needs to feel cared for and cared about in order to learn how to ensure healthy environments for children.

The descriptions of relationships in the study repeatedly included words such as comfort, support, respect, equality, and no threat, all descriptors of caring for and caring about. It is necessary for these elements to exist in order for a person to be able to take risks and open herself to many learning opportunities. The two students involved in this study both talked about the lack of fear they felt in the working relationship, and that because they did not feel threatened by the sponsor-educator, they could accept feedback and criticism in a non-defensive manner.

S-G#1: *...And she also would give me the opportunity to try it the next day, 'well try that again, do you want to do this again and give it another shot?' She's very flexible and very understanding. I would ask her 'can I try a song with the kids, and that one didn't seem to work on Tuesday, what about doing it tomorrow', and it was very comfortable that way. So she gave me chances to re-learn or retry things which was good. So our relationship was very comfortable and therefore learning and talking about things I was very comfortable to ask her for suggestions and not be intimidated by S-E#1, so it was good that way.*

S-G#2: *(important characteristics of the relationship) The first thing is the respect for each other and the respect that I felt coming from S-E#2 so that I was able to feel comfortable talking to her, comfortable to try things and to, ah, express my opinions and I learned a lot because of that comfort level and that allowance because she respected me and had confidence in me. She allowed me to do things and try things and not only watching her all the time.*

Support within the relationships reflected a strong sense of respect between the participants. This respect was the demonstration of equality between the two. Because both people felt respected by the other, they were both able to take risks: the student took risks in trying things again, and in talking about her mistakes; the sponsor-educator took risks in that she openly acknowledged her mistakes and the fact that at times she did not know “right answers”. S-E#2 explained:

INT: *Talk about the most important features of the relationship in terms of her learning, her learning experiences.*

S-E#2: *I suppose it would be the mutual respect that we have for each other.*

INT: *...And what would be an example of that mutual respect?*

S-E#2: *When we were having a really busy day or a lot of behaviour problems with kids, our opinions were both respected on how it should be handled, it wasn't like there's one way or another, I could easily respect she could think it through, and she could do the opposite for me. Like if the day was rough we could both empathize with each other, there is no blame like 'you created that', or, so it was more like we were working together.*

INT: *So it sounds like there was feedback there and communication but it wasn't criticalness, so no blame, not criticizing of what was going on or what people were like or what they were doing.*

S-E#2: *Right, ya, just generally respecting that it's tough to work with kids and that there's no one approach to it, you know there's so many different styles within one centre that any approach works with any child, the child accommodates to that.*

S-G#1 talked about the importance to her of the sense of equality:

S-G#1: *S-E#1's and my relationship became a side-by-side working relationship where she would react to me and respect me as her equal, whereas in other sponsor-educator/ student relationships I found I felt very beneath my sponsor-educator. Because I was still learning I could see to a degree how that would be still learning and looking up to your sponsor-educator but at times I felt very uncomfortable with that because I thought both being adults and both there for the same reason, for the children and you know for the well-being of the children, that to be looked down upon in such a manner was very uncomfortable for me.*

The support and respect so essential to a learner, by providing a place for trust to grow, confirms in the learner a sense of worth, accepts the learner, and reinforces the

ability of the learner to change, grow and progress when she is ready (Daloz, 1987).

Support and trust are intertwined, and are fed by the taking of risks by the participants in the relationship. In order to take risks, the learner must have a sense of safety. Daloz (1987) contends that adults who place themselves in the position of again being a student experience fear. In this study the two students acknowledged the possibility that they would experience fear in the practicum but stated that the comfortable and supportive relationship with the sponsor-educator reduced the fear for them, thus they were able to take risks and to learn.

Supportive relationships are particularly important to women, as they tend to value nurturance and caring and comfort between people. Because of their concern for the well-being of people around them the sense of comfort, support and respect are key elements in importance of the relationship as a positive force for the woman (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Daloz, 1987; Gilligan, 1982). In these cases, the students and sponsor-educators viewed the supportiveness provided by the relationship to be a crucial factor in the success of the students' learning.

Daloz (1987) proposes that women mentors tend to provide more support and nurturance while men mentors provide more challenge. In this study it was apparent that the sponsor-educators provided support and nurturance and that this was highly valued by the students. These sponsor-educators also provided challenge to the student.

Making Meaning of Experiences

Practicum has been defined in the following way: “As the final step in a formal training program offering a certificate, degree, license, or credential, student teaching (practicum) completes a period during which exposure requires the synthesizing of all previous coursework, training, workshops, and background experience” (Machado & Botnarescue, 1993, p. 2). In order for synthesis to occur an individual must actively engage in understanding experiences, in other words meaning making. The meaning making in these cases was achieved through feedback, weaving together of theory and practice, problem solving, constructive criticism, and absence of defensiveness. In order for the meaning making to occur, the other elements of being together, talking together, autonomy and safety must be in place, as is demonstrated in the following explanations from the student-graduates.

