THEY’RE ALREADY TEACHERS: EXPLORING NOTIONS OF IDENTITY, BELONGING, AND COMMUNITY WITH TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

by

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Date 13 February 2019

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Teachers College, Columbia University

2019
ABSTRACT

THEY’RE ALREADY TEACHERS: EXPLORING NOTIONS OF IDENTITY, BELONGING, AND COMMUNITY WITH TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

Michelle Clusiau Fraboni

Interest in the elementary education major by underrepresented minority (URM) students at a public four-year institution (Queens College) increased from 36% of declared majors in 2012 to 51% in 2017. However, a disproportionate number of URM students drop out of the educator pipeline, leaving the average percentage of URMs who complete the elementary education major at 22%. While there has been a great deal of research on the preparation of preservice teachers, the bulk of the scholarly literature is focused on the final student teaching practicum and preservice teachers’ experiences at the end of their academic programs. Little research has been done on beginning teacher education students and how their educational experiences, both past and present, influence the way they see themselves as learners and future teachers.

Guided by a sociocultural lens, this qualitative study examines teacher education students’ educational experiences and how those experiences influence and shape their paths into the teaching profession. The study was conducted using an interpretive inquiry approach to enable the exploration of participants’ lived educational experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), using data collected from semi-structured interviews, critical incident reports, and a focus group. Analyses informed by narrative inquiry and grounded theory methodologies were used to look across data collected from participants to paint a rich chronicle of the participants’ stories.
Findings highlight the pedagogy of care in conversation with notions of identity, belonging, and community, in order to note its significance for the more oft-studied aspects of teaching. This study contributes to research on teacher education and teaching and learning in higher education, and considers a different perspective on long-standing ideas about communities of practice.
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DEDICATION

For my family

Angelo, Mia, Rico, and Chloe
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dissertations are the culmination of many years of study, reflection, success failure, and seemingly unending hard work, and mine was no exception. I am writing my acknowledgments now, post-defense, with some distance and time to reflect on the entire process, and what a process it has been. There have been so many people who have taken this journey with me and supported me in many different capacities.

I must begin by thanking my dissertation committee, starting with my advisor and sponsor, Dr. Lalitha Vasudevan. Thank you, Lalitha, for “seeing” me, hearing me, and guiding me. Thank you for your scholarly wisdom, and for your unending supply of patience, good humor, and kindness. Thank you Dr. Detra Price-Dennis, for your invaluable feedback and insights, always offered with thoughtful warmth and kindness, beginning with my proposal defense, and right on through to my dissertation defense. Dr. Victoria Marsick, thank you for agreeing to chair my committee, valuing my work, and offering me invaluable feedback on moving it forward. Thank you for sharing your feedback with grace and kindness. Dr. Laura Azzarito, thank you for your incredibly insightful reading of my dissertation, for offering feedback that pushed me to see new ways of looking at my findings, and for your warmth and kindness throughout my defense. Thank you, my committee members, for making my dissertation defense a lively, rich, and fulfilling scholarly conversation. I truly marvel at your thoughtful and generous feedback, and the way in which you shared it, which I know has the Fred Rogers stamp of approval.

Thank you to Dr. Marie Volpe for helping me to cut through the noise and begin to see that there was, indeed, light at the end of the tunnel. Taking your class was the catalyst for moving my work forward and for helping me find my community and a sense of belonging at TC. Thank you for sharing your light with all of us.
To my dissertation writing group—Sandra, Kathryn, Emily, Ahram, Sophie, Anna, and Cristina: thank you for your support and encouragement, and for being my TC family. A very special thanks to Sandra and Kathryn, my TC kindred spirits, for taking care of me as I hobbled around Cape Cod during our summer writing retreat. Your always enthusiastic support, empathy, warmth, and kindness, coupled with wicked humor have provided me with strength, a community, and a sense of belonging.

Thank you to Dr. Chuck Kinzer and Dr. John Black for your support and encouragement to return to Teachers College after a six-year hiatus. Thank you, Rocky, for agreeing to work with me, and for your humor and eagle eye. Thank you, Dana, for tirelessly answering my questions with kindness and understanding.

A heartfelt thanks to Dan and Nancy, influential players in my master’s degree and my first graduate school mentors, for encouraging me to think critically, stretch beyond my comfort zone, and pursue doctoral work. Thank you to all of my EECE family for the many conversations about my unending doctoral studies and words of wisdom and support over the years. Thank you, Dais, for always taking time to listen and thoughtfully weigh in. To my Razran/CTL family, thank you for always having my back.

I am particularly indebted to two of my dearest, closest friends and colleagues, who have been at my side through this entire dissertation journey. Thank you, Eva, for your always thoughtful feedback, your gentle leadership, your friendship, and for helping me to find humor and to laugh when I needed it most. Thank you, Helen, for your wisdom and your gentle, insightful feedback. Your kindness, friendship, and nurturing spirit have been my inspiration, The two of you, Eva and Helen, have been my biggest cheerleaders. Words really don’t suffice, but I thank you from the bottom of my heart for sticking by my side as I’ve taken this journey.

To my dear friends who have watched this process without judgment, thank you for listening and always being there; and for J and J who offered up CMP as my first official writing retreat. Thank you, Sylvia, for your insight and wisdom, for helping me see things
clearly and stay the course, and for helping me discover, not only the power of the group but the power of kindness and caring.

Lastly, I must acknowledge my family. They are here, at the end of the acknowledgments, because they are my foundation. To my Mom and Dad, thank you for your never-ending support and love, and for knowing, just by the tone in my voice, when to ask, and when not to ask. And thank you for providing me with my own private writing retreat (including meals and laundry) when I needed it most.

To Rico and Mia, who were very young when I started this process and have grown into adults watching me start, stop, struggle, and persist. Thank you for never questioning and always understanding. I am so proud to be your mom and to watch you soar into your lives with strength, purpose, and kindness. Thank you, Chloe, for picking up on the nuances of my journey, for being a strong, loving partner to Rico, and for being such a supportive light in our family.

To Angelo, my partner and best friend since we were teenagers: thank you for growing with me and persisting with me, even when it all seemed quite impossible. Thank you for taking on the cooking, nourishing me with food and laughter, and for intuitively understanding and respecting what I needed, even when I would disappear into my writing for hours, days, and weeks at a time. Thank you for enduring the chaos, for listening when I couldn’t talk about anything but my research, and for silently tearing up as we watched Won’t You Be My Neighbor? on its opening weekend.

Finally, thank you to the students who participated in my study. I thank you for your time, your insights, your honesty, and your trust in me. Your drive and persistence as you pursue your dreams, and the stories of your experiences and motivations for wanting to teach, inspire me to honor and elevate the role of kindness and caring in the learning process.

M. C. F.
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Do you remember your favorite teachers? They were probably the ones who wanted to learn your name; who had a warm smile; who made you feel that they were glad to be there to help you learn. No matter how old or young we are, we learn best from people who care about us. That relationship grows when teachers are friendly, respectful, and interested in us as unique human beings. ("Mister Rogers" Reflects on Respect, Diversity, and the Classroom Neighborhood, Bafile, 2003)

For some readers, beginning a dissertation with a quote from “Mister Rogers” may immediately call into question the intellectual significance or seriousness of the work that is to follow. In fact, this dissertation includes many quotes about kindness and humanity, not only from Fred Rogers but from other respected scholars and every participant in my study. While this inquiry initially began with a narrow focus on teacher education students who took part in a specific program, the research findings have implications that reach far beyond teacher education and speak to the importance of student-centered teaching at all levels of education, and in all disciplines. The thread of humanity that emerged in the interviews highlighted how experiencing a teacher’s genuine caring, as well as feeling a sense of belonging, permeates learning experiences all through life and plays a role in learners’ developing identities—as students and as emerging professionals. This dissertation will report on the findings that emerged after analysis of data collected from 22 teacher education students. At the core of these findings: whether young or old, genuine caring, truly seeing students, is at the heart of teaching. At a time when accountability is of the highest priority at all levels of education, and when students' grades and test scores are the primary measures of teaching expertise, being a humanistic educator has not been a priority (Rose, 2018). However, at this particular moment in history, kindness and caring need to be in conversation with good pedagogy.
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Studying preservice teachers and how they are prepared to become teaching professionals is not a new area of research. There is an incredible amount of research focused on preservice teachers in traditional schools of education and the best practices for educating them. More specifically, there is a great deal of research on preservice teachers, or student teachers, who have successfully made their way into a teacher education program. There are qualitative studies on elementary preservice teachers’ educational histories, beliefs about learning, and student teaching experiences (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003), there are studies and books about how preservice teachers learn best (Bransford, Derry, Berliner, Hammerness, & Beckett, 2005; Hammerness, Darling-Hammon, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005), studies on educating preservice teachers in specific curriculum areas (Dredger, Nobles, & Martin, 2017; Niess, 2005; Thomas-Brown, Shaffer, & Werner, 2016; Vierra, 2011); and there are numerous studies on how to produce teachers who have technological competencies (Ertmer, Conklin, & Lewandowski, 2003; Hofer & Grandgenett, 2012; Pamuk, 2012). While this dissertation has drawn on a great deal of this research, the focus of my work has been on teacher education students who are not yet preservice teachers, as they are not yet accepted to a teacher certification program. This study is about people who aspire to be teachers and have only taken one or two prerequisite courses related to teacher education. It is a study
about people who are at the very beginning of the educator pipeline, on the path to becoming teachers, and their sense of identity, belonging, and community.

**Background and Problem Statement**

The development of identity—cultural, academic, professional, discipline-specific—has been studied by many researchers in myriad disciplines over the years (Bartlett, 2007; Chemers, Zurbriggen, Syed, Goza, & Bearman, 2011; Erikson, 1959; Flum & Kaplan, 2012; Gee, 2000; Ibarra, 1999; Syed, Azmitia, & Cooper, 2011; Tapp, 2014; Weiss, Feldman, Pedevillano, & Capobianco, 2004). This includes the field of teacher education, where the focus has been on those preservice teachers who are about to enter the teaching profession (Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Cherrington, 2017; Danielewicz, 2001). However, when it comes to researching future teachers, one part of the population—those just beginning their studies in teacher education—is not often considered, perhaps because they are at the very beginning of what the US Department of Education (2016) refers to as the “educator pipeline,” taking the teacher education courses that are prerequisites to a teacher certification program. At Queens College, which prepares the largest number of teachers in the New York metropolitan area who are employed by the New York City Department of Education (NYC Department of Education, 2016), a large number of students from underrepresented groups populate these prerequisite education courses. In fact, interest in the elementary education major by underrepresented minority (URM) students at Queens College has increased from 36% of declared majors in 2012 to 51% in 2017 (Queens College Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2018). However, an internal analysis of Queens College teacher education programs showed that not all students who are enrolled in prerequisite teacher education courses and declare elementary education as a major complete a teacher education program and receive teaching
certification. In fact, a disproportionate number of URM students drop out of the educator pipeline at Queens College (Fernández, 2016), leaving the average percentage of URMs who complete the elementary education major at 22% (Queens College Education Unit, 2018).

This is problematic, especially when looking at a recent report by the US Department of Education, which highlights the need to create a more diverse teacher workforce, one that more closely mirrors the P-12 student population (US Department of Education, 2016). This is particularly important in New York City and the surrounding boroughs, where the P-12 student population has become increasingly diverse. The most recent demographic data from the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) show a student population that is 15% White, 16% Asian, 26% Black, and 40% Hispanic (see Figure 1).

![Image of New York City Department of Education Student Demographics 2017-2018](NYC Open Data, 2018)

The most recent demographic data on teachers employed by the NYC DOE indicate a makeup that is 58.6% White, 19.6% Black, 14.4% Hispanic, and 5.9% Asian (Roy, 2014). More recently, The Education Trust-New York (2017) highlighted the mismatch between student and teacher demographics at the NYC DOE, noting that Black
and Latino students make up 65% of the NYC DOE population, while only 32% of teachers are Black or Latino (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. New York City Department of Education Shares of Latino and Black Students and Staff (The Education Trust - New York, 2017)

**Piloting a Learning Community for Teacher Education Students: The Cross-Campus Teacher Education Collaborative (CCTEC)**

My colleague and I developed the Cross-Campus Teacher Education Collaborative (CCTEC) with these early program students in mind. As faculty members and former coordinators of the undergraduate elementary education program, we have worked closely with these students, who are often transfer students and often from underrepresented groups. CCTEC was designed to connect preservice teachers from three City University of New York (CUNY) campuses by situating them within an online learning community and engaging them in collaborative pre-professional activities. The aim was to strengthen academic writing skills and create a sense of community for all teacher education students at Queens College, especially those who were transferring from the main feeder community colleges to the campus. Using the introductory Social Foundations of Education courses at the three schools (see Figure 3), CCTEC was designed to engage students enrolled in participating sections in a community of practice.
Common assignments that encouraged practice with academic writing and peer feedback were designed so that they could be embedded in the syllabi of the social foundations courses while taking advantage of online collaborative tools.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 3. Engaging Students Through Social Foundations of Education at LaGuardia Community College, Queensborough Community College, and Queens College

The CCTEC program was implemented three times involving over 350 students from the three campuses between 2014 and 2016. Using feedback from students and instructors, the pilot was revised and refined each year. By Fall 2016, the third year of CCTEC, students were given the opportunity to revise and resubmit their work after receiving feedback, and a face-to-face kickoff event and culminating face-to-face poster session were held to enable students to meet their cross-campus peers. A total of 71 out of 138 students completed the final evaluation, with 67% responding that their experience was very good (25%), good (25%), or excellent (17%), while the remaining 33% rated their experience as fair (22%) or poor (11%) (see Figure 4).
When asked if they would recommend to their friends that they participate in CCTEC, 71.4% responded yes, and 28.6% responded no. Some of the survey questions allowed for open-ended responses and participants took the opportunity to share their thoughts, both positive and negative. Figure 5 presents a word cloud of students’ responses. While there was a great deal of positive feedback about the overall CCTEC experience, students were very vocal about what they perceived as the additional workload CCTEC activities required.

Figure 4. Students’ Evaluation of CCTEC Experience in Fall 2016

Figure 5. Word Cloud of Fall 2016 CCTEC Participants’ Responses to Survey Questions
A number of the comments from students suggested the need for more interaction, and specifically making time for students to have more face-to-face interactions.

Additional comments from participants can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Comments from Fall 2016 CCTEC Participants

**Question 20: Would you recommend to your friends that they participate in CCTEC?**

- I think it’s great to be exposed to as many education events as much as possible. You never know who you might meet and at the very least, it’s a nice safe place to exchange ideas.
- because i thought it was a great way to learn and meet other students
- because its the beginning of one journey of becoming an exceptional teacher
- C-CTEC helped us have a huge step forward to becoming a teacher and understanding the process
- Yes because it was a great learning experience

**Question 22: What changes would make participating in CCTEC a more valuable experience?**

- Even though my personal experience wasn’t so pleasant, I do believe CCTEC is a great idea. Maybe if the meetings were a little less teacher organized and the students kind of just spoke as a large group to each other it might have worked out better. Also having the cross campus classes synced up would be a HUGE help. Then all students would be able to make it and the more likely idea of making new friends would happen.
- I really wouldn’t change anything it’s perfect how it is great job and keep it up
- I think the C-CTEC needs to feel more like a personal endeavor and less like a class requirement. There wasn’t much for students to feel like they had something personally invested in it. There are no real solid long lasting connections made at C-CTEC. I enjoyed the group topic meetings we had at each of the events. They felt really productive and constructivist in nature. But nothing happened afterward. I think C-CTEC would be more successful if it were able to elicit the energy from those meetings into other parts of the semester.
- I think we should’ve met more than twice because it was a great experience.
- Less online work, more in person meetings.
- More interacting with people instead of doing everything online.
- more interactions among schools
- More interactions within the students
- No changes it was perfect the way it was
- nothing really it was really helpful
- participating with the cross campus more often
- Presenting our work and more interaction.
- Probably having meet with the other students more than just two times.
Table 1 (continued)

**Question 23: Is there anything else you would like to share about participating in C-CTEC?**

- Good idea, just needs to be worked on. Good for networking and getting to know others who share similar goals as you.
- I enjoyed!
- it was a good experience
- i loved it and it was a very rewarding experience, thank you for that and seeing the school i definitely would love to attend there soon
- I just want to thank the people that made this happen for the journey.
- There needs to be an online atmosphere for students to feel comfortable communicating and connecting with each other. Maybe online games are effective or a form of social media. Something that can make the motivations feel intrinsic and genuine.
- It made my goals seem much more attainable. I enjoyed the field observation because I had the opportunity to observe a classroom from a different perspective. It also allowed me to feel certain that transferring to Queens College is the right decision.
- C-CTEC group is very helpful. i recommend it
- I think it’s a great experience for me to getting touch on education.
- Overall I think it was interesting and allowed the students to get a better sense of where the future of education is headed through collaboration.
- everything thing was helpful and fun and I enjoyed it a lot
- It was a excellent experience.
- Great experience
- Participating in the C-CTEC project allowed me to interact with other people older and wiser than me who’s learning the same major as i am.
- It might have been nice if every campus got a chance to host a CCTEC meeting instead of everybody going to Queens College. More meetings might also help remind students of the work they would need to do for CCTEC.

CCTEC was intentionally designed to connect teacher education students early in their studies by situating them within a community of their peers and engaging them in collaborative pre-professional activities in both face-to-face and online learning environments. Analyses from four semesters of the 2014 and 2015 implementations were conducted, comparing CCTEC participants to preservice teachers who were taking similar classes but did not participate in the project. Findings indicated that participating in the CCTEC project positively impacted participants’ academic success. Cumulative
grade point averages of the two groups revealed significant (p<.05) or near significant (p<.10) differences. When cumulative GPAs were averaged across those four semesters, CCTEC participants had a significantly higher average (2.81 vs. 2.67, p<.05). Additionally, CCTEC participants accumulated more credits each semester than non-CCTEC participants, earning 86 credits while non-CCTEC preservice teachers had earned only 77 credits (p<.10). Findings from the 2016 implementation of CCTEC are forthcoming.

There is no doubt that statistics on students’ academic successes, whether positive or negative, are extremely important, but those statistics don’t tell our students’ full academic stories. In fact, an important statistic from CCTEC 2016 reveals that of the 138 students who participated in the project that year, 23% were no longer enrolled in the City University of New York (CUNY) system during the Fall 2017 semester. There is no information on where these students are, whether they dropped out of college, just the teacher education major, or both. Clearly, we do not know enough about the experiences of these beginning teacher education students, their perceptions of the courses they took, and how they see themselves as part of the college and the larger teacher education community.

The 2016 implementation of CCTEC was the original focus of this dissertation. Recruitment efforts included emails to former CCTEC participants, emails to CCTEC faculty members to share with former students, and physical flyers posted around the education departments at Queens College. Emails were also sent to faculty teaching introductory education courses in the hope that former CCTEC students might be in their classes. As a result, six former CCTEC participants agreed to be interviewed. At the same time, I was also contacted by several teacher education students who had heard about the study but had not participated in CCTEC, and they wanted to know if they could be interviewed. I was surprised by the interest in participating in the study by non-CCTEC students, and it was at this point that I paused and took steps to expand the participant
pool to include any students, early in the pipeline, who were taking teacher education courses at Queens College.

**Purpose of the Study**

Originally, the purpose of this dissertation was to explore the 2016 implementation of CCTEC. However, once the recruitment process and the interviews commenced, it evolved into a study with a broader focus. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore with a group of teacher education students who were at the beginning stages of the educator pipeline their perceptions of their identities as future teachers, and the ways in which they experience (or don’t experience) a sense of belonging and community as they work toward becoming teachers. While there has been a great deal of research on the preparation of preservice teachers, the bulk of the scholarly literature is focused on the final student teaching practicum and preservice teachers’ experiences at the end of their academic programs. Little research has been done on beginning teacher education students and how their educational experiences, both past and present, influence the way they see themselves as learners and future teachers. Guided by a sociocultural lens, this research examines teacher education students’ educational experiences and how those experiences influence and shape their paths into the teaching profession and their developing professional identities.

**Identity, Community, and Sense of Belonging**

At the core of this dissertation are three interwoven concepts that are encompassed in the communities of practice framework. A community of practice is comprised of a group of people who are situated within a particular field or domain of interest, and who regularly interact to share their concerns and passions about the field (Wenger, 2006).
Being part of a community of practice goes beyond simple social interaction with other members; it enables them to become facile with the language and practices of a particular field (Cohen-Scali, 2003; Erikson, 1959; Gee, 2000, 2013; Ibarra, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977; Wenger, 1998), helping to shape a sense of identity within the group and within the larger domain. In fact, these discourses play a large role in shaping preservice teachers’ developing professional identities (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003; Danielewicz, 2001). Before the development of these identities can be shaped, however, there needs to be a place to belong. For undergraduate students in specific programs, learning communities are put into place and provide positive influences on students’ overall academic success and persistence (Belfield, Fernández, & Savage, 2014; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Cross, 1998; Tinto, 2003). This holds true for preservice teachers, who belong to a cohort of like-minded students when they begin their fieldwork and student teaching, and experience the support of other members of their community (Flores, Clark, Claeys, & Villareal, 2007; Korhonen, Heikkinen, Kiviniemi, & Tynjälä, 2017). However, in order to reap such benefits, students need to feel a sense of belonging—to a group, a discipline, and/or a campus (Astin, 1993; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Karp, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 1998). At its core, feeling a sense of belonging is entwined with the notion of caring: *caring about* members of a community and feeling *cared for* by members of that community. Students who do not yet identify with a particular group or discipline, or who have not yet cleared the necessary institutional hurdles, may actually be left out of these social learning opportunities, and not feel that all-essential sense of belonging.
Research Questions

This study aimed to learn more about students who are at the beginning of the teacher education pipeline, whose members have sometimes fallen through the cracks and not completed their education degree or teaching certification. As undergraduate students, often transfers, often URMs, and often not in any specific kind of community, it is important to understand their experiences and perceptions, and what they need to support their sense of belonging and developing professional identities. As such, the following research questions guided this study:

• How do teacher education students conceptualize the process of becoming a teacher?
• What are the critical influences on teacher education students’ developing professional identities?
• In what ways do teacher education students engage with a community of their peers?

Research Approach

The interplay between identity, community, and sense of belonging is multilayered and as such required a qualitative research design that enabled an in-depth look at the context of teacher education students’ past and present experiences (Creswell, 2013). The research was conducted using an interpretative inquiry approach to enable the study of participants’ lived educational experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The study used multiple data collection methods that were informed by grounded theory and narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of the participants: one-on-one interviews, critical incident reports, and a focus group. The primary data collection method was in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 participants to gain deeper insight into their experiences as they begin their journey toward becoming certified teachers. Critical
incident reports from interviewees were used to support the interview data, and a focus group of interviewees provided another source of data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The three data collection methods provided a rich depiction of teacher education students’ sense of identity, community, and belonging and will be detailed in Chapter III, which focuses on the methodology.

Positionality

I have worked with teacher education students in a public university setting for over 20 years. My roles as educator and advisor have provided me with a unique opportunity to get to know these students both academically and personally as they make their way through the certification process. I have seen that, as part of a large, public, urban university, students can often feel lost in the system as they pursue their education. I have learned that, for many teacher education students, pursuing a career as a teacher is a lifelong dream, while other students may take a little bit longer to find their path. These career aspirations are often fueled by their ideas about what it means to be a teacher, and those ideas are based on 12 years of experience as students. They bring this prior knowledge of teaching, both good and bad, with them as they begin their study of teaching and learning. As they pursue their coursework, they often struggle alone to connect the dots between assignments, courses, and administrative requirements, assuming that learning is an individual endeavor and rarely experiencing the benefits of being part of a community.

