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The Graduate School

BUILDING SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES AMONG
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS: UNDERSTANDING THE
ROLE OF EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Special Education

May 2016

This Dissertation by: Amani S. Alsalman

Entitled: *Building Successful Collaborative Practices Among Early Childhood Educators: Understanding the Role of Educator Preparation Programs*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Special Education, Program of Special Education

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ABSTRACT

Alsalman, Amani S. *Building Successful Collaborative Practices Among Early Childhood Educators: Understanding the Role of Educator Preparation Programs*

This qualitative case study was designed to explore the role of early childhood education and early childhood special education personnel preparation programs in providing training in effective professional collaboration knowledge and skills to preservice early childhood professionals. Effective collaboration practices are important processes that contribute to the creation of successful inclusion programs. Preparing preservice educators to demonstrate effective collaboration skills is critical to promoting positive attitudes and initiating successful collaboration practices that support inclusion in preschools. The evidence was collected through different sources such as interviews with program faculty and undergraduate students, reviews of course documents, and observations of classes. The data provided in-depth information regarding the extent that the two programs prepare their pre-service teachers to develop effective collaboration skills.

The experiences of the program faculty and students toward collaboration and teaming were positive and supportive in general. The program faculty and students identified several challenges in teaching and learning about professional collaboration and provided multiple recommendations to improve training of preservice teachers in

professional collaboration practices. Furthermore, the findings of the study regarding the methods of training in collaboration and teaming indicated a need to increase applied collaboration skills through coursework, field experiences, and practica. Providing professional collaboration knowledge with limited opportunities to practice collaboration skills was insufficient to prepare preservice early childhood teachers to be effective collaborators with other professionals in inclusive preschools. In addition, the findings highlighted similarities and differences between the early childhood education program and the early childhood special education program regarding training in collaboration. The findings of this study led to recommendations for policy, personnel preparation practices, and future research in order to prepare early childhood professionals to collaborate with other education professionals to enhance the quality of inclusive programs in early childhood settings.

Keywords: collaboration and teaming, early childhood preparation programs, collaborative practices, preservice teachers, early childhood educators, inclusion

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to praise Allah for the blessing. Foremost, all my deep thanks will be not enough to express my gratitude to Allah, who gave me the health, strength, endurance, and desires to achieve all success in my life. I am very thankful to Allah who awarded all special people around me to support and encourage me to get through this tremendous and arduous journey.

Great individuals have contributed to my academic success. I owe my appreciation to all those individuals who have made this dissertation possible. Special deep thanks to my mother, Aljohara Almajhad, and my father, Dr. Salman Alsalman, who inspired me first when I was a child and gave me unconditional love. Their overwhelming encouragement and support throughout my existence has helped to shape me. I owe my parents everything because they are always with me. I cannot forget the endless times they spent to advise me, to pray for me, to listen to me, and other countless helps and gifts. Thanks to my sister Fatimah and brothers, especially Mohammad for their support and encouragement.

Most importantly, I must mention my four amazing precious children, Layan, Abdullah, Nawaf, and Sultan, who are my breathing, life, and everything, I love them more than words can express. A big heartfelt thanks goes to my children for their patient and understanding of my busy schedule that kept me away from them for long hours for years. I could not have completed this journey without my husband, Khalid. Thank to him for his support and help with our children when I was away. I would like to express

my sincerest thanks to my co-advisors, Dr. Harvey Rude and Dr. Rashida Banerjee, for their support, time, guidance, and valuable feedback until they drove me to complete my dissertation. Their support and patience helped me overcome some difficulties and complete this dissertation. My dissertation would not have been possible without their supervision and constant assistance; I could not wish for better co-advisors. I also extend my sincerest appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Lewis Jackson and Dr. Kathleen O'Neil. I valued their useful feedback and input provided for this dissertation.

Special thanks to the individuals who participated in this study. I appreciate their time and cooperation to provide information and experiences. I am amazed by their passion for and dedication to be a part in improving early childhood education. It was a wonderful and unique opportunity to learn from them.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank everyone who has supported me in this journey. It is a pleasure to include them in my humble acknowledgment. I gratefully acknowledge Crystal Brothe, the director of the Writing Center, for her valuable advice and assistance in writing this dissertation. I am very thankful to all my friends who encouraged and supported me during stressful times. I am grateful and indebted to my government in Saudi Arabia, through King Saud University, for their financial assistance and support in completing my doctoral program with success. My deepest gratitude is to University of Northern Colorado and all individuals I met there for their various forms of support during my study. I will cherish forever all experiences that I gained throughout my academic journey. My tears precede my footsteps when I leave

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my second country, the United States, especially my beloved city Greeley, Colorado with

wonderful memories.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Effective collaboration among educational professionals is essential to meet the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004). Under IDEA (2004) Part C, infants and toddlers with disabilities, aged birth through 2 years, and their families receive early intervention services. Part B of the IDEA (2004), that covers services for children with disabilities aged 3-21 years of age, reinforces academic expectations and accountability for children and youth with disabilities and attempts to close the gap between learning for children with disabilities and requirements of general education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 acknowledges that each educator must collaborate with other professionals in order to address and meet individual and diverse learning needs of students in inclusive classrooms (Leatherman, 2009). The IDEA (2004) has six principles that serve the education of children and youth with disabilities. One of the principles closely related to this topic of collaboration is the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This principle emphasizes educating children with disabilities with their typical peers, and in order to include as many children as possible in general education settings, schools must provide access to general education curriculum for all children, thereby offering children with disabilities opportunities to meet educational standards. Early childhood professionals must work collaboratively (e.g., multidisciplinary teams) in order to

implement LRE effectively in inclusive preschools (Demonte, 2010; Etscheidt, 2006). Thus, the collaborative team members would create an educational environment where all children with and without disabilities could successfully develop and learn.

Initiating successful collaborative practices among educators in inclusive schools is a vital way to meet the requirements of legislative mandates (Cramer, 2006; Friend & Cook, 2013). As strong advocacy for inclusive practices and school reforms increases, special and general education teachers have new roles and responsibilities that require them to work together (Volonino & Zigmond, 2007; Winn & Blanton, 2005). An important challenge is how preservice programs could prepare education professionals to meet the demands of IDEA (2004; Voss & Bufkin, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Hunt, Soto, and Maier (2004) defined the dynamic of inclusive education that results when young children with special needs are involved with their typically developing peers at the same educational and community settings. These children receive needed services to achieve their goals that are established by collaborative teams, often consisting of their parents and education professionals. An effective collaborative team is a cornerstone for successful inclusion. Initiating successful teaming is enhanced when the team members collaborate with each other in order to achieve common goals.

Successful teaming and collaboration depend on professionals developing certain skills and knowledge. Despite significant efforts of professionals to include young children with disabilities in classrooms for typically developing children, the barriers that prevent educators from meeting those children's needs continue to affect children's learning outcomes (Garderen, Stormont, & Goel, 2012; Hodgson, Lazarus, & Thurlow,

2011). One major barrier is that most general education teachers do not feel prepared to teach children with disabilities (Chang, Early, & Winton, 2005; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Hodgson et al., 2011; Orr, 2009). Further, they feel unprepared to work with special educators to implement inclusion programs (Choi, 2010). Similarly, special education practitioners lack the pedagogical knowledge of the core curriculum (Orr, 2009) and knowledge of how to work with general educators as consultants and models (Choi, 2010). Studies have found that developing collaborative relationships between special and general education teachers is a useful technique that would lead to addressing and meeting the needs of young children with disabilities (Garderen et al., 2012; Hestenes et al., 2009; Winn & Blanton, 2005). As Kluth and Straut (2003) stated, "Collaboration and inclusion are inextricably linked" (p. 238). Preservice training programs are the cornerstones for future educators to develop the knowledge and skills they need in the classroom. Consequently, teacher preparation programs should endorse professional collaboration skills in order to enhance the quality of inclusion programs.

Most studies about collaboration conducted among educational professionals in K-12 schools reflected a need to conduct more studies for educators in preschools (e.g., Blask, 2011; Cartel, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009; Garderen et al., 2012; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). The nature of collaboration in early childhood is different from K-12 settings due to the nature of the roles of early childhood education (ECE) and early childhood special education (ECSE) professionals in classrooms. Often, the differences between early childhood and K-12 include educators' training programs, educators' qualifications, teaching environment, and school context (Whitebook, 2014). These differences influence the nature of the roles of ECE and ECSE professionals versus

the roles of K-12 professionals. For example, ECE professionals focus on family centered practices and family collaboration versus focusing on services to other professionals for K-12. ECE professionals work intensively with specialized service providers versus working with other teachers for K-12. Thus, the need for specific literature related to early childhood is beneficial to ensure effective programs and services for young learners who can benefit from special education.

Further, the literature studies that address preservice training programs across teacher education programs in collaboration are limited. Few articles have mentioned the lack of preparation of early childhood professionals to collaborate effectively in inclusive classrooms (e.g., Anderson, 2013; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Geer & Hamill, 2007; McKenzie, 2009; Piper, 2007). Because the attention to inclusion in early childhood settings has increased, an associated need exists for conducting more research to investigate the quality of early childhood professionals, the contents of professional development, and collaborative teamwork in order to increase the outcomes of both children with and without disabilities and their families (Choi, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Early childhood teacher preparation programs aim to prepare well-qualified and effective professionals who can implement evidence-based practices to address the emotional, academic, social, behavioral, and typical development to improve outcomes of all young children. Certainly, the preparation programs also focus on effective delivery methods and how to work with young children and their families in order to provide high quality instruction. The quality of early childhood programs is based on promulgated standards and practice guidelines by different early childhood organizations and

incorporated into national and state accreditation systems, such as the National

Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Early Childhood

Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, and the Division of Early Childhood

(DEC) Recommended Practices (Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011). Indeed, NAEYC

Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, DEC's specialty

personnel preparation standards, and new DEC Recommended Practices include the

importance of the acquisition of teaming and collaboration skills among early childhood

professionals.

Further, the Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion (ECRII) and the

National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI) developed a

comprehensive research synthesis in support of early childhood inclusion (Odom et al.,

2011). Authors stated that "collaboration is a cornerstone of high-quality inclusion" (p.

347) and the National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (2009) added that

"early childhood professionals may not be adequately prepared to serve young children

with disabilities enrolled in inclusive programs" (p. 5). These statements reflect a strong

need to examine the preparation of early childhood education (ECE) and early childhood

special education (ECSE) professionals to determine the content of preservice preparation

programs that develop skillful candidates who can collaborate effectively in inclusive

classrooms in order to enhance the quality of inclusion programs.

Therefore, in this study, I explored the role of ECE and ECSE personnel

preparation programs in providing training in effective collaboration skills to preservice

early childhood professionals. Often, ECE and ECSE preparation programs provide

training for professionals who will work with children aged from birth through 8 years.

For the purpose of this study, I only focused on training early childhood professionals who will work with children aged from 3 through 5 years at inclusive preschools. The literature reflects lack of addressing the area of professional collaboration for this particular age range in their inclusive classrooms (e.g., Anderson, 2013; Choi, 2010; Hestenes et al., 2009; Miller & Stayton, 2006). I investigated how ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs provided training in professional collaboration for preservice personnel. The evidence that I collected through individual and group interviews, review of documents, and observations provided in-depth information regarding the extent that ECE and ECSE personnel programs prepare their preservice professionals to develop effective collaboration skills that enable them to work with other professionals to enhance the quality of learning, particularly in inclusive programs. I explored the nature of professional collaboration programs that prepare ECE and ECSE professionals by observing classes and reviewing syllabi. Also, I gained the insights and experiences of the ECE and ECSE program faculty and their students about the effectiveness of collaboration training and whether these training programs support and assess collaboration knowledge and skills.

Significance of the Study

Standards for preparation programs of preservice early childhood professionals provide expectations for the nature of coursework and field experience in inclusive settings of children with special needs (Division for Early Childhood [DEC] & National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009). Effective collaborative practice is an important process that contributes to the creation of a successful inclusive environment. Preparing preservice educators to demonstrate

effective collaboration skills is critical to promoting positive attitudes and initiating successful collaborative practices at inclusive preschools. The traditional isolation of the work between general and special education professionals can be a barrier to alignment with the expectations of education reform (Winn & Blanton, 2005). Thus, new ECE and ECSE professionals with highly developed skills in collaboration have increased capabilities to create successful inclusive classrooms and provide high quality education for all children.

In universities and colleges, the faculty members in preservice ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs often have a strong impact on providing teaming and collaboration skills to their students. They have a significant role in designing and delivering the programs in order to support these skills. This study has the potential to better inform the impact of the preparation programs in the area of collaboration and help to improve the quality of ECE and ECSE programs in order to produce high quality early childhood professionals. Those professionals would be able to effectively plan, teach, implement interventions, and provide services for young children in inclusive classrooms by initiating successful collaborative practices. Thus, when higher education faculty embeds the research-based practices into their preparation programs, the preservice education professionals will gain competency in these practices. Most importantly, the desired outcomes of young children and their families will be enhanced. As Voss and Bufkin (2011) mentioned, faculty commitment to support preservice educators to help them develop complex skills to meet the needs of all children in inclusive classrooms is a necessity.

Research Questions

This study was designed to investigate how ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs provide training in collaboration and teaming skills in order to prepare preservice teachers to work collaboratively in inclusive preschools. The research questions that framed the focus of this case study were as follows:

Q1   How do program coordinators and instructors in personnel preparation programs characterize the experiences provided to ECE and ECSE preservice teachers that promote effective knowledge and skills in the areas of teaming and collaboration?

Q2   What methods of training in collaboration and teaming do preservice ECE and ECSE professionals receive during their personnel preparation programs?

Q3   What are the similarities and differences in the way ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs train their preservice teachers for collaboration and teaming responsibilities?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were utilized throughout this study:

Collaboration is defined as "a style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (Friend & Cook, 2013, p. 6). While consultation, collaboration, coaching, teaming, and other terms that are sometimes interchangeably used in the literature, the term collaboration is used more often in all sorts of venues because it seems more general to apply to a wide range of different types of schools and communities (Dettmer, Knackendoffel, & Thurston, 2013).

Early Childhood spans generally from birth to 8 years of age. For the purpose of this study, early childhood refers to young children from three to five years of age.

Early Childhood Inclusion is defined by the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education for Young Children (NAEYC; 2009) in their joint position statement as:

> Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports. (p. 2)

Early childhood personnel preparation programs include higher education teacher preparation programs that provide licenses and prepare future educators with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes they need to teach and serve young children from birth to eight years of age, and these programs often are based on research, theory, practice, and ethical considerations (Saracho, 2013).

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) consists of programs that provide supports and services to children with disabilities aged birth to 8 years and their families (Recchia & Puig, 2011).

Preservice personnel preparation for ECE and ECSE professionals is defined as providing knowledge and skills related to early childhood education within multiple coursework at either the undergraduate or graduate level in order to prepare preservice educators in fields that are related to young children aged birth through eight years (Banerjee & Rude, 2013).

Professional collaboration preparation is defined as preparing preservice education professionals with effective collaboration knowledge and skills in order to

enable them to collaborate with other education professionals, specifically to create successful inclusion.

Professional development is defined as assisted learning and teaching experiences for preservice and inservice teachers that are transactional and intended to facilitate the acquisition of professional skills, knowledge, and dispositions and implementing this knowledge into practice (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009).

Teaming is defined as consisting of individuals from different disciplines and experiences who collaborate to provide services that meet the needs of the child and family (Kilgo, 2006).

Conclusion

In the United States, preschool practices seek to achieve optimum outcomes for young children and families in inclusive educational settings. In spite of the fact that policies of inclusion have been there for several years, a gap in ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs still remains due to the unpreparedness of many new educators to teach young children in inclusive classrooms (Barned, Knapp, & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2011; Couse & Recchia, 2011; Voss & Bufkin, 2011). Collaboration among education professionals is a key factor for creating successful inclusion that the preservice educators should acquire during their preservice training. The focus of this study was to explore the perceptions of the ECE and ECSE program faculty and their students who are participating in ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs regarding how preservice teachers are prepared to be effective collaborators for inclusive classrooms. This study emphasized preparing early childhood personnel who will work with children ages three to five years in inclusive classrooms.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to recent national data (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), in 2012

approximately 42.5% of children 3 to 5 years old served under IDEA (2004) Part B

received their special education and related services in regular early childhood settings.

In 36 states, more than 50% of preschoolers with disabilities are served in general early

education settings (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009). Odom et al. (2011) stated that the

field of educating the preschool children has made little progress in increasing the

inclusion of children with disabilities in regular settings in the past decade. There are

some barriers to implement inclusion in early childhood settings, such as different types

of training the educators may receive (Cox, 2013) which would impact the quality of

inclusive programs in early childhood. Quality inclusive programs are tied to

collaborative teaming among education professionals (National Professional

Development Center on Inclusion, 2009). High quality early childhood programs promise

to enhance readiness for school, increase children's success in their future education, and

reduce grade retention and special education placements (Ramey & Ramey, 2004).

This chapter will review literature related to previous research associated with the

topics of collaboration, inclusion in preschool settings, and preservice professional

development. This chapter is organized into seven different sections. The first section

provides a synopsis of preschool programs in the United States. The second section

includes an overview of the definition and description of inclusion in early childhood

programs. The third section contains definition and description of collaboration, which include a generic definition and different interpretation of collaboration, collaboration in early childhood, and models of collaboration. The fourth section discusses the role of collaboration in education, which includes the importance of collaboration for children and their families, educators, and overall programs. The fifth section is a discussion of challenges to implementing collaboration. The sixth section reviews selected literature in professional development to promote collaboration skills emphasizing ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs. The seventh section provides selected research on early childhood educators collaboration impact. The eighth and final section synthesizes gaps in the current literature and provides a conclusion.

Preschool Programs in the
United States

Barnett and Carolan (2013) reported that state-funded pre-kindergarten, high quality education is critical for children with identified disabilities. Enrollment in a high quality preschool program enhances the likelihood of early identification for children with special needs and then appropriate services can be delivered to them. Additionally, state pre-kindergarten programs aim to serve children with special needs in the least restrictive environment with their typical peers in order to improve language and social development. These programs also prepare all children for elementary school readiness. In the United States during 2012-2013, preschool programs that serve 3 and 4 year olds reported serving at least 739,047 children with special needs who required Individualized Education Programs (IEPs; Barnett, Carolan, Squires, & Clarke Brown, 2013).

Children at risk across the U.S. are affected by various factors that have been associated with poor health and academic failure. Some of these risk factors include low

income, teen motherhood, low parental education, single parent households, and family members who are not proficient in English. Young children at risk benefit from high quality early care and education programs (Schmit, Matthews, Smith, & Robbins, 2013).

Programs that serve young children work under different auspices, some of these entities include the federal Head Start program, privately and publicly funded child care, and state prekindergarten programs. The majority of children who benefit from these programs are four-year-olds, while three-year-olds have lower enrollment (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2012). These programs are developed for a variety of reasons but are dissimilar in eligibility requirements, funding sources, standards, and provider types, such as private nonprofits and public schools (Barnett & Carolan, 2013). Moreover, the policies of the length of the preschool program day vary from state to state. Each state has different hours of service: the extended day, which is eight or more hours; the school day, which is more than four hours and fewer than eight; and the partial day, which is fewer than four hours (Barnett & Carolan, 2013). Although there are differences in the programs, educators still must meet strict requirements of federal legislation.

When a young child is eligible to receive special education and related services, a team of preschool professionals and the parents must meet to write an IEP for the child. IDEA (2004) requires placing the child who has an IEP in free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. In most cases, the least restrictive environment is the regular classroom. Providing special education services based on the IEP would include modifications, accommodations, and supports for the child. In order to implement preschool special education programs and provide appropriate services for

preschoolers with disabilities, early childhood professionals must initiate effective collaborative teams. Collaboration among education professionals will help to meet the requirements of state and federal mandated programs of special education. The collaborative team is also critical for children at-risk and their families by implementing interventions to enhance children's outcomes and provide resources and supports for the families.

Definition and Description of Inclusion

The term inclusion was first used in the field in the early 1990s and professionals are still using it today. In their position statement, Division for Early Childhood and National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) described early childhood inclusion thus:

> Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. (p. 2)

Further, Division for Early Childhood and National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) stated the desired outcomes of inclusion for young children with and without disabilities and their families to include positive social relationships and friendships, a sense of belonging and membership, and learning and development to reach full potential. Also, access, participation, and support are features of inclusion that can be used as indicators for high quality early childhood programs and services (Division for Early Childhood & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). The literature classifies three aspects of successful inclusion in early childhood settings: (a) when early childhood educators facilitate positive engagement and social interaction among all children; (b) when early childhood educators collaborate

effectively; and (c) when early childhood educators incorporate and empower families to be a part of the decision-making team in their children's education (Grace, Llewellyn, Wedgwood, Fenech, & McConnell, 2008).

Establishing collaborative relationships and enhancing communication among professionals are critical to support effective learning of all children and youth in inclusive environments (Salend, 2005). One major factor that makes inclusion successful is consultation within the support framework (Deppeler, 2012). The quality of classroom practices is a deciding factor in successful inclusion (Topping, 2012). Damasco (2013) described inclusion as an introduction of new classroom dynamics when educators bring to the classroom their different individual instructional methods, their diverse attitudes towards collaboration, and their roles and responsibilities in the classroom. Effective instruction, support, and strategies are required for successful inclusion, and all these factors need a collaborative environment in order to assist everyone to implement and reflect the best inclusion choices for educational practices. Inclusion strength relies on the combination of the collaborative and interactive skills of educators (Karten, 2013). Salend (2005) described the importance of inclusion by saying:

> All learners have the right to be educated in general education classrooms, full access to the general education curriculum and all instructional and social activities, full-time placement in general education classrooms, full range of services integrated into the general education setting…general and special education merged into a unified service delivery system . . . foster the academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and physical development of students and to prepare them to be contributing members of society. (p. 11)

Choi (2010) stated that currently, the term "inclusion" is not only restricted to the placement or the amount of time spent in general education, but rather portrays the process that occurs in a classroom with educators, peers, and contexts as well as

providing appropriate services for children's needs and their families. Historically,

beginning in the early 1970s, the researchers began investigations with more focus on

issues related to inclusion that were brought forth by professionals and families of

children with special needs. The domains that were most frequently discussed in the

literature related to inclusion were universal access, specialized instruction,

collaborations with parents and educators, preservice and inservice trainings, and benefits

for all children. These domains illustrate the strong focus on the quality of educators in

inclusive settings (Choi).

Effective collaborative practices among educational professionals are the

foundation of successful inclusion in early childhood settings (DeVore & Russell, 2007;

Lieber, Beckman, Hanson, & Janko, 1997). The quality of the implementation of

inclusion programs is a prominent issue in early childhood settings (Odom et al., 2011).

For example, Response to Intervention (RtI) has become a recent movement strategy in

inclusive classrooms. The authors indicated also that the implementation of RtI has

increased in early childhood settings in order to address all children's needs. The

Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children, the National

Association for the Education of Young Children, and the National Head Start

Association (2014) jointly developed a definition of RtI in early childhood as:

> Response to intervention in EC may be seen as a means of providing high-quality
> teaching and responsive caregiving through the delivery of differentiated support
> for all young children. In other words, in EC, RTI frameworks are a means for
> implementing a hierarchy of support that is differentiated through a data-based
> decision-making process (p. 110).

Also, they demonstrated the features of early childhood RtI frameworks as

following: "multitiered systems of teaching and caregiving practices, a high-quality

curriculum, ongoing assessment and continuous progress monitoring, and collaborative problem solving among team members" (p. 111). Implementing RtI requires effective collaboration among early childhood professionals in order to enhance the success of RtI to obtain the desired outcomes (Alsalman, 2014; Buysse & Peisner-Feinberg, 2010; Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009).

Definition and Description of Collaboration

Generic Definition and Different Interpretation of Collaboration

One of the ultimate goals of effective collaboration among educational professionals is to create successful inclusion. Throughout the years, different definitions and interpretations of collaboration have been used in educational settings. More than 20 years ago, the term "collaboration" was often used as a concept in educational settings more than in practice (Friend & Cook, 2013). Collaboration is expected to become a common practice in the future (Dettmer et al., 2013).

Friend and Cook (2013) presented a generic definition of interpersonal collaboration as "a style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 6). The authors developed this definition two decades ago and it still applies for all educational settings. The definition illustrates that various school activities, including interactions among educators, are not always collaborative practices (Cook & Friend, 2010).