S-G#1 explained how the sponsor-educator, through a combination of feedback, application of theory to practice, constructive criticism and assurance supported her in making meaning. The example shows as well the lack of defensiveness of the student.

S-G#1 I felt she was being very honest with me...to say 'so and so was fidgeting and in order to bring her into the circle if you had done this...and I would think 'that's a good idea', rather than '...here comes all the negative' because she was very positive in her criticism...but on the other hand she would also be saying 'you did that very well'...Which I think because I was so comfortable with her in both, the positive was positive and the negative was also in a positive light that I learned, I took that in and I would turn it around and say 'now I did that, how am I going to make that work this time'. And she would also give me the opportunity to try it the next day...

The following excerpt from the interview with S-G#2 illustrated how the weaving together of feedback, application of theory to practice, problem solving, and constructive criticism resulted in meaning making for her:

INT: *Can you give an example of how S-E#2 helped you to analyze the situation, some kind of learning situation?*

S-G#2: *Well the first thing that comes to my mind is I was setting up an activity ... We had quite a few children and S-E#2 was standing there with me watching everything and I was encouraging the children to go in (the worm cave) and crawl in and see what it felt like and to do that. Then the children started to get really hyper around it and as we were doing the activity, S-E#2 and I were discussing what was going on at the same time because ...I could withdraw and watch. She was pointing out things that the children were doing, like for example one of the children decided to feed the worms and he started bringing over pretend food to feed the worms, and how that was an incredible opportunity to talk about what worms eat and what they do when they eat... And so she pointed that out to me...as the activity was happening she was pointing things out and linking it to theory as it was going on, and light bulbs were going off for me... Then later on the activity got too much, they got too hyper around it and that's when S-E#2 started pointing things out to me (and that) this is when it needs to be stopped or tampered down or changed because... So her watching and pointing things out and showing things were really helpful, because had I been alone I think I would have missed out on some of those things. I would have been too involved into controlling and trying to make them do things whereas she helped me by talking to me.*

Katz has identified developmental levels of child care workers, and named the initial step as the “survival stage”, in which learners need assurance about themselves, specific information about how to do the job, and feedback on their performance (Zeece, 1991). The concept of a beginning “survival stage” is helpful in understanding the needs of the student in this incident. The presence of the sponsor-educator provided assurance, information and feedback.

In a sense, this sponsor-educator was challenging the student to observe and analyze what the children were doing in the play, as they talked and incorporated discussion of theory that seemed helpful in understanding how to extend the play of the

children. The understanding of how to extend the play of the children in itself extends the learning of the student. Therefore, questions being posed by the sponsor-educator stimulate thinking and analysis in the student. The blend of support and challenge (Daloz, 1987) enhance the interchange between the two. In this circumstance the student talked about how the sponsor-educator asked her to think about ways to deal with the situation, then supported her in following through with the decision. This example illustrates the need of the student to have positive expectations from the sponsor-educator (Daloz, 1987) and to have a belief in the her capabilities and judgments communicated by the sponsor-educator.

The provision of constructive criticism is another important aspect of the mentor role in terms of the challenge provided to mentees by skillful use of feedback and specific constructive criticism (Daloz, 1987). The students needed constructive criticism to provide assurance about themselves and their work, as well as specific information about how to do the work and how to improve their skills. The students in this study commented on the lack of constructive criticism from other sponsor-educators during their practica, and on their perception of much less valuable learning in these situations. An additional valuable aspect of constructive criticism is the potential to provide vision of how a person might be in the future with improved skills and abilities.

The learning of students was facilitated by a working relationship in which they were supported in constructing their own understanding of experiences within the context of the experience, and in which positive expectations of them led to self-confidence and further risk-taking. The provision of a vision of what the student was capable of becoming

was a powerful force in their evolving sense of vision for themselves. S-G#2 commented on the most important characteristics of her working relationship with the sponsor-educator:

S-G#2: The first thing is the respect for each other and the respect that I felt coming from S-E#2 so that I was able to feel comfortable talking to her, comfortable to try things and to express my opinions and I learned a lot because of that comfort level and that allowance because she respected and had confidence in me. She allowed me to do things and to try things and not only watching her all the time..

S-E#2 gave an example of how she supported S-G#2 by providing positive expectations as S-G#2 struggled with having made a mistake with a child.

S-E#2: Well it was basically explaining to S-G#2 that it wasn't her fault it happened because she hadn't put the time in to really know him ...so basically to reassure her that it wasn't the way she did that, that that was fine and to give her more success for the next time and for him to have more success so everybody comes out feeling better about it. And just setting her up with a plan and then it's set.

The positive expectations held by the sponsor-educators in regard to the students' ability to construct understanding of their experiences furnished a vision for the student of what she could become. S-G#1 described an experience in which she was enabled to adjust her understanding of her behaviour with a child within the supportive framework of her relationship with S-E#1.