My interest in studying the experiences of teacher education students as they become part of a teaching community has been fueled by both personal and professional learning experiences. I cannot claim to identify culturally with my research participants, most of whom are URMs. In fact, I grew up in northern Minnesota, in a middle-class White family, the oldest child in a family of four. However, many of my college
experiences mirror those of my participants: I was the first in my family to complete a college degree, I was a transfer student, and I took the long way around into teaching. I began college, first at a private all-girls’ college, the College of St. Benedict, and later at one of the largest urban universities in the country, the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, with the intention of pursuing an acting career. I began my classes at St. Ben’s in earnest, unenthusiastically taking the required liberal arts courses and devouring the one or two theatre courses I was allowed to take as a freshman. After a traumatic year of loneliness and so-so grades, I made plans to transfer to the University of Minnesota, which had a bigger and better theatre program. As a transfer student, I wandered from office to office, looking for advice on which courses to take and how to get more involved in the theatre program. I took several theatre classes, but I couldn’t seem to find my way into that particular campus community, and I’m not sure that I had the talent or the drive to compete with the other theatre majors. I eventually dropped my theatre major, and I found myself getting drawn into my sociology courses, in particular, those courses focused on the criminal justice system. In fact, I was so engaged in the introductory criminal justice course, a class of over 200 students, that I screwed up my courage and visited the professor during her office hours. I wanted to know if there were careers, aside from becoming an attorney, that I could pursue with a degree in sociology and criminal justice. I can’t recall exactly what she said to me, but I do recall leaving her office with burning red cheeks, feeling humiliated for wasting her time with my questions. It didn’t deter me from pursuing a degree in sociology and criminal justice, but I did make sure not to sit where she could see me in class. This incident has stayed in the back of my mind for many years, and it informs the way I interact with undergraduate students to this day. I graduated with a BA in sociology and criminal justice, and then worked as a corporate paralegal for a year. Feeling bored and unstimulated, I found myself working with my husband, who was directing a middle school musical theatre production.
It was during this time that I realized I was passionate about the kids and needed to make a big career change, and I found myself back at the University of Minnesota, pursuing my teaching degree.

The years in between were filled with child-rearing and part-time teaching, and I eventually found my way to Queens College, where I began a master’s degree in Elementary Education, with a focus on Instructional Technology. It was in this graduate program where I found my mentors, who became my in-class and out-of-class agents (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). They encouraged me to reach beyond the elementary classroom, recognizing my teacherness (readlisaread, 2014) with undergraduate students, as well as my potential for pursuing doctoral work. I began teaching educational technology to undergraduate teacher education students with great passion and curiosity, first as an adjunct, and eventually as a full-time lecturer.

I began my doctoral work in Instructional Technology and Media at Teachers College Columbia University at a time when educational technology—and the study of it—was exploding, and the program opened up my mind to the vast possibilities for using technology for teaching and learning. I took classes and I taught classes; there was a synergy between what I was teaching at Queens College and what I was learning at Teachers College, enabling me to apply what I was learning with my own students immediately. However, the busy personal, professional, and academic schedule I had created left no time for anything else. I would just come and go between work, home, and taking classes, and consequently, I had no sense of community at TC. Once I had completed my coursework, I floundered, disconnected from the doctoral program, and eventually just stopped showing up; and no one noticed. I resumed my studies six years later, determined to complete my dissertation, and at that time, I had some faculty members who acted as my out-of-class agents, advocating for me and encouraging me to return so I could complete my degree.

Returning to the program after six years, I felt like an outsider and very much alone. I struggled as I wrote up my pilot study and stalled as I began writing my
dissertation proposal. Connecting the dots between my identity as one who teaches and my developing identity as a researcher seemed impossible, even unlikely. However, several things happened that shifted my perspective and helped me change my story. I was seen, I was encouraged, and I was invited into the research community by my advisor. I became part of a community of doctoral students and slowly began seeing myself as a researcher. I also had the good fortune to take a class with another instructor, who created a sense of community in a class of doctoral students, all working on various stages of their dissertation proposals. In both instances, the level of care woven into their teaching encouraged a sense of community and belonging among their students. I could feel myself becoming more confident as a researcher as I interacted with these groups, but that sense of being part of a community truly hit home when I saw my name in the acknowledgments of a colleague’s dissertation. Being part of a community of researchers—feeling like I belonged—encouraged me to move forward. As I met the participants in this study and began to learn their stories and how they viewed themselves, I saw parallel processes between my own search to belong to a community and their processes as they pursued their teaching degrees and sought community with their peers. I cannot help but look at some aspects of the participants’ journeys through my lens.

As a teacher in higher education, as well as a doctoral student, I have acquired knowledge of teaching and learning via my personal, professional, and academic lives. I am particularly intrigued by the social aspects of learning and how they influence how people see themselves within a community of learners. My aim in conducting this study was to gain additional insights into the experiences of teacher education students early in the educator pipeline and the kinds of activities and experiences that influence the way they view themselves within an emerging community of practice. I hope the findings will contribute to the scholarly work in the field of teacher education and inform the growth
of communities and activities that foster teacher education students’ developing professional identities.

**Significance of the Study**

This research is intended to inform teacher educators, advisors, and administrators of the needs teacher education students require at the beginning of the educator pipeline. Findings from this research will be important in helping to support and sustain all teacher education students throughout the process of obtaining teaching certification, and especially for transfer students and students from underrepresented populations. It has the potential to influence the design of teacher education programs, in particular, those that aim to provide opportunities for early program experiences and supports, leading to the formation of a supportive teacher education community for emerging professionals. Of equal significance is the potential to influence the thoughtful use of technologies in helping to design such experiences, including which technologies to use, how much to use them, and how to effectively use them to engage students in a teacher education community, in both face-to-face and online modalities. Enhancing early program experiences may influence teacher education students’ sense of belonging to a community of educators and the way they see themselves within the professional community and may help to increase the number of diverse teachers in New York City public schools.
Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The second chapter of this dissertation will explore the theoretical and conceptual research related to this study, which focuses on teacher education students’ perceptions of their identities as future teachers, and their sense of belonging and community as they work toward becoming teachers. The Communities of Practice framework will provide a lens with which to examine the research questions for this study:

- How do teacher education students conceptualize the process of becoming a teacher?
- What are the critical influences on teacher education students as their identities as teachers take shape?
- In what ways do teacher education students engage with a community of their peers?

This literature review situates the research problem within the current literature on undergraduate education and teacher education and focuses on three areas relevant to this study. First, I look at belongingness or sense of belonging and the kinds of student support programs that promote it, including learning communities, their characteristics, and how they are utilized in higher education. Then, I explore identity and its theoretical foundations in relation to developing teachers. Finally, I focus on support programs for teacher education students, the role they play in supporting emergent communities of
practice, and the practices preservice teachers engage in as they participate in these communities.

The topics were researched using various online databases, including the Teachers College Columbia University library databases, the Queens College City University of New York library databases, the New York Public Library databases, Google, and Google Scholar. Using combinations of search terms such as social learning, sense of belonging, belongingness, learning communities in education, preservice teacher preparation, preservice teacher community of practice, and formation of professional identity, the literature searches identified a number of resources, including books, dissertations, and peer-reviewed journal articles.

**Communities of Practice**

“Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2006, p. 1). In describing a community of practice, Wenger (1998, 2006) includes three elements that must be present: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. *Mutual engagement* in a shared domain of interest is what distinguishes a community of practice from a neighborhood community or club. *Joint enterprise* includes intentional interaction by members of the community to promote learning about the domain of interest from each other via discussions and other activities. The third required element of a community of practice is a *shared practice* that includes “a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems” (Wenger, 2006, p. 2). At the heart of a community of practice is how it enables its members to situate their learning within the practices of the membership and be seen as members of the community. The notion of situated learning refers to the social process of
learning through participating in authentic activities, the “ordinary practices of the culture” (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989) within a community of practitioners.

![Community of Practice Structural Elements Diagram]

Figure 6. Community of Practice Structural Elements. Adapted from Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002).

Lave and Wenger describe the way new members of a community of practice become fully engaged in the community as a process of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Newcomers to a community of practice begin by observing the practices of the more experienced members, or oldtimers, and gradually take on tasks that require introductory usage of the language, tools, and practices of the community. It is an ongoing process by which the newcomers eventually become oldtimers, who then share their knowledge with the newest members.

Implicit in membership within a community of practice is the notion that each participant’s identity is shaped by being a participating member. This identity is the way in which individuals see themselves within a professional community. As a member, whether new or old, identity formation is a process that includes developing knowledge.
of, and skill with, the language, tools, and practices of the community (Cohen-Scali, 2003; Erikson, 1959; Gee, 2000, 2013; Ibarra, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977; Wenger, 1998). In reviewing the literature, it is important to keep in mind that the goal teacher education students are aiming for is to become members of the officially recognized community of preservice teachers seeking certification, and ultimately become members of a professional community of teachers.

Although a community of practice is most often thought of as a community of professionals, the three required elements—mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire—are embedded in a number of frameworks and engaging practices in the research on student engagement and persistence, and support programs in higher education. Within these practices are opportunities for participants (students) to see themselves as part of a community of peer learners, or an emerging community of practice. This review will look at the research being done in higher education to support all students and, in particular, the supports being offered that prepare teacher education students, who are potential preservice teachers, and who will become professional teachers in a community of practice. Because the power of learning communities and communities of practice lies in the extent to which its members feel a sense of belonging to a community, the next section begins with a look at sense of belonging and learning communities in higher education.

**Sense of Belonging and Learning Communities in Higher Education**

**Sense of Belonging**

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), who investigated the empirical evidence supporting the construct of belongingness and its relation to well-being, “human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships”; this requires that people
experience “frequent, affectively pleasant interactions … in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other’s welfare” (p. 497). In fact, a sense of belonging is third on Maslow’s (1962) hierarchy of needs, following the need for food and safety, and as precursor to a desire for learning. Research on sense of belonging in learning environments at all levels has been associated with a positive motivation to engage in academic work. At the elementary level, Solomon and colleagues investigated the impact of sense of school community on students’ academic motivation in school and found positive correlations with feeling a sense of community and intrinsic motivation (Solomon, Battistich, Kim, & Watson, 1996; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000; Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi, 1996). Goodenow and Grady (1993) studied urban adolescent middle schoolers and found that many students who had a poor sense of belonging had low academic motivation, and that students who were more likely to be academically motivated had a higher sense of belonging to their school community. Finn’s (1989, 1993) work with at-risk urban middle school students indicated that without being able to identify with a school and feel welcomed, valued, and respected, students were more likely to disengage and, eventually, drop out of school. Although focused on elementary and middle school environments, the findings are relevant when thinking about undergraduate transfer students on commuter campuses.

Within higher education, belonging is an important piece in the literature on student persistence (Astin, 1993; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Braxton et al., 2004; Karp, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 1998). Studies of belonging have focused on undergraduate students’ sense of belonging related to their transition to college, their overall experiences in college, and within specific disciplines. Astin’s (1993) work on what matters in college looked at a number of factors, but the most important conclusion, according to Astin, was the importance of the peer group in college: “the student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth
and development during the undergraduate years” (p. 398). Astin refers to the importance of the sociological perspective of a peer group, the norms they employ as a group of students affiliated with a specific major, and the influence they can exert over members of their peer group to remain in the major. Experiences related to curriculum, such as socialization with peers within the major as well as out-of-class experiences with peers, can also have a positive influence on students’ learning experiences and sense of belonging (Terenzini & Reason, 2005). For undergraduates on a commuter campus, especially if they have transferred from another school, finding a peer group can be challenging. In fact, Karp (2011) points out that much of the seminal research on college student success, which includes persistence and sense of belonging, has been focused on the four-year residential model. These theories, while relevant, don’t directly address community college students, commuter students, or URMs.

Some of the first research on the use of social networking sites (SNS) and sense of belonging was conducted by Strayhorn (2012). Looking at academic persistence and sense of belonging in first-year undergraduates using Facebook and MySpace in 2007, Strayhorn found that first year students of color used SNS more frequently than their White peers, women used them more frequently than men, and on-campus students used them more frequently than off-campus students. The findings did not indicate a relationship between the frequency of SNS use and academic persistence. There were, however, notable findings regarding a sense of belonging, which included a stronger sense of belonging for domestic students versus international students, on-campus students versus commuter students, members of social fraternities, and motivation to learn new things. Additionally, Strayhorn found that students with a strong sense of belonging “used SNSs infrequently or not at all” (p. 793). The Center for Community College Student Engagement report (2009) also found that more frequent use of social networking tools such as Facebook for any purpose was related to lower scores on engagement. However, use of social networking tools related to coursework or
academically purposeful activities like reaching out to classmates or instructors led to higher levels of engagement.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) looked at Latino students’ sense of belonging in college and found that academic interactions (discussing course content with peers outside of class), as well as social interactions (belonging to a religious club, sports team, or social-community organization), were correlated with a sense of belonging to the college community during their third year of college. However, they found that, based on the students’ perceptions of the campus climate for diversity, there was variability in the incentive to participate in these practices, which could impact their overall sense of belonging. Walton, Cohen, Cwir, and Spencer (2012) conducted four separate experiments with undergraduate students within the domain of math. In each experiment, participants were presented with opportunities for positive social interactions with other students working on math problems. Students in the experimental condition of each experiment were motivated to persist on math-related tasks, suggesting that “people draw motivation from a sense of belonging in an intellectual community” (p. 529). Walton and colleagues found that the suggestion of “mere belonging” was incentive enough to persist in the domain of math. Good, Rattan, and Dweck (2012) also looked at math, but they looked specifically at sense of belonging to the academic discipline of math. They defined belonging to an academic discipline as “one’s personal belief that one is an accepted member of an academic community whose presence and contributions are valued” (p. 711). Good and colleagues conducted studies that looked at the impact of the learning environment on women’s sense of belonging in math, how sense of belonging impacted students’ sense of belonging on their intent to remain in the math major, and a long-term study of students in a calculus course. Findings indicated that students in learning environments that reflected a gender-based stereotypical view of math (“women aren’t good in math”) or a fixed-ability view of math intelligence (e.g., “I’m never going to be able to learn this, I’m not a math person”), had a lower sense of belonging. Students
in learning environments perceived as malleable (“I can learn this if I work hard”) were better able to maintain a sense of belonging to math, even in perceived gender-stereotyped situations. Ultimately, Good et al. found that women’s sense that they were valued members of the math community was significantly influenced by what they thought their math community believed about the fixed versus malleable nature of mathematical ability and about women’s ability relative to men’s math ability. (p. 712)

The role that faculty and others play in creating an inviting learning environment and helping to encourage students’ sense of belonging is significant. In a study that focused on non-traditional undergraduate students, Rendón (1994) found that in-class external agents, such as faculty, advisors, and other campus staff, validated students either academically or interpersonally, which enabled students to believe in their ability to be successful. In-class validation of an academic nature by faculty was found to be particularly important and included examples such as:

- Faculty who demonstrated a genuine concern for teaching students
- Faculty who were personable and approachable toward students
- Faculty who treated students equally
- Faculty who structured learning experiences that allowed students to experience themselves as capable of learning
- Faculty who worked individually with those students needing extra help
- Faculty who provided meaningful feedback to students. (p. 40)

Learning Communities in Higher Education

Although not specifically professional communities of practice, learning communities exhibit some of the features that make communities of practice so powerful. It is relevant here, because learning communities can be implemented within and across disciplines, and their value lies not so much with the academic content, but with roles that students play within their learning communities and the extent to which they feel a sense of belonging.

The learning communities model is rooted in the sociocultural notion that learning is a social process (Bandura, 1977; Bransford et al., 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991;
Vygotsky, 1978). Bandura (1977) purports the triadic reciprocal impacts that behavior, personal and cognitive factors, and environment have on learning. Vygotsky’s (1978) views of learning underscore the role that community plays in the learning process. The culture within which learners interact with one another is paramount, enabling learners to safely contribute their knowledge to the community, as well as having opportunities to take on the role of more knowledgeable other (MKO). While Vygotsky’s work focused on children, the principles of sociocultural learning are valued in higher education as well. The seminal work of Chickering and Gamson (1987) noted seven practices for good teaching in higher education. Threaded throughout those seven practices are facets of sociocultural learning, including student-to-student and faculty-to-student interactions; setting up conditions for students to work in learning communities; active learning that includes working in small groups on and off campus; and opportunities to engage in peer feedback. Participating in learning communities can positively influence the way students engage with content in an academic discipline and the way they see themselves within a community of learners.

There was a surge of interest in higher education learning communities in the late 1990s (Cross, 1998), and it continues to be of interest to college administrators and researchers 20 years later. Learning communities in higher education most commonly use the linked learning communities model, which connects students academically and socially via thematically connected courses and curriculum (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), and research has shown that students benefit from participating in learning communities.

At the City University of New York (CUNY), learning communities have been implemented throughout college campuses at both the two-year and four-year colleges. At Queens College, a four-year baccalaureate college, the Freshman Year Initiative (FYI) places freshmen in a topic-based learning community that pairs an introductory college writing course with a general education course. The paired courses are scheduled in
blocks so that students have more time together and can attend campus events. Faculty
who teach the courses are invested in supporting freshmen and are encouraged to meet
and collaborate while planning assignments. Additionally, the FYI program office houses
student mentors who are assigned to communities, providing FYI students with resources
and support. Belfield et al. (2014) compared student records for the 2006-2008 FYI
cohorts with freshmen who did not participate in FYI and found that students who were
part of an FYI community achieved higher academic success.

FYI students are more likely to: obtain a BA degree within four years
(31% versus 24%) or six years (63% versus 52%); accumulate college
credits (113 versus 101); and post higher GPAs by the end of their time in
college (2.7 versus 2.5). These raw averages are suggestive of a significant
advantage from FYI participation. (p. 5)

Belfield and colleagues were not able to identify why the FYI cohorts were more
successful. They suggest that synergy between courses, block scheduling, and/or the
additional support services provided by FYI may be the mechanism by which FYI
students see better gains in academic success.

However, there is research that supports the notion that merely belonging to a well-
designed learning community of academic peers is what positively impacts students’
persistence and overall academic success. Tinto (1997) conducted a mixed methods study
of learning communities at Seattle Central Community College. Students who
participated in a first-year learning community reported greater satisfaction regarding
their interactions with other students and faculty, a more positive view of the college, and
greater rates of persistence with their studies. Qualitative analyses revealed three themes
related to why students participating in learning communities persisted academically:
“Building Supportive Peer Groups, Shared Learning-Bridging the Academic-Social
Divide, and Gaining a Voice in the Construction of Knowledge” (p. 609). Along these
same lines, Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) used the National Survey of
Student Engagement (NSSE) to look at rates of student persistence and academic success
at 18 US colleges. Findings from 6,000 students indicated that “student engagement in educationally purposeful activities” (p. 555) was positively related to grades and persistence for all students, but even more so for students of color and low-ability students. Educationally purposeful activities included a number of practices, including intrusive advising, well-structured orientations, service learning opportunities, and learning communities. Kuh and colleagues highlight the importance of classroom learning communities as venues for all students to interact, but particularly for part-time and commuting students.

Engstrom and Tinto (2008) also conducted a longitudinal study of students from 13 two-year and 6 four-year institutions with learning community programs. Students enrolled in learning communities were compared to their academically similar peers who were taking the same types of courses. Findings indicated that academically underprepared students in learning communities were “more academically and socially engaged” (p. 47), perceived themselves as more supported, and were more apt to persist the following academic year. Interviews with students in learning communities noted that the communities were places where they felt safe to speak up and ask questions of others in the community, and where they felt supported in their learning with peers. They noted a sense that they belonged in college, which validated their reasons for persisting.

Not all research on learning communities has been positive. Extensive research on learning communities at community colleges, including some at CUNY, has been conducted by researchers at the National Center for Postsecondary Research. Weissman and colleagues (2011) looked at learning communities designed to support students in developmental math courses at Houston Community College (Texas) and Queensborough Community College (CUNY). Both schools enrolled small cohorts of 20-25 students in a developmental math course linked to either a college-level course (QCC) or a student success course (HCC) for one semester. Students in the learning communities at both schools indicated feeling supported and passed their developmental math classes at
higher rates than students who were not placed in learning communities. However, three-semesters later, students in the control group caught up to the students in the learning communities. Additionally, there was no evidence of impact on student persistence or number of credits earned. Visher, Weiss, Weissman, Rudd, and Wathington (2012) conducted a study that included both Queensborough’s and Houston’s learning communities, as well as four other developmental learning communities (The Learning Communities Demonstration). The findings indicated little or no impact on student success measures such as persistence and credit accumulation, except for the Open Doors Learning Community at Kingsborough Community College (CUNY). Looking closely at KCC’s learning community, Weiss and colleagues (2015) found that participating in a one-semester learning community can have long-term effects on students’ academic success, but they point to the enhanced programs, with greater involvement from advisors and other support services, as well as greater support from the administration (from department chairs all the way up to the president) as possible keys to the success of the Kingsborough learning community.

Although a well-designed learning community has been identified as a high-impact practice for engaging students and supporting their learning (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006), many students only experience being part of a learning community in the first one or two semesters of college life, and that is if they participate in one at all. As a result, students often struggle alone to meet the demands of coursework and the challenges of adapting to the required academic literacies within different disciplines (Lea & Stierer, 2011; Tapp, 2014). Encountering such challenges can influence the way in which learners view their academic abilities, their engagement in the learning process (Dweck, Walton, & Cohen, 2014), and their overall success in college (Kuh et al., 2006; Mann, 2001; Tapp, 2014). The CCTEC project previously mentioned was designed to afford the benefits of working within a supportive hybrid learning community, while introducing teacher education students, or newcomers (Lave &
Wenger, 1991), to the discipline-specific language and literacies of the teaching profession, and to support their developing identities as teachers. The next section explores the concept of identity and the development of professional identity for teachers.

**The Development of Identity**

“Individual and society are intricately woven, dynamically related in continual change” (Erikson, 1959, p. 114). The concept of identity refers to the way an individual sees oneself within the context of a sociocultural environment, and its development is part of a social learning process (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Erikson, 1959; Gee, 2000, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). Identity develops over a lifetime, beginning in childhood, evolving throughout adolescence, with continuous growth and evolution throughout college and one’s professional life. Azmitia, Syed, and Radmacher (2008) highlight the importance of acknowledging the intersection of multiple types of identities, including gender, ethnicity, and social class, that influence the development of professional, or career, identity. In addition to the cultural factors that influence the development of professional identity, other factors, including “family, peers, schools, and media” (p. 5) all work together and influence the way individuals learn and develop as professionals. The development of professional identity has been studied across many disciplines, including the fields of medicine, engineering, architecture, and investment banking, to name a few (Arreciado Maraño & Isla Pera, 2015; Cruess, Cruess, Boudreau, Snell, & Steinert, 2015; Ibarra, 1999; Kinniburgh, 2014; Zou & Chan, 2016). There is also a rich body of literature on the development of professional identity in teachers.
Identity as Teacher

Unlike many of the professions listed previously (e.g., medicine, engineering, architecture, investment banking) and just about any other profession, we all have extensive histories with teachers, observing them and interacting with them for many years (Britzman, 2003; Lortie, 1975). It is this “overfamiliarity of the teaching profession” (Britzman, 2003, p. 27) that makes for the integration of personal selves and professional identities in developing teachers (Alsup, 2006).