Ludlow (2011) defined collaboration in inclusive schools as special education teachers having to organize their work with other professionals, such as general education teachers, inside and/or outside the schools. Deppeler (2012) defined collaboration as a

process to understand diversity and then to generate innovative solutions to the problems

and issues of inclusive settings. Leatherman (2009) also provided the following statement

about collaboration: "Collaboration is a current teaching trend that manifests itself in

many different forms" (p. 201).

Dettmer et al. (2013) explained that a practical definition of collaboration is

difficult due to the differences in school structures and circumstances. Many synonyms

for collaboration exist, such as coaching, consultation, and teaming. The word

collaboration is used more often in all sorts of venues because it seems more general to

apply to a wide range of different types of schools and communities. Synonyms for

collaboration have specific meanings and purposes, characterized as forms of

collaboration (Dettmer et al., 2013).

In the 1970s, consultation between special and general education teachers allowed

special education teachers to work in the general education classrooms to assist students

with disabilities by prescribing interventions for teachers to implement (Taylor, Smiley,

& Richards, 2009). For many years consultation, which is considered indirect service,

was the main role of psychologists supporting teachers who provided services to students

in schools (Feldman & Kratochwill, 2003). Currently, the consultation process is

voluntary, and one professional can support another in order to benefit the client, often

the student. Commonly, the consultant and the consultee use problem-solving strategies

by addressing students' concerns and plan interventions (Feldman & Kratochwill, 2003).

Another indirect service term is coaching, which is an approach developed to expand

educators' capacity so they can promote student outcomes (Reed & Bowser, 2012).

Coaching aims to transform thinking instead of working together. In education, several

types of coaching occur, such as instructional coaching and leadership coaching (Reed & Bowser, 2012). Educational professionals, who provide coaching, should have advanced skills and knowledge in order to create a learning community (Friend & Cook, 2013).

Some authors preferred to use specific elements for accurate definition for effective collaboration. Cramer (2006) identified collaboration principles as follows: (a) the goal of collaboration is to create a professional environment among educators in order to increase children's achievements to their highest potential; (b) collaboration helps each collaborator to solve problems efficiently; (c) different educators collaborate to create successful collaboration resource networks; and (d) educators share the roles that have traditionally been individual. Friend and Cook (2013) provided similar characteristics of collaboration, but also added that collaboration was voluntary when using a specific style when interacting with others, and collaborators should share accountability for outcomes. Overall, collaboration among educators is commonly recommended in the literature, but what is understood and known regarding collaboration practices and their implementations stays unclear (Garderen et al., 2012).

The collaboration among educators could be formal and informal interactions, and both of these types are important for the school culture (Friend & Cook, 2013). The authors developed a framework of components of collaboration, which establishes a personal commitment to collaborate with professionals, strong communication skills that focus on implementing practices, interaction processes from the beginning to the end of collaborative activities, programs or services in which collaboration occurs, and the context in which collaborative activities occur.

Taylor et al. (2009) indicated several types of collaborative teams that are needed for the special education process, including multidisciplinary evaluation teams, pre-referral intervention teams, and individualized education program teams. As the authors mentioned, all these teams require collaborative work to plan and implement inclusive educational programs successfully. Bock, Michalak, and Brownlee (2011) added a stipulation that collaborative practices should occur in personal meetings at least once a week. The existence of collaboration happens when the educators share knowledge, ideas, skills, and resources and discuss this knowledge to develop new plans and goals, improve current plans, and make progress in implementing programs (Choi, 2010; Karten, 2013). Dettmer et al. (2013) mentioned that in collaborative practices, the collaborators do not have to think alike, but they need to think together differently in order to be productive. The research also revealed the influence of administration on educational personnel (Blask, 2011). Given the necessity of sustained collaborative practices among professional educators to enhance the success of school inclusion, principals have to be facilitators and supporters of a collaborative vision (DuFour & Marzano, 2009; Smith & Leonard, 2005). Understanding the context for effective collaboration in K–12 may be useful for helping to inform implementation of successful collaborative practices in early childhood.

Collaboration in Early Childhood

Early childhood literature utilizes similar broad definitions of collaboration that were found in K-12 education literature. Coaching, consultation, and teaming are common approaches that are utilized in early childhood settings. Hunft, Rush, and Shelden (2004) defined coaching in early childhood as "an interactive process of

observation, reflection, and action in which a coach promotes, directly and/or indirectly, a

learner's ability to support a child's participation in family and community context" (p.

4). Rush and Shelden (2011) provided a description of coaching in early childhood as:

> A direct or indirect services delivery or an adult learning approach in which the coach is a teacher or therapist; the coachee is parent, other care provider, or colleague; and the benefactor of the coaching may be a single child, group of children, parent, or teacher. (pp. 37-38)

The other practice that is often confused with coaching is consultation. Buysse

and Wesley (2005) defined consultation in early childhood as "indirect, triadic services

delivery model in which a consultant (e.g., early childhood special educator, therapist)

and a consultee (e.g., early childhood professionals and/or parent) work together to

address an area of concern or a common goal for change" (p. 10).

Dinnebeil and McInerney (2011) noted that teaming is a vital activity in inclusive

early childhood settings. Friend and Cook (2013) defined teaming thusly: "An

educational team is a set of interdependent individuals with unique skills and perspectives

who interact directly to achieve their mutual goal of providing students with effective

educational programs and services" (p. 138). There are three common models of teaming

that have different degrees in which team members work more collaboratively. The

following models are: (a) a multidisciplinary team has the least collaborative work that

consists of a number of individuals from different disciplines, who have distinct

knowledge, skills, and perspectives that help to achieve the team's goals; (b) an

interdisciplinary team shares coordinating and integrating the information and services

for children and their families; and (c) a transdisciplinary team is the most recent holistic

approach in teaming and most collaborative work that the team members share or blend

their roles, the members perform their work interactively, and the members share their

expertise with others through consultation, coaching, and engaging in mutual training (Dinnebeil & McInerney, 2011; Friend & Cook, 2013).

The definition of the term of collaboration is still ambiguous in early childhood. In a qualitative study by Alsalman (2014), eight ECE and ECSE professionals defined the concept of collaboration differently, and these variances were attributed to the differences in the number of years of experience they had in the field and in self-development regarding collaborative practices. However, the application of collaborative practices is varied and requires a huge effort to be successful (Choi, 2010).

Models of Collaboration

Collaboration can occur in different programs and services in inclusive schools. Common models of collaboration include, problem-solving model, co-teaching model, consulting, and working in teams (Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Even though there is ambiguity in determining and describing some existing models of collaboration, the most common models of collaboration presented in the literature were problem-solving and co-teaching. Ostrosky and Cheatham (2005) describe six steps in the use of a problem-solving model in inclusive preschools as a guide for early childhood teachers. These steps can be implemented to address issues that early childhood preservice teachers may face in their teaching future. Preparing early childhood educators in how to use this process has the potential to help them address and solve any behavioral and academic problems and achieve better outcomes for children and their families. The problem-solving model provides great opportunities for a positive change in the classrooms and school culture in ways that help and benefit everyone. The six steps are as follows:

1.   Describing the problem.

2.   Analyzing the problem.

3.   Brainstorming ideas to address or resolve the problem.

4.   Prioritizing and evaluating the suggestions.

5.   Making decisions and implementing the interventions.

6.   Evaluating the outcomes of the interventions.

In addition, Friend and Bursuck (2012) provided several approaches of the co-teaching model that occurs when two or more educators share the instruction, typically in a single classroom setting. The first approach is "lead and support" in which one educator leads the instruction and another provides assistance to individuals or small groups of children. The second approach is "station teaching" in which children are divided into two diverse groups and each group works with one educator at a classroom station. The third approach is "parallel teaching" in which educators cooperatively plan teaching the lesson and deliver it individually to half of the class. The fourth approach is "alternative teaching" in which one educator works with a small group of students to pre-teach, reteach, supplement, or enrich teaching, while the other educator teaches the large group. The fifth approach is "team teaching" in which both educators share the responsibility equally for planning and teaching children. The sixth approach is "one teach one observe" in which one educator leads teaching the lesson while the other educator gathers information on the children to better understand them to improve instructional decisions (Friend & Bursuck). In order to utilize any collaborative models in an appropriate manner, educators search for ways to increase the effectiveness of their collaboration.

The Role of Collaboration in Education

In the rapidity of improvement in general and special education, it is impossible that an individual has sufficient knowledge and capability in any field to handle all circumstances, and for this reason, collaboration becomes a necessity (Dettmer et al., 2013). Schools that support collaboration tend to include all educators in the teaching and learning process. Effective collaboration in schools enables all educators' work to be successful, and in order to achieve this, each educator must have the capability, skills, and knowledge to collaborate. Ludlow (2011) provided some examples of what areas educators need to address by collaboration, such as specified programs and services, instructional delivery, assessments, and development of curriculum.

The new DEC Recommended Practices (Division of Early Childhood, 2014) were established to close the gap between research and practices and promote early childhood educators' work in order to enhance children's achievements and increase the potential in every child's development by providing the best practices for practitioners. These recommended practices were developed to serve children from birth through five years of age who were identified as, or were at-risk for, developmental delays and/or disabilities. Implementing these practices allows those children to access and participate in inclusive settings and can help to gain desired outcomes for those children and their families. Successful implementation of educational programs and services for children at risk or with disabilities in inclusive settings requires effective collaboration among early childhood educators. Teaming and collaboration was one of the topic areas, which offered guidance for practitioners. The five recommended practices developed to support teaming and collaboration emphasized collaborative work among educators in order to

address and meet the needs of children and their families successfully. The link for further review of these five recommendation practices is http://goo.gl/zKULkg (Division of Early Childhood, 2014).

Early childhood special educators and early interventionists use the personnel preparation standards developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the DEC personnel standards to deliver appropriate services to children with special needs from birth through 8 years of age and their families. These standards are utilized as a part of the accountability system and in personnel preparation programs in order to train highly qualified educators. These standards have to represent the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that are required in preparing educators for teaching and providing effective services. Collaboration among educators is one of the knowledge and skill domains of personnel standards (Cochran et al., 2012).

Importance of Collaboration for Positive Child and Family Outcomes

Providing high quality education to children, families, and future educators can occur by the combined knowledge and collaborative efforts among professionals (Piper, 2007). Although the literature indicated the importance of collaboration among educators, more empirical research is needed to investigate how effective collaboration benefits both the children with and without disabilities and the educators themselves (Choi, 2010). Collaboration benefits children with typical development because some of the research-based practices used in special education are useful for everyone, not only for children with disabilities.

Collaboration for heterogeneous settings will help to minimize the stigma effect of labels (Bock et al., 2011). When educators demonstrate the priority of collaboration to

benefit each child, parents of exceptional children will tend to be involved in their children's educational programs, provide their information, and help in mentoring the work by their children (Dettmer et al., 2013). The research revealed a positive relationship between educator collaboration and child achievement (Alsalman, 2014; Bock et al., 2011). In addition, collaborative practices are helpful as a tool for educators to provide a better learning environment for children, look at children's behaviors more holistically, and learn from different viewpoints and experiences in teaching children (Recchia & Puig, 2011). As evidence of the link between effective collaboration and positive outcomes for children, a single-subject study by Hunt et al. (2004) found that the outcomes of three children with severe disabilities, who were included in general education early childhood programs, improved when collaborative teams developed and implemented educational plans for those children.

In addition, Garderen et al. (2012) examined 19 peer-reviewed studies that were published between 1978 and 2009. These varied design studies focused on the impact of collaboration on exceptional students' outcomes. They examined various types of co-teaching that were implemented within each study. Overall, the researchers found that the studies in general support collaboration among educators to improve the outcomes of students with disabilities (Garderen et al.). However, these studies had different research designs, and none of these studies were conducted for preschools.

Importance of Collaboration for Educators

Some research has highlighted positive impacts of collaboration, not only on learners, but also on both general and special educators. Dettmer et al. (2013) summarized several benefits of collaborative practices on educators as follows: (a)

general educators will be more confident and successful working with exceptional students; (b) the time, efforts, and resources will be saved for all educators and parents; and (c) the educators can specify areas that the teachers need to learn about and then plan professional development sessions based on their needs. When the educators practice collaboration, the socialization with and learning from other educational professionals will be enhanced. Collaboration allows teachers with different expertise to work together equally within the school community and to share decision making in order to address the challenges in inclusive settings. Collaborative effort creates opportunities for educators to work on practices that are research based and support the implementation of inclusive programs (Bock et al., 2011; Deppeler, 2012; Thomson, 2013).

Escalating demands for learners' achievements, growing teaching complexity, and school accountability require collaborative work in different dimensions (Dettmer et al., 2013). Successful collaboration leads to an increased commitment toward future collaboration, positive attitudes, and beliefs about collaboration (Friend & Cook, 2013). In addition, collaboration is an important aspect of planning interventions and accommodations that address and meet diverse learners' needs in inclusive classrooms (Cartel et al., 2009; Garderen et al., 2012; Geer & Hamill, 2007). Effective collaborative practices help educators to maximize services everywhere and at all times in their inclusive schools (Alsalman, 2014).

Blask (2011) indcated that the best way to accommodate children with special needs in inclusive classrooms is collaboration among educational professionals because educators can gain more knowledge about each child's needs from each other. For example, when the general education teachers collaborate with other specialized

educators, such as the occupational therapist and the speech and language provider, they will acquire more extensive and accurate information about the child's needs. Hence, modifications or accommodations to instruction would be more suitable and individualized. However, even though the collaboration is essential to children's learning, collaboration between teachers and service providers in inclusive schools has not gained its fullest potential (Blask, 2011). Additionally, Ashbaker and Morgan (2012) argued that even though the paraeducators' roles changed to be directly linked with teaching, their full participation as team members in collaborative work is overlooked.

Through collaboration, all collaborators will gain new skills in teaming, intervention, and instruction (Cahill & Mitra, 2008). Voss and Bufkin (2011) focused on the importance of educators learning collaboration skills when they stated, "All educators must develop a wider range of collaboration skills that facilitate cooperative planning and instructional activities" (p. 340). General educators indicated that collaboration facilitated their learning regarding how to teach children with varying abilities and challenges in their inclusive classrooms, which led them to enhance their students' learning and success in the school outcomes (Grubert, 2011). Also, through the collaborative process, educational professionals increased their retention plans (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013), knowledge, and skills, and as a result, are more effective in inclusive settings (Grubert, 2011). Further, educators gain job satisfaction that is associated with the advantages from practicing successful collaborative models within their schools (Alsalman, 2014; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009).

Early childhood educators learn through collaboration with other professionals on the site (Choi, 2010). Often the early childhood collaborative teams consist of a classroom teacher, a paraprofessional teacher, a special education teacher, related service providers (e.g., occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech therapist), and/or a social worker (Anderson, 2013). All early childhood educators play a critical role in establishing and accomplishing collaborative team goals (Friend& Cook, 2013). The collaborative team in inclusive schools is becoming the main engine for ongoing professional learning because the educators work interdependently to accomplish common goals and make improvements in their teaching skills and their children's achievements (DuFour & DuFour, 2007; Grubert, 2011). Smith and Leonard (2005) suggested that the roles and responsibilities of all educators in an inclusive team need to be clarified, and the educators have to realize that they are responsible for the learning process of all children.

Importance of Collaboration for Overall Programs

The major purpose of collaboration among educators is to meet the demands of inclusion programs (Cahill & Mitra, 2008). Deppeler (2012) discovered that several research articles have shown that collaborative work is critical for developing successful practices in educational settings for all grade levels and has been linked to enhancement of all children's achievements (Goddard et al., 2007), changes in teachers' practices (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Jones et al., 2013; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008), and progress in teachers' self-efficacy (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008).

DuFour and Marzano (2009) mentioned that early childhood program adminstrators are far more likely to enhance learners' achievements by supporting

educators' learning through collaboration than by using only a formal educator evaluation. Administrators can provide time for collaboration among educators that are embedded into school routines, education resources and tools, training to enhance educators' skills and knowledge in collaboration, and structures to ensure that collaborative team time focuses on addressing and meeting learners' needs. Thus, the administrators promote the quality of implementing school programs and fulfill their major responsibilities of facilitating learners' learning at higher levels (DuFour & Marzano).

Collaboration is critical to implement various programs and services, such as Response to Intervention (RtI), differentiated instruction, IEPs, and parent participation (Friend & Cook, 2013). The RtI refers to a multi-tiered system in order to address the needs of all children in inclusive classrooms and to ensure that all children have equal opportunities to learn. The RtI is data-based and allows educators to know what intervention is working and what is not (Friend & Cook, 2013). Stuart and Rinaldi (2009) mentioned that evidence-based instructional practice, progress monitoring, and data-informed instructional problem-solving are the main elements of implementing RTI, and implementing effective RTI requires collaborative planning for all tiers. Implementing the procedures of RTI is based on collaboration (Friend & Cook, 2013).

Dettmer et al. (2013) indicated that educational professionals must work collaboratively in planning and delivering instruction in order to make sure that all children in inclusive classrooms have access to the general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible and assure that their needs are met. Educators must take into account the difference in abilities between children when planning and delivering

instruction. Differentiated instruction leads educators to structure learning environments that address the variety of learning styles, interests, and abilities found within a classroom. Consequently, the instruction is developed to meet each child's needs. In order to create successful differentiated instruction, collaboration is required for assessment and developing the curriculum. Collaboration is required also for IEP teams in order to achieve the desired outcomes. All educators who are involved with a child who has an IEP collaborate to gather data and share information about that child to develop the IEP and seek to meet its goals and objectives (Dettmer et al., 2013).

Parent participation is another approach that requires collaboration among educators to enable and encourage families of children to be a part of the collaborative team. Families are the main members of the collaborative team and the educators in the team must facilitate members' participation in their child's educational decision-making and provide information to the families in order to support their children (Friend & Cook, 2013). In general, the literature elucidated that effective collaboration among early childhood professionals is a significant key to ensuring the best for children and families' outcomes, professionals' work efforts, and educational programs. However, the literature revealed also some common barriers that prevent effective collaboration to occur.

The Challenges to Collaboration

Despite the critical role of collaboration in education, some challenges may arise when educational professionals attempt to create collaborative relationships. Some early childhood professionals typically work in isolation from others using directive styles to enhance children's learning which makes changing the school structure to be a challenge in a collaborative context. However, successful collaboration is based on equality in

contributions made by each collaborator, and an imbalance of power interactions may decrease true collaboration (Friend & Cook, 2013). Some of the main challenges to collaboration include a lack of time, negative attitudes, a lack of training programs, inadequate administrative support, unequal investment from team members for collaboration, and personal conflict.

Lack of regularly scheduled planning time for collaborative meetings, inability to sustain effective collaboration (Grubert, 2011), and difficulties to find an appropriate place in the school to meet due to the design of the school building, the distance between classrooms, and/or teachers' physical location during the school day limit the opportunities to collaborate among educators (Cartel et al., 2009; DuFour, 2011; Lingo, Barton-Arwood, & Jolivette, 2011; Naraian, 2010; Smith & Leonard, 2005.

Furthermore, unequal partnerships in terms of contribution to the collaboration efforts and in sharing the roles and responsibilities (Grubert, 2011), negative attitudes toward collaboration, deficiency of providing training programs on collaboration knowledge and skills, and personal conflict among collaborative team members are factors which minimize the chances of successful collaboration among early childhood educators and impact effective implementation of inclusion programs (Alsalman, 2014; Blask, 2011; Choi, 2010; Dettmer et al., 2013).

Another barrier of implementing effective collaboration in schools is misunderstanding the concept of the term collaboration (Friend & Cook, 2013). Also, Blask (2011) found there are difficulties of understanding the terminology of different fields, which made discussing a child's services among educators difficult. In addition, inadequate administrative support for collaboration is one of the essential challenges

because school administrators, such as principals, are mostly the controllers of increasing or decreasing the collaborative climate within their schools (DuFour & Marzano, 2009; Grubert, 2011).

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**Professional Development to Promote
Collaboration Skills**

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Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, and Knoche (2009) defined professional development in early childhood programs as "a number of experiences that promote education, training, and development opportunities for early childhood practitioners who do or will work with young children aged birth to eight years and their families" (p. 379). Banerjee and Rude (2013) pointed out that professional development occurs in two manners: during preservice preparation programs and/or inservice training programs. The preparation programs for preservice ECE and ECSE professionals provide knowledge and skills related to early childhood education within multiple coursework, at either undergraduate or graduate level, in order to prepare preservice educators in fields that are related to children (e.g., child care, developmental psychology, special education, or early childhood education). The inservice training programs for ECE and ECSE professionals are provided while the educators are working in their career at early childhood settings (e.g., preschools, childcares, or early elementary classes) in order to support their teaching and services for children and their families (Banerjee & Rude, 2013).

Professional development is critical for early childhood educators to acquire and advance the needed knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices so they can provide wealthier learning experiences for all children, including children with disabilities, and to support families. Early childhood educators are required to understand child development and early education issues, to engage children of different abilities and backgrounds as

well as their families, and to do so for accountability. This reflects the importance of producing high quality early childhood educators, who contribute to enhance learning and development of children and their families' outcomes. Promoting an environment for ongoing professional growth in educators themselves and the overall educational system is a major goal of professional development (Sheridan et al., 2009; Snyder, Hemmeter, & McLaughlin, 2011).

Early Childhood Personnel
Preparation Programs

Educators' preparation for inclusion often happens in initial training in colleges and universities or as ongoing professional development (Forlin, 2010). Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) and Prince (2010) stated that the effectiveness of educator preparation programs in higher education is fundamental to the improvement and retention of future educational professionals. Further, the researchers noted that these programs must provide learning experiences that tie theory and practice together. In the U.S., preparation programs for early childhood educators prepare future educators with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes they need to teach and serve young children, and these programs often are based on research, theory, practice, and ethical considerations (Saracho, 2013). Winton, McCollum, and Catlett (as cited in Banerjee & Rude, 2013) described the high quality preparation programs that preservice educators must acquire for necessary knowledge, dispositions, and skills in order to have the ability to implement this gained knowledge into practice. The research connected the quality of early childhood preparation programs and the success of early childhood programs, which positively impacted children's developmental outcomes (Saracho, 2013). Often, early childhood preparation programs utilize at least three national sets of professional

standards to follow. These professional standards include specific standards from DEC, general standards from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), and standards from NAEYC (Gallagher, Steed, & Green, 2014).

Piper (2007) explained that because children with special needs have historically been segregated from the general education settings, the educators who teach and serve those children have also studied in universities separately. ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs have often been kept segregated. This segregation in preservice educators programs continues the beliefs that children with special needs require specially trained teachers, which lead general teachers to excuse themselves from responsibility toward those children. Sustained segregation in preparation programs would decrease the improvement in inclusion programs (Piper).

One theoretical framework revealed that the paradigm of inclusive education is based on the principle that failure in learning of students with disabilities is due to a problem in the education system, not with the student. Changing attitudes and shifting perceptions of preservice educators from special education to inclusive education is a challenge that should be addressed (Sharma, 2010). Another challenge of increasing the number of children with disabilities in regular classrooms is preparing preservice educators for varied classrooms (Barned et al., 2011; Couse & Recchia, 2011; Voss & Bufkin, 2011). Robust plans to address and meet children's needs in inclusive classrooms should include high quality instructions, aligned assessments, and evidence-based interventions (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In addition, all preservice educators have to prepare for inclusion, and their training should require collaboration skills in order for effective applications to occur. The perspectives of preservice teachers should

be addressed while balancing current research approaches and evidence-based practices in authentic classroom settings (Voss & Bufkin, 2011).

Despite preparing early childhood educators to meet the needs of all children, their preparation remains a complicated challenge (Recchia & Puig, 2011). Early childhood educators play a vital role in children's development; nevertheless, the agreement of how to codify educators' skills and knowledge is still weak. A mismatch exists between the expectation of early childhood educators and the quality of preparation programs, which prepare those educators to serve children from birth to 8 years old and their families. Thus, it is necessary to pay attention to methods to improve the preparation programs for early childhood educators (Geer & Hamill, 2007; Whitebook & Ryan, n.d.).