S-G#1: ...I had a lot of things going on in my life at one period of my practicum and I felt looking back now I can see that I let the outside world interfere with what was going on in my practicum. I became very edgy and ended up being very interruptive on the children and when my sponsor-teacher had said to me 'okay now I need you to take a look at what's happened here' I thought 'okay what have I done?' When I took the time to look and take the time to talk with her, I learned that yes there was a problem there and it was that there was so many things going on that I wasn't focusing on that need, the needs of that child at that time. Instead there's so many other things interrupting in my thoughts and my head that I had made a mistake. I wasn't focusing on what I should have been focusing on and to make it better and to correct what I had done wrong right at that time I turned around and apologized to the child but I also took a step back and took a breath and sort of regrouped again and then remembered why I was there and

what I was doing. I think because S-E#1... had such warm hearts and were so loving and caring and that I took that situation as a learning situation not as a situation of criticism.

INT: *So their attitude toward you helped you to be able to communicate a learning.*

S-G#1: *Because they said 'okay here's something that happened so how can you learn from this' rather than 'here's something that happened and that was awful, you need to fix it right now', like it wasn't that kind of rigid attitude it was 'okay there's obviously something else going on here, if you need to talk about it we're here to talk about it ...if you need a shoulder to cry on', that sort of thing and that was very helpful because they sort of helped me get over it and fix what had gone wrong.*

S-G#1 took responsibility for herself and her behaviour in part because she was challenged in such a way that she sensed S-E#1's belief that she was capable of analyzing the problem and finding a solution. The challenging combined with vision and support, all evident in S-G#1's comments, enabled S-G#1 to develop a new understanding of herself. S-G#1 continued to explain the long term effect on her understanding which resulted from the incident:

Therefore, yeah, I had learned a lot more from that, then when things were bothering me I could say 'okay remember what happened', just talk to myself and say 'you know this happened last time, how did you fix it?' you know. So learning the difference between work and home and just the different aspects of your life and how they all interact and shouldn't interact at some point too...

Applying mentoring theory as postulated by Daloz (1987) leads to insight into how the interaction between the student and the sponsor-educator provided the catalyst for change within the student, change of which she was cognizant, and which she held as being valuable to her in future difficult situations.

Applicability of the Theoretical Bases of Mentoring and Supervision

As I examined the meta-themes, and looked to theories for assistance in understanding their importance and relevance, I found that supervision theory was less

helpful than mentoring theory. Supervision theory is rooted in the management tradition, in which the aims of the organization are supported by maximizing the output and productivity of the employees. Within this framework, the supervision received by an individual employee is as a staff member of an organization. Although supervision theory includes many similar terms to those of mentoring theory, such as modeling, communication, support, training etc., the terms gain relevancy within the system of the organization in contrast to the overall education and growth of the individual. The supervision literature refers to people working on a job, each of whom have individual responsibilities, so although there is a statement of what to do, the importance of fulfilling responsibilities lies in the success of the organization. The Structured Process Supervision model (SPS), especially adapted to suit human service organizations, presents a dual supervisor role: "...the role of mentor, in which supervisors look out for the needs of the staff person, as well as the role of director, in which they ensure that staff's efforts align with the goals of the organization. The effect is to balance facilitation and accountability." (Jarrett & Van Vugt, 1994, p. 15). The model encompasses the mentor role in as much as the supervisor takes on the role on behalf of the organization.

Mentoring theory, in which the growth and enhancement of the individual is the primary focus with less regard for the particular organization or environment, provides considerable support to my understanding of the dominant themes I have described as emerging from this study. ECE students tend to be in a process of rapid developmental and transformational change, and relationships with sponsor-educators and instructors have strong influence on the change that occurs. The relationships become the stimulant

and catalyst for change in the student. In order for the relationship to effect change the student needs to have trust in the others with whom she/he is engaging; acceptance and respect between the student and sponsor-educator is essential. During practica experiences a primary function of the sponsor-educator is that of role model, therefore emphasis on the mentor as role model is relevant.

ECE students in practica show varying levels of personal readiness for learning from opportunities provided them. Mentees have been shown to affect the amount of mentoring they receive by certain characteristics. These characteristics include: a high level of job involvement and career planning activity, an 'internal locus of control', and the valuing of relationships with supervisors and peers at work (Noe, 1988a; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). Each of these factors seems highly relevant to the practicum experience for ECE students as initiative, involvement, and internal motivation are necessary in order to be actively engaged in learning. Practicum involves intense work with agency staff and often other students, therefore it is essential that the student has a positive attitude toward and a valuing of working relationships in order to be successful in learning the complexity of the work.