In referring to identity as it relates to teachers, Rodgers and Scott (2008) noted:

1. that identity is dependent upon and formed within multiple contexts which bring social, cultural, political, and historical forces to bear upon that formation;
2. that identity is formed in relationship with others and involves emotions;
3. that identity is shifting, unstable, and multiple; and
4. that identity involves the construction and reconstruction of meaning through stories over time. Embedded in these assumptions is an implicit charge: that teachers should work towards an awareness of their identity and the contexts, relationships, and emotions that shape them, and (re)claim the authority of their own voice. This calls upon teachers to make a psychological shift in how they think about themselves as teachers. Contexts and relationships describe the external aspects of identity formation; and stories and emotions, the internal, meaning-making aspects. Awareness and voice represent the “contested” place where the normative demands of the external encounter the internal meaning making and desires of the teacher (italics in original). (p. 733)

The research on the development of professional identity in teachers is plentiful and has taken a number of perspectives. Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000) looked at experienced secondary school teachers’ perceptions of their professional identity by asking them to rate the extent to which they were subject matter, didactical, and pedagogical experts, and why they rated themselves in that way. They were also asked about influencing factors on their practice, which included teaching context or the culture of a school; teaching experience; and the biography of the teacher, or personal experiences such as past role models and perceptions of oneself as a learner. They found that most of the teachers saw themselves as possessing a combination of the three areas of expertise (subject matter, didactic, and pedagogical) and that there were significant
differences compared to their earlier perceptions of expertise in these areas. However, they were unable to establish connections between influencing factors (context, experience, and biography) and their perceptions of their professional identity, noting the importance of exploring these connections in future research.

In a Canadian secondary school undergoing a large reform, Lasky (2005) looked at how the teachers experienced the changing culture brought about by new accountability reforms. Using surveys and interviews, Lasky found that the teachers’ professional identities and their beliefs were at odds with reform mandates. Her participants articulated a sense of moral purpose in their chosen profession to make a difference and infuse their teaching of required standards-based academics with a human element. According to Lasky, the teachers felt that in order for students to learn best, there needed to be “synergy between an emphasis on academics and a culture of caring. One without the other was incomplete” (p. 909). More recently, Buchanan (2015) also looked at the accountability movement and the experiences and perceptions of teachers working in such a climate. After conducting multiple interviews with nine primary school teachers in three California schools, Buchanan found that there was a connection between professional teacher identity, the demands of accountability, and teacher agency. In her findings, she highlights the dominant political discourse of the accountability movement and how it has played a role in shaping the way teachers see themselves as professionals and the agency, or lack of agency, that has followed. Buchanan found that a “tighter coupling of policy and classroom practice” had occurred and, like Lasky, cautioned that teachers who are unable to include a human element in their teaching may choose to leave the profession leaving students to “only learn the material that helps them succeed on the standardized tests” (p. 715). Her recommendations include a deliberate push for teachers to critically reflect, beyond classroom practice, on their own professional identities, perhaps alone, but more significantly within communities of colleagues. She
concludes with the importance of finding spaces for this kind of discourse to happen, not only for teaching professionals but also for teacher education students.

Flores and Day (2006) looked at how new teachers’ professional identities took shape over their first two years of teaching. They found that many of the teachers’ initial assumptions about teaching and their professional identities were challenged by the negative cultures of teaching at their first schools. Their identities were “constructed and (de) constructed over time according to the relative strength of the key influencing contexts of biography, pre-service programs and school culture” (p. 230).

Similar to Lasky, Flores and Day recommend greater opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect on their beliefs about teaching in relation to the contexts of the schools in which they will teach during their teacher preparation programs.

**Preservice Teacher Identity**

The development of professional identity is a social learning process that begins long before preservice teachers begin their student teaching placements. The overfamiliarity of teaching referred to by Britzman (2003) and the “apprenticeship of observation” (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991, p. 106) make the development of preservice teachers’ professional identities unique as compared to other professions. Many factors contribute to the development of professional identity and how preservice teachers see themselves in the teaching profession, and personal histories play a very big part. The positive role models that are rooted in preservice teachers’ personal histories are very powerful (Crow, 1986; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991).

These personal histories can play out in positive or negative ways when it comes to implementing classroom practice of the kind that is valued by teacher education programs. Beltman, Glass, Dinham, Chalk, and Nguyen (2015) used first-year preservice teachers’ drawings of the teachers they aspired to be as a way to gain insight into the way they see themselves as future professionals. They found that preservice teachers in the
first year of their four-year program depicted themselves as confident, kind, engaging professionals, but their drawings lacked any of the complex realities of the teaching profession. The teaching practices that people experience as students get lodged in memory. Whether good or bad, those memories can sometimes make it difficult for preservice teachers to separate their student-self from their teacher-self when they first begin student teaching, as these identities are interrelated. Identity formation is a cognitive, social, and emotional process (Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; O’Connor, 2008; Yuan & Lee, 2015). This is one of the reasons that guiding identity development in teacher education programs is so important, because it shapes preservice teachers’ dispositions and priorities as they enter the field as teaching professionals (Hammerness et al., 2005). Beauchamp and Thomas (2006) and Thomas and Beauchamp (2007) found that the professional identity of preservice teachers who were about to graduate from a teacher education program was tentative and recommended a more deliberate focus on the concept of professional identity in teacher education programs.

Program support for developing identities is not always explicit, but the kinds of courses that are offered, how those courses are taught, where the fieldwork placements are situated, as well as the role models they observe all influence preservice teachers’ developing identities (Hammerness et al., 2005) and contribute to the surrounding Discourse community. In much the same way that Gee (2000) talks about D-Identities and being recognized as a certain kind of person within a Discourse community, Danielewicz (2001) points out the important role discourse plays in the development of identity, stating, “Not only do individuals construct identities through discursive acts, but also discourses themselves shape identities” (p. 135). Alsup’s (2006) work with preservice teachers highlighted the power of a transformative type of discourse as a way to support preservice teachers’ professional identity development. Borrowing Gee’s (1999) term for the common discourse adolescents of different ethnicities use to communicate, she labeled it “borderland discourse.” Alsup describes it as:
discourse in which there is evidence of integration or negotiation of personal and professional selves. It is at the discursive borderlands, and by association at the borders of various subjectivities or senses of self, that preservice teachers can discover how to move from being students to teachers, and can learn how to embody a workable professional teacher identity without sacrificing personal priorities and passions. (p. 36)

Alsup’s (2006) students used three different discourse genres over the course of 2½ years, including narratives, visual metaphors, and philosophy statements. All three genres were used to engage students in borderland discourse. Narrative genre was used most often, but Alsup felt that the visual metaphors were more likely to have characteristics of borderland discourse.

Emerging Communities of Practice in Teacher Education: Supporting the Development of Professional Identity

Communities of practice for preservice teachers have been approached in many different ways by teacher preparation programs. Some communities of practice are embedded programmatically, while others are often situated within coursework. Some communities of practice are designed to engage preservice teachers early in their academic careers, while others do not engage them until they begin their practicum work and are nearing the end of their certification program. Like any 21st-century learning experience in higher education, engaging in a 21st-century community of practice can take a number of forms, including designing interactions that use either (or both) face-to-face or online mediums for members to share and reflect on their experiences. This section of the literature review will look at how some emergent communities of practice have been implemented within teacher education, and the practices preservice teachers engage in as they participate in their respective communities.
Comprehensive Communities of Practice

Some teacher education communities of practice take a comprehensive approach that expands the idea of community for preservice teachers to be comprehensive in scope, engaging preservice teachers early on and throughout their academic careers, providing additional opportunities for support and engagement with peers and mentors. Teacher professional development in Finland follows a continuum model, engaging teachers in inquiry communities from preservice status all the way through the various professional inservice stages. Participants in peer group mentoring models (PGM) share personal and professional experiences with beginning and seasoned mentor teachers. Korhonen, Heikkinen, Kiviniemi, and Tynjälä (2017) studied preservice teachers who took part in the Paedeia Café, which was designed to bring “teachers from different stages of their career to share viewpoints and expertise and to learn together” (p. 156). The groups were small and included 2-3 students, 2-3 working teachers, and 1-2 trained mentors. They met once a month for coffee and cake to talk about pedagogical and classroom issues. Students were asked to keep a reflective journal and write a final reflective report for the class. Their goal was to examine how students experienced being part of the Paedeia Café and how the students’ experiences differed from one another. They found that students’ experiences as part of the group were all positive, but that participation took place at four levels, ranging from the lowest, which was described by preservice teachers as similar to a “coffee break,” where they would simply meet with friends, to gradually deeper levels of peer support, identity construction, and professional community. Monthly meetings focused on relevant topics around teaching and learning, as well as opportunities for preservice teachers (newcomers) to ask questions regarding their concerns about classroom practice and other issues, while inservice teachers (oldtimers) shared their stories and experiences. This model situates preservice teachers (newcomers) in an authentic community of practice with inservice teachers (oldtimers), enabling them to gradually engage in the community by a process of legitimate peripheral participation.
The Academy for Teacher Excellence at the University of Texas at San Antonio created learning communities for preservice teachers in order to recruit, retain, and support Latino teachers (Flores, Clark, Claeys, & Villareal, 2007). The learning communities are situated within a community of practice that includes preservice teachers at all levels of preparation, peer mentors, university faculty and staff, and teachers who are working in the field. All members of the learning community work collaboratively to support preservice teachers’ academic, personal, and professional growth (Flores et al., 2007). In the early stages of their program, preservice teachers participate in academics integrated with social activities. They spend time getting to know the college environment and the academic and procedural norms through seminars, cultural events, and speakers, while having access to tutors and other academic support throughout the school year as well as during the summer. Personal development is supported through counselors and counselor interns, while professional growth is supported through advisement and career mentoring. As a comprehensive community that supports preservice teachers from the early stages of their academic careers and into the profession, Clark and Flores (2014) found that participating preservice teachers developed into culturally efficacious teachers, or teachers who see themselves as effective teachers who will be able to address the needs of a diverse student population.

In both the Paedeia Café and the Academy for Teacher Excellence, students are supported by students who are at their same educational level, those who are a little farther along in the process, and seasoned professionals. Although they are teacher education students, not student teachers, they are seen as part of a community of teachers very early in the teacher pipeline.

**Communities of Practice Situated in Coursework**

Using the boundaries of a semester-long course is a more common way of situating a community of practice in teacher education. These communities are often fully online
or hybrid combinations of online and face-to-face interactions. For example, Zhang, Li, Liu, and Miao (2016) designed an online community of practice for preservice teachers in Hong Kong and Canada. Their purpose was to engage preservice teachers in a participatory culture of dialogue around the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity in education. They also used an online discussion forum to foster dialogue and create community for their participating preservice teachers. They found that their preservice teachers collectively reflected on issues of multicultural education with their cross-cultural peers. Engaging with one another around the development of new media curriculum projects enabled them to adopt an insider mindset (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) and a sense of agency as teachers.

Similarly, Sutherland, Howard, and Markauskaite (2010) worked with 270 preservice teachers in the first semester of their Master of Teaching program at the University of Sydney. As part of their introductory course on teaching and learning, students participated in face-to-face and online activities, which included lectures, seminars, classroom observations, reflective journals, and weekly assigned readings. Students were assigned to reading groups in an asynchronous discussion forum for the semester, in order to provide a “sense of online community” (p. 459). In their reading communities, students were asked to summarize the three main points of the assigned reading, elaborate on each point and how it influenced their current knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning, and reflect on their knowledge and how it will influence their classroom practice. Sutherland and colleagues used content analysis of students’ posts to look for evidence of “teacher voice,” a construct that is used to look at preservice teachers’ conceptual knowledge growth and the way they see themselves within the teaching community. Students showed positive changes in growth of knowledge and professional identity throughout the semester. Preservice teachers participated in this community by required sharing of their assignments and reflections within their groups. However, while they were allowed to respond to one another’s
discussion posts, individual reflection on one’s own work was the primary practice within this community.

Hou (2015) looked at the perceptions Chinese student teachers had about participating in a hybrid community of practice and the factors that make an online community of practice successful. The online community was developed for preservice teachers in their final semesters of student teaching and was intended to extend the face-to-face classroom community of the student teachers. Hou’s findings indicated that preservice teachers developed strong connections to their peers as well as their supervisors. They came to rely on one another, but they were also empowered through their online discussions and came to see themselves as more than simply learners but knowledge creators who were developing a sense of agency. The success of the online community of practice, according to Hou, was that the focus of the community was on the success of the group, which came as a result of the collaborative practices by the individual members. Through the sharing of thoughts and reflections, the student teachers developed a bond, resulting in an emotional connection that was seen as just as important as the professional connection.

Daniel, Auhl, and Hastings (2013) also engaged preservice teachers in peer feedback and reflection. They looked at 65 first-semester preservice teachers who participated in small groups consisting of a university faculty member, a cooperating classroom teacher, and preservice teachers. Reading to children was first modeled by experienced teachers, and then preservice teachers had to practice reading for their peers. After reading, each preservice teacher had to engage with their peers in the process of giving and receiving feedback about their reading performance. Daniel and colleagues found that the process of rehearsing their reading skills for their peers helped them prepare for their future roles as legitimate peripheral participants in a classroom. They also found that, while the early experiences with feedback were difficult, by the end of the class the preservice teachers were aware of the value of receiving feedback, and so
they began to hone their skills in giving feedback to their peers, enabling the development of trust between peers. This finding echoes Hou’s finding that personal and professional connections can be developed within a community of practice, and they are equally important in the learning process.

The timing of implementing the learning communities that were reviewed varied, with traditional, general education learning communities often seen as first-year initiatives, and teacher education learning communities implemented both early and late in their academic programs. When looking at traditional measures of student success, some learning communities were more successful than others (Belfield et al., 2014; Sommo, Mayer, Rudd, & Cullinan, 2012; Weiss et al., 2015). However, there is a common thread that runs through the literature on learning communities. The practice of engaging students with one another in purposeful educational activities and discussions was present in all studies reviewed. It is these engaging practices that, when implemented well, can provide students with a sense of belonging.

**Summary**

In this literature review, I have focused on three main areas of research: identity in relation to developing teachers; sense of belonging and student support programs, such as learning communities, their characteristics, and how they are utilized in higher education; and programs for preservice teachers to support emergent communities of practice. I began with an overview of the Community of Practice framework, outlining the three elements that provide a lens with which to view the research on support programs for preservice teachers.

I provided an overview of the concept of Identity as something that shifts and grows over time and is shaped by the sociocultural environments developing teachers find themselves in. I looked at sense of belonging and learning communities in higher
education, arguing that their important elements parallel those of communities of practice. Finally, I explored communities of practice designed to support preservice teachers and their development of professional identity.

There is a vast body of research on communities of practice, and the research on emergent communities of practice for preservice teachers shows that participants experienced growth in conceptual knowledge and generally positive experiences (Clark & Flores, 2014; Daniel et al., 2013; Korhonen et al., 2017). The examples of the Paedeia Café and the Academy for Teacher Excellence illustrate the value of engaging teacher education students at all program levels in a comprehensive community. Additionally, there are a number of instances where communities of practice include attempts at using technology to engage, encourage, and extend participation, but there are still gaps in support. For example, most of the current research begins at, or in, the community. There is a population of students who are at the very start of the educator pipeline, passionate about teaching, taking prerequisite teacher education courses, seeking to be part of a community of future teachers. There is a place in the literature for examination of the habits and ways of being that happen before a community is formed. This dissertation explores the experiences and perceptions of teacher education students who are not yet preservice teachers, and the ways in which they are seeking community as they make their way into a larger professional community of teachers.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will describe the qualitative research methodologies that were used to understand how beginning teacher education students experience the process of becoming teachers. I will explain my rationale for choosing a qualitative approach, describe the research setting and participants, the research design, methods of data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Rationale for Using Qualitative Methods and an Interpretive Inquiry Approach

Qualitative research methods are appropriate when a phenomenon or situation is not easily understood using quantitative measures. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of the situated practices of a population by enabling a deeper exploration of a problem or process. Conducting a study using qualitative methods enables the researcher to better understand the context in which participants’ social interactions take place (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methods enable the researcher to “learn more from the participants in a setting or a process the way they experience it, the meanings they put on it, and how they interpret what they experience” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 28). This study employed a social constructivist perspective, using methodologies from both narrative inquiry and constructivist grounded theory to
frame the qualitative inquiry of teacher education students’ interpretations of their experiences as they study to become teachers.

Riessman (2009), as well as Lal, Suto, and Ungar (2012), have highlighted the potential for using multiple methodologies when conducting qualitative research. According to Charmaz (2014), “grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves” (p. 1). Grounded theory takes an inductive approach, and it is iterative in nature, as the researcher can analyze data while collecting it. Categories are generated based on the ongoing analysis of data and compared across participants’ interviews to find relationships between categories and themes (Lal et al., 2012). A constructivist approach to grounded theory highlights the researcher’s place in constructing and interpreting data and views contexts and interactions as paramount to understanding the social nature of learning (Charmaz, 2014). Traditionally, Narrative Inquiry uses the story as the unit of analysis, coding for setting, plot lines, characters, and actions. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) referred to education as “the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other’s stories” (p. 2). Interpretive Narrative Inquiry as a methodology enables researchers to collect stories and “restory” them in ways that paint a chronicle of the participants’ stories. This research study employed multiple data collection methods, as in narrative inquiry, and looked across data collected by participants, as in constructivist grounded theory, to answer the following research questions:

• How do teacher education students conceptualize the process of becoming a teacher?

• What are the critical influences that shape teacher education students’ developing professional identities?
In what ways do teacher education students engage with a community of their peers?

Research Site

The research took place at Queens College, part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system. Queens College is a four-year liberal arts institution offering 61 undergraduate degree programs and 45 graduate degree programs. It is a commuter campus (95% of students live off-campus) and primarily comprised of undergraduate students (83%), with a large percentage (61%) of transfer students. The student population identifies as 27% Asian, 9% Black, 28% Hispanic, and 29% White. The student body includes many first-generation students (35%) and many (51%) from households with incomes below $30,000.

The Queens College Professional Education Unit includes the Division of Education, which houses three departments, including the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education (EECE), the Department of Secondary Education and Youth Services (SEYS), and the Department of Educational and Community Programs (ECP). Other Educator Preparation Programs (EPP) in the Professional Education Unit are housed in departments in other divisions, including the Department of Family, Nutrition and Exercise Sciences (FNES) in the Division of Mathematics and Natural Science, the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies (GSLIS) in the Division of Social Sciences, and the Music Education Program and the Department of Linguistics and Communication Disorders (LCD) in the Division of Arts and Humanities. Queens College offers 143 registered academic programs leading to New York State Teacher

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1Queens College is identified as the research setting per IRB approval from Teachers College, IRB protocol 4534 and Queens College, IRB protocol 2015-1065.
Certifications; Initial Certification is offered in 55 programs, 27 at the undergraduate level (Queens College Education Unit, 2018).

**Participant Selection**

Unlike quantitative methods, where the objective is to have a representative sample, qualitative methods use a purposeful sampling strategy to enable the researcher to gain the best possible insights into a research problem. In grounded theory, the sample should be chosen from a pool of individuals who have experienced the process to be studied (Creswell, 2013; Richards & Morse, 2013), and “who can contribute to the development of the theory” (Creswell, 2013 p. 155). This study began by recruiting undergraduate teacher education students who participated in the CCTEC\(^2\) project during the fall semester of 2016. Recruitment efforts included sending emails to former CCTEC participants (Appendix A), emails to CCTEC faculty members to share with former students, and physical flyers posted around the education departments at Queens College (Appendix B). Emails were also sent to faculty teaching introductory education courses, in the hope that former CCTEC students might be in their classes. I began conducting interviews with six former CCTEC participants. At the same time, I was also contacted by several teacher education students who had heard about the study but had not participated in CCTEC, and they wanted to know if they could be interviewed even though they had not been CCTEC participants. Due to the nature of the research and its focus on community, identity, and belonging, I filed an IRB amendment to enable expansion of the participant pool to include *any* students who were taking teacher education courses at Queens College. Once the IRB amendments were approved at both

\(^2\)The Cross-Campus Teacher Education Collaborative (C-CTEC) was designed to connect preservice teachers from three different campuses of a large public university by situating them within a hybrid learning community and engaging them in collaborative pre-professional activities.
institutions (Queens College and Teachers College), the next round of recruitment began (see Appendix C for new recruitment email and Appendix D for the updated flyer). A total of 22 participants volunteered to participate in the research. Twenty one-to-one interviews were conducted with 6 CCTEC participants, 13 participants taking teacher education courses at the college, and 1 beginning teacher, who was a recent graduate of the Secondary Education program. A focus group interview with 7 participants was held once the individual interviews were completed. The makeup of the focus group included 5 participants who had been interviewed and 2 participants who had not been interviewed. Of the 22 participants, 68% were transfer students, and all but 3 of the students (86%) attended school full-time. They ranged in age from 18 to 44, with half of the students (50%) falling into the 21-25 age group. Table 2 provides a full demographic breakdown of the participants. At the conclusion of the one-on-one interviews and/or the focus group interview, participants were remunerated with a $20 Amazon.com gift card.

Table 2. Demographics of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Transfer</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Childhood Language</th>
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<tr>
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<td>21-25</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Bengali</td>
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<tr>
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<td>QC</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>Guyanese</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Transfer</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simone</td>
<td>QC</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Black or African-American</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>QC</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>Part</td>
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<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aleesha</td>
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<td>Transfer</td>
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<td>35-44</td>
<td>Black or African-American</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatina</td>
<td>QC</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21-25</td>
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<td>Urdu</td>
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<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
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<td>Estafania</td>
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<td>Transfer</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
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<td>Zahn</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

Qualitative research methods often require multiple sources of data. In grounded theory research, interviews are often the primary method of data collection, while narrative inquiry draws from a broader set of data sources. This study used three data collection methods, including one-on-one interviews, critical incident reports, and a focus group. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method used to gain deeper insight into teacher education students’ perceptions of their experiences as they pursue teacher certification. The critical incident reports and focus group interview provided additional sources of data. The three data collection methods were chosen in order to provide a rich description and accurate interpretation of teacher education students’ perceptions and experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Interview Process

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection. Unlike informational or investigative interviews, interviews conducted within grounded theory studies enable the researcher to elicit participants’ recollections of experiences and their perceptions about those experiences (Charmaz, 2014). The
flexibility of the semi-structured interview format provided room for exploration when unexpected topics emerged from participants’ responses.

**Introduction and demographic information.** Once participants had agreed to be part of the study, a doodle poll was used to enable participants to choose from a number of days and times. When participants arrived at my campus office, they were offered water and snacks to calm nerves and to acknowledge that they were taking time out of their already busy schedules to participate in an interview. For many of the students, this was their first experience volunteering to be a participant in a research project. Some were anxious, unsure of what to expect, and some were obviously excited and wanted to hear more about why I was doing the study. Participants were asked to complete the informed consent process (see Appendix E), and once they had read and signed the consent forms, they were asked to complete the Demographic Inventory, which collected such information as age, gender, transfer status, and range/ethnicity information (see Appendix F).

**The interviews.** After completing the Demographic Inventory, I explained that we were going to start the interview, that I would be audio recording it, and that they could ask to have the recorder turned off at any time during the interview. I explained that the recorded interviews would be saved to allow for verbatim transcription so that I could represent what they had to say accurately. I also stressed that they would not be personally identified in any of the research reports and that all recordings would be deleted once the study was complete.

It was at this point that I began the interview, attempting to follow the interview protocol (see Appendix G for CCTEC protocol and Appendix H for non-CCTEC protocol). The importance of using a semi-structured interview approach was driven home a number of times throughout the 5-week interview process. Although I guided the interview process with specific questions, the flexibility of allowing for new but related topics to emerge from the participants resulted in interesting and unforeseen insights
about their experiences (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Morse, 2003). All interviews were transcribed verbatim and stored in a password-protected online database.