In some states, the educators who work with young children are encouraged to meet the State Preschool Yearbook's ten quality standards. Some of the standards are that the preschool teachers must have a bachelor's degree, must have specialized preparation in preschool education, must receive at least 15 hours of annual inservice training, and assistant teachers must have a Child Development Associate or equivalent credential (Barnett & Carolan, 2013). The literature revealed the importance of meeting these standards in coursework. A mixed methods study by Voss and Bufkin (2011) showed evidence of a positive influence on the standards of fieldwork for early childhood preservice teachers in inclusive classrooms. The findings of that study, which was conducted between 2004 and 2010, indicated that fieldwork produced significant changes in preservice teachers' attitudes and skills about working in inclusive settings. Understanding and implementing effective inclusive education were the top priority

components of the ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs (Voss & Bufkin, 2011).

The researchers predicted that outcomes for preservice teachers will become enhanced when course content of teacher education programs are linked to field experiences, which allows preservice teachers to gain a realistic picture of their future inclusive classrooms (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2003; Couse & Recchia, 2011; Saracho, 2013; Voss & Bufkin, 2011). The literature is replete with studies that examine the role of preparation programs for preservice educators in developing collaboration skills (e.g., Anderson, 2013; Geer & Hamill, 2007; Hestenes et al., 2009; Miller & Stayton, 2006). However, noticeably absent in literature is the description of the degree to which preparation programs are specifically designed to develop collaboration skills for future educators including the school leaders (Grubert, 2011; McKenzie, 2009).

**Preparing Early Childhood Professionals
for Collaboration**

Collaboration between special and general education educators in teacher preparation is needed to attain necessary skills to be able to facilitate children's success in inclusive classrooms (Winn & Blanton, 2005). Teachers with highly developed skills in collaboration can create successful inclusive classrooms and provide a high quality education for all children. Preparing preservice educators for collaboration skills will enhance the quality of inclusion and increase all children's outcomes. There is consensus among researchers that the positive change in educators' skills and attitudes toward inclusion and collaboration is often associated with teacher preparation programs (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009).

High quality field experiences are beneficial for both the early childhood preservice and inservice educators because they are providing a learning opportunity from each other and are helping to develop positive relationships that improve teaching skills and children's outcomes (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Korth & Baum, 2011). Preservice educators also need to understand how to proficiently create appropriate environments, plan and implement different activities, and coordinate daily routines for young children in inclusive settings. Therefore, future early childhood educators and inclusion programs in the early childhood field can have a positive impact (Hestenes et al., 2009). Geer and Hamill (2007) emphasized the positive impact of collaborative communication and reflection among preservice educators on constructing and connecting their coursework knowledge to their field experiences and also establishing effective relationships with other professionals. Coursework on inclusion and collaboration is inadequate without practicing these skills in realistic settings (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009). However, preservice educators might face a challenge when they do their practicum or internship experiences, because they will be evaluated on their own isolated work, not on their work with others, which may increase a belief of the role of professionals working in isolation (Friend & Cook, 2013).

Griffin, Jones, and Kilgore (2006) have mentioned that about one half of special educators and about one third of general educators experienced content related to collaboration during their preservice preparation programs. The unavailability of sufficient support and training in collaboration practices and professional development for teachers in inclusive settings will limit the progress of achievement of all children (Damasco, 2013; Grubert, 2011). Each discipline has to learn about each other's roles,

skills, knowledge, and responsibilities in preparation programs in order to create effective interdisciplinary collaboration in early childhood settings (Anderson, 2013). Effective educators consider themselves as learners (Korth & Baum, 2011). Universities and colleges usually structure their preservice educators' training programs in discrete tracts for diverse disciplines. This minimizes the opportunities for preservice educators from different majors to take courses together that promote collaborative practices. Therefore, preservice educators learn a variety of strategies in their coursework to use for diverse children in inclusive settings, but they often do not have the chance to collaborate with other preservice educators to discuss and process learned strategies (Geer & Hamill, 2007).

Many faculty members in universities value collaboration as a critical skill in preparation programs for educators (Lesley, Hamman, Olivarez, Button, & Griffith, 2009). Nevertheless, inadequate educators' preparation may occur for collaboration skills and ethics (Bock et al., 2011). Instructors in colleges and universities recommend assigned readings to study the aspect of collaboration, teach sociological principles for professional interactions, model professional interactions in multiple settings, demonstrate real collaborative practices by observation or simulated practices, and present case studies and situations in order to respond to new scenarios related to collaboration (Dettmer et al., 2013). These types of preparation programs would support planning and problem-solving skills across disciplines and can be considered powerful tools for establishing positive change for early childhood teacher education systems (Anderson, 2013). Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) found in their pilot study that coursework and field experiences that the novice teachers encountered during their

prepration programs did not provide adequate preparation for collaborative practices in the real world of teaching. This insufficient preparation impacts the confidence of new educators, which results in reluctance to collaborate with other professionals.

A study by McKenzie (2009) found that most special education faculty participants provided collaboration courses, but they are only a start. Less than one half of the faculty participants indicated that they required their students to collaborate with their general education colleagues during their learning in preparation programs, so the majority of preservice special education educators did not experience a real collaborative effort with general education colleagues until they began their actual career in schools. The results also showed that the participants felt that their general education colleagues valued the collaboration process and preservice general educators were less prepared than special educators in collaboration skills upon completion of their preparation programs. The author concluded that most of the concerns related to collaboration among professional educators in inclusive schools are attributable to the quality of preparation programs for both special and general educators (McKenzie).

Dettmer et al. (2013) stated that schools today emphasize using *our students* and *our classrooms* phrases instead of using *my students* and *my classrooms*; nevertheless, many educators feel unprepared for collaboration, which makes them appear as helpers vs. collaborators, with other professionals. Students in preparation programs should learn activities and practices to become efficient collaborators in their new teaching roles and interact with families of all students with and without disabilities.

Fortunately, all necessary skills to apply beneficial collaboration relationships among educators can be learned (Cramer, 2006). Learning the necessary skills, strategies,

and changing attitudes and perceptions about collaboration are keys to starting

collaborative practices to provide maximum benefits for children with disabilities in

inclusive classrooms. A gap exists between theory and practice regarding educators and

their ability to create successful inclusive classrooms for all children, which is considered

a vital challenge (Salend, 2005).

Research on Early Childhood Educators
Collaboration Impact

A pilot study by Anderson (2013) used qualitative data from two focus groups to

explore the experiences of second year, preservice ECE teachers and social work

graduate students about interdisciplinary education training and collaborative activities as

part of their graduate coursework. This study suggested that both graduate groups

realized the benefits of preservice inter-professional collaboration, but the experience of

working across disciplines was a challenge. This study also suggested that opportunities

for inter-professional collaboration, as part of early childhood preparation programs, play

a critical role in training the next generation of early childhood educators to work more

efficiently across disciplines in order to support desired child outcomes.

The findings of the previous study were consistent with results of a survey study

by Miller and Stayton (2006) that was conducted as a second national examination of the

practices of preservice early childhood educators in 24 interdisciplinary preparation

programs in 12 states. The authors found several benefits of using interdisciplinary

teaming in the early childhood preparation programs, as well as some challenges that

faced preservice educators. The students in the program viewed the modeling of

collaboration as a huge benefit. On the other hand, one of the barriers to the participants

who were involved in the interdisciplinary preparation programs was the administrative

structure of higher education, because the traditional structure of higher education does not support early childhood interdisciplinary preparation programs. Another barrier was a lack of consistency between the reality of program practices in early childhood settings and state licensure patterns for early childhood interdisciplinary preparation programs (Miller & Stayton).

Geer and Hamill (2007) conducted another qualitative study to examine the online communications between two groups to discover what they chose to discuss as they applied their learning at the university in their field experiences. The results showed positive outcomes for the participants that go beyond collaboration between the two groups. The greatest advantages of this collaboration were that the participants supported and learned from each other, as well as encouraged their cross-discipline classmates (Geer & Hamill).

In university settings, program leaders have provided very limited opportunities for faculty across departments to collaborate by using a team teaching approach in order to prepare preservice educators to work collaboratively in educational inclusive programs. Hestenes et al. (2009) addressed this approach by articulating a unique model of program collaboration between ECSE and ECE preservice educators within one university. This program prepares early childhood field educators to work with children with and without disabilities and by collaborating with different professionals. The program is comprised of a set of interdisciplinary courses in different areas taught with faculty along with co-teachers teaching the courses about the core methods. This 10-year history of the interdisciplinary collaboration program showed the benefits and challenges of this approach by data gathered from involved faculty and students.

The results of this study showed that the benefits far outweigh the challenges of applying a team teaching approach in early childhood coursework. Some examples of benefits included in this research were the opportunity for instructors to share various viewpoints with students in these courses, students learn the importance of inclusion and provided examples from both fields, the instructors learn from each other, and solve problems together. Also, some examples of challenges encountered in this study were the time consumed by sharing responsibilities among instructors in this program, the differences in philosophical and educational backgrounds between the instructors that affected the arrangement work, and personality and interaction differences. However, the challenges can be minimized through precise planning, constant communication, and evaluation (Hestenes et al.).

Teacher preparation programs may improve when faculty supports those programs that lead preservice teachers to becoming certified with excellent outcomes (Anderson, 2013; Forlin, 2012; Voss & Bufkin, 2011). Winn and Blanton (2005) added in their article that faculty members in higher education should support collaboration by sharing expertise, modeling collaboration (Grubert, 2011), understanding the process and the ultimate goal of collaboration, and openly discussing beliefs and values.

One mixed method study by Roache, Shore, Gouleta, and Butkevich (2003) included 125 educational professionals who taught students in grades K-12. This study showed that the educational professionals lacked collaborative skills, did not receive appropriate training on how to collaborate, and did not have sufficient support from their schools' administrators to collaborate with other educators to serve all students in inclusive settings. The results also indicated that teachers need training in collaboration,

encouragement from the administration, and time for collaboration. Grubert (2011) supported these results when he emphasized that administrators must support collaborative school cultures to promote successful and sustained growth in collaboration.

Choi (2010) conducted a qualitative case study to explore the experiences of six educators from one early childhood program about their professional development and collaboration within an inclusive setting. Findings of this study suggested a need for educators to be prepared with skills, knowledge, and practices via preservice and inservice trainings in order to meet all children's needs and increase the effectiveness of inclusion.

Gaps in the Current Literature

Cook and Friend (2010) determined that it is a challenge to conduct research on collaboration in special education for two reasons. First, collaboration is a style that exists only when applied to a specific effort. Most of the studies on collaboration consist of examining other activities such as team interactions, consultation, inclusive practices, or co-teaching with a collaborative style. The second reason is regarding the difficulty of identifying and determining the criteria of which an activity is considered a collaborative effort. Despite the challenges that might face researchers, there is evidence for optimism. The literature revealed that the collaborative inclusive schools showed greater success with their students' achievements than traditional inclusive schools where teachers tend to work in isolation (Cook & Friend).

There is a dearth of research literature regarding collaboration among educators and on specific collaborative models (Garderen et al., 2012), especially in preschools.

Few studies have examined collaborative practices among educators in preschools. Despite the growth in utilization of collaborative teaching approaches, few studies have been conducted to explore teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about collaborative practices (Austin, 2001). Notable recent exceptions include Brownell, Adams, and Sindelar (2006), Hunt et al. (2004), and Lingo et al. (2011), who focused on the importance of collaboration between special and general education teachers to increase academic achievement and access to the general education curriculum for exceptional children and youth in general education settings.

In addition, one of the major limitations was that most of the studies reviewed on this particular subject have conducted qualitative research methods. Studies on this particular topic that have conducted a quantitative method was difficult, primarily because finding measuring tools that measured diverse variables related to collaboration (Damasco, 2013). Empirical studies that focus on the extent of the relationships between collaboration among educators and children's achievements are scarce (Grubert, 2011; Moolenaar, Sleegers, & Daly, 2012).

A lack of common terminology is evident across research studies, which made locating studies difficult (Dettmer et al., 2013; Garderen et al., 2012) and made the concept of collaboration and understanding diverse collaborative practices unclear. For example, cooperation, consultation, and coaching are various terminology have been used as a synonym for collaboration. This may lead to mistakes in implementing collaborative practices and promote negative attitudes toward collaboration.

Mastropieri and Scruggs (2012) confirmed that several types of collaborative work in schools, such as co-teaching, have been effective in facilitating inclusion efforts,

but some challenges regarding planning and practice occur. This led to professionals realizing the importance of providing training and monitoring educators on inclusion efforts and the necessity of conducting further research on educational inclusion by listening to educators' experiences in order to provide support and create successful inclusion benefiting both children with and without disabilities (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2012). Due to the lack of general educators' understanding of teaching children with disabilties, more research is needed to show and address the reality of implementing inclusion in schools based on the sights and perspectives of all school personnel (Grubert, 2011).

Most studies about collaboration conducted among educational professionals in K-12 schools reflected a need to conduct more studies for the early childhood field. The nature of collaboration in early childhood is different from K-12 settings due to the nature of the roles of ECE and ECSE professionals in classrooms. Thus, the need for specific literature related to early childhood is a necessity. In addition, there is a need to pay attention to preparing teachers in early childhood education by using a team teaching model approach in universities (Hestenes et al., 2009). Because the attention to inclusion in early childhood settings increased, there is an associated need for conducting more research to investigate the quality of early childhood professionals, the contents of professional development, and collaborative teamwork in order to increase the outcomes of children with and without disabilities and their families (Choi, 2010).

Future research is needed concerning the differences in attitudes towards collaborative practices in inclusive settings between educators who experienced preparation on collaboration skills for inclusive settings and those who have not

experienced any preparation programs on collaboration (Damasco, 2013). Due to the importance of learning collaboration skills in preparation programs, a need exists to investigate the accuracy of implementing learned collaborative practices and skills when preservice educators start their own teaching careers, and to evaluate the quality of their interactions with professionals in other disciplines to teach and serve children in inclusive settings (Geer & Hamill, 2007). Examining beginning teacher motivations to participate or avoid collaboration with other educational professionals in schools would benefit preparation curriculum programs. High quality preparation programs and practices must be designed to fit and reflect the current experiences and expressed needs of novice teachers (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009). In spite of the fact that policies of inclusion have been there for several years, a gap in ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs still remain because many new educators feel unprepared to teach young children in inclusive classrooms (Barned et al., 2011; Couse & Recchia, 2011; Voss & Bufkin, 2011).

McKenzie (2009) argued that future research also requires identifying preparation programs that develop collaboration skills through designated content and merged field experiences for general and special education departments, and comparing graduate students from such programs to those who have not experienced these programs to investigate the quality of outcomes. Also, due to the lack of exploring the nature of collaboration training programs, a need exists to conduct national studies to address preparation programs for special and general preservice educators within both undergraduate and graduate levels. Additionally, although few studies addressed the insights of special education faculty about the effectiveness and the nature of

collaboration training, there is a necessity to examine other faculty who teach future general educators as well as service providers (McKenzie).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed literature related to previous research associated with the topics of inclusion in preschool settings, collaboration and its role in early childhood education, and the importance of preservice professional development on improving collaboration and teaming skills. Mounting evidence supports that the high quality of educators in inclusive classrooms is the best predictor for positive children's outcomes (Saracho, 2013). Providing high quality preparation programs can create high quality educators who are able to improve children's and their families' outcomes (Piper, 2007). Preparation programs for educators produce more efficient collaborative professionals when these programs emphasize creating a collaborative culture (McKenzie, 2009). Collaboration among educators that is guided by available research helps to enhance student achievement in inclusive settings (McDuffie, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2009). In addition, ECE and ECSE professionals need to prepare adequately in order to understand how to share beliefs and knowledge about children with diverse abilities and to instruct them in ways that meet the needs of diverse children (Anderson, 2013; Choi, 2010; Cramer, 2006; Winn & Blanton, 2005).

Grubert (2011) emphasized that collaboration is a core 21st century skill for benefiting educators, children, families, and schools. Effective collaboration can provide higher levels of knowledge in addressing and meeting the needs of children from diverse backgrounds and abilities. All stakeholders in education must seriously consider collaboration (Grubert). Most studies and articles called for the importance of training

educators to gain knowledge and skills about how to collaborate effectively in order to provide high quality teaching and services to exceptional children in inclusive schools.

Further, the literature studies that address preservice training programs in collaboration are limited. Hence, a study to explore ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs regarding how they provide training about professional collaboration knowledge and skills in order to enable future teachers to work effectively in inclusive classrooms.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) personnel preparation programs on preparing early childhood personnel for collaboration knowledge and skills in inclusive school settings. The main focus of this study was to explore the existence and the nature of collaboration training programs to address preparation for special and general preservice educators at the undergraduate level.

A case study is an approach for empirical inquiry to investigate a phenomenon in real life settings (Yin, 2003). Merriam (2009) defined case study as an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). A single case study is a beneficial method to study educational innovations, inform policy, and evaluate programs. Case study methodology was an appropriate approach to investigate the research questions due to the contextual understanding and in-depth description of the real-world case utilizing multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2014). This study produced in-depth understanding of how these preparation programs provided collaboration knowledge and skills for their students in order to prepare them to work collaboratively in their future inclusive early childhood settings. This case study reflected meaning that was embedded in the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of the participants toward collaboration.

The identification of various sources of information was beneficial for collecting in-depth data (Creswell, 2007). I investigated a bounded system as a case study, and the case study was conducted at one university in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. I utilized individual interviews, focus groups, observations, and reviewed documents as multiple sources of data collection to triangulate the study's findings. The findings of the study provided a valuable source of information that could support and improve the quality of ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs to enhance the future teachers' skills in collaboration to create successful inclusive practices.

Research Questions

This study was designed to investigate how ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs provided training in collaboration and teaming skills in order to prepare preservice teachers to work collaboratively in inclusive preschools. The research questions that framed the focus of this case study were as follows:

Q1   How do program coordinators and instructors in personnel preparation programs characterize the experiences provided to ECE and ECSE preservice teachers that promote effective knowledge and skills in the areas of teaming and collaboration?

Q2   What methods of training in collaboration and teaming do preservice ECE and ECSE professionals receive during their personnel preparation programs?

Q3   What are the similarities and differences in the way ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs train their preservice teachers for collaboration and teaming responsibilities?

Theoretical Framework

Constructionism is a social science theory in which meaning is constructed through human and world interaction (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism was appropriate to utilize in this study to gain in-depth understanding of how ECE and ECSE personnel

preparation programs provided collaboration knowledge and skills to their students. Constructionism seeks to provide interpretation of understandings of the participants' perspectives (Crotty, 1998). In this study, different participants constructed meaning in different ways regarding the same experience. Extracting participants' perspectives and experiences about providing training in collaboration were reflected in the degree to which they offer these types of training and the level of their commitment to deliver them to the students.

In addition, the acquisition of collaboration knowledge and skills has the potential to develop high quality teachers. Improving preservice professionals' skills and attitudes about collaboration are recommended practices (e.g., Choi, 2010; Grubert, 2011; Hestenes et al., 2009). Also, the development of collaborative skills should continue during their teaching practices through professional development programs. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and Andragogy theory (Knowles, 1984) emphasize adult learning and the significance of developing valuable learning skills and experiences. Both theories helped in investigating the preparation of ECE and ECSE professionals for collaborative practices in inclusive preschools. Andragogy theory would focus on creating learning opportunities applicable to their professional lives, while Bandura's social learning theory supports preservice teachers in learning through practice, observation, and modeling.

Setting and Participants

Purposeful sampling is an essential technique in qualitative research in order to concentrate on specific characteristics of individuals that are of interest and to obtain responses that hopefully help to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2007). Merriam

(1998) added, "Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). Because of the nature of qualitative case studies, the sample size is often small (Daniel, 2012). In this study, I used snowball sampling (Merriam, 2009). In snowball sampling the researcher locates the initial targeted purposeful sample of participants and asks them to list names of other participants who will meet the established criteria for participation in a study. Those next participants may recommend different names and so on. Snowball sampling is an appropriate strategy when the population that the researchers are interested in studying is difficult to locate.

University Setting

A university located in the Rocky Mountain Region that provides both ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs at the undergraduate level was selected as the setting for the case study. The university is recognized through state legislative mandate as the state leader in preparing educators and offers a comprehensive array of baccalaureate programs, masters, and doctoral degrees, primarily in the field of education, with selective admission standards. The university has six colleges: Humanities and Social Sciences, Business Administration, Education and Behavioral Sciences, Natural and Health Sciences, Performing and Visual Arts, and University College. These colleges offer 106 undergraduate programs, 120 graduate programs, and 60 extended campus and online programs. The average class size ranges from 25-35 students, depending on the program, and the student to the faculty ratio is 17:1. There are approximately 12,000 students from all 50 states and 49 countries. The student population is 62 percent female, 38 percent male, and 19 percent minorities. The

minorities include non-US citizen/ international, Hispanic, African American, Asian, Native American, Hawaiian, and multi-racial.

The College of Education and Behavioral Sciences at the university provides both ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs for the undergraduate level. These two programs meet the criteria for ECE and ECSE teaching emphases and licensure programs that prepare education professionals to serve children from birth to eight years of age. Graduates from ECE and ECSE programs will receive a Bachelor of Arts degree. Both programs offer state licensure to the students who successfully complete the programs.

Early childhood education program. The undergraduate ECE program provides interdisciplinary liberal arts foundation for students who select the Early Childhood Education Professional Teacher Education Preparation (PTEP) program. The program was developed collaboratively by faculty of the university and a community college in order to prepare students to teach children from birth through age 8. Throughout their education, students participate in campus-based coursework and classroom-based experiences. Upon graduation, students will be eligible to receive a teaching license after passing the state exam, which will allow them to direct an early childhood center, and teach in pre-K settings, and grades K-3 in a public school.

The total of course requirements for the ECE program is 126-130 credits. The program consists of three parts: liberal arts core (40 credits), required major (42 credits), and early childhood professional teacher education program requirements (47-48 credits). This PTEP program provides training on the topics of child development and learning, cultural sensitivity, children's literature, authentic projects and case studies, and teaching elementary level content with an emphasis on the primary grades K-3. The classes of the

program include a variety of topics that are related to early childhood education, such as guidance strategies for children, infant and toddler theory and practice, nutrition, health and safety, and school programs for young children. In addition, the program provides continuous classroom experiences. In the community college classes, students are involved in classrooms with children from birth to age five. In the university classes, students gain experience in elementary school classrooms with children ages five through eight. The last semester is a full-time student teaching experience in a K-3 classroom.

According to the ECE senior instructor, the program has somewhere between 200 and 300 students. Some students are studying at the university and others are studying at the extended campus in a different city, and they have the same coursework. As the ECE senior instructor mentioned, the ECE program focuses on teaching the child in context, the child, and the family. The program emphasizes child-centered courses, PTEP courses, classroom management courses, diversity courses, and assessment courses. The general anticipated outcomes of the ECE program are as the senior instructor stated, "We want well-rounded students who will be excellent teachers. They will have a licensure to teach kindergarten through third grade or they'll have a background in early childhood and they can run a childcare."

The ECE program follows the state standards for teacher preparation and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards. The ECE senior instructor explained the long process of developing their syllabi of courses. The syllabi of the courses, including the course objectives, were developed based on these two sets of standards. The instructors assign reading materials and activities in order to accomplish those objectives. After that, the college curriculum committee decides the acceptance of

the quality of the courses, and then the Professional Education Council reviews the syllabi. The last step is when the state accepts the syllabi of courses into the program.

The ECE senior instructor highlighted multiple tasks that the ECE program coordinator manages. One of those tasks is to arrange the ECE courses schedule and to assure that the courses have instructors teaching them. Another task is to work with the student teachers and the practicum students and provide appropriate placements for them, and make sure that they have suitable supervisors to mentor them out in the field. One important task of the coordinator is to solve problems that arise with the students.

Early childhood special education program. The undergraduate ECSE program consists of recommended Liberal Arts Core (LAC) requirements, courses in early childhood and early childhood special education theory, practice, and pedagogy as well as courses in the PTEP program. The teaching emphasis program ensures students have the breadth of knowledge and skills to be an early childhood special education teacher to teach young children from birth to eight years of age. The program emphasizes promoting families as partners, collaborative and cross-disciplinary service approaches, recommended intervention practices that are based on research evidence, and appropriate practices for work with children and their families across a range of abilities and cultural experiences. Students are required to take technology courses; and the use of technology is incorporated into the special education coursework. Extensive field based experiences in inclusive settings with children in three age-groups: birth to 2 years, 3-5 years, and 5-8 years are included.