However, the mentoring literature indicates a less structured approach to the working relationship than does some of the supervision literature. Even the theory of Kram (1985) in which she describes developmental stages of mentoring, with the first stage being that of initiation, provides little discussion of the techniques and structure to the mentoring relationship. This study speaks to the need of beginners in the field for some structure in the relationship, through frequent and regular communication and

feedback, in order to support the development of trust and respect. Katz' theory (Zeece, 1991) of the developmental levels of child care workers, describing the initial survival stage in which the learner needs assurance about herself, specific information about how to do the job, and feedback on her performance supports the understanding I have gained through this study. There is a strong need for beginners to have the security of structures built into the relationship in order to ensure that they are provided by the sponsor-educator with availability and communication. Thus, the results of this study indicate that mentoring theory as it applies to individuals in the process of being trained for a career would be enhanced by the integration of an element of structure in order to ensure consistent availability of the mentor and regular and frequent discussion times each day.

CHAPTER SIX

Reflections and Implications

This study examined two relationships between a student and a sponsor-educator during ECE practica. The method followed was a case study approach using a phenomenological orientation. The participants in the study described, through several interviews, their own experiences of the elements within the working relationships which supported the students in being successful in their practicum. Analysis of the data from interview transcripts led to the emergence of strong elements or themes, and further into a set of themes common to the two cases studied. From these themes a set of meta-themes was formulated: being together and sharing experiences, talking together throughout the day, autonomy and sense of self, safe and non-threatening atmosphere, and, making meaning of experiences. Each of the meta-themes was discussed within the context of ECE practice, with the theories of mentoring and supervision being utilized to inform the examination.

While the creation of broad generalizations based on case study is not appropriate or advisable, the intent of case study research is to examine in depth a specific situation(s), and to look for elements that are likely to be common to other comparable cases. Further it is reasonable to derive ideas and suggestions for similar situations in the future, and to consider ways in which to improve upon practica for ECE students based upon the findings of this research. This chapter will demonstrate some of the ways I have been influenced by the process and outcomes of this study.

During the practicum, the ECE student works with the sponsor-educator in an apprentice-like capacity. The participants of this study described in detail the side-by-side working throughout each day and the opportunities thus provided for cooperation, helpfulness, showing a desire to learn, purposefully watching to learn, and modeling. The continuous nature of the work led to a wide variety and number of learning opportunities, particularly important when working with children because of the spontaneous and complex aspects to the work. Both of these sponsor-educators took their role seriously and made their commitment to the role clear to the student. Each of the students stated that she appreciated the attitude of the sponsor-educator toward the role.

As the student and sponsor-educator worked together they continuously talked together. The talking served a critical purpose in building a trusting relationship. Although one of the cases in this study seemed to quickly form a comfortable relationship, the other did not, and needed determined effort and willingness to effect the development of comfort. In both cases, the talking together was continuous and coincided with the working together. As well, both cases had more structured meeting times during which the weekly performance appraisal forms were discussed and specific feedback was given relating to the objectives of the practicum. Significant factors in each of these cases were the special efforts invested by the sponsor-educators into communicating their feedback to the student.

The combination of being together and talking together were essential to the formation of these comfortable and supportive working relationships. The participants

needed to develop familiarity with each other, to form a solid safe base from which to function.

The sense of autonomy in the students as they developed self-confidence led to a willingness to take initiative and try new things. A sense of self provided the student the ability to reflect on her actions and take responsibility for herself. As the students felt confidence in the relationship and in themselves and safety in the environment they were then able to begin to make efforts to reach out, take chances, and receive feedback without defensiveness.

In both cases there was a willingness on the part of the student to show initiative, and the ability on the part of the sponsor-educator to show acceptance to the students' efforts and allow her to experience things for herself. The sponsor-educators were supportive and promoted independence rather than dependence in the student. Each was receptive to the other.

As the student increasingly attempted interactions, intervention and leadership with the children she began to make her own learning of the experiences. Critical factors for both students in the meaning making were feedback, weaving together of theory and practice, problem solving, constructive criticism and absence of defensiveness. This making meaning of experiences was an integration of the other component themes: being together and sharing experiences, talking together throughout the day, autonomy and sense of self, and a safe and non-threatening atmosphere. The meaning making constituted a transformative experience for the student. Both of these students believed they had changed through the practicum experience and sensed the significance of the change. The

comments of the students relay their making of connections rather than searching for absolute truths and their realization that different approaches can be made to finding solutions and dealing with issues. They demonstrated what Daloz (1987) terms “contextual relativism”. And they stated that the learning gained through the process was what they would take with them into their careers.

As I reflect on my learning from this process, I realize how important the mentor relationship can be to students as they enter a career. Enhancing the mentor/mentee characteristics of the working relationship between the sponsor-educator and student appears to have potential for improving practica experiences. However, in order for the relationship to have a strong and lasting effect issues must be addressed for each of the three parties involved in the practicum: the sponsor-educator, the student and the instructor.