**Critical Incident Reports**

Following the completion of the interview, participants were asked to complete a critical incident report. Critical incident reports, first developed by Flanagan (1954), are often used to corroborate participants’ interview data. It is a reflective tool that can help elicit further perceptions about an experience. Participants were asked to reflect on any time during their studies in teacher education when they felt like they were part of a community. They were asked to share the details of that experience and what activities or actions led them to feel like they were part of a community (see Appendix I). This process was set up to be a written reflection, and many of the participants agreed to complete the written reflection. However, some participants preferred to talk through their critical incident reflection, allowing me to ask for additional details about the experience that led them to feel like they were part of a community. These recorded critical incidents were subsequently transcribed and saved as separate critical incident reflections.

**Focus Group Preparation**

A focus group of seven people was the final method of data collection. The focus group interview was mentioned in all of the recruitment materials, and, in fact, many of the students specifically inquired about the focus group when emailing for further information about the study. At the conclusion of each interview, I would ask the participants if they had any questions for me, and several (eight participants) wanted to hear more about the focus group. In the end, four of the participants who had inquired about the focus group were able to coordinate their schedules and attend.

Like the one-on-one interviews, the goal of the focus group interview was to gain deeper insight into teacher education students’ perceptions of their experiences as they
pursue teacher certification, and to see if the focus groups’ perceptions aligned with what individuals said in the interviews. Similar to the one-one interviews, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed to guide the focus group interview (see Appendix J). Morgan (2013) describes a reverse funnel approach, moving from specific questions to more general conversation when conducting a group interview that is meant to get at participants’ conceptualization of an experience. By starting with a specific question related to a specific assignment or activity they had experienced in a teacher education course, participants were helped to recall their experiences while taking education classes.

The focus group interview. I scheduled a one-hour time slot for the focus group interview, choosing to convene the group of seven at noon during “free-hour,” which is a time when classes are not scheduled. We met in a small seminar room in the Elementary Education Department. I arrived at the room 15 minutes early in order to set up the room and meet the pizza delivery. To my surprise, two of the participants were already there, waiting outside the room. One of the participants was Simone, who had been interviewed several weeks earlier. The other participant was Ariel, who had signed up for an interview but had cancelled at the last minute. They immediately asked what they could do to help set up the room and began organizing chairs. It was suggested that I sit at the head of the table. The pizzas arrived, and Ariel immediately took over, serving pizza and soda to the others in the room.

By noon, five of the participants had arrived. There was a feeling of anticipation in the air as participants ate their pizza and started casually talking. They recognized each other from taking education classes together and were already comparing notes. We waited a few more minutes, and then I read the introductory statement so we could get the interview started.

As the formal interview began, I was, once again, grateful for the flexibility of the semi-structured interview format. Although I set the “initial direction” of the interview,
the control shifted, somewhat, to the participants (Charmaz, 2014, p. 71), who were extremely eager to talk to one another. Although scheduled as a one-hour interview, it lasted much longer. I turned the recorder off at 1 hour and 18 minutes, but a few students lingered for another 30 minutes, asking advisement questions of me, and asking each other about courses and instructors. The focus group recording was transcribed verbatim and stored in a password-protected online database.

Data Analysis

Iterative Analysis

Data collection was completed in mid-November, but iterative, informal data analysis began at the completion of each interview and while the interview data were being transcribed verbatim throughout the interview process. During transcription, taking reflective notes about each interview enabled a preliminary, informal analysis of the data to begin. Reflective notes were inserted as comments on the transcripts. The reflective notes, coupled with the time-stamps in the transcripts, enabled revisiting the interviews throughout the process to compare notes and comments from various participants. It was an important step between the collection of the data and the more formal analysis of coding.

Initial Coding

Charmaz (2014) defined coding as “the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data” (p. 3487). The formal analysis of the data began with initial coding and looking for “actions in the data … rather than applying pre-existing categories to the data” (p. 4626). The process involved labeling segments of data, line by line, using the commenting feature in Microsoft Word. Over 800 individual codes were generated, labeled, and numbered, from over 250 pages of
interview transcripts. Using a macro in Microsoft Word, comments were extracted from each transcript and compiled in a table, which was then copied and pasted into an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet enabled sorting the data by code number, code name, and interviewee. Examples of some of the initial codes include teaching as passion, being more than a teacher, teaching from a young age, being engaged in fieldwork and observations, not belonging to any clubs, and being first in family to teach. As part of the initial coding process, codes were compared with codes and across participants’ experiences, presenting possible paths to pursue in constructing a grounded theory.

**Focused Coding**

The next phase of the coding process, focused coding, enabled the exploration of relationships between the initial codes (Charmaz, 2014). Throughout this process, I returned to the data many times, listening to the audio recordings, reviewing the transcripts, and further refining the codes. As patterns emerged across the data, initial codes were refined and collapsed into 18 categories. I then began the process of memo-writing, reflecting on the data and the participants, and how the pieces fit together, resulting in two overarching themes: teacher education students at the beginning of their formal academic program in teacher education (1) already view themselves as teachers, and 2) are seeking community as they pursue their studies.

**Trustworthiness**

In a quantitative study, the rigor of the research is defined by internal validity, generalizability, replicability, and objectivity. In other words, it reflects the larger population being studied, and multiple researchers will discover similar outcomes in the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). To better reflect the nature of the research, the criteria used in defining the rigor of a qualitative study differ substantially, with a focus on “how
well the researcher has provided evidence that her or his descriptions and analysis represent the reality of the situations and persons studied” (p. 77). Lincoln and Guba (1986) describe the importance of looking at the nature of a qualitative study holistically, noting that the pieces do not stand alone as variables, but are “interrelated” (p. 75), influencing each other and, in turn, are influenced by the context within which the phenomena take place. The trustworthiness of a research study is based on several criteria, including credibility, dependability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Credibility can be demonstrated in a number of ways, including prolonged involvement in and observation of the field/participants being studied; triangulation of data from multiple sources; peer debriefing to test developing ideas; presenting a negative case analysis of the phenomena; and member checks with participants on interpretation of interview data. Demonstrating transferability with the use of detailed information and thick description provides a way for other researchers to match the findings to their own contexts. Dependability of a qualitative research study can be demonstrated by providing detailed explanations of the data collection and analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Using interpretive inquiry with elements from constructivist grounded theory analysis and narrative inquiry, this study demonstrates trustworthiness in multiple ways. My long-term involvement in the research setting provided me with details and an inside look at the processes and procedures required of students pursuing teaching degrees. I have spent over 20 years teaching and advising teacher education students, so I have had the opportunity to get to know these students and see the trends and shifts in the makeup of the population. The design of the study, which gathered data from multiple sources, including one-on-one interviews, critical incident reports, and a focus group, enabled triangulation of the data. Periodic peer debriefing enabled me to share ideas and emerging theories with others and provided me with multiple perspectives and additional insights on the data, and follow-up conversations with several participants to verify interview
information served as member-checks. In addition, I have provided detailed information about data collection and analysis, as well as thick description around the entire process.

**Limitations**

The are several limitations that must be considered in this study. One limitation is that it took place primarily within one department on one campus with a small number of participants. Additionally, one of the credible aspects of this study, which is my long-term involvement with the department where most of the participants are taking their classes, might be viewed as a limitation. Although I bring deep knowledge of the programs and participants, this may also be seen as a bias. Self-report interviews, critical incident reports, and focus groups all rely on the self-reported memories and activities of the participants, and emotions, both positive and negative, often color a great deal of those memories. Additionally, there is the limitation of my role as faculty in the program where many of the participants hope to be accepted. Although I haven’t formally taught the participants in the study, a few of them had participated in teacher education support projects, where I was a co-director. Additionally, the participants are aware that they may be enrolled as students in my class in the future.

Finally, the issue of holding a single focus group can also be viewed as a limitation in this study. Morgan (2012) recommends repeated focus groups either by using some participants from one focus group in subsequent groups or by bringing the same participants together twice to enable comparing and sharing of talking points covered. Logistical issues, such as scheduling and time constraints on the part of the participants, may have contributed to the inability to recruit participants for additional focus groups.
Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed explanation of the qualitative methods used to frame this study, as well as a rationale for choosing multiple data collection methods to explore the perceptions and experiences of teacher education students. Thick description of the research site and participants, 22 teacher education students, provided a window into the setting of the study. Details on the collection of data using one-on-one interviews, critical incident reports, and a focus group were provided, as well as the process for coding and analyzing the data. Finally, the trustworthiness and limitations of this study were addressed.
Chapter IV
THEY’RE ALREADY TEACHERS

In this chapter I begin to present some of the data findings, exploring notions of identity and what teaching means to the participants in this study. Excerpts from a number of participants’ interviews are woven into this chapter and the next to convey the richness of their stories, and in some cases, I have chosen to include lengthy excerpts. These excerpts provide context and details that were important to the analysis and subsequent understanding of how the participants see themselves within the teaching profession. Significant words, phrases, or full sentences in an excerpt are emphasized by using a bold font.

My kindergarten teacher was the best. I came from Mexico and didn’t speak English. She brought me books and worked with me—and she was in a public school. She was so caring—she even brought clothes for me. I would like to teach kindergarten, because of her…. I can honestly say she, literally, changed my life. I came here and didn’t know how to speak English at all. Like—some kid used to bully me, and I just didn’t know how to say nothing. Like not bullying me—like he used to pinch me, and I didn’t say anything because I didn’t know how. She’d be like—“you have to like…” she just—she was being more than a teacher, saying “you have to stand up for yourself” (Kaitie, interview, 10/18/17)

Kaitie’s story, like the stories of most of the teacher education students I interviewed, reveals an important truth: these students see themselves as teachers already. To be clear, the students I interviewed are in the very early stages of their formal education about “how to teach.” They are only beginning to learn about the foundations of educational philosophy and history, and they are just being introduced to the
developmental processes of young children and the implications for classroom practice. However, despite their inexperience in the implementation of research-based classroom practices, they have already begun to do the emotional work of teaching (Hargreaves, 1998). They identify with former teachers and recall, not so much the excellent way they set up reading groups or conducted a classroom lesson, but the classroom environment, the tone of the teacher, and the way they were made to feel about learning, and about themselves. The learning experiences of many of the participants have resonated with them, and they continue to resonate as they prepare to become teaching professionals. Kaitie, for example, shared a more recent classroom experience, when she was assigned to a classroom as an observer of an experienced teacher.

There was a teacher and there was a kid and she was talking to the kid. The little boy, he was, I guess he was like the slowest one in the class, you know. So, she was always like, she was always telling him like, “well, you always finish last,” like, “why are you always holding the whole class up?” And I kind of—I kind of felt like—I don’t know, cuz that kid was like—he was like he was trying, but he just couldn’t do it. And the teacher was like joking around I guess—like to her. I kind of feel like that was hurting that kid. Like, I don’t know—that’s a way to motivate him? I don’t know that’s the way you do it, but I was just kind of like—really? so I wrote that down in my um … journal. I was like, You know, I don’t know this is the right thing, but it made me question a lot of things. I was like, wait … cuz she … they put me in her class because they say she’s a really good teacher, and she’s had so many years of experience, I’m guessing. So, I was sitting there like, ok, like, she probably knows what she’s doing, like I didn’t want to like…. She’s really organized, though. Like, she showed me all her books and everything—but I don’t know—that just kind of like—threw me off. (Kaitie, interview, 10/18/17)

Acknowledging that there was, most likely, some history leading up to the teacher’s exchange with the student, Kaitie’s reaction and subsequent reflection about the encounter speak to her view of what it means to be a teacher. Her early experiences as a learner have colored the way she views teaching, which includes not only skill in the management of a classroom full of students, but the kind of caring demeanor her kindergarten teacher exhibited. Kaitie and many of the other participants are already
teachers by way of their own particular disposition, which is to enact kindness and caring in the way they interact with learners.

The idea that preservice teachers see themselves as teachers already is a familiar one in the literature about teacher identity formation, but it is most often studied only after students are formally matriculated in a teacher education program. In this chapter, I explore this notion by looking at students who are very early in the teacher education pipeline. Whether recognizing their desire to teach from a very young age, in high school, or during college, they see themselves as teachers right now. This perspective is embodied in the stories they shared and the ways in which each participant enacts her identity as a teacher, as illustrated in the language used in spoken responses, contributions to the focus group, and other practices that will be explained further in this chapter.

An important part of this story is the way in which participants shared their stories with me. The interview questions were designed to elicit information about the activities and practices of students who are taking teacher education courses and their perceptions of their processes. The interviews always began with questions about the education classes they had taken so far, the activities and assignments they were engaged in, and how they were feeling about where they were in the process. Several questions, planned for later in the interview, were focused on the reasons they chose to pursue teaching as a career, as well as key people who may have influenced their decision. However, most participants seemed to gravitate to this question unprompted, as if they could not wait to share the back story of their decision to pursue teaching as a career. This was particularly evident during the one-on-one interviews. Some participants would light up with a smile, meeting my eyes directly, as they shared a particularly joyful experience, while other participants smiled wistfully, sometimes moved to tears, as they recounted poignant stories from their pasts, either from childhood, high school, or college. It didn’t matter
which kind of story they shared; most participants took pains to set the scene and launch into stories that included rich, descriptive details about their experiences.

From the perspective of formal program milestones, these students are not yet recognized as teacher education candidates. They do not have what Gee (2000) would call institutional identity. They are only beginning their journey toward officially being identified as teachers, yet each participant sees herself as a certain kind of person—one who teaches (Rodgers & Scott, 2008), with a certain kind of disposition—one who cares (Goldstein, 1999). However, seeing oneself as a teacher, or identifying with the “teacher” label, does not automatically afford one an identity as teacher. This identity, as the kind of person who teaches, is evolving and constantly being shaped by how one sees oneself in relation to others (Danielewicz, 2001; Flum & Kaplan, 2012; Gee, 2000; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). These identities have been shaped by many factors, including the official label of “teacher” and all of its institutionally sanctioned connotations, as well as how each participant enacts the role of teacher, which has often been influenced by their personal histories. Like so many studying to become teachers, these personal histories play a significant part in identity formation, and role models in particular influence the way preservice teachers see themselves and how they enact the role of teacher once they begin teaching. The collected stories of my participants reveal the emotional interactions—the relationships—as meaning-making processes that have contributed to the formation of their current identities as teachers (Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

**Being More Than a Teacher: Role Models Past and Present**

If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you can be to the people you may never even dream of. There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person. (Fred Rogers, 2003, from The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember, p. 179)
Kaitie’s sentiment that her kindergarten teacher was being more than a teacher was echoed throughout the interview process by many participants. Like Kaitie, they recalled learning experiences from childhood, high school, or college with teachers who had gone above and beyond their pedagogical duties as they engaged them as learners. In many cases, being the student of a role model who was being more than a teacher seemed to signify a sense of being seen by that teacher, both as an individual and as a member of the class, and kindness and caring were themes that were threaded throughout these stories.

The idea that classroom experiences, especially those occurring in childhood, influence preservice teachers’ notions about teaching is not a new one (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). In fact, it is sometimes seen as problematic, because preservice teachers have all experienced schooling in one way or another. Referred to as the “superior pedagogy of experience” by Knowles and Holt-Reynolds (1991, p. 103), preservice teachers have their own classroom and teaching schemas based on their experiences as students (Anderson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1980), and they bring this prior knowledge of how they have been taught with them as they begin taking their education classes. These early lay theories about teaching endure, coloring the way teacher education students approach their first forays into the classroom (Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Sugrue, 2004). However, the experiences shared by many of the participants transcend deft pedagogical practices. At their core, they aspire to help others and to be seen in the same way they view their former teachers. As in Kaitie’s case, other participants mentioned former teachers who helped them as they struggled to learn English. Fatina moved to the United States from Guyana when she was five years old, and she shared this story.

I cried for three weeks straight, all day, because I was terrified. I’m like, I don’t know this English—like I could read it, you know, I could read it. But when the teacher’s mouth opened, or like my classmates, I would be like—what are you saying?? And I would be afraid to like read or you know say something…. And then I went into first grade the next year and I had Miss Clea. I can never forget her. She was the best thing that ever happened
She loved her so much and I was like she’s so great—I want to be just like her. Like within like three months I was reading chapter books. Like she really pushed me and she really helped me and she invited my mom to come in, and I felt comfortable. And she would like—I don’t know if it was correct—but she would give me that little extra attention. You know, like I was young, but I did notice it, you know, and I would feel comfortable to go up to her and like have that relationship. And I was like she is great. And I never ever, ever forgot her. You know I always—I always remembered her. (Fatina, interview, 10/30/17)

In speaking of her experience, Sam, who came to the United States from Bangladesh at the end of seventh grade, said:

I went to my whole elementary and half of middle school in my country, and the teachers are really different. They are very strict, and I never really liked teachers. So when I came into this country, I started from like end of seventh grade…. I went to a new American school where the teachers were really accepting. We didn’t speak English and they made us feel like we belong to America. (Sam, interview, 10/19/17)

Inez talked about her 5th grade teacher:

There was a science trip that we had to go to, and my mom did not have enough money. He paid for me so I didn’t have to miss that trip and miss the whole lesson…. I want to be that kind of teacher. (Inez, interview, 10/25/17)

In the previous examples and many others, teacher education students’ identities were partially shaped by former teachers, role models, who went beyond pedagogical techniques to educate their students. Unlike the example Kaitie gave from one of her classroom observations, these teachers singled students out in positive ways. Feeling like an outsider because she couldn’t read English, Fatina learned to read chapter books and began to feel comfortable; Sam felt accepted by her teachers and like she belonged in her new country; and Inez’s teacher made sure that she was not left out of the class science trip. As students, these participants were made to feel unique, which enabled them to have a sense that they belonged in the class. In each instance, whether or not the teacher did this for all students, it felt very personal to that participant. A common sentiment many participants shared was that they wanted to emulate their role models and provide
the same kinds of positive emotional situations for their students that they had experienced, and many of them are doing this already in their own work with students.

This sense of wanting to be “more-than-a-teacher” speaks to the underlying discourse of caring, moral obligation, and the role of affect in teaching and learning (Goldstein, 1999; Hargreaves, 1998; Noddings, 1992; O’Connor, 2008). In particular, it highlights the notion that simply carrying out the recognizable concrete elements of a teacher education curriculum, for example, capitalizing on knowledge of cognition and how people learn, employing the processes of classroom management and lesson planning, and enacting organizational strategies, is only one piece of what it takes to be an effective teacher. Tappan (1998) looked at this phenomenon by examining what he calls a “hidden curriculum” of caring in Vygotsky’s work (1987), highlighting, specifically, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and more knowledgeable other (MKO) as parallel to, and somewhat intertwined with, caring pedagogy. Using the main elements of Noddings’s (1992) caring pedagogy (modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation), Tappan (1998) looked at Vygotsky’s sociocultural learning theories through the lens of caring pedagogy. This same lens can be used to think about the education experiences participants shared. Their teachers modeled caring interaction between teacher and student, supporting their learning by enacting the role of more knowledgeable other, encouraging engagement in the dialogue of the classroom, allowing for scaffolded practice in a safe environment, and encouraging their developmental potential.

Estefanía’s third-grade teacher, as well as a teacher portrayed in a children’s book, both served as inspirational role models for her. When she talked about her teacher, she did so with great affection, describing her as being “like a second mother to me…” (Estefanía, interview, 10/25/17). She recalled the time her teacher did a read-aloud of Patricia Polacco’s book, Thank You, Mr. Falker (Polacco & Forbes, 1998), as the moment she knew she wanted to become a teacher. Thank You, Mr. Falker tells the story
of a young girl who is dyslexic and the teacher who changed everything for her. Estefania was so taken with the story of Tricia, the dyslexic student, and Mr. Falker, the empathetic, caring teacher, that she decided she wanted to become a teacher.

I [recently] bought myself the book, the hard copy of it. You know, whenever I even have a classroom, or even [my own] kids, I would love to show them this book, because this book is just so inspirational for me. Maybe, like, at that time, I could have been like, “you know, you’re way too young to even decide what your future would be like, the career you would like,” because you know many people in high school, or even still in college—first semester Freshmen—they’re still like, “I don’t even know what I want to do…,” they’re still in liberal arts. It’s like, that instance, you know, since then, I always had teaching as like my priority: “I want to be a teacher; this is exactly what I want to be….” As I grow older, I’m like, “Oh, like you know, it’s this book that actually gave me that inspiration…. I wouldn’t have connected with the teacher—maybe even the students—at that time, because…, I wasn’t like a low academic student. I was in good standing; I was doing good. It’s just the fact that I sympathized for other people. I saw that they were struggling, or even saw other people that were just, like, wouldn’t fit in. I felt for them—does that make sense? I know that, at that time, there were students -like—I’m pretty sure—was it in third or one of those grades that a friend of mine, she came from Colombia, too, and she didn’t know any English, and you know, she was very like—fearful, like you know what I’m saying. I sympathized for them, and like, when I read Thank You, Mr. Falker, he was the type of teacher that—I think Tricia was the girl—she said—like, you know, he didn’t care about like, the teacher didn’t have his favorites. Like he didn’t care if you weren’t able to add or do this; like he didn’t care. He was the same to everyone. That’s like, how we teachers should be like. There shouldn’t be favorites … and once I saw that Tricia was getting the help, and like Mr. Falker was helping her, even though she was very low, and you know it made a very, it impacted her, and she was like, oh my god, thank you! That really caught my attention. I was like, I would want someone to think of me that way, like when I grow up, and students that are, like struggling, you know I would want my students to be like, “Thank you Miss Estefania.” (Estefania, interview, 10/25/17)

Estefania’s quote highlights a number of important ideas about developing teacher identity. Although she has not cleared any of the institutional hurdles yet, and she has barely started the formal academic part of the teacher preparation program, she has started preparing for her classroom by purchasing her own copy of Thank You, Mr. Falker to share with her future students. She made it clear when we spoke that she
couldn’t personally identify with Tricia, because she had not been a struggling student. However, she felt that reading about Tricia’s experience enabled her to empathize with students she had known personally, who were probably struggling to learn English and feeling fearful, and like they “didn’t fit in.” This early exposure to a real-life, caring role model tapped into Estefania’s affect and stayed with her. Her ability to reflect back to her own experiences as a student and recognize that some students felt like they didn’t fit in, or belong, is significant, as she will inevitably encounter similar kinds of students in future classrooms. Referring to Mr. Falker as a teacher who didn’t have favorites, she said, “That’s like, how we teachers should be like” (my emphasis). She is already a teacher, not in the formal sense of heading up a classroom after completing the certification process, and not in simply identifying with those who are officially labeled “teacher.” Estefania is already a teacher, declaring as such in the actions she takes as an after-school instructor, as English tutor and homework coach to her cousins from Ecuador, in her planning for the books she will bring to her future classroom, and in her reflections on her own experiences as a learner. She embodies the practices of her role models in the emotional connections she brings to her work, and it is this sense of caring pedagogy that is an important part of her developing professional identity.

While many of the stories shared above were based on childhood experiences, examples of caring role models were not limited to early learning experiences. In fact, many participants spoke of high school teachers and college professors who cared about their students, endeavoring to make the classwork accessible and relevant, and forming bonds with students—stories of being positively singled out, of being welcomed, of being seen, and feeling a sense of connection or belonging poured out of the participants. Simone spoke with reverence about the teacher who was responsible for turning things around for her when she was a teenager in Jamaica. She referred to herself as a troubled student, “the class clown,” who had given up on school when “that one teacher” took the
time to encourage her to become the class monitor and even visited her home to understand better why she consistently came to school wearing stained clothing.