The nature of the ECSE program is to prepare preservice teachers to be able to work with young children with disabilities in inclusive settings. The ECSE program

meets national and state early childhood special education professional development standards for the promotion of development and learning of young children from birth to age 8 in inclusive settings. This major allows early childhood special education teachers to learn and apply the roles and responsibilities they must perform on a daily basis. The students learn how (a) to assess young children with disabilities and (b) to plan and implement an Individualized Family Service Program (IFSP) and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in collaboration with families and professionals under the rules and regulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the state Exceptional Children Education Act (ECEA). The total of degree requirements of the teaching emphasis of the program is 122 credits. The program credits are distributed as follows: (a) LAC (specific LAC 22 credits and remaining LAC 21 credits); (b) required major (70 credits); and (c) early childhood PTEP (12 credits).

The ECSE is a new program, which was started in 2013. According to the ECSE program coordinator, they have approximately 40 to 45 students who were accepted or admitted to the program. The major sets of standards that ECSE program follows are the state standards and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) professional learning specialist standards; in addition to State Department of Human Services, Licensed Child Care Director.

The ECSE program coordinator indicated that the program focuses on working with families and other professionals as well as on how to refer and establish eligibility of young children with disability and the IEP process and IFSP. The program emphasizes assessment methods on implementing and evaluating instruction, as well as focuses on typical and atypical development. The program includes learning about the evidence-

based practices, different curricula, and the Division for Early Childhood recommended practices. Another important component of the program is supporting a transdisciplinary teaming model in early childhood special education. Also, the program focuses on the field experience and practicum to practice what the students learn in the courses.

The ECSE program coordinator highlighted many different anticipated outcomes for their students. One of the anticipated outcomes is that the students are qualified to teach young children in inclusive settings, and they are able to collaborate with other educational professionals. Another anticipated outcome is that the students demonstrate the ability to plan instructions, to evaluate, and to revise their work. The students should be equipped with the knowledge and the skills of evidence-based practice, DEC recommended practices, and assessments.

The coordinator joined the university two years ago and after the team of the syllabi development created ECSE syllabi for the courses. Also, because the program is new, the ECSE program coordinator is planning to conduct a comprehensive review of the entire program after teaching all the new courses to make the necessary adjustment and revisions to the courses based on the feedback of the instructors and students' performances. The ECSE program coordinator listed some other responsibilities, such as making sure that the courses meet the state and the national standards, making sure that the content of the courses are not overlapping, and making sure that the instruction is of the highest quality. Further, the coordinator needs to plan for the courses' schedules for every semester and who will be the instructors, collaborate with the state agencies and community colleges to build relationships.

Participants

There were three groups of participants: the ECSE program coordinator and the ECE senior instructor, ECE and ECSE instructors, and undergraduate students. In general, program coordinators are often expected to support the program director by performing administrative tasks that are related to recruiting students, planning, directing and coordinating a specific program. The instructors plan course goals, content, activities and assignments and deliver the course. The undergraduate students are expected to be the future early childhood educators.

In this study, there were nineteen participants comprised of three different groups (ECSE program coordinator, seven instructors, and eleven students). The participants were identified by pseudonyms to ensure their confidentiality. In addition, the current ECE program coordinator could not participate in this study because the coordinator was recovering from a serious illness. For the purpose of this study, an ECE senior instructor agreed to participate to provide information about the ECE program.

Specific inclusionary criteria were applied in selecting the participants. The inclusionary criteria for the coordinator and senior instructor included the following: (a) the coordinator and senior instructor have experiences as ECE and ECSE program coordinator and senior instructor for undergraduate level at the same university; and (b) the coordinator and senior instructor should have at least one year of experience in their position.

The inclusionary criteria for the instructors included the following: (a) the instructors must have experience in teaching undergraduate courses in ECE or ECSE undergraduate programs; and (b) the instructors must have taught at least one section of

the courses that contain direct learning about professional collaboration content, as identified by the ECSE program coordinator and the ECE senior instructor. Three instructors participated from each program. Some of the instructors had no teaching credential, while some of the instructors had one or more teaching credentials for PS-6, K-6, special education K-12, Postsecondary Career and Technical Education (CTE), and/or speech language pathologist.

The coordinator's and instructors' demographics are shown in Table 1. The coordinator and instructors consisted of six females and two males. The formal educational degree of the coordinator and instructors was between a Masters and Doctorate degree and had between 3 to 26 years of teaching experience at the university/college level. The table shows that three of the participants had no experience in teaching at inclusive preschool settings, while five instructors had experience in teaching at inclusive preschool settings.

The inclusionary criteria for selecting the students were the following: (a) the students must study at the undergraduate level in ECE and ECSE programs at this university; (b) the students should have taken selected courses within the past two years; and (c) the students should be in at least their junior year. Only three ECSE students participated in this study because ECSE is a new program and had only those three students at their junior or senior year. There were eight ECE students who participated in this study. Traditionally, the recommended size of the focus group is between six to eight interviewees per group (Creswell, 2014).

Table 1

Coordinator's and Instructors' Demographics

Participants	Gender	Educational Degree	Years of Experience in Teaching at University or College Level	Experience in Teaching in Preschool Inclusive Settings
Participant 1	Female	Doctorate	8	No
Participant 2	Female	Masters	26	Yes
Participant 3	Female	Masters	10	Yes
Participant 4	Female	Masters	6	Yes
Participant 5	Male	Doctorate	4	Yes
Participant 6	Female	Doctorate	3	No
Participant 7	Male	Doctorate	11	No
Participant 8	Female	Doctorate	7	Yes

The students' demographics are shown in Table 2. Pseudonyms for students' names were used in order to protect their confidentiality. All the students were females and the class status of students ranged between juniors (4) and seniors (6) and one sophomore. The sophomore student participated in the focus group because she already had enrolled in at least one of the selected courses in this study and she had experience with the content of the course. The students ranged in age from 21and above and had

completed between 21 to 42 credits in their majors. All participating students were

working in early childhood settings while enrolled in the programs.

Table 2

Students' Demographics

Participants (Students)	Gender	Major	Class Status	Number of Completed Credits in the Major
Student A	Female	ECSE	Senior	25
Student B	Female	ECSE	Senior	25
Student C	Female	ECSE	Senior	25
Student D	Female	ECE	Senior	24
Student E	Female	ECE	Junior	N/A
Student F	Female	ECE	Junior	24
Student G	Female	ECE	Junior	N/A
Student H	Female	ECE	Senior	42
Student I	Female	ECE	Senior	42
Student J	Female	ECE	Sophomore	21
Student K	Female	ECE	Junior	42

Procedure

This section articulates specific procedures identified to address the research problem and aims to answer the research questions. Once this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix A), I contacted both the ECE senior instructor and the ECSE program coordinator at the university by email. I sent them a brief description of the research study in order to obtain their consent to participate. After obtaining their consent, we scheduled an individual meeting at a mutually convenient time and place. During the interview time, I asked them to identify two to three courses in the program in which collaboration content is taught. I also requested the participants to provide a list of instructors who taught identified undergraduate courses that provided professional collaboration content for students.

I contacted the selected instructors at the university by email, seeking their consent to participate in the study. During the interview with the instructors, I asked them to pass a flyer via either email or in class inviting recommended students who were enrolled in the identified courses that support professional collaboration content to participate in the study. The flyer contained an invitation to participate in a focus group interview, a brief description of what would be required, and contact information of the researcher. After interviewing the instructors, I observed suggested classes of the instructors for the courses that were available in the same semester. The students who were interested in participating contacted the researcher by email. I sent the consent form by email to those students who initially agreed to participate in this study and determined a place for a meeting. The students' consent form contained (a) a brief description about the study and focus group interview, and (b) preferred mode of communication. Then, I

obtained the signed consent forms from the students before starting the focus group

interview. I conducted two focus group meetings, one with ECE students and the second

with ECSE students. Traditionally, the recommended size of the focus group is between

six to eight interviewees per group (Creswell, 2014).

In addition, I asked all participants to complete the demographic information

forms (see Appendix B) prior to conducting individual and group interviews in order to

gather information about all participants. For example, the demographic questionnaire for

the coordinator and instructors included questions, such as degree held and number of

teaching experience years. The purpose of the demographic questionnaire was to provide

in-depth information about the participants. In order to understand and organize the

procedures, I developed a table that summarized the study procedures (see Appendix C).

This summary explained how each research question was answered.

<div align="center">**Data Collection**</div>

Many sources of evidence can provide data for case studies, including individual

and group interviews, observations, and documents (Yin, 2003). Collecting data using

multiple sources of information strengthens evidence and increases the accuracy of the

findings. The focus of the case study was on how ECE and ECSE programs imparted

professional collaboration skills among their students. I used several methods of data

collection, specifically interviews (both individual and focus group interviews), class

observations, and document reviews (i.e., course syllabi).

Interviews

Interviews are a primary source to gain data in qualitative studies. When the

researcher cannot observe feelings, behavior, or how individuals interpret the context

around them, interviewing people is substantial (Merriam, 2009). Individual and group interviews are critical to reflect insights about human actions or affairs and to help researchers to identify other relevant forms of sources (Yin, 2014). The dynamic nature of interviews is an essential component in the development of successful qualitative studies (Lichtman, 2014). Merriam (2009) mentioned that the interviews enable "the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 90).

For this study, I interviewed three groups of participants: the ECSE program coordinator and ECE senior instructor, ECE and ECSE instructors, and students from both programs in order to gain information and understand how ECE and ECSE programs provided training on professional collaboration. Semi-structured interviews were utilized in this study for both individual and group interviews. As a researcher, I utilized individual interviews with ECE senior instructor, ECSE program coordinator, and six instructors; and I employed a focus group interview with ECSE and ECE students who have studied courses that support learning about professional collaboration knowledge and skills.

I interviewed the ECSE program coordinator and the ECE senior instructor to obtain the following information: (a) general description about their programs; (b) description about how they provide professional collaboration content; (c) their opinions about the professional collaboration; (d) their recommendations to improve their programs, particularly professional collaboration content; and (e) their suggestions of instructors, who teach courses that support professional collaboration knowledge and skills.

Next, I interviewed suggested instructors to obtain the following information: (a) a general description about their courses that contain professional collaboration content; (b) providing the researcher copies of the content or the syllabi of these courses; (c) description about how they deliver professional collaboration content to their students and how they assess students learning; (c) their perspectives about the professional collaboration and teaming; (d) their recommendations to improve their courses, particularly about professional collaboration content; (e) suggested times and places of their classes to observe, if selected courses were available at the same semester; and (f) facilitate communication between the researcher and the students in order to invite them to participate in focus groups.

Thereafter, I interviewed students for two focus groups, the first one with ECE students and the second one with ECSE students, to obtain the following information: (a) students' perspectives about their learning regarding professional collaboration, and (b) students' recommendations in order to improve their learning about professional collaboration. I provided each student with a copy of the interview questions at the beginning of our meeting. I was the moderator, observer, listener, and analyst for the perceptions of the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015). I coded the participants with pseudonyms; each student participant had a different letter.

Due to the size of the focus group, I used a few open-ended questions in order to obtain in-depth discussion (Creswell, 2014). Krueger and Casey (2015) highlighted the importance of focus groups in generating information, assessing needs, and improving existing programs. Gathering more in-depth information from ECE and ECSE students about their training regarding professional collaboration was the main purpose of

utilizing focus groups. A focus group interview is distinguished from an individual interview in regards to the nature of the interaction, in which the focus group interview tends to trigger more ideas and thoughts among focus group participants (Lichtman, 2014).

Initially, I interviewed each participant individually between 40 to 60 minutes, and the two focus group interviews lasted about 90 minutes. I interviewed the participants at a time and place that was convenient for them. Creswell (2007) mentioned that the interview site should be quiet to avoid distraction. At the interview site, I asked all participants to sign the consent form and to complete the demographic information form before starting the interview. The interviews were guided by a list of open-ended questions (see Appendix D). All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim in order to ensure that the interviews were preserved for analysis (Merriam, 2009). Finally, a follow up email was sent to the ECSE program coordinator and the ECE senior instructor after completing the interviews with all of the participants.

Observation

Direct observation was another source of evidence in conducting this case study and provided additional information. Creswell (2014) defined observation in a qualitative research as "when the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site" (p. 190). The author also indicated the benefits of observation on investigating topics that may not be obtained during interviews. Developing an observational tool based on the literature review helped to provide guidance to the researcher during the observations. Yin (2014) stated "observational instruments can be developed as part of the case study protocol, and a field worker may

try to assess the occurrence of certain types of behaviors during certain periods of time in the field" (p. 113).

Merriam (2009) listed some components of performing the observation process. I used some of these components, such as: observing the participants; activities and interactions; and classroom conversation. I developed an observational form (see Appendix E) in order to answer the research questions, and I wrote field notes to document activities during the observations. In order to gain the maximum benefit of observations, the length of time of each observation and the number of observations were discussed and determined with the course instructors. For this study, I observed two classes of two courses that were available at the same semester of conducting the study. I observed one suggested class of an ECE course and another suggested class of an ECSE course. I utilized the observational form as guidance during the observation time.

I observed the used methods of delivering the content that support collaborative practices, used activities during class time, and the interactions between the instructor and students and among students, and classroom conversation. I used the developed observational form as a guide for the observation. I wrote field notes in order to document activities during the observations. The course instructors suggested the topics and the dates for observations. The length of time of each observation was approximately three hours; I spent the whole class time. I provided refreshments during the observations, and I introduced myself to the students and the purpose of the observation.

Documents

Merriam (2009) defined documents as "the umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand" (p. 139).

Using documents to produce a certain type of information would be the object of explicit

plans of collecting data (Yin, 2003). In addition, Creswell (2014) indicated that using

documents would assist the researcher to obtain the words and language of participants

and to have extended information of what they mentioned. The unique aspect of using

documents was that the researcher could access this source of information at any time and

anywhere. Also, Shenton (2004) stated that utilizing documents would support data "to

provide a background to and help explain the attitudes and behavior of those in the group

under scrutiny as well as to verify particular details that participants have supplied" (p.

66). Analyzing the course syllabi of suggested courses by ECSE program coordinator and

ECE instructors would corroborate and strengthen the evidence from different sources as

well as providing further specific details (Yin, 2003).

In this study, I reviewed the syllabi of six courses that were suggested by the

ECSE program coordinator and the ECE instructors. These courses included sections that

support and value learning in professional collaboration. I asked the instructors to provide

the syllabi and any available extended explanatory documents. For the content analysis of

the syllabi, I looked for content that supported the preparation of students for professional

collaboration in inclusive preschools using a rubric (see Appendix F) by utilizing: (a)

DEC Recommended Practices that are related to teaming and collaboration (Division of

Early Childhood, 2014); (b) Personnel DEC Standards (Standard 7: Collaboration); and

(c) NAEYC standards that are related to collaboration and teaming.

Data Analysis

The results of the individual interviews, focus group interviews, the documents,

and the observations provided the content for data analysis. In qualitative studies, data

often convey via words, which include direct quotations from the interviewees, in-depth descriptions when observing individuals' activities, and quotations or excerpts obtained from different documents (Merriam, 2009). Individual and focus group interviews, document reviews, observations data were collected over the summer and fall semester of the 2015 school year. I followed the six steps of data analysis process in Creswell (2014).

The first step was organizing and preparing the raw data for thematic analysis. I transcribed the individual and group interviews verbatim, saved copies of the syllabi and extended course documents in the computer, typed all the field notes of the observations and saved them in my personal computer files. The second step was reading all data in order to gain general ideas and thoughts. I read the interviews and other documents multiple times to make sure of the accuracy. In order to be sure that the information reflects the participants' thoughts, I used a member check procedure (Merriam, 2009). I submitted the transcribed interviews to the participants and highlighted the major points of the interviews for reviewing and checking the accuracy of information.

The third step was coding all the data by utilizing the QSR International NVivo 10 (2014) software as a qualitative computer tool that used to assist in analyzing and coding data. The NVivo 10 can be used to organize and analyze interviews, textual sources, field notes, and other types of qualitative data including audio and video files. Thus, using NVivo 10 helped the researcher in analyzing data to save time and effort as well as organizing information. The applications of this tool helped to locate all text associated with specific codes. In order to be more efficient in using this software, I completed a qualitative software course that focused and supported using NVivo 10. I loaded all of the transcripts and documents on NVivo 10 software for analysis.

The fourth step was using the coding process to produce a description of individuals, settings, and themes for analysis. For example, I analyzed the data to describe participant demographics and their perceptions and perspectives of providing professional collaboration content within their training programs and its impact on preparing future teachers to collaborate in their real inclusive classrooms. Qualitative data from the interviews, observations, and documents review were analyzed into themes (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2014) also stated "researchers can generate codes for this description. This analysis is useful in designing detailed descriptions for case studies" (p. 199). I analyzed the data using theoretical coding to categorize emerging themes.

The fifth step was utilizing a narrative passage to describe and convey the findings. In this stage, I used tables to display some of the findings. The last step was including the interpretation of the findings. At the end of the interpretation stage, I provided recommendations for policy, preservice preparation practices, and future research that were based on the findings.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research studies, reliability and validity are viewed differently than in quantitative research studies (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative validity refers to the idea that the examiner checks for the accuracy of the findings by using specific procedures; while reliability means that the examiner's methods are consistent across various examiners and various projects (Gibbs, 2007). In this study, I followed strategies identified by Creswell (2014) and Merriam (2009) to increase the accuracy of the findings. Establishing triangulation was the first strategy in which I examined evidence from different data sources and utilized this data to construct a consistent justification for

themes (see Table 3). Utilizing triangulation as multiple methods of evidence was more

powerful in the case study data collection because the findings likely would be more

precise and persuasive (Yin, 2003). Thus, triangulation was a vital component for the

validity of the findings and to ensure the reliability.

Table 3

Establishing Triangulation

Research Questions	Coordinator/ Senior Instructor Interviews	Instructors Interviews	Focus Group	Observation	Documents Reviews
1. How do program coordinators and instructors in personnel preparation programs characterize the experiences provided to ECE and ECSE preservice teachers that promote effective knowledge and skills in the areas of teaming and collaboration?	X	X			
2. What methods of training in collaboration and teaming do preservice ECE and ECSE professionals receive during their personnel preparation programs?	X	X	X	X	X
3. What are the similarities and differences in the way ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs train their preservice teachers for collaboration and teaming responsibilities?	X	X	X	X	X

The second strategy was implementing member-check procedure in order to

enhance study credibility. Thus, the accuracy of the final report would be increased. I

submitted the transcribed interviews to the participants for reviewing and checking the

accuracy of information. The third strategy was utilizing rich description to convey the findings. In other words, I described the findings in-depth in order to provide sufficient details about the data. The fourth strategy was using peer examination. This strategy was employed by the researcher to ensure the collection of valid data. As Merriam (2009) has indicated, all doctoral students have peer examination process through their dissertation committee members' feedbacks on the findings. The fifth strategy was employing an audit trail in order to promote the reliability of the study. The audit trail was a technique that describes in-detail how the data was collected and analyzed and how the findings were interpreted. The audit trail consists of an intensive collection of documentation that was particular to all aspects of the study.

In order to increase qualitative consistency, Gibbs (2007) recommended checking the accuracy of the transcripts and ensuring there is no shifting in the meaning of the codes during the coding process. In addition, Yin (2003) highlighted that the act of writing notes is a critical component for supporting the accuracy of data during the interviews, observation, and document analysis. Data collected to determine what the participants were consistently stating and what was observed and documented. This established a chain of evidence (Yin, 2003).

Ethical Considerations

When human subjects are involved in research as participants, ethical consideration must be addressed throughout a protection plan. Minimizing harm and risks and maximizing benefits for participants is one of the ethics in research. The benefits of conducting this in-depth case study may help to identify the specific characteristics of successful ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs. This provided a framework

for these program developments in order to offer their students the best opportunity to succeed in their future teaching in inclusive classrooms.

As a researcher, I must show respect for the participants and care about their privacy. In this case study, protection was provided for all confidential communications, such as the participants' identity and documents used. Integrity, honesty, and objectivity are critical elements of a research study (Creswell, 2014). As an ethical researcher, I demonstrated caution and careful procedures in the process of collecting data and reporting the results.

To ensure participants' protection in this case study, I followed the ethical considerations in research and the guidelines of the University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board (IRB). The first step in conducting this study was writing and submitting an IRB application narrative in order to obtain IRB approval. After the IRB approval and prior to participation, all participants were given consent forms (see Appendix G) that included the purpose and a description of the study, their rights to confidentiality, possible benefits and risks, agreement for voluntary participation in the study, audio recording of the interviews, and participants' rights to withdraw at any time without repercussion. Prior to participation, participants were asked to read and sign the consent form. The researcher provided the participants with a copy of their signed consent forms prior to the individual and focus group interviews.

The participants' identities were kept confidential. I assigned fictitious names and created composite profiles of participants. For example, I assigned numbers and letters for the participants' names, such as Participant 3 and Student A. Also, all materials of the research, such as documents and written transcripts, were stored in a personal computer

using a confidential password, and I as the researcher and my research advisors were the only individuals who were able to access the research data.

Conclusion

Early childhood professionals' collaboration is critical to initiate successful implementation of inclusion programs. Preparing preservice early childhood professionals to develop sufficient knowledge and skills in collaboration is necessary in order to produce educators who are able to develop high quality collaborative practices to support children and families in inclusive classrooms. The aim of this study was to gain information regarding providing training for ECE and ECSE preservice personnel about effective professional collaboration in inclusive classrooms. This case study provided a rich description from the perspectives of ECSE coordinator, ECE and ECSE instructors, and their students at the selected university. This qualitative study provided insight into early childhood preparation programs regarding professional collaboration for the benefit of inclusive classrooms, educational professionals, personnel preparation standards, and researchers.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents a review of the study and detailed findings. The purpose of this case study was to explore the role of early childhood education (ECE) and early childhood special education (ECSE) personnel preparation programs in providing training about effective collaboration skills to future early childhood professionals who work with children with and without disabilities who are in preschool. The research questions that framed the investigation were as follows:

Q1   How do program coordinators and instructors in personnel preparation programs characterize the experiences provided to ECE and ECSE preservice teachers that promote effective knowledge and skills in the areas of teaming and collaboration?

Q2   What methods of training in collaboration and teaming do preservice ECE and ECSE professionals receive during their personnel preparation programs?

Q3   What are the similarities and differences in the way ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs train their preservice teachers for collaboration and teaming responsibilities?

Four different sources of data were utilized in this study. These included individual interviews with ECE and ECSE program faculty, focus group interviews with ECE and ECSE students, reviews of course syllabi, and two classroom observations. I investigated a bounded system as a case study conducted at one university. I coded the findings based on the three research questions. I utilized theoretical coding to identify emerging themes from the qualitative data (Creswell, 2007). The findings of the study

were expected to provide a valuable source of information that could support and improve the quality of ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs in order to enhance future teachers' skills in collaboration in order to create successful inclusive practices. Below, I present the findings by each research question. See Chapter III for participant demographics.

<div align="center">

Research Question1: Coordinator's and
Instructors' Perspectives Toward
Teaming and Collaboration

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In order to answer the first research question, I asked the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors about their own perceptions on inclusion, teaming, and collaboration. Then, I asked them more expanded questions about their perspectives in supporting collaboration and teaming among their college students.

I developed a coding process for all existing data for Research Question 1 from the individual interviews with four ECE and four ECSE participants that led to the development of four major themes. This section of findings includes the following themes: (a) participants' perspectives on inclusion; (b) collaboration and teaming definitions; (c) perspectives about the purpose of collaboration; and (d) participants' expectations for preparing preservice teachers to collaborate.

Participants' Perspectives on
Inclusion

The literature indicated that collaborative teaming is extremely tied to the quality of inclusive programs and is a cornerstone for successful inclusion (e.g., Choi, 2010; Kluth & Straut, 2003; National Professional Development Center on Inclusion, 2009; Odom et al., 2011). Hence, I asked the participants about their thoughts in inclusion in

order to connect their perspectives toward inclusive programs and collaboration and teaming practices.