I am convinced that in order for practica to be effective learning situations the early childhood educators must be serious about the importance of their role as sponsor-educators, must be truly available to the students, and find a variety of ways to communicate effectively with the student. Furthermore, they must be comfortable with being a model for students and with providing feedback and constructive criticism. They must themselves be autonomous and facilitate autonomy in the student. They must be capable of providing support, challenge and vision to the students. As well, the serious and important role of the sponsor-educator needs to be acknowledged by ensuring that there is work time available to do the work required.

Students, on the other hand must be serious about maximizing their learning in the practicum setting. They require autonomy and a sense of self and the ability for self-reflection before they enter the practicum, as well as beginning skills with children, and confidence that they have some skills. The students need a strong grasp of theory in order to be able to successfully integrate theory with practise, the primary goal of the practicum.

Instructors need to take initiative in bridging the gap between the theoretical perspective of the training program and the practical perspective of the agencies where the practicum occurs. Students must be prepared before they begin the practicum and instructors need to assess the readiness of the student for the practicum experience. With the very short nature of most ECE programs in the province, it is important to realistically consider the degree of change and learning possible for a student, and examine the selection process. Applicants could be selected who have a stronger possibility of success in the program in the short amount of time available. Instructors must also take responsibility for preparing sponsor-educators for the role they will be undertaking with students, and helping them understand how to facilitate the learning of the students.

In order to provide suitable practicum placements for students instructors need to have a thorough understanding and familiarity with the agencies and staff, develop a peer-like working relationship with staff and clarify the role and responsibilities of the sponsor-educator and the instructor in relation to students. They must select and match the sponsor-educator with the student. The instructor should take a strong part in arranging the practicum, and then clearly take responsibility for formal evaluation during the practicum.

Implications of the Study

The following statements reflect implications for my work as an ECE instructor in a community college and my responsibilities in regard to practica. The concepts discussed comprise my interpretation of the essence of the study and focus on my role as an ECE college instructor to improve the practica through more specific and extensive training of both students and sponsor-educators.

1. ECE students in practica benefit from the sponsor-educator role being similar to a mentor role in which the mentor provides support, challenge and vision for the student.

In this study the students emphasized the importance of being with the sponsor-educator and sharing experiences throughout the day. Opportunities for modeling and on-going coaching are then continuous. The mentor role has a strong element of modeling, and within mentoring theory the importance of modeling for both individuals is described. For students at the point of being novices, the duration and intensity of the modeling is often important, as is the amount of talking together that is possible during the day. If the sponsor-educator were to assume aspects of the mentor role such as consistent and continuous modeling and frequent discussion throughout each day, the students would benefit.

This study clearly demonstrates the importance of sponsor-educators having large amounts of time and attention to give to students each day of practicum when students are in this stage of learning. As well, it has been noted that improving the quality of practica experience should include encouraging the development of supportive relationships

between students and sponsor-educators which include on-going coaching and consistent modeling (Smith, 1990). Having the time and energy for the attention is difficult for many sponsor-educators because of factors within the early childhood settings.

In light of the evidence that informal mentorships are often more effective than formal, it might be helpful to engage sponsor-educators in determining ways of giving staff choice in regard to accepting a practicum student. The staff who do choose to accept a student could be given support for the role as well as training. Other staff who are less interested in having responsibility for students would then not be expected to take a turn as part of the expectations of staff members.

Previous studies have suggested that practicum experiences might be improved by having practicum sites accept their role as reflective and self-renewing institutions where students become socialized, and by training sponsor-educators to analyze their teaching supervision technique (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988; Reid, 1994; Smith, 1990; Spodek, 1994). Sponsor-educators need to be provided with training to support their understanding of the modeling and talking and how these functions facilitate the learning of the student who is a novice in the field. The talking needs to include explanations of practice and thus provide a blending of theory and practice. The importance of emphasizing of the reciprocal relationship between knowledge and skill in order to bridge theory and practice has been noted in other studies (Melton, 1995; Zeichner, 1990).

ECE students in the study benefited from constructive criticism which was frequent, positively presented, and given most often in verbal form, as well as in written form. Sponsor-educators are trained and skillful in working with young children, however

they seldom have specific training in instructing adults. I believe that early childhood educators tend to strive to be very positive in their interactions with people, and because of this strong effort to positiveness they often find it very difficult to provide feedback which they believe others will perceive as being negative. If the sponsor-educators were given skill training in giving specific feedback and constructive criticism, they would be better prepared to use the skills in working with students and they would feel more comfortable in saying things that might be construed as being critical.

Specific Conclusions:

- The role and responsibilities of the sponsor-educator should be defined with the inclusion of the characteristics of the mentor role.
- The responsibilities of the sponsor-educator should be recognized in the job description of the early childhood educator and the sponsor-educator be provided with work time and/or release from other responsibilities to do the work required.
- Sponsor-educators should be chosen based on their desire and commitment for the role.
- Sponsor-educators should be provided with training which enhances their understanding of the mentor role and develops skill in modeling, explanation of practice and giving specific feedback and constructive criticism.

2. The quality of the practicum experience for ECE students could be enhanced by building within students the ability for critical self-reflection.