Simone also shared her thoughts about a physics professor who teaches a course that every Queens College elementary teacher education student is required to take before entering the professional sequence of the program. It is a conceptual physics course, and many students describe the way they feel about having to take the class as nothing short of terrified, as they have had negative experiences in STEM courses in the past. She began by saying:

I’ve had one learning experience that I’ll take with me forever, and if I could be half the professor that he was, or he is, then I would have been perfectly happy with myself. I had Physics, and Professor G…. When I went into that class I had the biggest fear, and he said, “Listen we’re going to work on this. This is what we’re going to do…” and he broke it down in such a way that whatever interfered in your life, you know, he taught you a different way to think about the same math that you’ve been doing ever since and look at it in a different way. (Simone, interview, 11/2/17)

Before studying to become a teacher, Simone was studying nursing, but she dropped the major because she was having difficulty with the classes. She went on to say:

So when I thought about doing physics, I dreaded it. I really dreaded it, and I would have done anything to find a way to get out of it. But the very first day of class, I did it in the summer, and the very first day of class, his words were “whatever you thought this was going to be, forget it.” He reassured the students that it is not as bad as you think, and he gave us … he gave the class purpose. It wasn’t just to test your physics or test anything else. It wasn’t a grade. It was more of—let me impart knowledge to you so you can go and impart the same knowledge to kids. So, for that—that’s one lesson that will always stick with me. He was a really good professor in that field, and I’ve made it my vow: anybody here taking physics, I tell them, “Do not go in there thinking it’s the worst. He will break it down, and he will make it make it worth your while. You know that’s one of the first A+’s I’ve got that I’ve like … I went in thinking a B, a B+ and I’ll be fine. Right. Right. So it … blew me out the water. He’s really good. (Simone, interview, 11/2/17)
These sentiments were echoed in the focus group, where others shared similar thoughts about the physics professor who begins building his students’ confidence in their abilities on the first day of class.

The first day of the class he told us “forget about the exams, focus on getting the concept,” and that was the thing that relaxed me. Because, like you, I am but the worst in math. I cannot stand it. (Sam, Focus group participant, 11/15/2017)

Other examples of what a caring professor looks like came from participants reflecting on their experiences in their teacher education classes. Jen equated caring with communication:

The interactions with all the professors I’ve had, I think, no matter what the content is of the class, or what I learned, I think just the interaction with the professors in this department. I feel like all professors care for what we’re doing and what we’re going through. Like, they always try to connect them to communicate and try to work things out. There’s expectations, but they’re always willing to help when you need it. Like, especially when you’re having those, like, rough semesters where you have so much to do, so much work to do. Just knowing that the professors are willing to reach out and communicate and try to help, like, “Oh if you need anything…” like, you know they’re always telling us, “If you need anything, you know, just e-mail, you know, contact us. “ And I think that’s just what makes you feel a little more, like, relaxed. Like, if I need something, I can just talk to them. (Jen, interview, 10/30/17)

For Sam, caring was more about being seen. She spoke about a specific incident in one of her education classes:

So, the professor asks, like, “How do you feel?” Last week we watched a movie Finding Superman … Waiting for Superman. Finding Superman was the other reading related to Waiting for Superman. So, after watching that movie we discussed how we felt, and I said that I felt really heartbreaking, and the professor remembered it—after one week. So, she called on me and said, “Oh I remember that you said it was very heartbreaking for you. So, do you want to say something?” And then I said my opinions about the movie. So I feel like, in my other classes, I don’t feel that much engaged with the professors. But in this education class I do. So, it makes me feel really good. (Sam, interview, 10/19/17)

It is easy to dismiss the impact of a teacher’s caring actions on students’ experiences and overall learning. For some in higher education, courses taught by caring
instructors are perceived as less rigorous, and some faculty say this can lead to coddling students, which might make them weaker (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). However, caring actions, as described by Simone, Jen, and Sam—making the learning relevant and understandable, communicating with students, and seeing or remembering students—are supported by the literature on teaching, learning, and effectively engaging students. Rendón (1994) defined such caring actions as validation, as “an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development” (p. 44). Rendón Linares and Muñoz (2011) go further in saying:

Validation is not about pampering students or making them weaker. On the contrary, it is about making students stronger in terms of assisting them to believe in their ability to learn, acquire self-worth, and increase their motivation to succeed. Validating actions should be authentic, caring, and nonpatronizing. (pp. 17-18)

In *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*, Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, and Norman (2010) devote an entire chapter to student development and course climate and remind instructors that “student-centered teaching requires us to teach students, not content” (p. 158). The tone an instructor sets with students influences course climate, which can impact students’ perceptions of the instructor and validate their ability to be successful with the course material (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1995, 2005; Rendón, 1994; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011). A recent study by Cavanagh and colleagues (2018) looked at students’ engagement in a college level active learning science course as it related to their growth mindset (Dweck, 2008) and level of trust in the instructor. To look at students’ trust in the instructor, the research team had them rate “elements of their instructor’s responsiveness” (p. 3) as defined by demonstration of understanding, acceptance, and caring. Their findings indicated that students’ trust in the instructor as well as their level of growth mindset were predictors of their engagement in their active learning science course. It
should be noted that the level of trust in the instructor—i.e., the extent to which students perceived that the instructor understood them, accepted them, and cared about them—was “the strongest and most consistent predictor of student commitment, engagement, and course performance” (p. 5).

It is these kinds of experiences, with role models who were “more than a teacher,” that shape and validate teacher education students’ sense of themselves as successful learners and their evolving identities as teachers. It is this “identity as teacher” that they carry with them into classroom environments where they enact the role of teacher.

Enacting the Role of Teacher

While just beginning to formally study to become teachers, many participants are currently enacting the role of teacher, and many have done so for quite a while. Unlike aspiring doctors, nurses, chemists, or lawyers, people who aspire to be teachers can actually enact the role of teacher long before they have been officially recognized as such. This next section describes the ways in which some participants are already enacting the role of teacher.

Teaching from a Young Age: The Beginning of Things

A number of teacher education students began their early teaching experiences by teaching others close to them. Some were emulating role models, and some were exercising their need to be of service to family members, but a number of them began taking on the role of teacher at a young age.

Estefania, who decided she wanted to teach when she was in the third grade, after reading Thank You, Mr. Falker, said: “I remember, every teacher, they would want to throw stuff out. I would grab it and take it to my house and make my cousins my students” (Estefania, interview, 10/25/17).
Mia also enlisted her cousins as her students and “put tape and paper on the wall
and pretended to be a teacher” (Mia interview, 10/25/17). The “beginning of things” for
Alex was when she and her younger sister used to help the teacher in a Pre-K center by
reading to the children. Carla worked at sleep-away and day camps in high school, after
her own experience at sleep-away camp at the age of 8. Some participants’ early teaching
experiences came as a result of wanting or needing to help a family member. When Mia
began taking education courses at the community college, she recognized her brother’s
learning disability:

He was a slow learner, and I was studying education at that time, too....
And my mom and dad would come to me, like I was the one. I took care
of everything for him from beginning to end. (Mia interview, 10/25/17)

At the age of 14, Inez also worked with a family member who had a learning
disability.

Well, my nephew, he has dyslexia. He’s a bit autistic. He’s on the
spectrum. So, he has, had trouble reading, and no one really give him the
time. So my first job was, I mean, to figure out ways to help him. And
this is when I was 14, and it was a rough one year. It took him one year to
read a whole book. But it was a good experience, because that was the day
where he decided that it’s time to go to high school, because he was home
schooled.... That was the time where I was like, I want to be a teacher. (Inez,
interview, 10/25/17)

Estefania, Mia, Alex, Carla, and Inez all described situations in which they were
informally entrusted with the role of teacher when they were younger. Even at their
young ages, they were part of the teaching domain, inspired by purpose and value
(Wenger et al., 2002) and enacting a sort of teaching practice. Long before ever taking a
formal education course, they were already teaching in some way and recognized by
others as the kind of people who teach.

Summer Camp, Libraries, and After-School Programs: Making a Difference

For many of these students, their early experiences pushed them to seek
engagement in activities that place them more formally in the role of teacher. They are
now after-school instructors, library tutors, and dance and religious education instructors. They spend their summers working at summer camps, special library programs, and teaching in summer academic enrichment programs. Other students, like Jen and Aleesha, have more formal classroom experience, as they work full-time in schools while taking classes part-time; Jen is a paraprofessional in an elementary school, and Aleesha works full-time as a teacher’s assistant in a Pre-K classroom.

As they immerse themselves in the practices of teachers, they are invested in the work they are doing and feel a strong sense that they are “making a difference” in the lives of their students in the same ways that their role models made a difference for them. More importantly, although early in their academic pedagogical studies, they draw upon their coursework at the college to enact pedagogically sound practices in the work they do with children. They see themselves as teachers, but they are cognizant of the evolving nature of their teaching identities. This holds true for a subset of the participants who are working full-time in classrooms as teachers: two of the participants are teaching full-time as high school teachers while they take education classes, and one is a recent graduate who is currently a K-6 physical education teacher. Although farther along in the educator pipeline, these participants acknowledge that their teacher identity is also evolving and being shaped by a number of factors, including their role models, their students, and the way others see them.

**Being Seen by Others as a Teacher**

Another factor contributing to the participants’ identity formation, of seeing themselves as teachers already, is the way in which others see them. The “others” often include people who are trusted members of their daily lives and inner circles: family members, such as parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents; close family friends; and teachers. For many participants, they have been recognized by people they trust as “a
certain kind of person in a given context” (Gee, 2000, p. 99) for quite a while. This identity as teacher is connected to their performance in the context of the family or neighborhood community, where they were placed in situations where they were assigned the role of teacher, such as when they taught cousins and siblings. In other early teaching experiences, such as working at summer camps, or in libraries and afterschool programs, they were seen as teachers because they sought out these roles and were deemed competent by those in leadership positions. In both instances, early teaching experiences enabled each participant to be seen by trusted others as the kind of person who teaches. This included the individuals who were taught (siblings, cousins, kids at camp, and afterschool), employers, and family members. For some of these participants, they seemed destined to pursue teaching as a career, and they were seen early on as teachers, even if informally.

Taking the Long Way: From STEM to Teacher Education

Unlike those participants whose pursuit of a teaching career has been a lifelong dream, making their paths fairly straightforward, this sense of clarity in the pursuit of teaching as a career choice was not the case for everyone I interviewed. For some participants, the realization that teaching was a desired career path evolved more gradually, taking paths that indirectly led them to teacher education courses. In fact, there is a subset of participants who began taking introductory teacher education courses after first starting out as majors in STEM, or STEM-related disciplines. Their reasons for first pursuing these majors, and eventually leaving these majors, are multifaceted and could actually be a topic for another dissertation. However, some background on STEM disciplines in higher education is necessary to put this group in context.
STEM disciplines, as defined by the National Science Foundation (NSF), include principal science and engineering disciplines, such as math, physics, chemistry, and biology, as well as psychology, political science, and economics (Gonzalez & Kuenzi, 2012) and were expanded in 2012 by the Department of Homeland Security to include over 400 majors, including health-related disciplines (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2012). In 2007, the U.S. Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, as well as the National Science Foundation, published reports in response to indications that the United States was losing its competitive, innovative edge in an increasingly global, knowledge-based economy (National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2007; National Science Foundation, 2007). The reports called for expanding the pipeline into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) disciplines and reforming the P-16 U.S. education system, which was “failing to ensure that all American students receive the skills and knowledge required for success in the 21st-century workforce” (National Science Foundation, 2007, p. 1). The concern over groups traditionally underrepresented in STEM (the disabled, ethnic and racial minorities, and women) has resulted in a high-profile push for programs aimed at increasing the number of URMs in STEM (Gonzalez & Kuenzi, 2012). For some participants, pursuing STEM-related disciplines was connected to a desire to meet familial expectations (Archer et al., 2012), while others seemed to connect to a desire to fulfill their own altruistic values (Carlone & Johnson, 2007).

Simone described herself as someone who had started going back to school a number of times to pursue different certificate programs. When she decided to pursue a degree in earnest, she began a nursing degree because she saw herself as wanting to take care of young mothers the way she had been taken care of when her newborn was sick. She wanted to “be one of those good nurses that kind of brings comfort and joy and care
“to mothers.” When asked if she had ever thought about teaching before she went into nursing, she responded:

Yeah, years ago, but to be honest, I was a bad student; I was one of the worst. I was suspended so many times; I was supposed to be expelled, and I was like, that’s what I’m going to get back. It’s like, Karma has a way of pushing you <laughing>, so I tried to stay far, far away from teaching because of that, and then, no matter what I did…. The first day I walked into Queensborough, the advisor that’s signing [us] up for classes, she said, “Oh, you signed up for the teacher program, right?” I’m like, “No, nursing,” and I should have just listened to her then <laughing>. (Simone, interview, 11/2/17)

As she began taking courses in the nursing program, she began to question her decision. She was passing her required science courses, but she felt she wasn’t retaining the material. At the same time, she was teaching religious education and becoming more involved in her son’s elementary school. Thinking back to her advisor’s surprise when she learned she was pursuing nursing, she began to see herself in a different light. She took more notice at her son’s school and began visiting other schools in her area, where she would tell the older students to stay focused on their work, because “your education will take you anywhere you want to go.” Below she describes the schools and the conversation she had with herself about deciding to pursue a teaching career:

The schools are not the greatest you know. The teachers, most of them care, but not all. One of the main things I saw was there was not a lot of teachers that looked like me, and there was a lot of kids that looked like me, or looked like my kids. I’m like, where are they going to be motivated? You know, it’s not like they’re in certain areas where you’ll see a few Black teachers that will come in. They’re not seeing anyone. You know, you can count on a handful the ones you see that look like me, and one of the things was … that dawned on me like, why wouldn’t you go back to school and come back to this area? You know, I’m not loyal to any area. I was not born here. I was born in Jamaica. So, it’s not like I can say I grew up [here] so I have to give back to [this area]. My kids are still young, I could move them anywhere, and they can have roots there. But that area, I think, is so under-served that my kids don’t even go to school where we live because of that. So, to me, I want to be able to go back into that kind of environment and give back, try to make a difference there. Let them see somebody that looks like them that are doing it. That was one of the main things that got me
into like—I need to do this—I need to finish this. (Simone, interview, 11/2/17)

It seems that, as much as young Simone did not want to see herself as a teacher, she evolved into someone others began to see as one who teaches. This view was reflected in the ways in which she interacted with students in the religious education classes she taught, and in the local neighborhood schools she visited, and the ways in which she saw herself “going back to school” to pursue teaching as a way to “give back.” She sees herself as a motivational force, a role model who can inspire students who look like her. She wants to have a hand in “training the next generation to be just as caring” as the nurses who took care of her when her son was born. She wants to make a difference and to be seen as someone who teaches.

Aleesha, too, began her undergraduate career taking science courses in pursuit of a nursing degree. She was working part-time in a Pre-K afterschool program while attending community college, when the program director said to her, “You sure you don’t want to be a teacher, because you’re so good with the children.” Like Simone, she hadn’t seriously considered teaching as a career, but as she struggled with the math and science courses required for the nursing program, she recalled the director’s words.

You know, I started thinking about what the director said, and then I started, you know. I took one teaching class and did the fieldwork, and was like oh, I really like this! So, then I said alright … then my son came, and he had special needs. And I was more curious about, you know, wanting to know how to help him with his special needs. So that kind of pushed me even more to go into the field of teaching, because I was like, I need to know how I’m going to be able to teach him, to help him if he needs anything. So that kind of forced it even more into me, and I got into it, and I really, really, really love it. (Aleesha, interview, 10/30/17)

Aleesha continues to take her education prerequisite courses and complete her fieldwork, while co-majoring in Psychology, working as a teacher’s assistant in a Pre-K Headstart program, and parenting her special needs son. She is already a teacher.

In making the leap from STEM, Simone and Aleesha are part of a subset of participants who began taking teacher education courses after first beginning as STEM
majors working toward a nursing degree. While seemingly not encouraged to pursue their STEM majors, for both of these young women, the leap to teacher education from nursing was encouraged by what Rendón Linares & Muñoz (2011) would label as validating out-of-class agents, such as faculty or advisors. These agents “actively reach out to students to offer assistance, encouragement, and support, as opposed to expecting students to ask questions first” (p. 17).

For other participants, family expectations influenced their chosen majors, and this was the case for Sam, Mia, and Fatina, all of whom began college in pursuit of STEM or STEM-related majors. Sam had started as an Accounting and Economics major, but working in a local school as part of a college service program got her thinking about education and questioning her Accounting and Economics major:

So, in CUNY Service Corps, when they placed me in [a New York City public school], I was an Accounting and Economics major. So, I was thinking “this is like just another job,” you know? I’m just going to do it for money, and then, you know just put it in the resume if I have to. And later on—on my last day—I decided that “no, I can’t handle Accounting anymore,” even though I was having good grades, but I wasn’t really into the classes. I was like, “What am I doing here,” you know? So I decided I would just change my major. I just got the signatures, and then changed my major on the same day—last day.

MF: So, what inspired you?

I realize that I’m going to miss the children and the classroom setting a lot, so I thought, I was always passionate about it, because my father was a teacher as well, in my country [Bangladesh]. (Sam, interview, 10/19/17)

When I first interviewed Sam, she was still majoring in Economics and Elementary Education, but by the time the focus group met, she had dropped the Economics major and switched to an English major. During the focus group interview, I asked why she made the switch:

It’s just that, I don’t think I am very good at math; I’ll be honest. So, I was taking so many math classes. Only thing I did enjoy was the math class that I had to take for Elementary Education. I got an A on that and the rest of the classes was W, D, or C. So, I know it’s not working out; there are way
too many bad grades on the transcript, and that doesn’t look good. And I’m not really interested in Economics anymore. It de-motivated me. (Sam, focus group interview, 11/15/17)

For Sam, the decision to pursue teaching instead of Accounting and Economics did not seem to upset her family. However, the fact that her father was a teacher when they lived in Bangladesh may have made her transition out of Accounting and Economics less upsetting than it was for other participants. For Mia and Sam, the transition from STEM to teaching was more traumatic, as their families’ expectations were that they would pursue careers in the sciences. Mia said:

I come from a long history because, you know about our culture, like I’m the only daughter and my mom wanted me to become a doctor. But from the first two and a half years of college, I was very upset. I was very emotional because I wasn’t happy doing all those—cutting animals and doing all those dissections and everything like that. (Mia, interview, 10/25/17)

So, Mia talked to her brother, who recognized her love for working with children, and she talked to her father, who called teaching a “respectable job,” with “certain hours” that wouldn’t require Mia to be “overworked.” Together, along with Mia’s aunt, who is a special education teacher, they spoke to Mia’s mom about her desire to teach and not pursue a career in medicine. Mia describes the scene below.

One night we all sat down and we spoke. We talked, and my brother said the news to my mom, and she was like “what???” It took her—like—she needed her coffee right there. Like, it took her a while to process that. And then it took her about a month to open up to that fact. So, that was my last semester of taking all those classes. (Mia, interview, 10/25/17)

Fatina was also a STEM major. She was studying biology at another school because her parents liked the medical field’s potential for earning “big bucks.”

Well, my parents, you know, they’re always like—medical field! That’s where it is—big bucks, and you’ll never regret it! So, when I was at York, they had a Physician Assistant Program. So, I was a biology major for like a minute, you know, and I just didn’t like it. It’s like, I mean you have to study hard no matter what. I was—I was—studying super hard and like, it was just boring, you know? And then I was like, “do I see myself doing this for the rest of my life and never having to complain every day
about it?” And, I couldn’t, and I think this is not for me. And when it came to dissection—we had to dissect all sorts of things, like fetal pigs and all that, and I was like, to my lab partner—“you do that—I’ll do the work.” So I was just answering questions, and I was just like yeah, you do that. And so, I was like, I can’t see myself doing that. And patients—when they get sick—I just don’t have that. I am—I cry easily—I’m very sensitive. I get attached—I’m super attached—so I get these kids like. Even if I spend two days with them, I go, “I don’t want to leave,” you know what I mean? So, that wasn’t for me, and like, \textit{it kind of broke my parents’ heart a little bit}. But they were like, “you know if you’re going to do something stick to it, and be consistent with it, and you’ll succeed and have a passion.” Yeah, because my dad was on me, he was like, he likes his job, and he doesn’t know how he would be able to, like, you know go there every day. So, sometimes it’s not all about the money. You know, I mean if it was all about the money, I wouldn’t be doing this! <laughs> (Fatina, interview, 10/30/17)

Mia’s and Fatina’s experiences reflect the work of Archer and colleagues (2012), who looked at the ways in which families shape elementary children’s science aspirations. In their research, which took place in England, they observed that South Asian families exhibited “an interplay between family habitus, capital, and a South Asian cultural discourse (which identifies science as a ‘respectable’ and desirable career aspiration for ‘us’)” (p. 893). This was especially highlighted for Mia, whose family is from Pakistan. There is strong parental influence, particularly on daughters, to become medical doctors and bring prestige and higher social status to the family (Moazam & Shekhan, 2018).

While Mia, Fatina, Sam, Simone, and Aleesha may have aspired to study in the sciences in the past, their interests changed as they grew older, and each woman shifted her identity from “science person” (Carlone & Johnson, 2007, p. 1190) to one who teaches.

**Teaching as a Way of Being and Thinking**

This chapter put forth an argument for what enacting oneself as a teacher entails and highlighted the different ways in which education students, early in the educator
pipeline, see themselves as teachers. Seeing themselves in this way—as teachers—has taken shape through a process of interactions both inside and outside the classroom. Their experiences as learners and teachers, their role models, and those who see them as teachers have all contributed to their developing teacher identity. They described their role models, past and present, and how they were “more than a teacher” in many instances, demonstrating engaging pedagogical practices imbued with kindness and caring. They described their own work in educational settings and how they endeavor to make a difference to students in the same ways their role models made a difference for them. They also described being seen by others as teachers, by the out-of-class agents (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011), the ones who recognized their teacherness, which is aptly described by one blogging teacher as “a way of being and thinking” (readlisaread, 2014).

In writing about the development of professional identity in learning to teach, Rodgers and Scott (2008) refer to stories and emotions as “the internal, meaning-making aspects” of identity formation (p. 733). This chapter explored these meaning-making aspects by looking at the ways teacher education students’ personal histories—their experiences as learners and teachers—contribute to their developing professional identities and the sense that they are already teachers, enacting the role in many different ways. In looking at the stories of these students, specifically the stories about their role models, it’s not simply that they were kind and caring, it’s how their actions instigated a sense that each participant belonged—to the classroom, to the country, to a group of successful learners—and it’s a reminder of the power that educators in all disciplines have in shaping the way learners see themselves. Their role models tapped into what Baumeister and Leary (1995), Goodenow and Grady (1993), and Osterman (2000) deem essential motivating elements for students in learning environments: the sense that they belong—that they matter—within a community of learners. This carries through into being identified by others as teachers—again—being seen by others as belonging to a
specialized group of individuals dedicated to teaching. The next chapter looks at the community, the “contexts and relationships” (Rodgers & Scott, p, 733) that are essential to the formation of identity, and how the participants in this study are seeking ways to find their way into a community, where they can enact their teacherness.
Chapter V
SEEKING COMMUNITY

A traveler in a foreign land best learns names of people and places, how to express ideas, ways to carry on a conversation by moving around in the culture, participating as fully as he can, making mistakes, saying things half right, blushing, then being encouraged by a friendly native speaker to try again. He’ll pick up the details of grammar and usage as he goes along. What he must not do is hold back from the teeming flow of life, must not sit in his hotel room and drill himself on all possible gaffes before entering the streets. He’d never leave the room. (Rose, 1989, p. 142)

The concept of identity connects individuals with the larger world (Flum & Kaplan, 2012); “it synthesizes past, present and future experiences” and is “anchored in a sense of ’being part of’—a web of relationships, group solidarity, and communal culture” (p. 240). In Lives on the Boundary, Mike Rose (1989) refers to the students in his remedial writing class as needing a safe space to become critical thinkers and questioners, to acquire the language of formal schooling in higher education, enabling them to be “let into the academic club” (p. 141). As I sat with the 7 teacher education students who participated in the focus group interview and then reflected on the individual interviews I had completed with 20 students, I was reminded of Rose’s quote. Although my research is not specifically about remedial writers, his words speak to the need for teacher education students, already teachers in so many ways, to have space to think, problem-solve, and try on the formal language of the teaching profession in safe spaces inside and outside their classrooms. For many of the students who are taking the prerequisite teacher education courses, there are no connectors between the courses they are taking. They simply move from course to course, waiting to be let into the club that will lead them to
fulfilling their dreams, and many of them are “traveling” alone. However, given the opportunity to talk—about their paths, their passion for teaching, and even their administrative and advising questions—they seem to acknowledge that they are traveling alone, in a somewhat foreign land, and appreciate the opportunity to connect to someone. At a time when the ubiquity of technology allows us to connect with anyone, anywhere, and at any time, the participants I interviewed, individually and in the focus group, are seeking community and ways to connect with their peers. They want to share stories of their own classroom learning and their own teaching experiences. They want to compare notes about the certification process: How are you getting there? What did you think about that assignment? Who did you go to for advisement? They want to use the language of teaching and learning with their peers who are also at the beginning of the educator pipeline, and they want to know who the agents are, both inside and outside the classroom.