All eight participants agreed on the vital benefits and the importance of inclusion programs. The eight responses from participants ranged between brief and long descriptions. The shortest response consisted of approximately 24 words and the longest consisted of about 627 words. Participant 2 stated, "I think it's wonderful. I think it benefits all children. I think it benefits all the adults. I certainly support it." Some participants discussed inclusion through their experiences of working in inclusive early childhood settings as Participant 3 said, "I've had quite a bit of experience working with children with special needs and feel . . . strongly that is a good thing." While others reflected on their perspectives from their educational backgrounds as Participant 5's statement, "I think most of my beliefs about inclusion [are] reflected in this statement [Division for Early Childhood inclusion statement]."

However, few participants did not support full inclusion; in certain circumstances they thought this would impact all children negatively. For example, Participant 1 stated, "Sometimes you get a child who really has trouble fitting into the situation and is very disruptive . . . I sometimes wonder what that child is getting out of it. If they're so disruptive, they can't focus on the lesson." Participant 7 agreed about this point and explained, "I think there are situations where taking students out of an inclusive environment and some self-contained learning opportunities are important for a variety of reasons too because our obligation in schools is to create the best, the safest learning environment."

Overall, even though some participants indicated that inclusion programs have made progress over the years, improvement is still needed to implement these programs as Participant 5 said,

> I feel we need to do a better job in how to implement inclusion in our schools and to increase the number of children who are included . . . we need to do a better job in terms of helping our general ed teachers and special ed teachers to be able to provide a better inclusive environment.

Also, teacher preparation programs and parents of children with disabilities would impact the development of inclusion programs as Participant 7 stated,

> Are we really preparing teachers to work with the full spectrum of kids? . . . That's a very challenging environment. So I think one of the main issues is we have to continue to get better teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to work in more inclusive environments. And the other challenge I think is from the family perspective . . . we want them [families] involved in the child's education and in their life, and we want them to be real partners in the school, but they may not always want that.

Some participants thought that successful inclusion is still on its way to improvement in different dimensions for educators, such as attitudes and beliefs toward inclusion, implementation, and achieving the true and desired outcomes of inclusion. Participant 8 supported this by saying, "I think research tells us that attitudes and beliefs impact their practices and the practices impact the outcomes for the children. So I think we have to start with the changing beliefs." Some of the participants indicated that the quality of implementing such programs is based on teachers' attributes, their backgrounds, and the type of education and training they received. In general, all the participants supported inclusion and some of them were extremely supportive of full inclusion as Participant 6 stated, "Preschools should definitely be the easiest place to have full inclusion."

Collaboration and Teaming
Definitions

The participants defined collaboration and teaming terms differently. In general,

there was a consensus about the definition of collaboration as "working together in order

to achieve a common goal"; however, more discrepancy occurred among participants'

definition of the term "teaming." The results showed that some of the participants had

deeper thoughts about these terms and others had more general visions. These deeper

thoughts described and focused on some elements of collaboration including sharing

knowledge and roles, creating resource networks among educators, and equality in

responsibilities toward children. Participant 8 provided a detailed definition for

collaboration when she said,

> Collaboration usually to me means equal partnerships in terms of what each
> member has to offer where every member has an equal say in the outcomes and
> process of both. Collaboration is building on the strengths of each team member
> so even if somebody is able to participate 30% in one part of it but 70% in
> something else [the collaborators] still are able to build on those strengths of each
> other.

While some participants provided brief and general definitions for collaboration as the

definition of Participant 4, "I think collaboration is just a group of people coming

together to set goals for a common outcome."

In addition, several participants focused on describing how collaboration and

teaming should work. They portrayed the process of implementing collaborative

practices. Participant 5 explained collaboration as,

> Collaboration, I think that the communication channels should be always open
> among the team members, so all of us have access to the same information . . . be
> able to make the best decision and to have a good discussion and conversation
> about any decisions that should be made . . . we need to have again the shared
> vision, what we call the role release and be open to share our experience,
> knowledge, and skills, our resources, the communication.

Some of the participants defined collaboration and teaming through their work experiences as Participant 7 expressed, "From my perspective and my experience, the term collaboration seems more inclusive of everybody in terms of actively participating." And Participant 3 explained her knowledge about collaboration by saying,

> Collaboration is working as a team. . . . That would mean the classroom teachers would talk with the OT, the Early Childhood Special Ed persons, the specialists, when they came in and be able to have the opportunity to sit down and really look at what the goals are for the child and how they can meet those goals. . . . I know that doesn't always happen because people get busy.

Some participants indicated that those terms "collaboration and teaming" are similar to each other, while some others believed they are different. For example, Participant 7 stated, "They're very similar in terms of working together to accomplish a common goal." However, Participant 6 said, "Teaming and collaboration are different because I think to be a good team member, you probably want to be collaborative, but teaming, to me, is being part of a team." Other participants looked at these terms as levels of actions that lead to anticipated outcomes. Participant 8 reported,

> It [teaming] could be a possibility of inequality where it's springing together of people to work on a common outcome. Collaboration goes a little one step further to make sure that all the partners have . . . equal participation and stake in the outcomes or conversation in the outcomes.

A different perspective was revealed by Participant 1 when she defined teaming as a co-teaching experience: "I've never properly team-taught because most of special ed folks in the room . . . were aides and they weren't really teaching with me. Teaming is where I would be teaching and then the team member would pick up and teach." while other participants described teaming in detail by starting with how to establish teaming and explaining the process of it.

Participants' Perspectives of the
Purpose of Collaboration

Through asking the participants about the function and the purpose of

professional collaboration, I gained multiple answers. Some of the participants' answers

about the purpose of professional collaboration were brief and general, while others

provided more detail.

Six out of eight participants thought that the concept of establishing a

collaborative team was important to provide needed services and accomplish successful

outcomes for children and their families. Participant 8 mentioned, "The function [of

collaboration and teaming] is definitely [an] improvement of child and family outcomes

basically saying that no one person can really do what a team can do." The participants

emphasized that a collaborative team should make efforts to make sure that the child's

needs are being addressed and met. Participant 5 stated, "Collaboration basically is

mainly about bringing together our knowledge and skills from different disciplines and

channel them in one direction which is to improve the service that you are providing for

the family and children." Participant 2 elaborated her vision when she explained how

educators should work by saying:

> For any child to develop to the best of their ability, all those adults who are a part
> of that child's life need to be on the same page. They need to share a vision of
> who the child is, what the child needs and understand and respect what each of
> those adults can bring into that child's experience in their education experience, in
> their life experience, for everyone to respect all the different things that all these
> individuals can bring in together.

A few participants extended their point of view by focusing on the skills of

collaboration, such as sharing ideas and interventions, planning instructions, achieving

goals, respecting each other and so on. For example, Participant 7 focused mostly on the

skills when stated:

> I think the purpose of collaborating should be to take advantage of experience and the expertise of all the professionals that you have there. . . . So we have more people that come up with creative ideas, knowledge and experience for how to do things or how to address issues then we get more efficient and we're able to address more of the needs.

In addition, Participant 8 highlighted another aspect of collaboration: " I think

part of it [collaboration] would be for them [collaborators] to understand that everybody

is an equal partner . . . including the family member." Participant 4 had a different

response to the purpose of professional collaboration, which was her same definition of

collaboration, "Like I said earlier, it's having a group of people come together to work on

common goals to meet an objective." Participant 1 came up with another different

perception regarding the purpose of collaboration by saying, "sometimes you do it

[collaboration] because it's fun to have a friend."

Moreover, Participant 6 mentioned the importance of collaboration to teachers

and their work with children "I think without it [collaboration], there are so many missed

opportunities. If I don't know what's going on for that student and how you're supporting

it, then I'm probably going to support it differently." Participant 6 extended her view

regarding collaboration among educators "you're going to have better outcomes for kids

with better collaboration. If you don't have the opportunity to work together and

understand why and how other people are doing things, then . . . you may not be doing

what's best for the student." Participant 5 supported the value of collaboration for

educators by saying:

Each one of us is bringing something different to the table. That is very valuable and can benefit me as a teammate to improve myself as a professional and also ultimately to improve . . . how I am providing the service for the families and their children . . . I think the value is also about resources. . . . When we have a plan to collaborate with each other and how we plan and provide the service, we can save a lot of these resources that we can use with other families who are in need for them.

Participants' Expectations for Preparing
Preservice Teachers to Collaborate

I asked the participants whether they thought their undergraduate students were appropriately prepared in collaboration for their future work in preschools. All the participants had positive feelings about their students and their readiness to work in early childhood settings equipped with the knowledge and skills in collaboration. These positive perspectives came about because the participants believe they are supporting knowledge and skills within their programs. However, some participants mentioned that they did not see their students in the field and how they collaborate with other educators; nevertheless, most of the participants thought they provided sufficient information to their students that enable them to be successful collaborators. Hence, they assumed and hoped that their students would be efficient collaborators.

Some of the participants explained their positive expectations and referred it to the way of teaching their students. Participant 3 pointed out that "a lot of the classroom activities they do have to work as a team . . . they understand and they are aware that when they go out into the real world they have to work as a team with other people." Another explanation was stated by Participant 7, "we spent a lot of time about working with the students about how to share data, how to share information, how to connect it to the decision making process."

Participant 4 raised a point particularly in reference to the relationship between frequent collaboration practices and proficiency in collaboration, "I can teach them [students] the terms and teach them how to do it [collaboration], but until you're really in that situation . . . you don't become really good at it until you do it a lot." Many variables may impact future teachers' collaboration skills as Participant 7 indicated, "I think I prepared them [students] equally to be collaborative . . . I think there are a lot of variables . . . personality and approachability may play a role in that." Moreover, Participant 1 was concerned about her affirmation that the students have efficient skills in collaboration because she does not assess them in this practice, "That's hard to say because I don't assess for it. I think many of them are [efficient in collaboration] . . . but I can't say for a fact because I don't assess. I don't know how you even assess with that."

A few participants reflected that learning about professional collaboration does not happen only in college, but it should be ongoing inservice professional development. Participant 5 stated, "We want the students to understand and realize that collaboration is a process that could be improved over time . . . it is an ongoing process because every person you collaborate with is going to teach you something."

Moreover, all participants reflected on the role of the preparation programs on the students' attitudes toward collaboration. They indicated their students were influenced positively towards collaboration because their programs supported this area. In addition, some participants believed that collaboration is a learned behavior and that future teachers should learn and master this practice. Participant 6 clarified this point when she said,

> If we make it a priority in preparation, they're [students] going to understand it as a priority. . . . I think in that fieldwork experience, it [collaboration] probably has to be assessed there. It is a behavior. If it's not a natural behavior for you or you're not a good communicator, then it's going to have to be a learned skill. You're going to have to change your behavior, and we know that changing behavior is hard. That's something that would need coaching, modeling, direct instruction for that.

This was consistent with what Participant 8 noted about research studies that reflected the relationship between professionals' collaboration and children and their families' outcomes. She elaborated "teaching knowledge and skills around collaboration is a part of that . . . we are still very, very territorial in what we do. Whether it's within higher education, whether it's in classrooms, whether wherever we are."

Besides the role of preparation programs plays on attitudes, a few participants indicated that preparation programs have a strong influence on ethics, approaches, and values of future teachers toward implementing collaborative practices. Participant 5 acknowledged the level of implementing collaborative practices in schools "depends on the students first of all, and it depends on the environment that they are going to end up working at. It depends on how much support that environment is providing to its members to be good collaborators." Participant 2 added students' desire and their commitment to implement collaborative practices in their future work at schools. She emphasized that the students should consider the importance of collaboration and working hard in order to gain the needed skills; she explained that when she said:

> You always have some students who choose to put as little as they can into a class, do the bare minimum, to pass and get out. They have the bare minimum but they have at least learned about how important it is, learned about how collaboration is vital if you want to be the best you can be for children."

Another point of view was revealed by a few of the participants regarding the impact of personality on creating successful collaborative practices. Participant 7 stated,

"Personality plays such a role in collaboration." This participant thought that preparation programs do not impact personality while personality effects the implementation of collaborative practices and its successfulness.

Research Question 2: Methods of Training in Collaboration and Teaming

This second section of findings comprised the results from four different sources that helped to answer Research Question 2. The sources were individual interviews with the ECE and ECSE program faculty, four ECE and four ECSE participants; focus group interviews with eight ECE and three ECSE students currently in the program; review of syllabi and some extended documents from six selected courses; and two different class observations, one in an ECE university class and the other conducted in an ECSE course. The coding process for all existing data for Research Question 2 from the different sources led to developing two major themes and several sub-themes.

The first theme was about information that was related to courses and instructional methods in both programs. The individual faculty interviews provided findings about anticipated outcomes of the courses, teaching collaboration knowledge and skills, time allocated to support collaboration, and collaboration assessment methods. Review of course documents was another source in providing further details about the ECE and ECSE six selected courses that support professional collaboration and teaming. The ECE and ECSE class observations section includes a narrative description of the methods of teaching, activities, interactions, and any details related to teaching teaming and collaboration knowledge and skills.

The second theme for Research Question 2 was students' perspectives of their training on collaboration in the two preservice college programs. The focus group

interviews with ECE and ECSE students provided information that included collaboration and teaming definitions, students' perspectives of the purpose of collaboration, students' training in inclusion, and students' training in knowledge and skills in collaboration. Below I present results from these four sources of information related to the two themes.

Theme 1: Courses and Instructional Methods

I have discussed this theme below as delineated through the individual interviews with the ECE and ECSE program faculty, review of course documents, and class observations. All these three sources provided information about the six selected courses from ECE and ECSE programs that support collaboration and teaming.

Coordinator's and instructors' interviews. All six selected courses in ECE and ECSE programs provided evidence supporting inclusion and collaboration among educators. One of the participants indicated that she is teaching an entire course to train preservice teachers in collaboration and teaming knowledge and skills, while other participants are teaching collaboration knowledge and skills as sections in their courses. ECE selected courses emphasized collaboration in courses that focused on administration in early childhood settings, interpersonal relationships, and introduction to special education in early childhood, while selected ECSE courses tend to cover assessment, recommended practices for inclusive preschools, and collaboration with families and professionals. Two of the selected ECE courses are offered both in the fall and spring. Those courses are provided either face-to-face or online. Selected ECSE courses are often face-to-face delivery and each course is provided once a year. All selected courses are three credits and offered over 16 weeks. All selected courses have textbooks as references and additional readings, and utilize the learning management systems Blackboard or D2L

to supplement in-class teaching and learning. All ECSE participants were teaching selected courses for the first time because the program was new.

The participants agreed in their answers that they utilized varied instructional methods during their classes' time due to their beliefs that everybody learns differently. These instructional methods ranged in conversations, lectures with a PowerPoint, providing videos, guest speakers, assigning readings, and individual or group work activities. Some of the participants mentioned using blended learning during class time; Participants 4 described it,

> We do a lot of blended learning in here, so they have like a group of them [students] maybe working on a device like an iPad or computer working together on a video or something. Another group may be collaborating on a collaborative poster about the topic for that night, and then another group will be with me. Then we rotate."

In addition, some of the courses included quizzes on parts of the course content. Some of the participants used role-playing in some activities as Participant 5 stated, "In the classroom, we can assign readings. We can do class activities, examine case studies, show a video, role-play. That's all valuable." Also, all of the participants used group work in their courses either during class activities or in assignments, but the difference was in the frequency of using group work. ECSE participants reflected that they were encouraging their students to involve and/or observe real practices at early childhood settings. Many participants mentioned the critical aspect of the Internet in supporting students' learning as Participant 7 stated, "we of course thank goodness for the internet. We were able to find some other assessments that were being administered on kids." Further detailed information about the selected six courses will be articulated under the review of documents section.

Anticipated outcomes of the courses. The participants had generally anticipated goals of these different selected courses. One goal was helping preservice teachers realize where their strengths and weaknesses are. The second goal was supporting preservice teachers to be effective collaborators and work together to improve child and family outcomes. Five courses were including sections to support professionals' collaboration, while one whole ECSE course was about collaboration with families and professionals. The third goal was how to collaborate with families as Participant 5 stated, "the most important member of the team that you need and have to collaborate with is the family." The fourth goal was increasing the ability to be successful teachers for children in inclusive classrooms. Participant 3 reflected on this point when she said, "That would be talking about how to set up a training for their staff, how to provide what their staff needs to be . . . so they will be a successful teacher in the classroom"

The participants identified more specific anticipated outcomes of these different selected courses. Some participants reflected that their courses emphasize administration and prepare their students to be center directors or teachers. Participant 4 supported this by saying, "That they can open a center, be a director of a center or teach in a classroom and have children with disabilities come in, and they know the procedures of how to do that." Moreover, four courses focused on the Individual Education Program (IEP) and the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) process as Participant 7 stated, "they [students] can use all of that information to develop an IEP and an IFSP." In addition, the six selected courses had further varied particular goals. These goals ranged between learning about different models of collaboration, job descriptions, developing training programs

for teachers, administering different assessments, recommending practices for inclusive education, and working to support ethical practices on behalf of children.

Collaboration knowledge and skills. The answers of how the instructors provided or supported collaboration knowledge and skills to their students were diverse. Various points of view were elucidated regarding how instructors encourage their students to learn or practice collaboration. Some of the participants focused mostly on discussing the problems that the preservice teachers may face in their future inclusive schools, and emphasizing the importance of teamwork in overcoming challenges and problems in providing services for children and their families. Some participants focused only on supporting collaboration knowledge through lectures in communication skills, leadership, and management. Participant 6, a university instructor, reflected that she only focused on collaboration knowledge in her statement, "Cooperation and collaboration is one of the objectives for the course. I know they have the knowledge of what that should look like, but we didn't practice it and I didn't assess it." Participant 6 justified the reason for emphasizing collaboration knowledge rather than opportunities to apply this knowledge in practice when she said, "I definitely think I gave enough information. I didn't have the opportunity to give enough practice because I don't know that I really zoned in on the skill set that you would need to be a good collaborator."

In addition, Participant 2 explained how she used team-building activities in most of the assignments to support collaboration when she said,

>The staff orientation outline [assignment], the students have to put together a plan of how they would orient a new staff member and to get the full credit, they need to have it more than just an hour. They have to really go in depth and orient them to everything. The team building activity, the students have to put together a resource list of activities that they as a director could do with the staff as a whole. To help them build their ability to work together. Then in class, for the day that activity is due, they turn in a listing, a whole resource list but they have to lead the class in 2 of them. That class period, the whole 3-hour class period is spent having students lead each other in team building activities.

Similarly, Participant 1 mentioned, "I do a lot of activities that require collaboration. Some of the assignments that I offer . . . one of their assignments is to write a report on this child to go into our file for next year's teacher." Also, Participant 2 extended her methods of teaching collaboration when she stated, "I do a lot of projects where in a small group they have to create something: they have to create a musical instrument, they have to come up with an activity to do to a rhyming book."

Participant 5 in the following statement illustrated supporting collaboration learning,

>We try to teach the students that there is a legal basis for collaborating with other professionals. It's not like we are doing it out of our good nature. We are required to collaborate with others in the field in providing services. On the other hand, you are obligated to do that in your job. We try to teach them the different kind of models that were developed around teaming and collaboration so they can see the history of that and the difference between these different models and why we prefer one model as opposed to other models.

A few participants confirmed that they are supporting both collaboration knowledge and skills. For the knowledge piece, Participant 8 supported it through lectures, case studies, watching videos of team meetings, completing assigned readings, and discussing content on collaboration in the classroom. Participant 6 reflected her satisfaction about teaching collaboration knowledge "We really provided a great discussion that day of how collaboration is all of us respecting each other, where we're at."

For the skills piece, limited methods were used in order to support collaboration skills. Participant 5 reflected on the methods of supporting collaboration skills by saying,

> The other piece is we are trying to teach them a set of skills, actually a group of skills about how collaboration looks like in our field. I talked about when we say to keep open channels of communication, what do we mean by that? When we say about sharing knowledge and skills, how this should look like in our field. When we think about how we can give the families or how we can empower the families to have a strong voice in our teams, how this should look like.

Some of the participants indicated that students were learning collaboration skills through role-playing. Participant 4 noted that she always used collaborative practices when she stated, "our topic always comes back to how you collaborate on this child to make sure that his or her needs are met. I think you just have to practice and that's what we do, and we do lots of role modeling with collaboration."

The results showed that few instructors require their students to implement what they learned through implementing these practices in classroom activities, such as using problem solving teams, or outside the classrooms through observing collaborative teams and asking students to comment and reflect on their experiences. Discussing and solving case studies was one way of supporting collaboration skills as Participant 8 reported,

> One case study is in the class, so they [students] get into small groups and then they read the case study at home and when they come in I provide two or three discussion questions, trigger questions for them to talk about it in small groups of two, and then we discuss them as large groups. I think one of the strengths of these classes for them is to be able to openly disagree with me or their peers. It is in a dialogue form . . . so they have to think through how the teaming process will work through that process or a case study of a problem situation in a pre-school classroom and how will the team solve the situation.

Collaborative team observation was another way to support collaboration skills as Participant 8 stated, "on the practical piece . . . they observe team in collaboration and

action . . . they observe a team meeting or some of that and then they come back and comment and reflect on it."

   Time for supporting collaboration. Regarding the time that the instructors spend in supporting collaboration knowledge and skills in their courses during each semester, some thought that they discussed or practiced teamwork, collaboration, and communication in some to most classes, while other participants thought they discussed or practiced teaming and collaboration in every class.

   The results reflected that the instructors prepare their students for the practice of collaboration in their courses. One ECSE instructor taught an entire course on the topic of collaboration. However, in both programs there are some courses that addressed topics in professional collaboration. Participant 6 reflected the time she spent on teaching collaboration when she said, "We actually spent a whole chapter on it and then every time it came up again . . . It's hard to say how many times, but we started with it [collaboration] and we ended with it, and I think probably about half the time [in the course], it came up."

   Also, all participants agreed that they teach collaboration through using collaborative assignments and/or activities. All participants believed that they spent sufficient time to support learning about professional collaboration. Some participants referred to their support in using group work during class times as Participant 1 said, "I would say it comes up 90% of the time. I don't know, it might be more. I do a lot of small-group work." Few participants attributed their support for responsibilities to demonstrate collaboration with parents as Participant 7 noted, "I would say at least half of the days we had some discussion about sharing or talking with parents. So I think that's

. . . that would fall into that collaboration piece." Other participants referred to their

support in talking about collaboration and teamwork in general as Participant 3 stated, "I

would say in not all classes but in most classes we do talk something about the teamwork

and collaboration and communication" whereas Participant 2 had a similar general

statement, "I think there's elements of it [collaboration] in every class we teach."

Moreover, Participant 8 provided more explanation for the time of supporting

collaboration that she spent during classes by saying:

> Usually in every class there's some piece of these discussions so based on where we are and it is guided somewhat by the readings . . . I think every time every week we have some pieces of knowledge, some amount of skills based application and some assessment every week.

Assessment of collaboration. Most of the participants indicated that they do not

assess collaboration knowledge or skills, and they thought that they should create ways to

assess students' learning regarding these skills. Participant 1 stated that, "I don't assess. I

don't know how you even assess with that." Participant 6 had similar statement, "I didn't

assess their ability to collaborate. It is not in my objectives. It's not built into the course,

and it probably should be . . . I think it's the most important thing, but I didn't assess it

and I don't know how I would."

Only two participants indicated that they assess their students on skills that relate

to collaboration through class assignments, discussions, and the students' participation

because most of the assignments are related to the application of knowledge in

collaboration. Participant 8 reflected on her methods of assessing collaboration

knowledge through implementing learned knowledge into practices when she said,

> Have them [students] read for the knowledge to assess some of that knowledge, have them read what they needed to read in class and are they actively participating through the readings as well . . . so most of my assignments are related to the application of that knowledge

Also, Participant 2 provided an example of how she assessed her students regarding their understanding of collaboration through an assignment that required her students to observe a director in a program "specifically observing them in their supervision practices, in their hiring practices, asking about all those things, asking about how they collaborate, how they supervise all of that, then they write up a paper."

Additionally, a few participants provided possible ways of how they could assess collaboration knowledge and skills. For example, Participant 4 wanted to know what her students learned and what she taught them by reporting that, "I may have them write a summary or reflection journal that's due the next week about what they learned about collaboration and the IEP process." Participant 1 had a different idea of how she could assess her students on collaboration by saying, "You could assess for that by having students write something. If we had talked about this three or four months ago, I could've had a final exam question on collaboration. . . .That's as close as I can get to how you would assess."