Because the students in this study were building the ability for self-reflection they were better able to take responsibility for self within the relationship with the sponsor-

educator and to take initiative and risks. They were able to view themselves from more than one perspective, orient themselves within the environment and thus meet challenges as they arose. The sense of equality and autonomy they both felt gave them freedom and encouragement to develop personal opinions and perspectives, and in turn to take initiative and risks.

As noted earlier, suggested strategies for improving the practicum experience for the student include the active involvement of students in reflective practice through evaluating skills, knowledge and attitudes (Hoover, 1994; Zeichner, 1990). Prior to practicum the ability to engage in critical self-reflection could be developed in students through coursework designed for that purpose.

Specific Conclusions:

- Selection of students should include demonstration of the following: a beginning ability to be self-aware and to self-reflect; positive working relationships; a high level of personal involvement in work and an internal locus of control; and, the ability to accept feedback.
- ECE coursework should be designed to enhance critical thinking and the ability for critical self-reflection.

3. ECE students would benefit by specific skill development prior to practicum so they enter practicum with competence and self-confidence.

The sponsor-educators in this study expressed the importance to them of a practicum student quickly demonstrating confidence and beginning skills with children.

When the sponsor-educators were able to observe these aspects very early in the practicum they in turn were able to relate to the student with more respect, equality and faith that the student had the potential to learn effectively in the setting.

It is important then that students have numerous opportunities within classroom experience and simulated lab situations to practice skills and begin to develop confidence in themselves before the initiation of block practicum in field settings. Previous studies have suggested that practica be improved by focusing on the goal of the student mastering effective teaching behaviours (Smith, 1990). If the student had specific skills prior to beginning the practicum experience the mastery of effective teaching behaviours during practicum would be enhanced.

Specific Conclusions:

- Readiness of students for practicum should be improved by strengthening the understanding of relevant theory prior to their entering practicum.
- In-class learning activities in the ECE program should be designed with a focus on the student demonstrating beginning skills prior to entering practicum.

4. The quality of the practicum for ECE students could be improved by ECE instructors taking full responsibility for summative evaluation of students in order to support the mentor role of the sponsor-educator and remove from it the threat of evaluation.

Daloz (1987) discusses the idea that women mentors tend to provide more support and nurturance while men mentors provide more challenge. Since most of the sponsor educators are women they may especially need help in learning how to challenge students.

In this study it was apparent that the sponsor-educators provided support and nurturance and that this was highly valued by the students. These sponsor-educators also provided challenge to the students, however the students noted that challenge was less present in other practica and that consequently the learning for them was lessened.

It would seem that sponsor-educators would be supported in providing challenge and vision if the responsibility for formal or summative evaluation were more clearly placed with instructors so the sponsor-educator could take a more nurturing role with students. This may mean more clear separation of the roles of instructor and sponsor-educator, so that the instructor takes responsibility for evaluating students through observation, videotaping, record-keeping and grading. The relationship between instructor and sponsor-educator may evolve to being more like a partnership in which individuals have clearly different responsibilities. As well, instructors may need to obtain professional development in the area of practicum instruction.

Sponsor-educators tend to feel intensely uncomfortable at the prospect of taking responsibility for stopping a student in her/his career path (as was expressed by S-E#2 in regard to working with weak students). If they could be more removed from feeling this responsibility I believe they would have more freedom to provide support, challenge and vision.

Specific Conclusions:

- College practicum instructors should be chosen based on an ECE practice background, experience as a sponsor-educator, and, the ability to guide and evaluate students within field agency settings, as well as relevant academic credentials.

- Instructors should access professional development in practicum instruction.
- Instructors should clarify role expectations with sponsor-educators and assume responsibility for evaluation of the students.

5. Students in ECE practica would benefit if instructors arranged practicum assignments in consideration of a match between the student and sponsor-educator that fit the student's confidence and skill level, as well as the need for intellectual challenge.

Although it might be preferable to have student placements made on the basis of a natural connectedness or fit between the sponsor-educator and student it is not usually possible to do this. In the ECE practicum, assignments must be made on the basis of many factors such as agency availability and lifestyle needs of the student.

One approach, suggested by Ralph (1993), describes a model of contextual supervision which provides a means to fit supervisory style with supervisee development. The model includes four levels of supervisee development and four corresponding levels of supervisor style: D1, eager novice; D2 fearful neophyte; D3 reluctant contributor; D4, peak performer; and, S1, directing; S2, coaching; S3, supporting, S4, self-regulating (Ralph, 1993, pp. 287-288).

Considering these two case studies within the framework of the model suggests its applicability in this study. In Case One the student-graduate might be considered to be a D2 level with low to moderate competence and low to moderate confidence, while the sponsor-educator used the approach of S2 coaching, providing high task and high supportive activities to bolster the confidence and competence levels (Ralph, 1993, pp.