So, at the very heart of this chapter is an even more important truth that has emerged from this research: these students are seeking ways to connect and be part of a community so that they can share their teacherness with like-minded peers. It should be noted that prior to participating in this research study, many participants were not actively seeking community. In fact, they may not have realized they were missing the connections to their peers until it was brought to their attention. This chapter will explore this notion by looking at interview and focus group excerpts, as well as the critical incident reports collected from the participants.

**Campus Community at an Urban Commuter School**

I just come and go—that’s what I do. (Divisha, interview, 10/18/2017)

One of the biggest challenges faced by all participants in the study is that they are commuter students. Except for several students, most of the participants
interviewed were enrolled in a “traditional” four-year undergraduate college program;\(^1\) all participants were commuter students with busy personal and, sometimes, professional lives. Additionally, of the 22 students who participated in the study, 15 had transferred into Queens College, and 2 have plans to transfer to Queens College in the near future. When asked about belonging to a community of students on campus, most students immediately answered that they did not feel like they belonged to a community. Their reasons were varied, and many of them didn’t put the blame on the campus but pointed to their own choices and time limitations, and the underlying feeling about “not belonging” seemed to be somewhat matter-of-fact. Divisha is an older student, a parent, and she attends community college full-time so that she can fulfill her lifelong dream of becoming a teacher. When asked if she feels like she belongs to a community of students on campus, she responded very quickly and said, “No … I just come and go, that’s what I do.” When I acknowledged that it is hard to be involved on a commuter campus, she said, “I’m trying to get myself involved, but sometimes I, it’s like I want to do so much, so many things, but then I can’t find the time.” Inez also feels time-challenged. In response to my question about belonging to a community of students on campus, she said, “Not really, because I’m doing way too much. Yeah, I’m a full-time student and a full-time worker. I’ve … wanted to join certain clubs, but with my schedule, it’s just insane.” Participant after participant talked about the ways in which they don’t, or can’t, engage with their peers.

Alex transferred from a community college and is also a full-time student. She studies Theatre and Elementary Education, both majors that require a great number of field hours. She also works four days a week at a pharmacy.

\(^1\)Two participants were enrolled at a community college with plans to transfer to Queens College. Two participants were enrolled in graduate teacher certification programs, and one participant was a recent graduate of the undergraduate physical education program.
Not really, and it’s not because there isn’t…. You know, it’s just the
time is hard. You know, when I first came here I didn’t have any friends…. 
So I don’t have people local—it’s just crazy. So, when I first transferred 
here, my first friend was the shop manager of the theatre department. So that 
became my place. You know what, lately it’s been feeling like I don’t have 
a place right now because I haven’t been able to go there. It’s … it’s 
been difficult trying to kind of find a place and trying to balance 
everything at once, but you know, I’m trying. Like, I saw, even the other 
day, the poster, the flyer, for the education club, and that was the day I got 
sick … I was really excited to go, and I was like, I can’t even go. So, it’s 
difficult right now. (Alex, interview, 10/23/2017)

Fifteen of the 20 participants reported that they are working, with 6 of those 
working full-time. They make their academic lives work by squeezing in classes and the 
accompanying coursework between the responsibilities of work and, for 4 of the 
participants who are parents, childcare. These findings echo those of the 2016 CCTEC 
pilot study, where participants were asked how they spent their time in a typical week. 
Table 3 provides a summary of the responses from those who answered the question, and

Table 3. How Teacher Education Students Spend Their Time

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Activity</th>
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<th>1-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
<th>16-24</th>
<th>More than 25</th>
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<td>34.92%</td>
<td>26.98%</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for pay-on campus</td>
<td>85.04%</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
<td>4.72%</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
<td>0.79%</td>
<td>3.15%</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for pay-off campus</td>
<td>36.22%</td>
<td>10.24%</td>
<td>10.24%</td>
<td>10.24%</td>
<td>8.66%</td>
<td>24.41%</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxing and socializing</td>
<td>8.59%</td>
<td>42.19%</td>
<td>26.56%</td>
<td>14.06%</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
<td>5.47%</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing care for dependents</td>
<td>24.80%</td>
<td>22.40%</td>
<td>12.80%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>7.20%</td>
<td>24.80%</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing care for dependents (children, parents)</td>
<td>24.80%</td>
<td>22.40%</td>
<td>12.80%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>7.20%</td>
<td>24.80%</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuting to campus</td>
<td>4.69%</td>
<td>53.91%</td>
<td>27.34%</td>
<td>8.59%</td>
<td>2.34%</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
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</table>
several areas stand out. When students were asked how much time they spent working, either on or off campus, about 50% responded that they work more than 11 hours a week, and about 25% work more than 25 hours per week. Similarly, about 25% of the students spend more than 25 hours per week caring for dependents.

In the interviews and focus group, many of the participants noted that, in addition to their paid part-time or full-time work, they spend time in classrooms conducting required field observations for the education courses they are taking. Many of these students accept that this is the way their lives must be right now in order to attain their academic goals.

Aleesha is a transfer student, studying Psychology and Elementary Education. She is a parent of a child with special needs, and she works in a Pre-K setting as a teacher’s assistant. When I asked her if she felt like she belonged to a community of students on campus, she responded without hesitation:

Not yet, not yet. I think, probably when I start in the program itself, and really being there, then I will feel like I’m in the community. But right now—not yet. I’m just taking classes with people and some of them, I still see them and say hi, but I don’t think I’m like, really in a community yet. (Aleesha, interview, 10/30/17)

Fatina, who transferred from another four-year school, is a full-time undergraduate, studying English and Elementary Education. She works part-time at an afterschool program, and her priority is to focus on her studies. When asked about whether she felt like she belongs to a community of students on campus, she replied:

No, I don’t. I am not active on campus. I go to school. I go to class. The only action I get is the library…. I go to the library. I do my homework. I hate doing assignments at home. So, I do everything [here] even if I don’t have class. Like today I don’t have class, but I still come on campus to do my homework, and then I just go to work. And I also work on the weekends, too. It’s not like there’s nothing the school has to interest me. It’s just, my priorities are not there. And, because I’ve always been raised in that environment where, it’s like, you go to school, excel, be the best. Don’t worry about friends, don’t worry about groups. And when I got older, and I was able to, you know, hang out and go join them and join that, I just
didn’t feel the need to. So, I just, don’t. No participation in anything, <laughing> and I don’t even know, this sounds so pathetic, but I don’t even have friends on campus. I don’t know, I have classmates during the semester who I would work with, and then when the semester is over that’s it, you know. I don’t think I’m a mean person, it’s just, I don’t know. When I’m in my class. I do like, I really, I know my teacher, my professors, like, they care. And, they’re always available, and I know that. But, like I said, I don’t really go to things like outside of class or outside of school, so I don’t have that sort of relationship. I have more like an academic relationship. Yeah. So, no, I don’t know. Kinda sounds sad, now <laughs>. (Fatina, interview, 10/30/2017)

Dianna is studying History and Elementary Education. She is not a transfer student, having begun her studies at Queens College as a freshman. She had a different take on the question of feeling like she is part of a community of students on campus:

Not really. I think it’s hard to belong to any community on a school you don’t dorm at. I feel like it’s much easier if you dorm to have, like, little circles. But if you don’t, everyone has their own classes, and then your friends this semester, you’re not really—you don’t see each other the next semester and you kind of lose connection. So, it’s hard for a school where you don’t dorm. I feel like you make a lot less friends, honestly, if you don’t get to dorm. Your friends are all temporary, honestly, if you meet them in school. (Dianna, interview, 10/12/2017)

Kaitie, who participated in the Fall 2016 CCTEC project, is the youngest participant in the study. She attends community college full-time and works at an afterschool program. She offered this response when asked about feeling a sense of community on campus:

Kaitie: It’s like, not really, because, I don’t feel I have a group that we can like, talk about this or anything like that. But I guess it’s, like partially my fault, too, because I know the clubs are out there, I know there’s a group, yet I don’t go to them. That [education] club—I looked it up online, and it didn’t show up, so I thought it was cancelled.

MF: So, you were part of the Education Club?

Kaitie: No I went to a few meetings…. When I would go, they only, the meetings … they had somebody talking, or something like that. So it wasn’t really like….

MF: So you just didn’t get to have time to talk?
Kaitie: Yeah, Yeah. So, kind of, that’s why I stopped going because, the only people coming were presenting. It was just us sitting there, and then people talking. It was more like a workshop, or a lecture. I guess it helped, but I also wanted to get to know the people, like, who I’m with and…. (Kaitie, interview, 10/18/17)

In total, 18 of the 22 participants indicated that they did not feel like they belonged to a community of students on campus. Based on the classic student success literature, it is tempting to surmise that these students may not persist in the major or continue their studies at all. The literature shows that the more students are involved, i.e., connected to the campus and invested in their own learning process, the more likely they are to persist and stick with their studies (Astin, 1993; National Institute of Education, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). However, this seminal research describes two classic categories of students: highly involved students who spend a great deal of time studying, engaging in campus activities, and interacting with peers and faculty on campus; and uninvolved students who are not particularly engaged in their studies, do not spend a great deal of time on campus, and do not engage with peers or faculty. However, the participants in this study cannot easily be labeled as involved or uninvolved. Many of them are highly involved by way of taking classes in teacher education and enacting their roles as teachers, but the circumstances of their personal lives make it difficult to be involved in the kinds of campus activities that promote a sense of belonging. In describing involvement as defined by the seminal research at the time, Rendón (1994) observed that students are expected to get involved on their own, and that the role of the school, aside from providing things like tutoring centers, clubs, and extracurricular activities, was a passive one. Rendón’s participants described a transformative process of validation, where someone either in-or out-of-class, took an active interest in them when someone took the initiative to lend a helping hand, to do something that affirmed them as being capable of doing academic work and that supported them in their academic endeavors and social adjustment. It appears that nontraditional students do not perceive involvement as them taking the initiative. They perceive it when someone takes an active role in assisting them. (p. 44)
For many of the participants in my study, this sort of validation occurred in their past educational experiences, with educators who were “more than a teacher,” taking on the role of active agents, either in class or out of class. However, there are a limited number of active out-of-class agents within the QC teacher education department who are encouraging involvement in the type of campus-related activities that support a sense of belonging. Still, there is a fundamental need for people to connect to others and feel they are part of something (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This is especially important for nontraditional college students, who are commuters, URMs, and transfers from other institutions (Azmitia et al., 2008; Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2013; Rendón, 1994; Syed et al., 2011; Tapp, 2014; Tinto, 1998), and it appears that many of the participants I spoke with are missing out on the benefits of belonging to something on campus (Carr & Walton, 2014; Karp, 2011; Walton & Cohen, 2007; Walton et al., 2012).

Achieving Community: It’s Complicated

“...you just have to make your college life that way. You have to go out there and find out....”

The quote above is from Mia’s interview. She was one of four participants who indicated that she does, actually, feel like she belongs to a community of students on campus. This next section takes a closer look at the stories of Raya, Mia, Molly, and Sam., who all said “yes” to a sense of belonging to a community.

Raya

Raya responded to the call for participants within a few days of hearing about the study. She was very communicative by email about setting up an interview, so I was somewhat surprised when I met her in person, as she was timid and a little tentative in her responses, using the least number of words she could get away with in answering and speaking barely above a whisper. She had transferred from a community
college a few semesters prior, with a plan to pursue an education major alongside English. We talked about the courses she had taken and her plans to pursue a teaching degree. She was knowledgeable about some of the processes for getting into a certification program, but her goals regarding which area she planned to teach were unclear to me—and to her. Initially, she had hoped to become a secondary math teacher, but her grades in math had suffered. She changed focus and set her sights on teaching younger children, but she had never worked with young children except for a read-aloud assignment she had recently completed in one of her education courses. She described the experience of recording herself as she read to her young cousin as a painful one (she actually winced when she spoke about it), but she was looking forward to observing students in an elementary classroom in the coming weeks. When I asked her if she felt like she belonged to a community of students on campus, she hesitated, answered yes, and then explained that she was a member of two student clubs: the Caribbean Student Association and the Hindu Student Association. However, when I asked her to complete the critical incident reflection and write (or talk) about one time when she felt like she was part of a community, she declined. Raya’s experience may be similar to that of the students Hurtado and Carter (1997) looked at when studying Latino students’ sense of belonging. They found that membership in social-community organizations, such as religious clubs, sports teams, or student government, was associated with a higher sense of belonging to the campus community. However, students who were members of ethnic student organizations did not experience a higher sense of belonging to the campus community than non-members. Hurtado and Carter speculated that students may join such associations as a way to share common interests, as well as their feelings of being marginalized within the campus community, leaving them to feel a part of that particular group, while still not feeling like they belong to the campus community. Raya had a sense that she belonged in some way to a community of students on campus, perhaps both the Caribbean Student Association and the Hindu Student Association.
One week later, when Raya received the email about participating in the focus group, she was the first one to sign up. She was very quiet during the focus group, but she did contribute to the conversation, enthusiastically, when everyone was talking about their wonderful experiences with Prof. G., the Physics professor. In a recent email from Raya, she wanted to let me know that she had dropped the education major and was only going to pursue her English major.

Raya’s story is an important one. Although she answered that she felt like she belonged to a community of students on campus, Raya indicated that she didn’t actually feel like she belonged to a community of future teachers. She declined to complete the critical incident reflection because she could not think of a time when she felt like she belonged to a community. A great deal of our interview focused on advisement questions that she had about prerequisite courses, GPAs, and requirements for different programs. She seemed to be seeking as much information as she could about administrative issues and finding ways into the teaching profession. After she had signed up for the focus group, she emailed, apologizing that she was not going to make it on her chosen day, and she hoped the date could be changed. It was changed, and she was able to attend; she seemed very happy to be there, listening quite a bit and contributing just a little. I received a few more emails from Raya during the semester, asking questions about retaking courses or other questions about the education major. She was trying to find her way into the teacher education community, as evidenced by the kinds of questions she asked during our one-on-one interview, in the way she listened so carefully to what other students had to say during the focus group interview, and in her subsequent emails to me. She seemed to be searching for any piece of information that would help bring her into the community. I cannot help wondering if she would have made a different decision about pursuing an education major if she would have had access to a sustained teacher education social network.
Mia

Mia spent several unhappy semesters at a community college taking pre-med courses to satisfy her parents. “I come from a long history because—you know about our culture—like, I’m the only daughter, and my mom wanted me to become a doctor.” However, she was miserable and not doing well in her science and math courses:

I didn’t care about anything that happened on campus, like, I was just there. I was like, just being in college, my mom will be happy knowing that, you know, “my daughter is in college. Oh, she’s in university; she’s studying,” or whatever. (Mia, interview, 10/25/17)

With the help of her father, her brother, and her aunt, who is a Special Education teacher, she told her mother that she wanted to become a teacher, not a doctor. When she transferred to Queens College, she wanted to “start fresh” and get more involved on campus. When asked about feeling like part of a community of students on campus, she responded:

Yeah. I love that there’s always something going on…. I go to a lot of things that happen on Queens College campus. Like today there was the pumpkin patch. I mean we were able to make our own pumpkins and raise money for people that have been affected by the hurricane. They also had breast cancer awareness as well. I bought a T-shirt there, because all the money goes towards breast cancer. So, everyone’s like how are you so, like…your college seems so lit, or whatever. So, like, you just have to make your college life that way. You have to go out there and find out. Like, just, the education club. I saw one poster; I took a screenshot of it, and I have my agenda and have everything written down on it. Now that there’s so much that happens on my campus, and I want to know what goes on because all of this…. I want to enjoy my college life, you know. So, there is a community here. But the student themself- or the person - have to find out their community—where they belong. And, you know, how they can get to these events, and how they can build friendship. Nonetheless, I’m not really in any clubs, just because some of the clubs here are very, you know, like I can’t obviously do those type of things … but with the education club, this is … I’m like, OK this is something I want to be part of. But besides that, outside of that, I’m like an afterschool teacher. And in the morning I work with CUNY Explorers. I’m not sure if you know about that program, where we show 7th graders around college and help them decide about college at an early age. (Mia, interview, 10/25/2017)
Mia completed her critical incident reflection, and we concluded the interview. I thanked her and offered her the incentive gift card, and she replied: “Thank you! Yeah, I forgot about that. I was just talking, and talking, and talking, and I’m like, this is like an interview thing, and you’re like some, like, therapy session.” In her critical incident reflection, Mia said:

My professor for EECE 340 posted this on Blackboard and I personally love participating in things that have to do with Education. I spoke to Miss Michelle about how I came to be an Education Major. We spoke about my life and what I had overcome, obstacles, classes and volunteer work. The whole entire time I was having flashbacks and got a little emotional thinking about what I had overcome. There’s still a long way but I know this road will be worth the destination. This study was not required for class it was voluntary. However, it felt good to talk to someone, it felt as if a burden has been lifted off somehow. I’m thankful for the experience.

Mia’s first community college experiences seemed to have a strong influence on the way she “does college” now. She seeks community in what seems to be a somewhat frenetic way, seeking connection with others in any way she can, for example, by raising money for breast cancer, raising money for hurricane victims, or working with the CUNY Explorers Club, which introduces 7th graders to college. She puts the onus on herself to find her community and equates it with finding happiness, saying, “Everyone can build their own community, build their own little happiness….” Like so many of the participants, Mia seeks community in ways that provide service to others. When we spoke, she had just attended the first meeting of the newly reinstated Education Club, and she had a number of ideas for making the Education Club more of a service organization. Although she tried very hard to rearrange her schedule, Mia was unable to attend the focus group. I think she would have enjoyed connecting with other education students, many of whom were also transfer students, to simply talk about becoming a teacher.
Molly

Molly heard that I was conducting a study through the grapevine in the Education Department. She had seen the flyers, and she had been on one of the email lists sent to students. Molly had participated in a pilot program for education transfer students during her first semester at Queens College. Students in Jumpstart@QC, an eight-week, hybrid workshop on writing for academic purposes in the field of education, met face-to-face on Saturday mornings and engaged in education-related activities and discussions. Students received instructor guidance and feedback on ungraded writing activities, and they participated in peer feedback exchanges in person and online. At the time of our interview, Molly had moved into the professional sequence of the Elementary Education certification program, but her insights are valuable when looking at the early experiences of teacher education students.

When I asked her if she felt like she belonged to a community of students on campus, she answered yes, that she was an officer for one of the academic honor societies. She then said:

But at the same time, I feel like I belong much more to the Education Department. Since I’ve started here, I’ve always just been in the department all the time, talking to professors, asking for help. Like, it has a special place in my heart. The campus is very welcoming. I feel like I do belong here as a student, and the staff is very welcoming as well. I think I belong here, because I really. I love the … the professors influence me as a student. I feel like throughout my education courses I’ve taken at Queens College, professors that I’ve had were very influential to me as a student and also to make me want to continue my major. (Molly, interview, 11/8/17)

When I asked Molly to complete the critical incident reflection, she struggled a bit, and she wasn’t sure how to respond to the question. We talked more about identifying one particular time when she felt like she was part of a community, and she jumped at the chance to talk about Jumpstart@QC.

I like the jumpstart. It was … I thought … I felt like I was part of a community because … because we met six consecutive Saturday mornings with the people that were education majors and had the same interests as me. So the experience was very, it was enjoyable, because we all shared. We
all shared our ideas every morning, and we all had different tasks. Some of it was … we had like different articles or like we’ll have group discussions about some activities I participated in. Jumpstart were mostly collaborative work. I would say, I felt very happy coming to jumpstart in the mornings and talking and sharing my ideas. And I learned a lot in jumpstart. It … and it contributed to who I am today, because I still have all the writing, the articles, and I still refer back to them. (Molly, spoken critical incident reflection, 11/8/17)

This was a positive response to the question of “when have you felt like part of a community,” but she participated in the Jumpstart community over three years ago. As I thanked her for participating in an interview, she responded:

No, no it was very … I actually … I actually enjoyed it. Because not many … these questions that you’ve asked me, I don’t … no one asked me that before. Think about … reflect on your own previous education experiences. Like, I just take the courses, and I keep moving. But no one takes the time to actually say, “ok, so how do you feel about these courses?” Especially as an undergrad as well. (Molly, interview, 11/8/17)

Molly transferred to Queens College and landed in the Jumpstart program, worked part-time in various education departments on campus, and was successful in being admitted to the professional sequence of the Elementary Education program. Still, she seemed to appreciate the chance to talk and reflect on her experiences and would benefit from more opportunities for reflection with other teacher education students.

Sam

… I’m safe and, everyone, you know, they speak my language. That’s how I feel. (Sam, interview, 10/19/17)

When I interviewed Sam, she was studying Economics and Elementary Education. As the interview unfolded, Sam shared that she was currently a member of the Teacher Opportunity Corps (TOC), which is a program designed to increase the number of teachers from underrepresented and underserved populations in New York City’s high needs schools. As members of the TOC, students receive financial support, as well as academic and professional development support, as they work toward certification. She was about to begin a ten-week internship in a high needs school; however, this was not to
be her first experience in a school setting. Sam had also been a member of the CUNY Service Corps, which enables CUNY students to engage in a paid internship with support from mentors and the local CUNY Service Corps monthly meetings. Sam’s assignment had been to work as a teacher’s aide in a local public school, and it was this experience that led her to pursue teaching as a career. In addition to being a member of the CUNY Service Corps and the TOC, Sam was a member of SEEK. The Percy E. Sutton SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge) Program was launched at the City University of New York in 1966. It is a program that provides academic and social support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds throughout their college careers.

When I asked Sam if she felt like part of a community on campus, she said, without hesitation:

Yes, I do…. It actually started this semester. whenever I’m around the TOC members—Teachers Opportunity Corps members—or the Education Club members, I feel really safe. I feel like oh, I can finally talk about how I feel. I know like I belong to a group. So, these are the community-wise feelings that I’m getting. Also, the SEEK family—I feel like whenever I’m entering their building, or the CUNY Service Corps building I say, “Oh I’m safe,” and everyone, you know, they speak my language. That’s how I feel. (Sam, interview, 10/19/17)

Sam is just beginning to take classes in the teacher education program. She is at the very start of the educator pipeline, but she has a number of supports and peer groups that enable her to feel safe as she makes her way through the complexities of the teacher education program. The Percy Sutton SEEK program, the CUNY Service Corps, and TOC are all providing Sam with some of the supports Karp (2011) refers to as important for college students in achieving success, including creating social relationships, clarifying aspirations and enhancing commitment, and developing college knowhow.
Community of Future Teachers

Being part of a community is an important aspect of the way people see themselves. Identities, whether personal, professional, or academic, are contextual and are formed as a result of interactions with others (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Danielewicz, 2001; Flum & Kaplan, 2012; Gee, 2015; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). It is especially important within an academic domain. As Good et al. (2012) point out, at the heart of belonging to an academic domain is the feeling that one fits in, belongs to, or is a member of the academic community in question. In addition to viewing oneself as being inside a discipline rather than on the fringes of it, sense of belonging may also entail a sense of being valued and accepted by fellow members of the discipline. (pp. 700-701)

While many of the participants indicated that they do not feel like they belong to a community of students on campus, when asked about their sense of belonging to a community of future teachers, many of them said that they do feel a sense of community in their education classes.