Review of course documents. The instructors provided the syllabi and some extended documents from the six selected courses. These extended documents included sections that support and value learning in professional collaboration, such as guidelines and rubrics of assignments, readings, and courses' topics. The syllabi and given extended documents were utilized to support the preceding data forms. For the content analysis of the syllabi and extended documents, I looked for the existence of preparing students for professional collaboration in inclusive preschools using a rubric that I developed that

included competencies from (a) DEC Recommended Practices that are related to teaming and collaboration (Division of Early Childhood, 2014); (b) Personnel DEC Standards (Standard 7: Collaboration); and (c) NAEYC standards that are related to collaboration and teaming.

The findings showed that ECSE courses were using more competencies in the area of professional collaboration. Table 4 presents what competencies that were addressed in each course. The results regarding DEC Recommended Practices showed that competency TC3 was covered in three courses, competency TC2 was covered in two courses, and competency TC1 was covered in only one ECSE course. For Personnel DEC Standards, the table displayed that competency 7.1 was the most frequently used being represented in four courses, competency K7.1 was used in three courses, and competencies S7.1, S7. 2, S7.7, and S7.10 were each used in one ECSE course. The findings regarding NAEYC standards exhibited that competency 6a was covered in two ECSE courses and the competency 6c was covered in one ECSE course. Overall, ECSE used more competencies that are related to professional collaboration in the selected courses. More information about the courses (e.g., course description, course objectives, and course topics) was provided (see Appendix H).

Table 4

Addressed Competencies in the Select Courses

Courses	Title of the Course	Followed Competencies	Elements of the course covered collaboration and teaming content
Course One	Administration: Human Relations for Early Childhood Education	DEC Recommended Practices: (TC3) Practitioners use communication and group facilitation strategies to enhance team functioning and interpersonal relationships with and among team members. DEC Personnel Prep: (7.1) Professionals use the theory and elements of effective collaboration	One assignment. One topic outline.
Course Two	Administration of ECE Programs	DEC Recommended Practices: (TC2) Practitioners work together as a team to systematically and regularly exchange expertise, knowledge, and information to build team capacity and jointly solve problems, plan, and implement interventions.	Small part of reading for an activity. One indirect topic.
Course Three	The Exceptional Child	DEC Personnel Prep: (7.1) Professionals use the theory and elements of effective collaboration; (K7.1) Structures supporting interagency collaboration, including interagency agreements, referral, and consultation	One topic One assignment Reading (chapter 10)
Course Four	Evidence-based Practices for Preschool Learners, 3-5 Years	DEC Recommended Practices: (TC3) Practitioners use communication and group facilitation strategies to enhance team functioning and interpersonal relationships with and among team members. DEC Personnel Prep: (7.1) Professionals use the theory and elements of effective collaboration; (K7.1) Structures supporting interagency collaboration, including interagency agreements, referral, and consultation. NAEYC: (6a) They know about the many connections between the early childhood field and other related disciplines and professions with which they may collaborate while serving diverse young children and families.	One of the course objectives One topic Reading (chapter 10)

Table 4 (continued)

Courses	Title of the Course	Followed Competencies	Elements of the course covered collaboration and teaming content
Course Five	Appropriate assessment in Early Childhood Special Education	NAEYC: (6c) Candidates demonstrate understanding of and essential skills in interdisciplinary collaboration. Candidates demonstrate that they have the essential communication skills and knowledge base to engage in interdisciplinary team meetings as informed partners.	One sub-objective
Course Six	Collaborative Practices with Families and Professionals	DEC Recommended Practices: (TC1) Practitioners representing multiple disciplines work together as a team to plan and implement supports and services to meet the unique needs of each child and family; (TC2) Practitioners work together as a team to systematically and regularly exchange expertise, knowledge, and information to build team capacity and jointly solve problems, plan, and implement interventions; (TC3) Practitioners use communication and group facilitation strategies to enhance team functioning and interpersonal relationships with and among team members. DEC Personnel Prep: (7.1) Professionals use the theory and elements of effective collaboration; (K7.1) Structures supporting interagency collaboration, including interagency agreements, referral, and consultation; (S7.1) Apply models of team process in early childhood; (S7.2) Collaborate with professionals to support children's development and learning; (S7.7) Participate as a team member to identify and enhance team roles, communication, and problem-solving; (S7.10) Implement processes and strategies that support transitions among settings for young children. NAEYC: (6a) They know about the many connections between the early childhood field and other related disciplines and professions with which they may collaborate while serving diverse young children and families.	Course description, Course objective, Three assignments, Most of the topics of the course, Activities (video), Readings.

Class observations. For this study, I observed two classes each of ECE and ECSE courses that were available at the same semester of conducting the study.

Early childhood education class observation. The first ECE class observation was in Course two. Upon consultation with the instructor, I observed the class in week 11 of the 15-week evening class for 3 hours. The topic of the class was "Evaluating Center Components & Staff Development." Eight out of 10 students were present that day. The class started on time and the instructor disseminated an agenda handout for the class. There was a discussion between the instructor and students about the previous assignment. PowerPoint was used in the lecture. A position statement of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment was used for reading and discussion. The first activity was the instructor disseminated a set of scenario cards to the students. Every two students had one scenario to read and use the position statement as a guide for resolving the major ethical dilemmas faced in early childhood settings. One major section of the position statement described the ethical responsibilities of early childhood education professionals that was discussed briefly in the class. This section included establishing and maintaining positive relationships among early childhood professionals. The descriptions of positive relationships were comprised of respect, trust, collaboration, cooperation, support, and shared resources with co-workers in order to provide the best early childhood program. Then, the instructor provided her previous experiences as a director of an early childhood setting. She provided examples of different problems she faced and how she had overcome these issues.

After that, the instructor provided examples of early childhood center evaluations to the students while she was explaining those evaluations. She reviewed the state early

learning and development guidelines on the website. The second activity was demonstrating several questions on the board about early childhood center and staff evaluations. The instructor discussed the answers with the students and talked about the quality of early childhood programs. Then, the instructor disseminated a Factors Criteria Checklist to the students to review. This checklist had some elements that described teamwork, problem solving, communication, and professionalism. She discussed the responsibilities for working with other specialists at the center in order to meet the goals for the child. Then, she asked students to provide previous personal experiences regarding working with others. A few students were active in describing their experiences and discussing the issues with the instructor.

The last section of the lecture was talking about leadership. The instructor disseminated a leadership survey to the students to complete. The survey had some elements that were focused on teaming and decision making processes. In general, some of the students were effectively interacting. At the end of class time, the instructor assigned scenarios to the students and asked them to work in small groups (four students per group) to discuss and resolve the scenario issues for the next class.

Early childhood special education class observation. The observation was in one selected class of the ECSE course classes. The title of the course was "Collaborative Practices with Families and Professionals." The instructor suggested observing the class in week 10 of the 15-week semester. The class time was from 4:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. The topic of the class was "Introduction to Coaching." Five out of six students were in attendance in a conference style classroom. The class started on time and the instructor

disseminated the lecture handouts for the class. A PowerPoint presentation was used to guide the lecture.

The instructor started with brief chats with students asking them to share news and events for about 10 minutes. Then, the instructor reviewed and discussed the previous class topic, which was "Principles of School based Collaboration and Teaming." There was an active conversation between the instructor and the students regarding last week's topic. The students were required to read the text "Who moved my Cheese?" The students watched a 16-minute video reflecting the story of "Who moved my Cheese?" as the first activity in the class. The instructor encouraged students to write notes. After that, the instructor and students discussed and reflected on the meanings behind the video that were related to the topic of collaboration. They discussed the different attitudes among team members and how attitudes impact group work. The instructor emphasized collaboration explicitly as a professional role.

Then, the instructor asked and discussed the definitions of consultation, collaboration, teaming, co-teaching, and emphasized the distinctions among these terms by explaining the coaching term. During the lecture, the instructor encouraged the students to ask questions and to talk about their previous experiences. The instructor used pictures in the PowerPoint and provided examples that were related to the topic. During the lecture, the instructor discussed with the students some collaboration skills, such as sharing information with the collaborative team, learning from each other, and using appropriate eye contact with team members. The last activity in the class was a small group discussion between students in order to continue their work on a Child Plan assignment that required them to work together to plan an assessment, intervention, and

transition planning for a child. In general, the instructor encouraged open conversations, and most of the students were active in sharing information or asking questions.

**Theme 2: Students' Perspectives of
Their Training on Collaboration**

I conducted two different focus groups, one was with three ECSE students and the second was with eight ECE students. The interviews lasted for approximately 90 minutes. I provided refreshments during the interviews, and at the end of the discussions, I provided a thank you card with a $20 gift card for each student. I used a voice recorder and notes during the meetings. Focus group interviews were used to triangulate the data.

Early childhood special education students. The ECSE program is a new program that was started in 2013. The three participating seniors were the first cohort to participate in the ECSE program. I coded the participants with a pseudonym; each student participant was assigned a different letter.

Collaboration and teaming definitions. All participating students agreed on their own definition of the meaning of collaboration. They defined collaboration as a communication between a group of people by respecting each other and sharing a common goal with a passion to work together effectively. Students A and B agreed that teaming is a synonym and a substitute of the term collaboration and it is just "a way for people to simplify collaboration." Student C had an additional description for teaming, which was that "teaming is more personalized to the person. I may collaborate with people because I have to collaborate with them, but I'd rather team with people that I choose."

Students' perspectives of the purpose of collaboration. All the students reflected that the purpose of collaborating with other educators is to serve the needs of the children

and their families. The students also agreed that the value of collaboration is helping

educators to increase the success of each child. As Student C stated, "I think the value

doesn't come with the team itself but what you can get out of that and how you use what

you discussed and put it into practice."

    Students' training in inclusion. All the students shared the same point of view

regarding the lack of training on how to implement successful inclusion. Student B noted

that there was one course that talked about inclusion the most. Student A stated,

> The word inclusion is thrown around so much in our classes that it almost just
> becomes our opinion like what we already know. It's not so much of them
> breaking down what inclusion means or what it really is. . . . It just becomes our
> own personal knowledge of it.

The students thought that they learned general information about inclusion through

readings and the lectures of the classes, but not in details of what it is or how to include a

child. The students also expressed their concerns about what they experienced at their

field experiences that there were differences between what they know and the real

practices in schools. Student C provided an example,

> I also was in an inclusive classroom where it worked socially, but academically,
> there was a huge gap and no one knew how to close that gap, and that's a big deal,
> is closing those achievement gaps . . . I don't think it's ever successfully taught
> how to do that in the right way.

Student B had a similar experience at her field experience place when she stated, "I guess

it was kind of inclusive but not really, not to my definition of inclusion."

    Collaboration knowledge and skills training. The students thought that they had

preparation concerning how collaboration among educators is important in schools.

Student A with the tacit agreement of other students noted that one course was the best in

terms of preparing them for their future work at inclusive schools when she stated, "If

we're going to talk about being prepared, I would have to say that [instructor's] class has probably done the best at preparing us, for me at least, because she [the instructor] was real. She was a realist. . . . She didn't just sugarcoat things to make us feel better and not afraid." In general, all the students felt that they are not fully prepared to practice collaboration. Student A stated, "I think our professors can teach us that [collaboration] but they can't fully prepare us for that until we experience it for ourselves." All students voiced their appreciation of their field experiences in learning and observing some teachers working with other teachers. Student C said, "These past couple of semesters where we have been out in the field has totally changed my perspective on everything," because she thought that, "I don't think you can ever be prepared. You can have all these scenarios come at you, but it's all fake until you really get there [field experience]."

Moreover, all the students agreed that they did not experience good models of collaboration at their field experience placements. Student A stated that, "there wasn't much collaboration among the teachers and the other people that worked with the kids." The students expressed their wishes to experience more collaboration or at least observe collaborative practices as Student B said, "I wish I would have seen more collaboration in my field experience." The most collaborative practices they saw were informal collaborations. There was no specific time for collaboration and it happened only when a teacher had a question for about five minutes, and often, the collaboration was between the early childhood special education and general education teachers. Additionally, Students B and C thought they learned from their courses, professors, and readings that the requirement to set specific meetings for collaboration was the only correct way to

collaborate. Students B and C are now glad to know through their field experiences that there are other ways to practice collaboration.

When I asked the students if they observed any other type of collaborative practices, Student A said, "I did a mock IEP . . . I played a child. Sitting here on the table and experiencing and getting to be on the other end of it and watching everybody else collaborate was probably the best form of collaboration I've seen." The students also mentioned that they did a lot of group work, which they considered as a practice of collaborative teaming.

All the students felt that, until now, they were not efficiently prepared to be effective collaborators with other educators. Student C stated, "I don't think we've ever experienced it [collaborating with other educators]. I guess in that sense, no." Also, the three students expressed that they felt they are not yet ready to collaborate with educational professionals from different departments or even different universities.

Early childhood education students. This focus group consisted of eight ECE undergraduate students. Most of those students start at a community college, and then transferred to the university to continue their education in an ECE program. All students were working at early childhood settings.

Collaboration and teaming definitions. All students defined collaboration in general and briefly. The students agreed that collaboration is working together for a common goal. There were differences between the students in defining the term "teaming." Some of the students thought collaboration and teaming are different, and some thought they have the same meaning. Student F stated,

> I think teaming is the same thing as collaboration but I think it's a little bit more personal because if let's say you are collaborating with 12 teachers but you really work with 2 teammates in your classroom every day, the relationship is a little more personal, closer, but I do think it's the same thing.

Student K looked to teaming as different than collaboration by stating, "I do think though that teaming is more refined and specific to maybe a smaller or a portion of that goal. . . . Teaming involves using the strengths" that each teacher has to work on area that she is more familiar in.

   Students' perspectives of the purpose of collaboration. Four students referred to the purpose of collaboration as benefitting the children. Student D stated, "We want every child to be successful . . . we have to work as a team, we have to collaborate, we have to come together, put our ideas and our goals together in order to serve the children." Student G attributed the purpose of collaboration to have different visions enables the teachers to see the issues or problems in a holistic picture. The other students thought that collaboration helped to share ideas and teaching methods as well as to reduce teacher stress. Student J focused on trust as an important aspect to collaborate effectively. She provided an example of her experience with a classroom teacher " it took her a long time for her to trust me and I'm like, "I'm here to help." Now that she knows me, we are collaborating and we are getting to know each other so I think building that trust."

   Students' training in inclusion. All the students agreed that they did not receive sufficient training in inclusion. Student G indicated that her training on inclusion was through an introductory level exceptional child foundational course. She stated, "In that class, we were taught that the purpose of inclusion is to try to have every child included in a classroom." All other students thought that they gained some information about inclusion from their readings, their work, or community colleges when they were

studying there. Student F said, "I don't think I received training while at [the university] for successful inclusion in the classroom. I think that's something that's so important because my district is an inclusion district." Student K reported an issue when she said,

> I have not directly received any training in inclusion where it concerns developmental disabilities or racial differences that people might isolate or anything else like that in terms of the child, but I also haven't received training in how we include occupational therapist or how we include a speech therapist or how we learn to relate to those people and their specialties

When I asked the students about their thoughts regarding inclusion in early childhood settings, their answers varied. A variety of different perspectives emerged without a common understanding of what inclusion means in different contexts. Some of them supported inclusion and defined it as including children from diverse backgrounds as Student H stated,

> I support it [inclusion] very much because I deal with a lot of diversity, a lot of children from different countries, and they walk into my center not speaking any English. . . . I support that we need to have the training and be prepared.

Student I indicated support for inclusion and explained that in her statement, "No one should be separated, variety it's a lot. They [children] have two moms or two dads, so I see a lot of that. It needs to be included in the studies here [at the university]." Some students were supportive of inclusion, but they indicated it was not helpful for some children in certain circumstances. Students F, G, and J believed that inclusion should be purposeful for the child and the teachers should have skills and receive specific training on how to include children. Student G offered a statement of concern about her training program when she said,

If you are early childhood major, you take one special education class. That class is nothing compared to being in a classroom of kids with special needs. . . . Everybody in education should do student teaching five weeks here, five weeks in the special education classroom, because that's how you differentiate, that's how you are successful in inclusion. Otherwise, it's a waste of time and it's unfair to the student.

Additionally, Student K had a concern regarding the lack of training on inclusion that allowed her to identify or know if the child has an invisible disability or how she can get help from other professionals "if you don't know what to look for, I think it will be overlooked."

Collaboration knowledge and skills training. All the students agreed that they did not receive enough training on collaboration. Some of the students mentioned that some instructors talked about the importance of collaboration in general, but that was not sufficient to learn or practice the skills. Student F stated,

At [the university] I feel like I didn't really experience a lot of professional collaboration. There was class like EC 101. The professor that taught that class plus another. . . . She did talk about the importance about collaborating with the other educational professionals in your school, in your team, but that has been my only and that was as a freshman year so that was years ago.

Student G agreed with the other students and said, "They [instructors] all mentioned it's [collaboration] important but they don't teach you why, they don't teach you how, they don't teach you like there's a set way to do it."

All students concurred that they are not yet practicing or observing collaboration through their courses or field experiences. One student mentioned that there will be a collaboration component in her field experience next semester and she thought "but I think it's one opportunity, it's one paper, it's not enough." Student K expressed the necessity to be afforded opportunities to practice collaboration to understand other professionals because "special Ed teachers and general Ed teachers are sometimes not

able to understand each other and then work well together." Most of the students

reflected that all collaborative practices they observed only were at their work.

Student D was the only student who felt confident that she was prepared well to

collaborate with other professionals. She stated,

> I may have had a class [that] taught me collaboration per se, but I got piece [learn about collaboration] in some of my classes. I think that I would be able to fit in with my teachers [at preschool] when we go and collaborate . . . [for a] child. I have that background; I have that piece that they have given me here.

The other seven students felt they are not efficiently prepared to be effective

collaborators. Student K stated, "I have not had any training that specifically sets me

down as a future teacher with another person who is already an educator in a classroom,

and helps me understand the interplay between myself and the teaching profession."

Research Question 3: Similarities and Differences Between the Early Childhood Programs

The results for Research Question 3 are based on the findings from Research

Question 1 and 2. Coding process for all existing data for Research Question 3 from the

different sources led to developing major themes: the ECE and ECSE programs'

similarities and differences in training their students in collaboration. Each sub-theme

included similarities and differences between coordinator's and instructors' experiences

and perspectives, students' perspectives, and training methods.

Similarities in Collaboration Training Between the Early Childhood Programs

Coordinator's and instructors' experiences and perspectives. One of the

similarities among some participants, who teach in ECE and ECSE programs, was that

they had no experience working at preschool settings. Those instructors only had

experience in kindergarten and above settings. Regarding the perspectives of participants in inclusion and collaboration, both ECE and ECSE participants supported inclusion and collaboration. However, two ECE participants and one ECSE participant supported inclusion, but they believed that it was not working in some situations.

A familiar theme emerged when I asked the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors about their thoughts regarding professional collaboration in early childhood; most of the first thoughts were focused on collaboration with families. Also, seven instructors out of eight mentioned that the purpose of collaboration was to meet the needs of children. Most of the participants expressed that they teach collaboration, but they did not assess it and they did not know how to assess it. Even though most of the participants reflected on the lack of practicing collaboration in the field and difficulties to access and observe good collaboration models, all ECE and ECSE participants tend to have positive feelings about their students and their readiness to work in inclusive preschools with essential knowledge and skills in collaboration.

In addition, all participants agreed that supporting collaborative practices through preparation programs has a strong impact on the students' attitudes toward collaboration and teaming. Some ECE and ECSE faculty thought that their students did not have adequate knowledge or experience knowing the terms that are used and/or the work nature of other education professionals from different disciplines.

Students' perspectives. In general, ECE and ECSE students defined collaboration similarly. All three ECSE students and four ECE students agreed that the purpose of collaboration is to serve the needs of children. Even though ECSE and ECE students agreed that they received training about the importance of professional

collaboration, they felt that they were not fully prepared to practice collaboration due to a lack of training in how to implement successful collaborative practices. All ECSE and ECE students expressed that their courses focused on knowledge more than practices, and they recommended more hands-on practice in the field.

Moreover, similar to the instructors' perspective, ECE and ECSE students thought that they did not have adequate knowledge or experience knowing the relevant terms and/or the work nature of other education professionals from different disciplines. Another likeness between students was that all ECSE and ECE students agreed that they did not receive sufficient training in inclusion and did not know how to implement successful inclusion.

Training methods. In general, ECE and ECSE programs were similar in the most of the teaching content that both programs have assessment courses, children development courses, and focus on children and their families. Also, both programs have courses with sections focused on collaboration and/or collaborative practices, which were embedded in the content. Some examples included assignments or activities that support the idea of collaboration and teaming. More than half of the ECE and ECSE participants expressed that they supported their students to work in small groups as a part of collaboration training. The responses regarding the time that the ECE and ECSE participants spent in discussing or practicing collaboration and teaming in their courses ranged between time spent in some classes to time spent in every class.

**Differences in Collaboration Training
Between the Early Childhood
Programs**

Coordinator's and instructors' experiences and perspectives. All ECSE

participants elaborated on their thoughts about inclusion in early childhood settings,

while three of the ECE participants provided limited descriptions. One ECE instructor

had more details about inclusion. All ECSE participants agreed that inclusion programs

have made progress over the years, but improvement is still needed to implement these

programs successfully. In general, most of the ECSE participants' descriptions about

their courses tended to focus on inclusion, on working with other educational

professionals, and on how to refer and establish eligibility of young children with

disabilities. However, most of the ECE participants' descriptions about their courses

tended to focus on administration in early childhood, adult relationships, and special

education in general.

Most of the ECSE participants tended to support collaboration knowledge

learning and implementing this learning into practices. The ECE participants tended to

take into account students' desires and abilities are factors in increasing or decreasing

students' motivation to learn and gain collaborative skills.

Students' perspectives. One of the differences between the ECSE and ECE

students was that the new ECSE program impacted the students' ultimate preparation for

inclusive preschools. Consequently, the ECSE students recommended a formal meeting

between the ECSE faculty and the students to foster increased collaboration among the

ECSE faculty in order to address students' needs and improve their outcomes.

Half of the ECE students had different understandings of the meaning of inclusion in special education. They used a child who had two moms, two dads, or different race as examples of included children. The ECE students reflected that they had insufficient training on IEPs, which is a part of an inclusion program for students identified for special education services and expected teaming practices. They recommended increasing their knowledge and practices about IEPs. The ECE students reflected that they did not practice or observe collaboration through their courses or field experiences.

Training methods. There were several differences between ECSE and ECE programs in their training methods. The first difference was that the ECSE courses' content had more focus on working with other educational professionals, and centered on special education trends and issues in the early childhood field. The three ECSE courses that have sections supporting professionals' collaboration are generally focused on assessment, collaboration with families and professionals, and research based practices. Also, the ECSE program tended to provide more field experience in their courses. The ECSE program focused on encouraging students to involve and/or observe real practices at early childhood settings. The emphasis of the ECSE program was placed on providing an entire course about professional collaboration and teaming. This course supports extensively professional collaboration and teaming in most of the objectives, topics, readings, and assignments. The ECSE program coordinator confirmed that this course is the main vehicle identified to teach about collaboration and teaming. Thus, the ECSE program meets more competencies that are related to professional collaboration. Each ECSE course has either an objective or sub-objective that is related to professional

collaboration. Two ECSE courses did not address professional collaboration elements in assignments.

In addition, the suggested ECE courses that have sections supporting professionals' collaboration are generally focused on administration, adult relationships, and ECSE. Two ECE courses support professional collaboration in one topic and one assignment for each course, while one ECE course supports collaboration only in one indirect topic: "Staffing & Supervision/Developing Relationships." The ECE courses did not address professional collaboration element in the objectives of the courses.

The last difference between ECE and ECSE programs was related to the class observations. In the ECE class observation, there were a few elements in teamwork and collaboration that were in small parts of readings and a brief discussion about it. In the ECSE class observation, there was intense learning in professional collaboration and teaming; the students read and watched a video about this topic, and worked in small groups as a simulation to real collaborative practices. The instructor and the students had intensive discussions about collaboration, teaming, and coaching.

Additional Findings

Throughout the individual interviews with the ECE senior instructor, the ECSE coordinator, the ECE and ECSE instructors, and the focus group interviews with ECE and ECSE students, there were additional findings that were not directly addressed by the research questions. These additional findings added precious information in order to improve methods of training on collaboration and teaming in these preparation programs. These additional findings included (a) ECSE coordinator's and ECE and ECSE

instructors' challenges in teaching collaboration and recommendations and (b) students'

challenges in collaboration training and recommendations.