287-288). Guidance and direction and encouragement were provided and collaboration increased as the practicum progressed.

In Case Two, the student-graduate showed characteristics of D3, moderate to high competence and fluctuating confidence, a “reluctant contributor” (Ralph, 1993, p. 287). The sponsor-educator provided S3, a supporting level of supervision, emphasizing support more than task (note her references to a co-worker partnership), and gave the student responsibility for decision-making. This approach appears to have been effective in increasing the consistency of the student’s confidence.

Further application of the four levels of the model may provide a method to assist instructors in determining appropriate matches between students and sponsor-educators. The match of the two is of great importance yet is often based on a vague sense on the part of the instructor as to which individuals might work well together, or on other factors such as location of residence and settings, rather than a careful analysis of the factors defined in the model.

Throughout the project I have been mystified as to how and where the personal readiness of the student fits into the picture of the components of the working relationship. The comments of sponsor-educators often reflected their view of the significance of a student’s readiness for the practicum experience. The contextual supervision model may provide a means to consider the readiness of the student and address her/his needs based on the apparent level of readiness.

Specific Conclusions:

- Instructors should develop a thorough understanding and familiarity with early childhood agencies and staff in order to be able to select and match the sponsor-educator with the student.
- Instructors should access and utilize methods of building appropriate matches between student and sponsor-educator.

6. Because of the implications the study holds concerning the people who enter the field of ECE, the conclusions should be shared with ECE BC, Community Care Facilities Licensing (Ministry of Health), and the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training.

As the professional association in the field, ECE BC represents the interests of early childhood educators in the field agency settings who perform the work of the sponsor-educator and provide the practica sites. Community Care Facilities Licensing is responsible for the licensing of both the child care service and the early childhood educator staff, and provides guidelines for the ECE training programs which include expectations for practica. The Ministry of Education, Skills and Training is responsible for the ECE training programs in the public post-secondary institutions, providing program approval and funding. At present there is considerable interest and concern in the field of ECE regarding practica for students and the expectations being placed on ECE services to provide practica sites. Although this case study is of small scope, it provides information and insights which may be a valuable base of information for investigation into the preparation of early childhood educators.

Specific Conclusions:

- The conclusions of the study be forwarded to the board of ECE BC, Community Care Facilities Licensing, and the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training.

Further Research

The conclusions of this study lead to the possibility of further research on the topic of ECE practica in order to determine strategies for improvement of the effectiveness of the practica for students. The continuous daily work with the students is performed by the sponsor-educators in the agencies, while decisions about practica expectations and evaluation procedures are usually made by college instructors. It is essential that there be a merging of these disparate realms for the benefit of the students, and ultimately for the benefit of the profession. It would be useful and instructive to obtain the views of sponsor-educators as well as college instructors on several issues:

- perceptions of problem areas in supervising students
- ways that institutions might provide support to sponsor-educators in working with students
- possible content, format and training for sponsor-educators
- selection of students for ECE programs
- perceptions of the readiness levels of students and how this is demonstrated

Research which compiled and summarized such information would be useful in providing a framework for increased consistency in practica expectations within college programs and across college programs.

Research would also be helpful regarding different models of instructor evaluation of students in field settings; and, on methods of developing in students the ability for critical self-reflection and reflective practice.

I have studied and struggled with the mysteries of making practica effective learning situations for students for as long as I have been a college instructor. I believe that improving the quality of the practicum experience would be beneficial for all students, but that it is essential for the students who at the outset are less competent and confident. I believe the conclusions of this research inquiry shed light in particular on ways to address the needs of the less able students. The very competent and confident student tends to create learning opportunities for her/himself and to be accepted as an equal by other staff, thus enters the practicum with strong predictors of success.

There is much more to be learned about the practicum experience. I have found this study has led to many thought provoking discussions with a wide variety of people. Every discussion confirms my fascination with gaining a better grasp of the many issues and perspectives. The study has uncovered significant information about the working relationship between the student and sponsor-educator: it seems this is merely the first door of the many that are to be opened on the topic of practica in early childhood education.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER SOLICITING PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

PAST-STUDENT

SPONSOR-EDUCATOR

Selkirk College,
Box 1200,
Castlegar, B.C. V1N 3J1,
September 11, 1995.

Dear

I'm looking for past students who had an **especially good working relationship** with their sponsor-educator during a block practicum in the 1994-95 year. If you feel your practicum experience was more successful because of the relationship you had with your sponsor-educator, you're one of the people I'd like to talk with!

I'm doing the study as the research component of an MA in Human and Social Development through the University of Victoria. The study is a unique opportunity for both you and the sponsor-educator to talk about your experience of the learning and working relationship during the practicum. The research will be conducted between September 1995 and January 1996. The thesis I write on the study will provide interesting information about ECE practica. **Your input will be important and valuable, and helpful in improving the practicum experience in the future.**

If you're interested in taking part in the study, please complete the attached form, providing information on how to contact you and the sponsor-educator. I'll phone you and explain the study further.