Classroom Communities

Finding community in their education classes makes sense, because their classrooms are where they can begin to speak the language of teaching. For example, in addition to the community Sam has found from participating in SEEK, Service Corps, and the TOC, she has found community in the classroom. Sam’s critical incident reflection said:

One more event I can think of other than the one I mentioned: I took Math 119 over the summer session which lasted for 6 weeks. There wasn’t much time to get the required textbook. Me and some other classmates, who I never met before, exchanged numbers and tried to look for the textbook online or in libraries. The textbook was costly as well but we managed to get a pdf of some chapters and collected other chapters from the Math Lab. **Within first 2 days of classes, the classroom felt like a community. Peers were easy to approach, which I didn’t feel in any other classes until this point of my college career. Throughout the session, classmates helped**
each other understand math problems as well as with potential job opportunities. It wasn’t required for the class. Students helped each other on their own. I think it is really important to feel comfortable in a classroom no matter if the students are in elementary school or in college. If the students are comfortable with each other then they can help one another learn a certain task after class. So far education classes helped me gain positive experiences and new teaching techniques. (Sam, critical incident reflection, 10/19/17)

When talking about one of her education classes, Alex said:

We create our own lesson plans, and what I really like about the classes is that we put ourselves in as the teachers, which is relatable to acting, because you know when you’re acting and you’re studying the script you don’t talk about the character as like an outer body—you know like—you’re that character. You talk like you are that person. So it’s like, when I’m teaching my class, you know, this is what I’ll do .... You know we all like, talk to each other. It’s a forum, which I like, too, because a lot of us have different opinions, and different backgrounds, and different experiences, and then we’re like—wait I have something that relates to that, or something you can tweak a little bit, or you know, add and take out. So, it’s been very collective, which has been interesting. But you know it’s really cool when you step inside a class and you’re like, “Oh my god … so-and-so is there...” you know? So you’re going through everything together; you’re not alone anymore. (Alex, interview, 10/23/17)

Both Sam and Alex highlight the role that communicating within the context of a discipline creates a sense of community in a class. For Sam, it was solving the problem of locating a textbook online with her classmates, which then led to a sense of shared content and career goals. Alex talks about the communication that happens in the class around the lesson plans she and her classmates develop and teach each other. She refers to her class as a forum for discussion, and one that is “very collective.” Similarly, Simone spoke of the bonds she formed with a group of students as a result of working on a class project in one of her education courses. “They made that time that semester worthwhile, and it’s good. We are all friends, still.” Estefania described her experience in one of her education classes:

It’s like the whole teaching environment … while the professor is teaching us, it’s like she’s teaching us how to teach children…. I like it because it’s like all of us are in that whole field. It’s not like a class where it’s just like, you know, you have different majors, like business majors. It’s
like everyone is kind of in the same thing. We all give ideas and have different ideas. (Estefania, interview, 10/25/17)

Inez tries to keep in contact with students she has met in her classes, which makes her feel like she is part of the education community, and Dianna characterized her education classes as a place where “you feel like everyone is, you know, aiming for the same goal.”

For many students, education classes may be their first encounter with active learning that is connected to authentic, real-world issues. Readings and discussions are connected to what students are observing in the field and when they are enacting their roles as teacher assistants, para-professionals, after-school teachers, and summer camp instructors. They are provided with opportunities for interacting with their future co-workers on relevant projects related to educational issues, which enable them to try out the tools and language of the profession in a safe space. This feeling of community in classrooms described by participants is an important piece of building a sense of belonging to a community of future teachers. However, these communities are bounded by the constraints of the classroom, and they seem to be seeking ways to connect beyond their classes.

**Seeking Community, Connecting the Dots**

It is in the introductory, prerequisite education courses where many students are introduced to the formal language and tools of the education profession, and it is in these classes that they have opportunities to try out the language and tools in conversation with their peers and mentors. The participants I spoke with were seeking ways to sustain their sense of belonging to a classroom community and extend it to the spaces in between their classes. This was evident in how they shared their stories through participation in the interviews and the focus group. In some ways, it seemed as though they were seeking to connect the dots between classes and classmates. There is a sense that they are, right now, just on the edge of the discipline and looking for ways into the
community, beyond the obvious way of being formally accepted to the professional sequence of the teacher certification program.

**Participating in a Research Study—Seizing Opportunities to Connect**

One of the surprising findings was the eagerness with which some participants engaged in the interview process. Many of them had never participated in a research study and were visibly nervous when they arrived for the interview, but as we began to talk, they relaxed and opened up. They were extremely engaged in sharing their stories; they revealed their personal histories and emerging identities as teachers with great enthusiasm. Some, like Mia, referred to the interview as a kind of “therapy,” while others, like Molly, were surprised to have been asked their opinions and perceptions about their journeys as teacher education students. I was unprepared for the awkwardness expressed by some participants when they were presented with the incentive, a $20 gift card. It was as if I had done them a favor by interviewing them, and they felt strange accepting the incentive. Kaitie’s response was, “Thank you. I kind of like this, cuz it kind of makes me like, I don’t know, get more into the community. I like doing this.” Divisha’s response:

D: Oh, the card!

MF: Yes, of course! Your time is very valuable.

D: … honestly, I really didn’t do this for the card. I wanted to come and have the experience, to know more about … and … I’m so glad I came, because you know what, you helped me out to understand a little bit better than I was [about] my major. (Divisha, interview, 10/18/17)

By the end of the interview, many participants felt comfortable turning the tables a bit, asking about me and why I was doing this research. They were intrigued by the thought of contributing to my dissertation research, thanking me for the opportunity to participate. The interview with Estefania ended like this:

E: … and then, for the focus group, you will email me for that one.
MF: I will email you. You know, there is no pressure if you decide you don’t want to participate.

E: No, no I will, I know I will.

MF: That would be great. Yes, I’ll try to do that in the next couple of weeks. It is going to get harder and harder to get people together. I’m trying to …

E: That’s for your exertation, you said?

MF: Dissertation …

E: And, what is that, like, for?

MF: It’s basically, I’m … it’s a doctoral degree, and …

E: So, you need, like the ending …

MF: Yeah, so it’s a research project, and I am really interested in teachers, and …

E: Future teachers …

MF: Yeah …

E: That’s nice, it’s a good project. (Estefania, interview, 10/25/17)

When I invited participants to the focus group via email, Estefania responded that she would be attending. The night before the interview, I received an email from her:

I have a friend who is an Education Major and is currently in Queens College. I was commenting to her about the focus group so she actually wants to join us. Is there anyway she can also participate for tomorrow? (Estefania, email communication, 11/14/2017)

Her friend, Jane, enthusiastically participated in the focus group that day. In fact, it was during the focus group, which extended far beyond the one hour allotted, that the participants began to talk about ways to continue the conversation they had started that day. While I had a full list of questions to pose to the group in a semi-structured way, the participants had other ideas. They took our time together as a way to discuss everything from what they were doing in their education courses, to the education program and the professors in the program, to the importance of motivating New York City public school students to achieve beyond “just passing.” They listened to each other
with focused intent, advising one another on everything from choosing courses and
avoiding certain professors, to the fastest way to get to campus. At one point, about 2/3 of
the way through the focus group interview, Ariel interjected, “This is so much fun; we
should do more of these.” Her comment was met with laughter and strong agreement
from the rest of the group. She went on to say, “We should have more of these with our
little group.” From that point, the conversation turned to ways to create a community.
There was acknowledgement of the newly launched education club, but it had the
unfortunate connotation that it was for a specific group of students who were already part
of a special program. The mention of a potential “offshoot” of the education club as a
place for education students to just talk, was met with great enthusiasm. There were even
suggestions of creating their own online group where they could contact each other and
continue having discussions, and where all the program resources they needed would be
in one place.

As I began to try and wrap up the session, I thanked the participants for their
insights and contributions to the conversation. Ariel’s response: “We should do this
again; this was so helpful. Now I know when I see you guys around, it’s a little bit more
friendlier [sic], and we can say…. She was interrupted by Jane, who said, as she raised
her hand to high-five with Ariel, “…we can go “Hey!! Education!!!” There was, once
again, raucous laughter from the group. This was followed by a distribution of the gift
card incentives, which should have signaled the end of the interview. However, a number
of the participants lingered, asking questions of me and one another, reluctant to leave
their newly found, yet fleeting, community.²

²Many of the focus group members have become part of the Student Advisory Council
for Transitions to Teaching (TTT), a new project co-directed by Helen Johnson and Michelle
Fraboni and supported by the GraduateNYC Innovation Fund. TTT is a hybrid community
dedicated to students who are considering becoming elementary school teachers. Similar to
recruitment for the focus group, one member of the advisory council asked about bringing her
friend, and she was enthusiastically encouraged to do so.
In reflecting on the focus group, and the ways in which the participants interacted with each other, I am reminded of Wenger’s (1986, 2006) characterization of a community of practice. The focus group, intended to be a data collection tool, actually included the three elements of a community of practice: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. The participants were *mutually engaged* in the pursuit of teaching as a career; without intending to, they were engaged in the *joint enterprise* of learning more about the education program and their peers through reflection and discussion; and finally, they had a *shared practice* that included sharing the experiences, stories, and issues they have faced on their journey to becoming teachers.

Up to this point, the essential learning process of “becoming a member of a sustained community of practice” (Lave, 1991, p. 55) has been limited to those students who have been accepted to the major. These early program students, who are already teachers in so many ways, are working in a vacuum. They run from work to campus, and from class to class, with no sustaining lifeline, or glue, to connect all the little pieces of their developing identities. In many ways, this focus group served as the kind of community participants in the study have been seeking.

Even as many of the research participants were seeking community, the lack of interest in participating in a focus group stands out as well. While individually, in one-on-one interviews, participants communicated a desire to seek community with other students in the major, the practical aspects of making time to participate in a focus group, where they could have found community, may have played a part in their choice not to participate. Table 3 provides a sense of how teacher education students spend their time each week, and between jobs, taking care of dependents, attending classes, and doing school work, it is possible to assert that there was not much time left for participating in an activity that doesn’t allow for tangible rewards such as income or grades. There may also be cultural cues at work. For students like Fatina or Mia, whose families prioritize academics above all else, participating in a community may seem like a frivolous waste
of time that would not yield a tangible outcome and may be seen as something that has the potential to impact negatively on their grades. So, from their perspective, and many students like Fatina and Mia, being part of a community in a traditional sense can merely be in the way. Although it may seem desirable, the realities of their complicated lives can outweigh the perceived benefits of participating in a community. This speaks to the need to better understand our students by looking closely at the meanings and concepts of outcomes and rewards as students see them, as well as providing more opportunities for participation across broader spaces.

**Seeking Community and a Place to Belong**

This chapter described the ways in which many teacher education students who participated in this study are seeking community, as demonstrated by their actions and the things they shared in the one-on-one interviews, as well as their comments when participating in the focus group and their responses to the critical incident reflections. While research points to the important role community plays in college students’ persistence (Kuh et al., 2008; Tinto, 1998), many of the participants indicated that they do not feel like they belonged to a community on campus. Many of the participants accepted this as part of the urban, commuter college experience and really did not expect much in the way of community activities. While they travel to campus to take their classes, many of the participants indicated that lack of time due to familial and/or job obligations prevented them from engaging in campus-wide activities, and they seemed to accept that as part of what they do to achieve their long-term goals.

A subset of participants initially stated that they did, indeed, feel like they belonged to a community of students on campus, providing evidence by way of listing their memberships in campus clubs; yet these same participants articulated a sense that they welcomed the opportunity to interact with others on campus, and in particular their
teacher education colleagues. In fact, many participants talked about the sense of community they felt in their teacher education classes. This seemed to stem from the way the classes were structured, as active, seminar types of classes where all students are encouraged to participate, providing opportunities for them to practice authentic activities and to use the language, tools, and practices of the teaching community (Brown et al., 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Although they reported finding community within their education courses, there seemed to be a sort of void, leaving them with no way to connect the dots in between their education courses.

The students’ need to connect the dots, to feel like they have a place, became most evident in the ways many of the participants articulated their enjoyment in participating in the research study. There was a sense that what they had to say was important and that they were contributing something important to the field of teaching. Mia referred to the one-on-one interview as a “therapy session,” Divisha thanked me for clarifying information about the education program, and Kaitie said that she liked being interviewed because it made her “get more into the community.” The focus group, in particular, highlighted the ways in which these teacher education students were seeking community. There were very few lulls in the conversation. In fact, it was sometimes difficult for me to cut into their conversation, which focused on such topics as meeting program requirements, good and bad teaching in elementary schools and at QC, specific assignments, and even the best way to commute to QC. It was a frenzied conversation, as if they had a great deal they had stored up to share with a group of like-minded individuals. As we wrapped up the session, all members of the focus group were in agreement that they wanted to “do this again” and continue meeting. They even had suggestions regarding the kinds of resources they would like to see, such as a website
with particular requests for materials and information as well as chat and discussion tools that would enable them to continue the face-to-face conversation they had started that day.

Not only is a sense of belonging essential for leading a healthy and fulfilling life (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), but the research on sense of belonging in higher education learning environments is associated with a positive motivation to engage in academic work (Astin, 1993; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Braxton et al., 2004; Karp, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 1998). Although they are very early in their education studies, and even in their college careers, the participants in this study instinctively know the importance of belonging to a community, as many of them experienced a sense of belonging that was orchestrated by their role models. And so, these students, who are akin to Mike Rose’s (1989) “travelers in a foreign land,” move about the culture that is the world of education, but in most cases, they are traveling alone, between their classes and occasional community clubs. Many are seeking more community and sense of belonging because being part of a community is more complicated than simply enrolling in a class or joining a campus group. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe the way new members of a community of practice become engaged in the community as a process that begins with observation and evolves into graduated degrees of participation in the use of language, tools, and practices of the culture. Authentically belonging to a community entails being an active participant, and participation plays a large part in feeling a sense of belonging. However, it begs the question: How do students who are at the beginning of the educator pipeline, traveling through the maze of courses and requirements, even get into the room to start participating? The answer lies in the people who are the sanctioned members of teacher education programs. Faculty, advisors, and seasoned peers must travel alongside these students and offer an invitation to participate. Admittedly, it can be difficult to “meet our students where they are” when their very
hectic, complicated lives place them in many places all at once. CCTEC aimed to provide community and connection for students interested in becoming teachers, but deliberately embedding the community into an online academic space that required academic conversations between classes was perceived by some students as simply adding to their already heavy workload. They were invited into the conversation, but participation came with strings attached in the way of grades. Inviting these busy students into conversation by truly “meeting them where they are” recognizes both their online and offline lives and provides opportunities to bridge the two by capitalizing on the way students actually use digital spaces. Recent research indicates that students use these digital spaces “as important sites for learning and self-exploration” (Brown, 2106, p. 60) and “to understand what is happening on campus, to define their sense of connection to their institution, and to interact with faculty and with each other” (Guthrie & Meriwether, 2018, p. 99). Foundational theories of identity, belonging, and community can inform the use of digital spaces, but those of us who endeavor to provide opportunities for students to connect in these spaces must be mindful of what technological tools allow users to do, as well as understand the affordances of the environment for students (Brown, 2016).

It is up to teacher educators, the administration, the department, and the faculty, to become in-class and out-of-class agents both in-person and online (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011), providing encouragement and support, as well as avenues beyond the classroom for participation in an emerging community of practice. Provided with opportunities to participate and belong, beginning teacher education students may remain in the major and feel more supported as they work their way to achieving the dream of becoming teachers.
Chapter VI

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

I began this dissertation by presenting a problem within the undergraduate Elementary Education teacher certification program at Queens College. Although the department attracts a large number of students to its prerequisite courses, and 51% of the declared EECE majors are students from underrepresented groups (Queens College of Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2018), a large number of these students drop out (Fernández, 2016), leaving a much smaller percentage of underrepresented students (22%) who actually complete their teacher certification (Queens College Education Unit, 2018). This is problematic, as the U.S. Department of Education has stated the need to create a more diverse teaching workforce that more closely mirrors the P-12 student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This is especially problematic when looking at the demographic makeup of students in New York City public schools, where the latest statistics from the New York City Department of Education show that the student population is 40% Hispanic, 26% Black, 16% Asian, 15% White, and 3% Multiple Races (NYC Open Data, 2018). The most recent demographic data on teachers employed by the NYC Department of Education indicate a teacher population that is 58.6% White, 19.6% Black, 14.4% Hispanic, and 5.9% Asian (Roy, 2014).

Because these students are so early in the educator pipeline, just taking prerequisite courses and not officially accepted and enrolled in the elementary certification program, they are often not considered in the research on preservice teachers. However, it is
important to understand this population of students and why they may be at risk of leaving a teacher certification program even before they have begun. This dissertation was a sociocultural inquiry into the experiences, processes, and perceptions of teacher education students who are at the very beginning of the educator pipeline. The following questions guided this inquiry:

- How do teacher education students conceptualize the process of becoming a teacher?
- What are the critical influences on teacher education students’ developing professional identities?
- In what ways do teacher education students engage with a community of their peers?

Highlighted in this study are notions of connectedness and community, and the role that a sense of belonging may play in the process of developing identity—as learners, teachers, and developing professionals. Researchers long before me have studied community, sense of belonging to a community, and how those two concepts influence the way learners view themselves or develop an identity as a certain kind of person. However, what stands out here is the timeless importance of connecting to others and being part of something. Feeling a sense of belonging is inextricably tied to one’s identity, which is reflected in the way people see themselves within a community.

While they were separated in the previous chapters as artifacts of a linear dissertation, the major themes in this study—identity, community, and belonging—are intricately connected by the ways the participants experienced learning at the hands of caring educators. A thread of kindness and caring, of teacherness, of ways of thinking about learners and helping them be in the world, casts a softness on the sharp edges of teaching at a time where numbers and performance outcomes take precedence. Examples of this softness included the participants’ descriptions of learning environments that considered their needs as learners and human beings and being encouraged by teachers.
who embraced a growth mindset across disciplines. This is not to say that student success, as it is reflected in grades and accumulated credits, is not important, but it speaks to the ways in which the most successful teachers enable their students to succeed. In a recent blog post, Mike Rose (2018) described interviews he has been conducting with adults, young and old, about transformative learning experiences both in and out of school. The metaphor that surfaced over and over again was teaching as a way of seeing, as a very human way of mentoring, perceiving, and really seeing students. This is the ethos that influenced the participants in my study as well: they felt seen and cared for in a way that enabled them to see themselves as successful learners, and they felt a sense of belonging to their classrooms.

Although they are very early in their pursuit of teacher certification, the participants in this study are already teachers in many ways, trying on the language and tools of the profession as they enact their roles as teachers. However, without a community of peers and mentors—a community of practice—they are trying out the language and tools of the profession in a vacuum, operating without feedback. In-class and out-of-class agents have nurtured their early, emergent identities as teachers up to this point, but they are still on the outside of the preservice teacher community. As such, they are seeking community with others who are on the same path. Prior research has shown the importance of belonging and community to college students’ success, including the role a peer group plays, particularly within a disciplinary major, in providing motivation to engage in academic work and persist in a major (Astin, 1993; Karp, 2011; Terenzini & Reason, 2005). However, these students, many of them transfer students, have no real sense of community outside of the one or two education courses they are taking. They do not feel connected outside of their classes, and they run the risk of leaving teacher education even before they have formally begun a certification program. While they currently see themselves as teachers, this may change if they are unable to find their way into a supportive community of peers and agents.
Implications for Practice

Implications for Practice in Teacher Education

The two themes that emerged from this study—*they’re already teachers* and *seeking community*—highlight the importance of truly seeing our students and their potential for success as classroom teachers. Nurturing their early emergent identities falls to those of us who act as in-class and out-of-class agents. These include office staff, who are sometimes the first point of contact for students trying to make their way into teaching, advisors who guide students in choosing courses and charting a path, and faculty who act as role models and set the tone inside and outside their classrooms.

Unlike student teachers who have already “made the cut” and have been let into the preservice teacher community, early pre-major teacher education students want and need to be able to join a community of their peers and be part of the education conversation. Providing spaces for students to engage with one another and practice using the language and tools of the profession can provide a stronger foundation for building on their existing identities as teachers. Enabling students to feel like they belong—that they are seen by both peers and educators—is a powerful motivator for staying the course. The launch of *Transitions to Teaching* is designed to do just that. With support from the Graduate NYC Innovation Fund, *Transitions to Teaching* provides a way for students to connect with other students interested in becoming teachers, as well as connecting with education faculty and advisors in an informal setting outside the classroom, in both face-to-face and online formats. The program is for all teacher education students, but it specifically targets the transfer student population, who are often URMs and first-generation college students, in the hope that they will remain in the teacher education program, complete their certification, and teach in the New York City public schools.
An important implication is to consider—or reconsider—the use of technology in teacher education. For many years, the focus has been on teaching preservice teachers how to use the latest technological tools for their own productivity, gathering data, and supporting classroom curriculum. These are important reasons to use technology in teacher education programs, but the findings from this study suggest that teacher education programs may want to expand the use of technological tools to include ways to extend community and engage students who are at the beginning of the teacher pipeline. In doing so, those of us who are teacher educators would be wise to listen to the voices of the students so that we can “meet them where they are” and engage them with tools they will actually use. The Transitions to Teaching website is a starting point for providing a central place for essential resources, and a potential communication hub, but the way the digital space will be used for communication will evolve with input from students.

**Implications for Practice in Higher Education**

While the implications for teacher education programs are very important, the implications for practice in higher education are even more important, as they impact not only learners in the field of teacher education, but learners in all disciplines. The stories shared by the participants highlight the all-important link between what faculty in higher education do in their classrooms and whether or not students succeed with the subject matter. Leaders in higher education need to rethink the way college-level teaching is viewed in relation to research, service, and faculty recognition, as well as the way teaching and learning actually take place (Neumann & Bolitzer, 2014). There are signs that change is underway, as there is a heightened focus on faculty development and Teaching and Learning Centers (Condon, Iverson, Manduca, Rutz, & Willet, 2016; Haras, Taylor, Sorcinelli, & von Hoene, 2017), as well as a call for support and development of more discipline-specific pedagogical expertise (Chasteen, Perkins, Code, & Wieman, 2016; Neumann, 2014), as evidenced by the number of teaching-related
grants awarded in higher education by the National Science Foundation (NSF News, 2018), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH, Office of Communications, 2018), the United States Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The roots of this shift stem from the important work that has been done in the learning sciences by researchers such as Bloom (1956), Anderson (1977), Gick and Holyoak (1983), and Bransford and colleagues (2000). Books such as How Learning Works, Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching (Ambrose et al., 2010), Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning (Brown, Roediger, & McDaniel, 2014), and Minds Online: Teaching Effectively with Technology (Miller, 2014) provide faculty with important research-based guidelines for developing courses and assignments that utilize active learning techniques. However, these techniques don’t stand alone; there is another piece of the teaching puzzle, one that is sometimes difficult to measure. This difficult-to-quantify piece includes ways of seeing students (Rose, 2018), teacherness (readlisaread, 2014), and awareness of the human aspects of teaching. Getting to understand who our students are and the tone we set and the environments we create, both online and off, influence the way learners see themselves as belonging to a discipline. Faculty development programs need to focus on best pedagogical practices that include awareness of students and who they are as learners.