**Coordinator and Instructors: Challenges
in Teaching Collaboration**

The participants highlighted different challenges in preparing their students to

practice professional collaboration. Some of these listed challenges were the personality

traits and abilities of practicing collaboration with other professionals successfully as

Participant 3 said, "They [students] just don't have all the right personality traits or . . .

the skills that they are personally motivation to do those jobs. . . . They have a degree but

there's no way they could really do this job." Additionally, the cultural environment that

the students work in was a significant factor to support or overlook collaborative

practices. This will lead students to either increase or decrease their motivation to learn

and practice collaboration. Participant 2 described this challenge by saying,

> Some programs [preschool programs] are much more highly emphasized,
> collaboration and working together. . . . Some programs look at the rules and
> regulations for childcare and they do what they have to do to get their license and
> keep their license but they don't go beyond that.

A few participants expressed their concerns of providing opportunities for their

students to experience collaboration, and struggles of finding successful collaborative

models for their students. Participant 5 provided an example of this:

> If you wanted the students to observe one IEP meeting, you know there's a good
> example out there of how professionals collaborated during an IEP meeting. If we
> cannot find a way for the students to get access to that meeting, that becomes a
> challenge.

Another challenge was how the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors

ensured their students were able to practice these skills with accuracy in their real jobs at

schools. Participant 4 clarified, "I can teach them and teach them and not know what they

actually do outside, because it is different when you're actually in that situation." And she extended her explanation, "a lot of them [students] have never been in that situation before, so they don't have a lot of background knowledge to bring to the table when they're doing it [collaboration]." Participant 6 confirmed this challenge by saying, "I don't get to see them [students] really practice this skill [collaboration]." Also, finding high quality mentors who support effective collaborative practices and provide students with helpful feedback was a challenge mentioned by Participant 5.

Another challenge was about the lack of the relationship between universities and school districts, where some participants indicated the necessity of strengthening these relationships in order to improve education outcomes. Participant 8 referred this challenge to time issue "There are some attempts from both sides but I think the other thing is again the time constraints because there's already so much that each one of us is doing." Likewise, there is a challenge that discussed the time students' spent in learning and practicing collaboration at their colleges instead of in real early childhood settings. Participant 1 explained that,

> They're [students] all very similar, they're all college students, so they're not working with different personalities, different bodies of knowledge, different ages that you would in a school. . . . They don't have that diversity of collaboration… One of the difficulties with the education process is that they're sitting in a college classroom that looks like a college classroom.

Participant 4 felt that her students learned a lot in the class about different terms used by professionals from different disciplines in inclusive classrooms, "but unless you're exposed to it [terms] on a day to day basis . . . you're not going to learn it as well." Practicing collaboration between females and males can be a challenge as Participant 1 stated, "Men can take over, and that can change the collaboration. Women are sometimes

raised to defer to men, men expect it." Gender can impact successful collaboration because sometimes men tend to decide and females tend to listen.

Assessing collaboration knowledge and skills was another challenge mentioned by most of the participants. Participant 6 mentioned, "I think it's the most important thing [collaboration], but I didn't assess it and I don't know how I would." Most of the participants thought that they teach and support collaboration, but they do not assess it and they do not know how to assess it. Participant 8 noted that assessing collaboration knowledge is applied in the program more than assessing collaboration skills, "Right now we are theoretically kind of testing them [students] but we don't really observe them."

Most of the participants articulated their concerns about the lack of providing their students with enough quantity and quality of learning experiences regarding collaborative practices throughout their programs. Participant 5 stated, "Observing one team or working with one family and one team is not enough. The idea is the frequency." Moreover, some participants expressed their agreement that there is no time to collaborate with other department faculty in order to provide collaboration opportunities among their students. Participant 1 stated,

> I talked with [instructor] I said it would be so neat if we could come up with a homework assignment, a project, where my students had to talk to your students and vice-versa in order to complete the assignment. Of course, we're busy up to our ears and never got around to doing it.

Coordinator's and Instructors'
Recommendations

Seven participants mentioned several recommendations for improvements related to preparing preservice teachers in order to gain effective professional collaboration knowledge and skills. One of the recommendations was to increase efforts in supporting

learning about professional collaboration through varied instructional methods and practicing the skills through activities, and assignments. Participant 3 said, "I thought of adding some new components to my class just to ensure that I'm really giving the teachers the information they need to be successful as a collaborator and a team player in the education because it has such an important part." Also, Participant 6 had a similar thought when she stated, "I don't get to see them really practice this skill [collaboration]. I probably could've done a better job in that in their assignments. I could've put more responsibility for collaborating as part of the assignments." Also, she extended her recommendation and said, "I would definitely change one or more of the assignments to assess collaboration."

The second recommendation was when Participant 8 expressed an issue when she said, "I think we don't talk as much in our programs and courses sometimes about professional to professional collaborations." She recommended infusing professional collaboration knowledge and skills in national and state standards in order to ensure that all new early childhood educators from various disciplines have similar learning opportunities in collaboration knowledge and skills.

The third recommendation was induction programs for the new teachers, which was mentioned by Participant 8. Induction programs can support new teachers to create a positive collaborative environment that leads to increase retaining among educators in school districts. Specifying a part of the induction programs to focus on finding ways to mentor these new teachers for the next 2 years while they are at their workplace. Thus, the instructors can help the new teachers to transition between all the theoretical and idealistic learning to the real working environment.

A fourth recommendation was made by Participant 2 when she recommended an idea that will help to make sure that the new teachers are maintaining and continuing their learning in collaboration skills; she said, "A lot of the continuation of those skills . . . and developing more skills in our field is up to the individual to seek out further professional development opportunities, to practice the skills that they have . . . we emphasize all of the free or low cost professional development opportunities."

A fifth recommendation mentioned by some of the participants, was to increase field experiences and provide opportunities to the preservice teachers to observe and practice collaborative practices in action. Participant 4 stated, "it would be nice to be able to have them [preservice teachers] do it in field experience. At least sit in and watch an IEP meetings . . . and see how the collaboration works." Participant 7 also agreed with this recommendation by stating, "maybe we do need to try to build in more experience in the classes so when they get to those field experiences in the schools . . . or out in the agencies." Participant 6 reflected a similar point, and emphasized on the importance of providing excellent collaborative practices for the students, "I think it's also really important to make sure that students have positive collaborative experiences because it's not really happening out there in the field." Participant 6 extended her point of view and said, "Not everybody's [instructors] going to be good at all parts of collaboration, but to be valuing it and having those opportunities for it."

Participant 6 mentioned the sixth recommendation when she noted the importance of communication between the faculty including the coordinator of the program and the fieldwork placements of the students and initiating good models of collaboration at sites. She clarified her point of view when she said,

> I think, like I said, I tried to do that [model of collaboration] in the classroom, but I think on the site, it's going to be so much more important because then you see what the other players are bringing to the table as far as collaboration, and then you can help the students understand why it is or isn't happening based on what other people are doing.

The seventh recommendation discussed by over half of the participants emphasized the importance of collaboration among coordinators and instructors in the program and with other faculty from different disciplines. This recommendation focused on creating an environment in universities that enable preservice teachers from different departments to work together in order to give them opportunities to collaborate like they would have to perform in real life at schools. Participant 8 explained this in her statement,

> I think if you are really going to simulate collaboration we do need to simulate it at the personnel level here as well in terms of trying to see can we say run courses where actually ECE and ECSC students work together? Can we develop assignments together so that they actually have to collaborate and they'll learn it right up here. Or SLPs or OTs and PTs can we collaborate with these departments and actually give them opportunities to do something together like they would have to do in real life.

In addition, the ninth and different recommendation indicated by Participant 1 that was related to designing the learning environment at the university to imitate the real preschools which would enable them to learn and practice collaboration in a similar real environment, she stated, "I would love to have a room dedicated to early childhood that could look like an early childhood room." Because she thought that, the students learn better in an environment that looks like their real future placements.

**Early Childhood Special Education
Students' Challenges in
Collaboration Training**

The first challenge that the three students mentioned was about their feelings

about the new ECSE program and impacted their ultimate preparation. They felt that they

were the experimental subjects in the program. Training in collaboration skills was one

aspect impacted because of the new program. Student A explained this when she said,

"Our professors are just as lost or confused as we are when it comes to fully preparing us

because some of them have never even worked in early childhood."

Another challenge was the lack of information about other educational

professionals from various departments, which made collaborating with those

professionals frustrating. Student C confirmed this, "We've had people come in and talk

to us from other professions, but it's the bare minimum and it's terminal . . . It's all

technical terminology." Student B had a similar issue, "I don't have any idea what . . . I

have a little bit of an idea, but I don't have what OTs, PTs, SLPs specialize in or how to

help." The students agreed that collaborating with educators who use similar or the same

terminology is easy and as Student A stated, "I could confidently collaborate with them

[educators who use similar or same terminology]." On the other hand, working with other

professionals/specialists who use different terminology is a challenge, as Student C

described, "It does come down to terminology because we could talk professionally with

another educator. When it comes down to another specialist, I'm like, treat me like I'm

six because I have no idea what you're saying." In addition, Students A and B felt they

lack strategies of how to collaborate with other professionals. Student A described this, "I

don't know anything that. . . . It goes back to other professionals. I don't know what they

do. We can say all day long, yeah, we have to collaborate with them, but [we do not know how].”

An additional challenge was the students reflected that they want to learn about the worst cases or scenarios they might face in their real life as teachers and the best methods to solve these cases. They thought that most of their training was what are the ideal situations. Student A explained her feelings, “I feel like sometimes they’re afraid to tell us or show us about the bad and horror stories and what actually does happen more frequently than the good.” Student C added,

> I don’t want to have to go out into the field and make those same mistakes. If we can get somebody to tell us or mock it for us then we can kind of prepare. . . . It would be nice if there’s a textbook like the bad in early childhood special education.

Student A provided an example of a difficult situation that the students need to be trained on “when you get a child that has a behavior problem that is aggressive, we don’t even know how to protect ourselves . . . or the child.”

A challenge mentioned by Student B, “My lack of knowledge and being comfortable with being able to collaborate with people who don’t want to be there, who don’t want to be on that team.” All students agreed on this challenge, and they thought that they learned the importance of collaboration, but they did not learn the skills of how to deal and work with professionals who do not collaborate or collaboration is not their priority.

All students expressed that their courses were focused on knowledge more than practices. They thought they learned a lot of information, but when it came to transfer this information into practicality it became difficult because they did not have adequate practical experiences. Student C said:

> There's very little practical aspect to what we learn in class. It is all textbooks. Here's some terminology you need to know. . . . I'm tired of reading a case study because you don't get all the information. I want to see it. I need to see it a visual. Our classes are focused on one way with one learning style and it's someone who can take reading a textbook and lectures, and I can't.

Student A felt that her education now at the program is similar to her high school education in terms of readings, tests, and assignments with limited real practices. Student C explained the reason of the necessity of practices, "I have learned more in my field experience than I have in any class I've ever taken." In addition, a lack of communication among ECSE instructors was a challenge mentioned by the students. Student C stated, "I think also there's the communication between our professors on what's supposed to be taught . . . is lacking."

Early Childhood Special Education
Students' Recommendations

All the three students thought that they need more field experiences. Student C elucidated the needs of practices "We could be in a preschool setting or we could be in an elementary setting, but we don't have any of that practical, realistic experience to grasp on to. I think even observing a mock IEP, which they don't even let you observe mock IEPs anymore, would be beneficial." Student B confirmed this need and said, "Definitely just more hands-on, real-life cases that we're going to be running into." The students recommended that having more experiences and practices with different professionals from different disciplines are needed. The students reflected the need to meet with other professionals in the class to collaborate with them, as they will do in the real inclusive schools. Student C explained how she wants to practice with other professionals,

> I want a PT to come in and show me. What would you do with stiffness? I have no idea, but a PT would know. If they come into the classroom one time and they do that with me just by moving in a mock type of physical therapy session with an infant or a preschooler, we would have that hands-on experience. It all goes back to hands-on. It goes back to collaborating with other professionals

Student C reflected on the needs to train the students on how to work with other professionals from different disciplines in order to serve the children in inclusive settings "You want to be coached, and we have yet to be coached on how we can assist other professionals with the children."

In addition, the students suggested initiating a formal meeting between ECSE faculty and the students in order to discuss students' needs and to improve their outcomes. Student A stated, "I think to benefit the future students that are coming, I think it would be good for the professors now to hear our voices, especially us three." And she extended her thoughts and said, "Maybe allow at least us three to come in at least on a weekly meeting or once a month with them and be able to express that because I feel like our voices aren't being heard"

Another recommendation was that the students felt they need more discussion in the classrooms about their field experiences and what they faced and how to solve real problems proficiently. Student A noted, "Just be discussions. Talk about our experiences and our jobs and our field experiences. Especially now once we do get our placements."

The students reflected the necessity of developing positive relationships between the students and the instructors in order to make the students feel comfortable to discuss any issues and continue and maintain this relationship after they graduated. Thus, the new teachers will have their instructors as resources that the students can contact them when they need. Student A reflected on this by saying, "It would be nice to have that

relationship with them to be able to set foot in their office, call them, email them even when we're off doing our student teaching and be able to still receive the professionalism that we should be getting now as students."

One of the recommendations revealed by the students was the importance of collaborating among the ECSE instructors. The students felt that the lack of communication or collaboration among ECSE instructors impacted the students' learning. Student A recalled this statement, "professors tell us last semester, even if they were asked to teach this semester course, they would not do it because of certain other people not being able to collaborate with them and tell them what it is." The students felt the importance of modeling effective collaboration among the ECSE instructors in order to positively influence the students' learning.

Early Childhood Education Students'
Challenges in Collaboration
Training

The students listed several challenges that prevented them from being fully prepared in collaboration knowledge and skills. The first challenge was the lack of practicing collaboration or as Student I said, "Hands on experience." The second challenge was about the lack of learning about other professionals' roles and the terms they used. The third challenge was deficiency of providing realistic courses that prepare students for inclusive schools, specifically for collaboration as well. Student G described her program when she said,

> Here like I said, you take one special education course and that's it. You can't effectively collaborate with other team members when you get this tiny little glimpse of this huge thing. You think, that's something that the program should absolutely consider is giving us more exposure, more courses around special education

Some students mentioned the lack of teaching them about IEPs, which they thought it is

critical to know about it. "I just wish that we knew what or have more training on what an

IEP is and all that stuff," as reported by Student J.

Early Childhood Education Students'
Recommendations

The students provided different recommendations regarding their program in

order to prepare them to be effective collaborators in inclusive settings. The first

recommendation was adding specific course for collaboration as Student J suggested,

"maybe adding more specific classes, like an EC class towards just collaboration, how to

collaborate. I would name it, how to collaborate in an EC classroom." Also, all students

agreed that embedding collaboration knowledge and skills in the ECE courses is a

necessity as Student F described this as,

> We need to have more exposure to that [collaboration] and maybe not more
> classes because nobody wants to take more classes but . . . embed the important of
> collaborating and really preparing us as general education teachers how to
> collaborate with these specialists. Because again if you have no idea who they are,
> what their role is, you're walking into this classroom and you're kind of blind
> folded.

In addition, the students reflected on their needs to have more training in inclusion in

order to learn how to include children and how to work with other professionals to serve

included children.

The second recommendation was about providing more field experiences with

each of the ECE courses, "I think we need more field experience" as Student F indicated.

The students recommended more collaborative practices in their preparation programs.

As Student I said, "I think we need to have more on hands work." The students thought

that more experiences would provide them more understanding and confidence for their

future work. The third recommendation was that all the students agreed that there is a

need to learn about different professionals' roles as Student K explained,

> As future teacher person in this program, got to understand the roles of an
> occupation therapists, the role of a special ED teacher, the role of a speech
> therapist and have some of the vocabulary, have some understanding so that when
> you become a teacher, you have more confidence in talking to those other
> professionals in your school. Then you can collaborate because you come from
> some similar background.

The fourth recommendation was mentioned by Student K about offering "a lab

school environment that they [the university] could use" in order that the students can

practice their learning in a real environment. The fifth recommendation was suggested by

Student K and I that reflected the need for orientation at the first year of the program as

Student K described, "Why can't we get some similar information all at once in the

beginning, like in orientation so you know what you are going after, you have some

terminology, you have some expectations . . . more realistic about what that professional

world is." The sixth recommendation centered on providing workshops as another way to

achieve this expectation, "If they can't embed it [collaboration] into their curriculum or

ED classes, offer us typical ECE people specialize classes or workshops."

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings for the three research questions and additional

findings. I categorized the data collected through the research process, including

individual interviews with the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors, focus

group interviews with ECE and ECSE students, review of six syllabi and extended

documents of selected ECE and ECSE courses, and class observations for selected ECE

and ECSE courses. The findings for the first research question categorized into four

themes included the experiences and perspectives of the ECSE program coordinator and

the ECE and ECSE instructors in inclusion, collaboration and teaming definitions, the purpose of collaboration, and expectations of students. The findings for the second research question categorized into two major themes that included applications within courses and instructional methods for collaboration and teaming and students' perspectives of their training in collaboration. The findings for the third research question were based on the findings from the first and second research questions. The findings categorized into two major themes. The first theme was the ECE and ECSE similarities in training on collaboration and the second theme was the ECE and ECSE differences in training on collaboration. Finally, there were additional findings that were not directly addressed by the research questions. These additional findings added precious information in order to improve methods of training on collaboration and teaming in these preparation programs. These additional findings included two major themes. The first theme was coordinator's and instructors' challenges in teaching collaboration and recommendations and the second theme was about students' challenges in collaboration training and recommendations. Interpretation for the findings is discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the role of early childhood education (ECE) and early childhood special education (ECSE) personnel preparation programs in providing training about effective collaboration skills to future early childhood professionals. The purpose of this chapter is to provide interpretative insights into the findings of the research questions and make comparisons to extant literature. The following three research questions were explored in this case study:

Q1   How do program coordinators and instructors in personnel preparation programs characterize the experiences provided to ECE and ECSE preservice teachers that promote effective knowledge and skills in the areas of teaming and collaboration?

Q2   What methods of training in collaboration and teaming do preservice ECE and ECSE professionals receive during their personnel preparation programs?

Q3   What are the similarities and differences in the way ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs train their preservice teachers for collaboration and teaming responsibilities?

This final chapter provides the interpretation of the major findings that were extracted from the data. The data was gained from individual interviews with the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors, focus group interviews with students in the undergraduate ECE and ECSE programs, review of documents from six courses that emphasize collaboration, and class observations of these courses. This chapter includes: (a) synopsis of the findings, (b) discussion of the findings, (c) limitations of the study,

(d) recommendations for policy, personnel preparation practices, and future research, and finally (e) an overall conclusion of the chapter.

Synopsis of the Findings

Research Question 1: Coordinator's and Instructors' Perspectives Toward Teaming and Collaboration

All eight participants agreed on the benefits and importance of inclusion programs. Consequently, all participants had positive perspectives toward collaboration and teaming. Six out of eight participants thought the concept of a collaborative team was important to provide needed services and accomplish successful outcomes for children and their families. However, the faculty participants defined collaboration and teaming terms differently.

Additionally, all eight participants shared positive feelings about their students and their readiness to work in inclusive early childhood settings with essential knowledge and skills in collaboration. These perspectives emerged because the participants thought they were supporting knowledge and skills within their programs. In addition, all faculty participants reflected on the role of teacher preparation programs on the students' attitudes toward collaboration. They felt their students were influenced positively toward collaboration because their programs supported this area.

Research Question 2: Methods of Training in Collaboration and Teaming

This second section of findings was comprised of the results from four different sources: (a) individual interviews with four ECE and four ECSE faculty participants, (b) focus group interviews with eight ECE and three ECSE students, (c) review of syllabi

and some extended documents, and (d) two different class observations. The coding process for all existing data for Research Question 2 from the different sources led to developing two major themes.

The first theme was a discussion of courses and instructional methods. The ECSE program coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors indicated that all six selected courses in ECE and ECSE programs supported professional collaboration. Some participants focused only on supporting collaboration knowledge through lectures and activities in communication skills, leadership, and management. A few participants confirmed that they support both knowledge and skills of collaboration through lectures, videos of team meetings, readings, discussions, role-playing, and through implementing collaborative practices in classroom activities. However, most of the participants indicated that they did not assess collaboration knowledge or skills. In addition, the reviewed syllabi and some extended documents from the six selected courses demonstrated that most courses did not adequately address professional collaboration competencies, and only one course supported professional collaboration intensively. Similarly, the findings of ECE and ECSE class observations indicated that methods of delivering the content of the topic and using different activities were similar. The ECE instructor was concise in supporting collaboration knowledge. The ECSE instructor provided intensive content that supported both collaboration knowledge and skills.

The second theme was related to students' perspectives of their training on collaboration. The findings of both ECSE and ECE focus group interviews included the students' definitions of collaboration and teaming, their perspectives of the purpose of collaboration, their training in inclusion, and their training in collaboration knowledge

and skills. In general, ECSE students indicated that they have sufficient knowledge about the importance of professional collaboration, but they lack practice in collaboration skills within their courses and field experiences.

Research Question 3: Similarities and Differences Between the Early Childhood Programs

Some of the similarities between the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors were: (a) supporting inclusion and professional collaboration; (b) responding concerning the purpose of collaboration that was to meet the needs of children; (c) teaching collaboration, although not assessing it; (d) creating positive feelings about preparing their students to work in inclusive preschools; and (e) agreeing that preparation programs have a strong impact on the students' attitudes toward collaboration and teaming.

Similarly, there was a consensus among the students in the following areas: (a) defining collaboration; (b) being insufficiently prepared to practice collaboration; (c) having insufficient knowledge or experience regarding terminology and/or the work nature of other professionals from different disciplines; and (d) receiving insufficient training in implementing inclusion. In addition, the similarities between ECE and ECSE training methods occurred in most of the teaching content, and both programs provided courses with sections in professional collaboration.

There were some differences between the ECE and ECSE programs. The most prominent differences between the ECSE coordinator's and ECE and ECSE instructors' perspectives included the differences in their thoughts about the nature of inclusion and descriptions of their courses. The most significant differences between responses of ECE

and ECSE students were understanding the meaning of inclusion in special education and practicing and observing collaboration through courses and field experiences. Furthermore, the most prominent difference between ECE and ECSE training methods was that the ECSE program provided an entire course on the topic of professional collaboration and teaming.

Additional Findings

Throughout the individual interviews with the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors, and the focus group interviews with ECE and ECSE students, there were additional findings that were not directly addressed by the research questions. These additional findings included: (a) ECSE coordinator's and ECE and ECSE instructors' challenges in teaching collaboration and their recommendations to improve supporting collaboration and teaming within preparation programs, and (b) students' challenges in collaboration training and their recommendations for enhancing their training in collaboration and teaming. These additional findings were previously described in Chapter IV.

Discussion of the Findings

This study provided vital information to support professional collaboration practices through early childhood preparation programs. Based on the data, the ECE and ECSE program faculty had positive perspectives toward inclusion programs and professional collaboration practices. The results showed a positive relationship between perspectives toward inclusion and perspectives toward professional collaboration. Additionally, the participants' visions about inclusion were convergent, and their perspectives were based on their background and/or experiences. The most notable

difference in their perspectives was that a few participants did not support full inclusion in circumstances that were perceived to impact all children negatively, while it was apparent that some participants indicated the need for improvement in implementing effective inclusion practices in early childhood settings.

Even though there was tacit consensus about the definition of collaboration as working together to achieve a common goal, the description of the process and skills of collaboration and teaming was viewed differently by the study participants. The various definitions for collaboration and teaming among the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors may result from different reasons. One of those reasons was presented in the literature that there is still no specific practical clear definition for collaboration, and teaming is an associated term with collaboration, because any effective collaborative practice requires a team, but not every team works as a collaborative team. Various school activities, including interactions among educators, are not always collaborative practices (Cook & Friend, 2010). The other possible reason for respondents' differences in definitions is the participants' various backgrounds and experiences in the early childhood field. The participants received different training from their preparation programs. Also, three of the participants had no experience in teaching in preschool settings, while other participants had diverse experiences in working at different preschool placements.