If you have questions about the study or the request being made, please call me at 365-7292, local 362.

Thanks for your interest.
Sincerely,

Judy Pollard,
Instructor,
Early Childhood Education Program

NAME:

ADDRESS:

PHONE NUMBER:

NAME OF SPONSOR-EDUCATOR:

PHONE NUMBER:

DATES OF THE BLOCK PRACTICUM:

Please return the form to:

Judy Pollard,
Instructor, Early Childhood Education Program,
Selkirk College, Box 1200, Castlegar, B.C. V1N 3J1

THANKS FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE!

Selkirk College,
Box 1200,
Castlegar, B.C., V1N 3J1,
October 10, 1995.

Dear

I'm looking for pairs of past students and sponsor-educators to take part in a study of the practicum experience for students in the ECE program at Selkirk College. Your name was given to me by _____ because she felt she had an especially good working relationship with you in the block practicum last year.

The study is the research component of my MA in Human and Social Development through the University of Victoria. Taking part in the study is a **unique opportunity for both you and the past student to talk about your experience of the learning and working relationship during the practicum.** The research will be conducted between September 1995 and January 1996. The thesis I write on the study will provide interesting information about ECE practica. **Your input will be important and valuable, and helpful in improving the practicum experience in the future.**

If you feel the relationship between you and _____ was especially successful in terms of the learning for the student, please phone me at 365-7292, local 362, and I'll explain the study in more detail.

Sincerely,

Judy Pollard, Instructor,
Early Childhood Education Program.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRES:

PAST STUDENTS

SPONSOR-EDUCATORS

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PAST STUDENT

NAME:

Phone number:

Dates of Practicum:

Sponsor-educator:

1. How would you describe the working relationship between you and the sponsor-educator during the practicum?
2. In what ways has the relationship between you continued since the completion of the practicum?
3. Describe how the sponsor-educator assisted you in your learning during the practicum.
4. How might the sponsor-educator describe you as a practicum student?
5. How was your working relationship with this sponsor-educator different from that with other sponsor educators in other practica?

Please complete and mail to:
Judy Pollard, Instructor,
Early Childhood Education Program
Selkirk College, Castlegar, B.C., V1N 3J1

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SPONSOR-EDUCATOR

NAME:

Phone number:

Dates of Practicum:

Student:

1. How would you describe the working relationship between you and the student during the practicum?
2. In what ways has the relationship between you continued since the completion of the practicum?
3. How did you provide assistance to the student during the practicum?
4. How would you describe this person as a practicum student?
5. How was your working relationship with this student different from that with other students in other practica?

Please complete and return to:
Judy Pollard, Instructor,
Early Childhood Education Program,
Selkirk College, Box 1200, Castlegar, B.C. V1N 3J1

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY ENTITLED,
STUDENT and SPONSOR-EDUCATOR RELATIONSHIPS DURING ECE PRACTICUM: How do participants define the working relationship which leads to successful learning experiences for the student?

I understand that this research project is studying the practicum experience for students in the ECE program at Selkirk College in terms of the relationship between the student and the sponsor educator. I understand that I will be asked about my impressions, opinions and experiences during the practicum, in a questionnaire and in interviews prepared and conducted by Judy Pollard, Master's candidate in the department of Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria. I understand also that past student participants will be asked to make available to the researcher the written records of the practicum (journal, performance appraisal form, instructor evaluation summary and notes).

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without explanation.

I understand that any data collected will remain confidential; interview results and questionnaires will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Furthermore, I understand that my name will not be attached to any published results, and that my anonymity will be protected by using code numbers to identify the results obtained from individual subjects.

I understand that my interview(s) will be audiotaped and that the tape will be erased immediately after the thoughts/feelings/experiences that I talk about are coded in written form. I also understand that if I do not wish to have my interview taped, I can refuse to do so.

I understand that whether I participate or choose not to participate will have no bearing on my future relationship with the Early Childhood Education Program at Selkirk College, or on any possible future student status.

Date:

Signature:

Researcher: _____ Phone: 365-7292 local 362
Judy Pollard, Graduate Student

Faculty Advisor: Frances Ricks, Ph.D. _____ Phone: 721-7979

VITA

Surname: POLLARD Given Names: JUDITH ANN

Place of Birth: SMITHERS, B.C. Date of Birth: JUNE 13, 1942

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Calgary	1960 to 1964
Selkirk College	1973 to 1974
	1993 to 1994
University of Victoria	1985 to 1996

Degrees Awarded:

Elementary Teaching Certificate	University of Calgary	1964
Early Childhood Education Certificate	Selkirk College	1974
B.A. (C.Y.C.)	University of Victoria	1993

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Title of Thesis: STUDENT AND SPONSOR-EDUCATOR RELATIONSHIPS
DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PRACTICUM

Author:



JUDITH ANN POLLARD

AUGUST 24, 1996