Implications for Theory

The traditional community of practice theoretical frame posits that there are three elements that constitute a community of practice: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. As such, much of the research around communities of practice has focused on the knowledge generated and shared by its members (Caudle & Moran, 2013; Cho, 2016; Hou, 2015; Iyer & Reese, 2013, Pyrko, Dörrler, & Eden, 2017; Waring, Currie, Crompton, & Bishop, 2013). However, my research on the experiences and
perceptions of students pursuing teacher education illuminated an area within communities of practice that hasn’t been fully addressed. Very little has been written about the relationships that form as members think together about content and knowledge production, nor has there been much work that looks at those who are not yet members and sit at the edge of a community. This was evident in the ways that the teacher education students involved in my study began to view themselves in relation to their degree program, to one another as future teachers, and to the profession, more broadly. The success of a learning community’s knowledge-making/meaning-making certainly stems from the act of thinking together, but what is the glue that enables members to persist in and feel a sense of belonging to a community? What is it about the action of thinking together, of solving problems and generating knowledge, that enables members to feel a sense of belonging to a community of learners? My research contributes a missing piece to this framework, which is the importance of care that emerges within successful communities. By caring, I mean that members of successful communities both enact care and feel cared for. Members enact care by seeing each and valuing each other’s contributions to the community. Being on the receiving end, feeling seen and valued, provides a sense of being cared for. But why even pay attention to the notion of care, and what might it look like in communities?

In her books, Caring and The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education, Nel Noddings (1984, 1992) defines the essential elements of caring as “the relation between the one-caring and the cared-for” (Noddings, 1984, p. 9). She goes on to quote Milton Mayeroff (1971) from his book, On Caring: “To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself” (Noddings, 1984, p. 9). Noddings and Mayeroff both define caring as a relationship, and this relationship can be between teacher and students or between peers in a learning community, community of practice, or affinity group, in both face-to-face and online environments (Ito et al., 2018). The act of thinking together implies a level of trust
between members that develops through a sense of caring, and in turn fuels a sense of belonging. Having a sense that one belongs is the essential piece when thinking about the formation of identity within a community. Whether a classroom community, a community of practice, or an emerging community of practice, its members act as both cared-for and the one caring (Noddings, 1984), and both actions are contributing elements to feeling a sense of belonging.

For example, my research illustrated the ways in which participants experienced being cared for (by elementary teachers, college professors, and peers), as well as being the ones caring (for younger students and peers). In addition, when students participated in the focus group, their roles shifted back and forth between being cared for and the one caring. In both instances, it was care that shaped the experiences of the participants, and the resulting affect was that of feeling like they belonged. Specifically, in the case of the focus group, the ways participants saw each other, listened to one another, and recognized their common goals and experiences, members exhibited all the elements of a community of practice (albeit an emerging one): mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. At that moment they felt like they belonged, and their sense of belonging in those spaces was not premised by their mastery of content or ability to perform; it was shaped by a sense of care.

Using a theoretical lens of care can provide insights into what really drives communities of practice and can highlight the importance of sense of belonging and the role it plays in the development of professional identity within a discipline, and within a profession.

**Reflections and Future Research**

The focus of my research has always been on learning, how it happens, and the tools and techniques that best engage learners. My natural instincts have always been to
teach in a student-centered way, but the findings of this research study have put a spotlight on the ways that true student-centered teaching reverberates through students’ lives and influences their identities as learners, from elementary school all the way through to postsecondary education. This dissertation and its findings parallel my own learning experiences and evolution as a learner, teacher, and researcher. The implications of this work have changed the way I view my own teaching, and the ways in which faculty development should be approached. It has prompted a renewed urgency to revisit the mission of faculty development from one that focuses exclusively on faculty to one that begins with students and their success.

The ideas put forth here stretch beyond the field of teacher education; they are the beginning of a focused resolve to elevate the conversation around the practice of teaching in higher education in all disciplines. This final section discusses potential areas of future research within teacher education, as well as teaching and learning in higher education.

**Impact of Teacher Education Community of Practice**

The *Transitions to Teaching (TtT)* program, a new grant-funded program that was launched at Queens College in fall 2018, provides an opportunity for students who want to be teachers, like the participants in this study, to engage with peers, faculty, and advisors in an out-of-class learning community. Possible areas of research include how belonging to such a community influences students’ developing identity and sense of belonging within the field of teacher education, and specifically looking at whether a program such as *TtT* provides better supports for transfer students and URMs. It will also be important to study which tools students prefer for interacting in the digital spaces of *TtT* and how they interact in both the online and offline spaces afforded by the group. A long-term study that follows student members as they enter the profession as new classroom teachers, looking at the evolution of their identities and how they work within their community of practice, could also inform such programs and shape future iterations.
Faculty Development in Higher Education

Traditionally, faculty development programs focus on faculty first, teaching them how to execute best practices in their teaching, and assessment of these efforts has mostly been focused on faculty satisfaction (Sorcinelli, Berg, Bond, & Watson, 2017). However, there is a renewed and important interest in looking at the impact of such faculty development efforts on students’ learning outcomes in many disciplines (Haras et al., 2017). This is often measured by looking at traditional indicators of student success, such as course grades, persistence, and time to graduation. There are few studies that have looked at the connections between individual faculty members’ teaching practices and how they influence students’ perceptions of their identities and sense of belonging within a discipline, and how those perceptions impact student learning outcomes. There is even less research on the pedagogy of care within higher education. Further research might explore what the pedagogy of care looks like in a community of learners in a college classroom, and to what extent it influences a sense of belonging to that community. What gets identified as caring, and how do we understand it within higher education? How is caring defined by college faculty, how is it demonstrated, and does it differ by discipline? What does caring mean to college students from different cultural backgrounds? Finally, what kind of faculty development encourages faculty to care and to “see” their students?

Final Thoughts

I’ve often hesitated in beginning a project because I’ve thought, “It’ll never turn out to be even remotely like the good idea I have as I start.” I could just “feel” how good it could be. But I decided that, for the present, I would create the best way I know how and accept the ambiguities (Rogers, 1994, You Are Special: Neighborly Wit And Wisdom From Mister Rogers, Kindle location 560)

It seems fitting to close this dissertation with a final quote from Fred Rogers, whose ideas about teaching and learning are embedded with notions of kindness and caring. This particular quote, about accepting the ambiguities of a project, resonated with
me. As I think about my research and how it fits into the larger body of research on teacher education, and on teaching and learning in general, I see both ambiguities and certainties. The certainties include the fact that the participants in my study have been influenced by teachers who cared; they cared enough to “see” their students and to create learning environments where students felt a sense of belonging. There is also the certainty that the study participants, and many other teacher education students who are at the beginning of the teacher pipeline, need to be seen and invited into a community.

There is the certainty that my research findings have changed my teaching practice. I have always taught with a sense of humanity and kindness, but the opportunity to be in conversation with the research participants has renewed my awareness that my demeanor matters, and that the tone I set in my class actually does influence the way they see themselves as learners in my classroom. I “see” them and their lives outside of my classroom, and I recognize the importance of regularly touching base through our Google Classroom site and our class Remind app. Both of these digital tools enable quick and effective ways to communicate and remind students that “I am here,” I see them, and that they are part of our classroom community. Finally, there is the certainty that there are others who teach undergraduate students and believe in showing students that they care. I recently met the famous “Professor G,” the beloved Physics professor who breaks down students’ fears about math and physics and helps them succeed in his course. We have plans to begin conversations about his teaching within the disciplines of science and math, and I am hopeful that this will spur additional conversations in the disciplines of math and science.

Although I have listed a number of certainties, ambiguities remain. As I complete this dissertation, I am thinking about my research, which focused on a small group of 22 teacher education students. How does it fit into the larger body of research on teaching and learning in higher education? How can student-centered teaching become a priority in higher education? In what ways can a campus teaching center “sneak in” words like
Kindness and caring when talking about best practices for teaching undergraduate students and still be taken seriously? How can faculty who teach online and hybrid courses convey a sense of caring and concern, of “seeing” their students, within an online environment?

I find myself with more questions than answers right now, but I would like to conclude with one final thought. While I grew up watching Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood on PBS, I hadn’t thought about the show in many years. So, I was struck when I saw the recent documentary about Fred Rogers, Won’t You Be My Neighbor? I was struck by the way his philosophies resonated with what the participants in my study had to say about learning, and the role that kindness and caring, of being “seen,” played in their experiences and their ultimate desire to become teachers. This is a certainty. As for the ambiguities, I will accept them for now and look forward to continuing my research on teaching, learning, belonging, and community.
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Appendix A

CCTEC Participant Recruitment Email

Dear ______________________

You are receiving this email because you participated in the Cross-Campus Teacher Education Collaborative (CCTEC) in the past. We are conducting a research study, because we would like to know more about your experiences in CCTEC as well as other experiences you have had while taking teacher education courses.

Specifically, we are interested in how you experienced being part of the CCTEC project, and what your experiences in your other classes have been since that time. We want to know which CCTEC activities you found valuable, how you felt about participating in CCTEC, and the kinds of activities related to becoming a teacher that you are currently participating in.

We hope to answer these questions by hearing directly from CCTEC participants. There are three ways for you to participate if you want to take part in the study.

We are doing one-on-one and group interviews with students, and you can participate in:
- a one-on-one interview,
- a group interview,
- or both a one-on-one interview and a group interview

Participation in this study will involve: (1) completing a consent form in person and agreeing to the terms and conditions of the study, which will include the audio recording of the interview, and (2) participating in either a 45-60 minute face-to-face interview on a day and time convenient for you, a 45-60 minute small group interview, or both.

You will receive a $20 Amazon gift card for your participation in either a one-on-one interview, or a focus group interview. If you choose to participate in both interviews, you will receive two $20 Amazon gift cards.

Please consider taking a few minutes of your time to participate in this study! Whether or not you choose to participate will not affect your grades in any of your courses. We just want to know what it was like to participate in CCTEC, and what it’s like to be a teacher education student at CUNY, and we need your help to answer these questions.

If you are interested and would be willing to participate in this study, please follow this link to provide your contact information: http://bit.ly/2fQsazA
You can also email me at mfraboni@qc.cuny.edu, or call me at 718-997-5324

Thanks for your consideration!

Michelle Fraboni
Director, Queens College Center for Teaching & Learning
Co-director, Cross-Campus Teacher Education Collaborative
Lecturer, Queens College, Dept. of Elementary & Early Childhood Education
Doctoral Candidate, Teachers College, Columbia University
718-997-5324
mfraboni@qc.cuny.edu
Appendix B

CCTEC Participant Recruitment Flyer

Research Study

Did you participate in CCTEC during the Fall 2016 semester?
We’re looking for participants for a QC study.

Eligibility to participate:

- Enrolled in an introductory education course at either Queens College, Queensborough Community College, or LaGuardia Community College during the Fall 2016 semester
- Participated in Cross Campus Teacher Education Collaborative (CCTEC) during the Fall 2016 semester

Participation in this study includes one-on-one and group interviews. You can participate in:

- 1-hour one-on-one interview,
- 1-hour group interview,
- or both a one-on-one interview and a group interview
- Compensation of a $20-dollar Amazon gift card for each interview

If interested, please scan the QR code, call 718-997-5324, or email cctecstudy@qc.cuny.edu
Appendix C

Non-CCTEC Participant Recruitment Email

Dear

You are receiving this email because you are currently enrolled in a teacher education course. This research study is being conducted so that we can better understand how students experience the process of becoming teachers. Specifically, I am interested in knowing the kinds of assignments and activities teacher education students find most valuable as they study to become teachers.

I hope to answer these questions by hearing directly from teacher education students. There are three ways for you to participate if you want to take part in the study.

I will be doing one-on-one and group interviews with students, and you can participate in:

• a one-on-one interview,
• a group interview,
• or both a one-on-one interview and a group interview

Participation in this study will involve:
(1) completing a consent form in person and agreeing to the terms and conditions of the study, which will include the audio recording of the interview, and
(2) participating in either a 45-60 minute face-to-face interview on a day and time convenient for you, a 45-60 minute small group interview, or both.

You will receive a $20 Amazon gift card for your participation in either a one-on-one interview, or a focus group interview. If you choose to participate in both interviews, you will receive two $20 Amazon gift cards.

Please consider taking a few minutes of your time to participate in this study! Whether or not you choose to participate will not affect your grades in any of your courses. I’m really interested in knowing what it’s like to be a teacher education student at CUNY, and I need your help to answer these questions.

If you are interested and would be willing to participate in this study, please follow this link to provide your contact information: Teacher Education Study

You can also email me at mfraboni@qc.cuny.edu, or call me at 718-997-5324

Thanks for your consideration!

Michelle Fraboni
Director, Queens College Center for Teaching & Learning
Co-director, Cross-Campus Teacher Education Collaborative
Lecturer, Queens College, Dept. of Elementary & Early Childhood Education
Doctoral Candidate, Teachers College, Columbia University
718-997-5324
mfraboni@qc.cuny.edu
Appendix D
Non-CCTEC Participant Recruitment Flyer

Research Study
Are you a teacher education student? We’re looking for participants for a Teacher Education study.

Eligibility to participate:

- Currently enrolled in a teacher education course at either Queens College, Queensborough Community College, or LaGuardia Community College.

Participation in this study includes one-on-one and group interviews. You can participate in:

- 1-hour one-on-one interview,
- 1-hour group interview,
- or both a one-on-one interview and a group interview
- Compensation of a $20-dollar Amazon gift card for each interview

If interested, please scan the QR code, call 718-997-5324, or email cctecstudy@qc.cuny.edu
Appendix E

Participant Letter of Informed Consent

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: LEARNING IN COMMUNITY: PRESERVICE TEACHERS PARTICIPATING IN AN EMERGING COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Principal Investigator: Michelle Fraboni, Doctoral Candidate Teachers College Columbia University
718-997-5324, mcf29@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “Learning in Community: Preservice Teachers Participating in an Emerging Community of Practice.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are taking a teacher education course.

Approximately twenty people will participate in this study and it will take up to 2 hours of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

This study is being done to better understand how students experience the process of becoming teachers.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to:

- complete a short demographic inventory about yourself (5 minutes)
- briefly talk about some of the assignments and activities you have completed in your teacher education courses (5 minutes),
- participate in either a one-on-one interview on a day and time convenient for you (45 minutes), a small focus group interview (45 minutes), or both a one-on-one interview AND a focus group interview,
- complete a short written reflection called a critical incident report (10 minutes).

If you choose to participate in an individual interview, you will complete the demographic inventory, talk about some of your teacher education course work, and be interviewed by the principal investigator. You will be asked questions about your experiences and be able to talk about your experiences as you study to become a teacher.
At the end of the interview, you will be asked to write a short reflection, called a “critical incident report.”

If you choose to participate in a small focus group interview, you will complete the demographic inventory, talk about some of your teacher education coursework, and talk with other teacher education students about your experiences as a student taking teacher education classes. At the end of the interview, you will be asked to write a short reflection, called a critical incident report. Focus group members will be asked not to discuss what is being spoken about outside of the focus group, but it is impossible to guarantee complete confidentiality.

To ensure accuracy, individual interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded for later transcription and review. After the audio recording is written down (transcribed), the audio recording will be deleted. You will be given a pseudonym or false name/identifier code in order to keep your identity confidential. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will still be able to participate.

All interviews will be done at Queens College in Powdermaker Hall, room 054A, at a time that is convenient for you.

**WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms of discomforts that you may experience are not greater than those encountered in daily life. However, there are some risks to consider. Your participation may involve the collection of some private information relating to your experiences in teacher education classes. However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don’t want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.

The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a de-identified code (for example CCTEC_0009) instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected database and locked in a file drawer.

**WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. However, it may benefit the field of teacher education to better understand the needs of students who want to become teachers.

**WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

You will receive a $20 Amazon gift card for each interview you participate in.
WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?
This study is over when participants have completed the demographic survey (5 minutes), individual interview (45 minutes), focus group session (45 minutes) and written reflection/critical incident report (10 minutes). However, participants can choose to not participate in any one part.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY
The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your de-identified code. The master list, which identifies, you is kept locked and separate from the list of de-identified codes.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?
The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND OR VIDEO RECORDING
Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don’t wish to be recorded, you will still be able to participate in this research study.

_____ I give my consent to be recorded

__________________________________________________________ Signature

_____ I do not consent to be recorded

__________________________________________________________ Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

_____ I consent to allow written, and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College Columbia University

__________________________________________________________ Signature

_____ I do not consent to allow written, and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University

__________________________________________________________ Signature
WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?
If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Michelle Fraboni, at 718-997-5324 or at mfraboni@qc.cuny.edu. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Lalitha Vasudevan, 212-678-6660.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty to future student status or grades; services that I would otherwise receive.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Signature: ___________________________
Appendix F

Demographic Inventory

The information collected from this questionnaire is completely confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this research study.

1. At which college are you currently enrolled?
   □ LaGuardia Community College
   □ Queensborough Community College
   □ Queens College
   □ Other (please specify).

2. Did you begin college at this institution or elsewhere?
   □ Started here
   □ Started elsewhere

   Name of college(s) you previously attended:

3. What is your class level?
   □ Freshman/first year
   □ Sophomore
   □ Junior
   □ Senior
   □ Not sure

4. Are you a full-time student?
   □ Yes
   □ No

5. What is your gender?
   □ Female
   □ Male
   □ Another gender identity

6. Which category below includes your age?
   □ 18-20
   □ 21-25
   □ 26-34
   □ 35-44
   □ 45-54
   □ 55-64
   □ 65-74
   □ 75 or older
7. What is your racial or ethnic identification? Please check all that apply.
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White
- Some other race or ethnicity (please specify)

8. What was the primary language spoken in your childhood home?
- Arabic
- Chinese
- English
- French
- German
- Greek
- Italian
- Japanese
- Korean
- Punjabi
- Russian
- Spanish
- Urdu
- Other/multiple languages (please specify)
Appendix G

CCTEC Interview Protocol

Introduction:
While participating in CCTEC, you had some assignments that were required for your class in____________________(Educational Foundations at whichever school…) and shared with CCTEC peers.

<Show CCTEC Blackboard Course Management page with summary of activities>

Thinking back to last fall, when your class participated in the CCTEC project, there were a number of activities/assignments that you were required to submit. I would like you to choose 1 or 2 assignments that capture your experience as a participant in CCTEC.

<Interviewee chooses an artifact(s)>

Research Question #1:
In what ways did CCTEC participants enact being members of the CCTEC community?

Interview Questions:
1. Can you talk about what it is about this activity that represents your experience in CCTEC?

2. Are there other activities that you participated in while you were a member of CCTEC?

3. Can you describe your experiences participating in those activities?

Research Question #2:
How do students who participated in the CCTEC community conceptualize their participation in the community?

Interview Questions:
4. Can you describe your experiences as a participant in CCTEC?

5. How did participating in CCTEC activities make you feel?
   5a. Can you tell me about your best experience while participating in CCTEC?
   5b. How about your worst experience?

6. Would you recommend participating in CCTEC to a friend? Why or why not?
Research Question #3:
In what ways do CCTEC participants currently enact being a member of the teacher education community?

Interview Questions:
7. What kinds of activities related to the field of education do you currently participate in? (These can be activities that are required for your class work, or they can be activities outside of your class work.)
   If they are currently participating in activities within teacher ed:
   7a. Can you describe how these activities make you feel about becoming a teacher?

Research Question #4:
How does being part of a community influence preservice teachers’ sense of themselves?

Interview Questions:
8. Do you feel like you belong to a community of students on campus? 8a. Can you talk a little bit about that? Why or why not?

9. Do you feel like you belong to a community of future teachers? 9a. Can you talk a little bit about that? Why or why not?

10. Can you talk a little bit about your decision to pursue teaching as a career?

11. What made you decide to become a teacher?
   11a. Tell me about some of the key people in your life who have influenced your decision to become a teacher.

12. Where do you see yourself in 2 years? In 5 years?

Thank you for your time!
Appendix H

Non-CCTEC Interview Protocol

Introduction:
Thinking about some of the classes you have taken, are there any assignments that really stand out to you, assignments that really helped your learning and/or that capture your experience as a student preparing to become a teacher?

<Interviewee has time to jot down some ideas>

Interview Questions:
1. Can you talk about what it is about this activity that represents your experience as a teacher education student?

2. What other activities have you participated in as a teacher education student?

3. Can you describe your experiences participating in those activities?

4. How did participating in these activities make you feel?
   4a. Can you tell me about your best experience as a teacher education student? 4b. How about your worst experience?

5. What other kinds of activities related to the field of education do you currently participate in? (These can be activities that are required for your class work, or they can be activities outside of your class work.)
   If they are currently participating in activities within teacher ed:
   5a. Can you describe how these activities make you feel about becoming a teacher?

6. Do you feel like you belong to a community of students on campus?
   6a. Can you talk a little bit about that? Why or why not?

7. Do you feel like you belong to a community of future teachers?
   7a. Can you talk a little bit about that? Why or why not?

8. Can you talk a little bit about your decision to pursue teaching as a career?

9. What made you decide to become a teacher?
   9a. Tell me about some of the key people in your life who have influenced your decision to become a teacher.

10. Where do you see yourself in 2 years? In 5 years?

Thank you for your time!
Appendix I

Critical Incident Report

Thinking about the time you have spent taking education classes, please recall one particular time when you felt like you were part of a community.

In 1-2 short paragraphs, please describe that experience:

• What was the context of the experience? Was it required for a class?
• What was the activity you were participating in?
• Describe what you were thinking and feeling while you were participating in that activity.

Thank you! Your perceptions are very helpful in trying to understand students’ experiences as they study to become teachers.
Appendix J

Focus Group Interview Guide

**Introduction:**
Thanks so much for taking the time to join me to talk about your experiences in teacher education. My name is Michelle Fraboni, I teach in the Elementary Education program here at Queens College, and I’m a doctoral candidate at Teachers College Columbia University.

I’ve reached out students who are taking teacher education courses, because I want to hear about the kinds of assignments and activities that you are finding most valuable.

As we’re talking today, it’s important to remember that there are no wrong answers but simply different points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

You’ve probably noticed the microphone, and that’s because I’m audio-recording the session so I don’t miss any of your comments.

We will be using first names today, but I won’t use any names in my research report. Anything you say is completely confidential. I also ask that you not share any private information you may learn from other members of this group.

Let’s get started by going around the room and briefly introducing ourselves. Tell us who you are and which education course you are currently taking.

Now let’s talk about your experiences in your education courses: Thinking about some of the classes you have taken, are there any assignments that really stand out to you, assignments that really helped your learning and/or that capture your experience as a student preparing to become a teacher?

<interviewees have time to jot down some ideas>

**Interview Questions:**

1. Thinking about the activity you have written down, what is it about that particular activity that represents your experience as a teacher education student? *This will be round robin, and everyone will have a chance to answer. If people are having a hard time articulating why they will be prompted: Remember, it can be a positive or negative experience.*
2. How did participating in these activities make you feel?
3. Tell us about your best experience as a teacher education student. How about your worst experience?
4. What other kinds of activities related to the field of education do you currently participate in? (These can be activities that are required for your class work, or they can be activities outside of your class work.)
   If they are currently participating in activities within teacher ed:
5. Can you describe how these activities make you feel about becoming a teacher?
6. In what way do you feel like you belong to a community of students on campus?
7. In what way do you feel like you belong to a community of future teachers?
8. What words come to mind when you think about your teacher education courses?

Thank you all for your time.