Furthermore, some of the participants elucidated their methods of supporting professional collaboration by using group work for activities or assignments. Group work activities and assignments are not sufficient for students to learn and practice collaborative teaming that is intended and aimed to serve young children with and

without disabilities in inclusive classrooms. There is a need for direct training on professional collaboration in order to increase ECE and ECSE students' knowledge and proficiency in practicing collaboration skills.

ECSE and ECE students reflected on their positive thoughts about inclusion programs; nevertheless some ECE students described inclusive programs as including children from diverse backgrounds (e.g., a child who has two moms or a child from a different race). The ECE students' understanding of inclusion may indicate their lack of training in understanding the meaning of inclusive programs that are related to the IDEA (2004) act. The findings also indicated that there is a need for training preservice teachers on how to implement successful inclusion. Odom et al. (2011) reported that the quality of the implementation of inclusion programs is a prominent issue in early childhood settings. Implementing successful inclusion programs requires effective collaboration among educators in order to increase the outcomes of young children with and without disabilities in inclusive preschools.

In addition, ECE and ECSE students expressed their positive perspectives toward collaboration and teaming and they reflected knowledge about the importance of collaboration, but needed to gain more skills and practice. The amount of training on collaboration and teaming coupled with field/work experiences had a significant role in defining the terms of collaboration and teaming among students. The literature classifies professional collaboration as one of the critical aspects of successful inclusion in early childhood settings (Grace et al., 2011) and the National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (2009) confirmed that quality inclusive programs are tied to collaborative teaming among education professionals.

The majority of the participants shared their knowledge about the purpose of professional collaboration that is to address and meet the needs of all children and their families. The ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors expressed similar thoughts that were discovered by Lesley et al. (2009) that many faculty members in universities value collaboration as a critical skill in preparation programs for educators. However, few instructors and students referred to the purpose and the value of collaboration among educators to share knowledge, ideas, perspectives, and experiences without mentioning the benefit of the outcomes for children and their families. This may indicate a need to promote their knowledge about the ultimate goal of collaboration.

The findings of the study revealed that ECE and ECSE programs focused generally on professional collaboration knowledge and ECSE reported more examples of practicing collaboration skills. The ECSE program provides an entire course on the topic of collaboration and teaming, which requires students to practice collaborative teaming. This supported Griffin et al. (2006) findings that approximately one half of special educators and one third of general educators experienced content related to collaboration during their preservice preparation programs. Many ECE students kept repeating the word "help" as a synonym for "collaboration", which may reflect their superficial knowledge of the differences between collaboration and helping. Supporting the knowledge of professional collaboration by instructors and providing a few opportunities for collaborative practices between the students from the same department is not sufficient for students to gain adequate skills and experiences to be successful collaborators in the future. This is consistent with what McKenzie (2009) found that collaboration courses provided by special education faculty were only a starting point

because the majority of preservice special education educators did not experience a real collaborative effort with general education colleagues until they began their actual career in schools.

In general, ECE and ECSE students commented on the lack of training on how to collaborate with other professionals in order to implement successful inclusion. This superficial knowledge is attributed to different factors revealed from the findings that may hinder future teachers to be effective collaborators in inclusive preschools. The first factor was insufficient professional collaboration elements in most of the descriptions/content, objectives, topics, assignments, and readings of ECE and ECSE courses. Hence, there was insufficient attention to providing specific practices of professional collaboration through the coursework, field experiences, and practica. The findings of this study supported previous findings by Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) that coursework on inclusion and collaboration is inadequate without opportunities to practice these skills in realistic settings. This lack of skill practice in the area of professional collaboration explains the absence of assessing students' knowledge and skills.

The second factor was related to the concerns by the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors of finding enough high quality opportunities for students to learn and experience professional-to-professional collaboration throughout their programs. This concern is consistent with what the ECSE students expressed that they did not experience good models of collaboration at their field experience placements. This may impact the students' confidence and attitudes to practice collaboration at their future schools. Insufficient preparation for collaborative practices impacts the confidence of

new educators, which results in reluctance to collaborate with other professionals (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009). The lack of training for preservice and inservice educators in professional collaboration may lead to the scarcity of efficient models of collaborative practices.

The third factor contributing to superficial knowledge occurred because of the establishment of two separate preparation programs for ECE and ECSE students' education. The two separate program models do not reflect a true professional collaboration that is expected from inclusive future placements in practice. This condition supported what Piper (2007) found that the segregation in preservice educators programs continues the beliefs that children with special needs need specially trained teachers, which leads general teachers to excuse themselves from responsibility towards those children because general teachers lack the specialized training. Sustained segregation in preparation programs would affect professional collaboration, which is a critcal aspect for inclusion programs' improvement. Friend and Cook (2013) illustrated their fears related to segregating in preparation programs that preservice teachers might face a challenge when they do their practicum or internship experiences because their work will be evaluated on their own isolated work, not on their work with others, which may increase working in isolation among professionals.

Another concern related to differences in preparation programs is that some ECE and ECSE instructors and all ECE and ECSE students reflected the lack in understanding the terminology and the roles of other professionals from different disciplines. Each discipline has to learn about each other's roles, skills, knowledge, and responsibilities in preparation programs in order to create effective interdisciplinary collaboration in early

childhood settings (Anderson, 2013). This barrier may negativily impact the future teachers' confidence to collaborate with other professionals.

The lack of relationships between school districts and unversities, as well as between the faculty including the program coordinators and the students' fieldwork placements was a fourth factor. Consequently, ECE and ECSE students lacked experience in collaborative practices and observations at real early childhood settings. The findings of Voss and Bufkin's (2011) study indicated a positive influence of fieldwork on changes in preservice teachers' attitudes and skills about working in inclusive settings. Insufficient experiences may impact students' learning and their abilty to initiate and implement successful collaborative practices in their future role as early childhood teachers. This reflected research findings indicating that outcomes for preservice teachers become enhanced when course content of teacher education programs are linked to field experiences, which allows preservice teachers to gain a realistic picture of their future inclusive classrooms (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2003; Couse & Recchia, 2011; Saracho, 2013; Voss & Bufkin, 2011).

The fifth factor was that the NAEYC standards for early childhood professionals lack an explicit statement of "professional collaboration in inclusive classrooms" in the core standards and in key elements of these standards. This leads to the possibility that state and other national standards that other early childhood preparation disciplines (e.g., speech therapy, psychology, and occupational therapy) followed might have the same issue.

The last factor revealed by ECSE participants was the relatively recent implementation of the program in which they were enrolled. The evolving nature of the

program design and potential gaps in program elements may impact the students'

learning and practicing professional collaboration. The ECSE program coordinator

reflected the need for time in order to know the areas that need more improvement

including collaboration and teaming. Also, ECSE students mentioned the lack of

common expectations between ECSE instructors, which was attributed to the dynamic

where they were teaching for the first time for this new program. A formal meeting

between ECSE students and ECSE faculty to discuss students' needs and to improve their

outcomes and the overall program could be a beneficial idea suggested by the students.

Furthermore, sustaining and improving the acquisition of collaborative skills

among new teachers was a concern. New teachers face new and different situations that

require a high degree of proficiency with collaboration skills. Providing ongoing

professional development for new teachers, offering feedback from mentors, and

establishing positive relationships with the instructors seemed beneficial techniques for

those new teachers in order to enable them to overcome any challenges in their future

inclusive preschools.

The literature revealed that program leaders in college and university settings

have provided very limited opportunities for faculty across departments to collaborate by

using a team teaching approach in order to prepare preservice educators to work

collaboratively in educational inclusive programs. Most participants in this study

indicated the lack of collaborative work across different departments to prepare future

teachers to understand the roles of various education professionals and to practice

collaborative teaming with those different professionals. This lack in collaboration

among early childhood program leaders mirrored the deficiency among ECE and ECSE

students in understanding other professionals' roles and terminology that was discipline specific. The results of Hestenes et al. (2009) ten-year history study of an interdisciplinary collaboration program showed that the benefits far outweigh the challenges of applying a team teaching approach in early childhood coursework.

Although there were positive feelings reflected by the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors regarding their students' readiness to work in inclusive schools with essential knowledge and skills in collaboration, the ECE and ECSE students still felt unprepared due to a lack in practicing collaborative skills. These positive feelings among the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors were due to their beliefs that they spent ample time talking and discussing collaboration during class times. This time was primarily focused on how to cover collaboration knowledge, which is not adequate to prepare preservice teachers to be efficient collaborators with other education professionals.

Moreover, the findings of observations revealed that the ECE class observation included brief discussions and activities that required short readings about professional collaboration. In contrast, ECSE class observations had extensive discussions and activities that required reading and watching a video about professional collaboration as well as practicing and simulating transdisciplinary collaborative teaming. Also, reviewing the documents of the six selected courses showed that ECSE courses addressed more competencies that are related to professional collaboration.

Generally, after reviewing the syllabi and extended documents of the selected courses, interviewing ECSE and ECE students, and observing classroom practices, I found the programs included some elements of professional collaboration knowledge, but

lacked applied practice on professional collaboration skills. Connecting knowledge about professional collaboration with practicing professional collaboration skills in environments that are close to the real setting is a critical process to gain efficiency and willingness to implement successful collaborative practices in inclusive preschools. Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) and Prince (2010) indicated the effectiveness of educator preparation programs for the improvement and retention of future educational professionals, and the researchers emphasized that preparation programs must provide learning experiences that tie theory and practice together.

All students and some of the instructors recommended adding and embedding more elements of professional collaboration practices in their courses. The students would like to learn about professional collaboration in the content of their courses and, most importantly, practice collaborative skills through their class activities, field experiences, assignments, and practica. All students emphasized the need for additional opportunities to practice collaborative skills because they felt practicing these specific skills were marginalized in their programs. Most ECE students expressed their desire to have a dedicated course in professional collaboration for inclusive classrooms. Increasing the elements of supporting professional collaboration practices throughout the early childhood preparation programs is necessary to fully prepare teachers in collaboration in inclusive classrooms.

The findings pointed out a need to provide ongoing preservice and inservice training in professional collaboration. The consistency and continuation in practicing professional collaboration are necessary to refine learned collaborative skills. Thus, the concerns expressed by the ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors regarding

how they assure that their students implement effective collaborative practices in their future inclusive schools will be attained through ongoing preservice and inservice training. Consequently, the new teachers will be able to implement the best practices in collaboration and create successful inclusion in order to best serve all children and their families. Choi (2010) suggested a need for educators to be prepared with skills, knowledge, and practices via preservice and inservice trainings in order to meet all children's needs and increase the effectiveness of inclusion. The U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Service (2015) recommended, in their joint policy statement on inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs, state policies that support the implementation of high quality inclusion and increasing education professionals' collaboration in early childhood settings. The findings of this study support the implementation of the joint policy statement recommendations for preparing preservice educators to be effective collaborators is critical to create high quality inclusion. The preparation programs are the first step and the cornerstone to have high quality teachers and inclusive programs that will lead to enhanced outcomes for all children.

The ECSE coordinator and ECE and ECSE instructors reflected their consensus that preparation programs have a significant impact on the students' attitudes, beliefs, ethics, approaches, and values toward collaborative practices. Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) found an agreement among researchers that the positive change in educators' skills and attitudes toward inclusion and collaboration is often associated with teacher preparation programs. Hence, there is a need to improve preparation programs in supporting collaboration and teaming practices in a way that simulates reality. Many

researchers (e.g., Choi, 2010; Grubert, 2011; Hestenes et al., 2009) underlined the recommended practices of improving preservice professional skills and attitudes about professional collaboration.

Limitations of the Study

This case study had a narrow scope because it explored the ECE and ECSE personnel preparation programs regarding providing professional collaboration skills to their students at one selected university. This study explored only two programs rather than including different programs that prepare other education professionals, such as service providers who are active members of teams. A small number of only 19 ECE and ECSE participants in this study were considered. There were eight ECE students who participated compared to only three ECSE students who participated in this study. It was possible to locate only a small number of ECSE respondents since they were the first cohort of a new program, which may have impacted the findings. Furthermore, while ECE was an established program, the ECSE program was a new program that had been operating for just two years. All ECSE instructors were teaching courses for the first time and all ECSE syllabi and extended documents that I reviewed were new. I observed the ECSE class that was provided for the first time, which may have affected the findings of this study. Moreover, only one class in each of the programs was observed. The limited number of class observations may impact the accuracy of findings.

The value of qualitative research often lies in the themes and the description established for a particular study. Despite the rich descriptions that the case study provided, the generalization of the findings was limited. The limitation of generalization was due to the unique characteristics and variables of the particular case study in one

setting. In qualitative studies, especially in case studies, particularity rather than generalizability is the key feature of this type of research (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, I recognized the potential for researcher bias as another possible limitation in this study. As a researcher, I have a special education background, which is a factor that may influence the findings. Also, I had personal experiences at preschools in various school districts that were potentially impacted by program participants. The researcher's bias may affect the findings during the interpretation process (Merriam, 2009). Another limitation was the lack of research studies discussing the role of early childhood preparation programs on promoting collaboration knowledge and skills, which may impact the interpretation of the findings. More research on this topic could increase the accuracy of interpretation of the findings.

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**Recommendations for Policy, Personnel
Preparation Practices, and
Future Research**

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Despite the above mentioned limitations, the emerging findings of this study have implications for policy, personnel preparation programs and practices, and research. The recommendations that I have provided would help to enhance the quality of education professionals and early childhoods inclusive programs. Thus, the outcomes of all children and their families may increase.

Recommendations for Policy

Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations related to the improvement in education policies were identified. One recommendation suggested adding and embedding a professional collaboration component into all national core standards for early childhood professional preparation programs, such as NAEYC

standards and State standards. A comprehensive explanation and accompanying rationale for the importance of this component and the best methods to implement it is fundamental.

Another recommendation suggested having one designated early childhood agency for each state system of education. Thus, the probability of providing high quality early childhood programs would potentially increase through consistent guidelines. The professional development for preservice and inservice teachers would create similar competencies among those teachers. All children would have similar education programs and services, which leads to focus on enhancing their outcomes and leads to ensure these programs and education professionals can address and meet the needs of all children equally.

Improving the relationships between school districts and colleges/universities is critical for seamless approaches to professional development for preservice and inservice educators that could enhance outcomes for children who are served by these educators. Enhancing deeper cooperation between colleges/universities and school districts could be achieved in different ways. The first possible way is that faculty could provide professional development for school district teachers and administrators, especially in professional collaboration practices. Developing workshops to enhance awareness of the importance of collaboration and teaming for children's outcomes and to learn and gain effective collaboration skills in order to implement successful collaborative practices are two examples. The second possible way to improve relationships is to ensure that certain preschools are created to have the highest quality of professional collaboration practices in order to be helpful practice sites for preservice teachers to observe, learn, and practice

collaboration skills. The third possible way improve systemic relationships is to empower preschools to provide classrooms as the learning environment for high-level college courses. Inservice teachers who choose to observe and learn the most recent research-based practices could also be encouraged to participate in these classes that feature professional collaboration as one of the critical practices. Therefore, the education system will have more qualified preschool teachers to collaborate with different preservice teachers, which could lead to more field experience opportunities and more meaningful practicum experiences. This may help to prepare high quality education professionals in collaboration skills and implement identified best practices collaboratively in inclusive programs to address and meet the needs of all children and their families. Also, improving the relationships between school districts and colleges/universities will promote the successful transition for preservice teachers to become fully prepared inservice teachers.

Moreover, leaders should work on changing and/or increasing leadership attitudes and beliefs toward the importance of professional collaboration practices for educators and the accuracy of implementing inclusive programs and providing the best services in order to improve outcomes for children. This includes district leadership positions, preschool leadership positions, and early childhood department leadership positions in higher education. Hence, professional development for preservice and inservice teachers can be designed to support professional collaboration practices. Additionally, positive attitudes toward collaboration and teaming among district and the school level leadership positions may help to create positive professional collaborative culture in schools. This

positive professional culture of collaboration is expected to be helpful for new teachers to preserve and to continue implementing what they learned in real settings.

Recommendations for Preservice
Personnel Preparation Programs
and Practices

Findings from this study reflected a need for improvement in early childhood preparation programs in the area of professional collaboration practices. Universities are encouraged to provide professional development for all instructors, program coordinators, and faculty leadership. This training should address professional collaboration knowledge and skills and how they can support and assess these practices through coursework, field experiences, and practica. Thus, embedding effective professional collaboration knowledge, skills, and practices into the content of courses, field experiences, and practica could become easier to implement and more efficient.

The suggested recommendations for preparation practices should include adding and embedding elements of professional collaboration knowledge and skills into all college/university early childhood courses, and practicing these skills as part of field experiences and the practicum. Faculty members can embed professional collaboration content through the objectives, assignments, and readings of the courses and ensure the alignment of course syllabi to national standards that support professional collaboration and teaming. Faculty should strive to embed and increase field experience in coursework because extensive field experience in early childhood personnel preparation programs is essential to transfer learned theories to practices. In addition, it is necessary to develop a variety of assessment methods in order to measure college students' mastery in professional collaboration knowledge and skills.

Additionally, there is a need to begin practicing professional collaboration skills in preparation programs among college students from varied programs who are expected to work in inclusive early childhood settings. These collaborative practices should simulate the real practices in inclusive preschools. The students could work collaboratively on designated assignments and projects as well as during field experiences and practicum.

Further, initiating coursework designed to promote collaboration and teaming in inclusive classrooms across college/university programs is needed. Courses could target preservice education professionals who will work at inclusive early childhood settings. This coursework could potentially be available to a variety of preservice education professionals, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, and school psychologists.

Moreover, faculty members across early childhood departments could collaborate to develop high quality training in professional collaboration within their programs for preservice teachers. Thus, faculty members can serve as models of effective collaborative practices for their students as well as infusing and mastering effective collaborative skills among these students.

**Recommendations for Future
Research**

The findings of this study identified several possible domains for further research that are related to professional collaboration and teaming. The suggested recommendations for further research are offered to better inform this area of inquiry. Because this study was conducted in one university, there is a need to replicate this study to include a variety of different colleges and universities that provide early childhood

programs across the country. Researchers are encouraged to conduct further qualitative studies to explore attitudes of leadership at different levels toward collaboration and teaming, including leadership at the school, district, university personnel preparation, state education agency, and federal education agency levels of impact. Also, there is a need to investigate collaboration among different university programs and determine the barriers that prevent university programs/faculty from implementing collaboration.

A study to investigate the extent to which different school districts implement professional collaboration practices among their education professionals is needed. This could include preschool through high school settings. Furthermore, there is a need to address new teachers' skills and their implementation level of learned collaborative skills and how they transfer theoretical learning into real practices at their work. This will help the early childhood preparation programs to know the effectiveness of their programs, and to recognize the areas that need to be improved. Finally, a quantitative study to examine the best collaborative practices that are associated with enhanced outcomes for children and their families is needed.

Conclusion

Early childhood personnel preparation programs for ECSE and ECE play a significant role in preparing the next generation of novice education professionals to collaborate effectively with other professionals in inclusive preschools. This supports the increased potential to create healthy and comfortable environments to implement high quality inclusive programs to increase children's outcomes. The findings from this study provide educational leaders, policymakers, and researchers with a deeper knowledge of the current status regarding the training of early childhood education professionals on

professional collaboration for inclusive settings. Thus, understanding the barriers to effective collaboration skills and implementing successful collaborative practices will support professionals to overcome identified challenges.

The results in this study presented some overlapping findings that appeared in all 19 participants' perspectives, identified challenges, and recommendations regarding professional collaboration and teaming. Overall, there is a gap between theory and practice regarding preservice teachers' abilities to implement successful collaborative practices that address and meet all young children's needs in inclusive classrooms. The findings indicated that ECE and ECSE programs focused on collaboration knowledge more than the ability of preservice teachers to demonstrate collaborative skills. Preparing preservice teachers for collaboration skills has the potential to enhance the quality of inclusion and increase all children's outcomes. There is a consensus among researchers that positive changes in educators' skills and attitudes toward inclusion and collaboration is often associated with the influence of teacher preparation programs (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009).

The findings in this study supported the conclusion by McKenzie (2009) that most concerns related to collaboration among professional educators in inclusive preschools are attributable to the quality of preparation programs. Recommendations regarding the improvement in training preservice education professionals on professional collaboration were reported as potential strategies to achieve desired outcomes. These recommendations addressed refinements to educational policies, preservice education programs and practices, and further research studies that can inform future improvements in early childhood education practice.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE: April 13, 2015

TO: Amani Alsalman, MA
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [742420-2] Building Successful Collaborative Practices Among Early
Childhood Educators: Understanding The Role of Educator Preparation
Programs
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: April 13, 2015

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of
Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to
federal IRB regulations.

Hello Amani,

**Thank you for your excellent revisions. Your IRB application is approved and I wish you the best
in this research endeavor.**

Sincerely.

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORMS

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM
FOR FACULTY

Name of the Participant: _____ Date: _____

Department of the Participant: _____

Please respond and check to the following:

1. **Gender:**

   Male _____   Female _____

2. **Educational Degree:**

   Masters Degree _____   Doctorate Degree _____

   Other _____   (_____)

3. **Major:** _____

4. **Teaching credential, if any** _____

5. **Years of experience in teaching at university level:** _____

6. **Current position at this university:**

   Coordinator _____   Instructor _____   Other_____

7. **Years of experience as a coordinator at this university** _____

8. **Years of experience as an instructor at this university** _____

9. **Do you have experience in teaching in inclusive classrooms at a preschool?**

   Yes _____   No _____

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM
FOR STUDENTS**

Name of the Participant: _____   Date: _____

Please respond and check to the following:

1.   **Gender:**

Male _____   Female _____

2.   **Age:**

_____ 17 and under
_____ 18-20
_____ 21-24
_____ 25 and above

3.   **Major:**

_____ Early childhood Education
_____ Early childhood Special Education
_____ Other (please specify)_____

4.   **Class Status**:

_____ Freshman   _____ Sophomore   _____ Junior   _____ Senior

_____ Other

5.   **Total number of completed credits in the major**: _____

6.   **Did you take the following courses?**

(Course #) Yes _____   No _____
(Course #) Yes _____   No _____
(Course #) Yes _____   No _____

APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY PROCEDURES

Summary of the Study Procedures (Research Question 1)

Research Questions	Participants	Source of Information	Used Procedure in collecting data	Plan for Analysis
Q1. How do program coordinators and instructors in personnel preparation programs characterize the experiences provided to EC and ECSE teacher candidates that promote effective knowledge and skills in the areas of teaming and collaboration?	1. ECSE program coordinator and ECE senior instructor. 2. ECE and ECSE instructors for selected courses that include competencies in collaboration	Individual interviews with the ECSE program coordinator and ECE/ECSE instructors.	1. Contacted the participants. 2. Obtained the consent forms from the participants. 3. Obtained demographic information from the participants. 4. Interviewed the participants and a voice recorder was used.	1. Transcribed the individual interviews verbatim. 2. Read the interviews multiple times to make sure of the accuracy. 3. A member check procedure was used to increase the accuracy of information 4. Coded the data by utilizing Nvivo 10@ software. 5. Analyzed all data into themes. 6. Utilized a narrative passage to describe and convey the findings. 7. Interpreted the findings. 8. Developed recommendations based on the findings.

Summary of the Study Procedures (Research Question 2)

Research Questions	Participants	Source of Information	Used Procedure in collecting data	Plan for Analysis
Q2. What methods of training in collaboration and teaming do preservice EC and ECSE professionals receive during their personnel preparation programs?	1. ECSE program coordinator and ECE senior instructor. 2. ECE and ECSE instructors for selected courses that include competencies in collaboration. 3. ECE and ECSE undergraduate students for selected courses that include competencies in collaboration.	1. Individual interviews with ECSE coordinator and ECE/ECSE instructors. 2. Analyses of selected course syllabi that cover professional collaboration content in the course. 3. Observation of ECE and ECSE classes, if courses are available (the length of time of each observation and the number of observations will be discussed and determined with the course instructors). 4. Focus groups with EC and ECSE program students.	1. Contacted the participants. 2. Obtained the consent forms from the participants. 3. Obtained demographic information from the participants. 4. Interviewed the participants by using open-ended questions, and using a voice recorder. 5. Reviewed selected syllabi and extended documents of suggested ECE and ECSE courses. 6. Observed suggested ECE and ECSE classes, if courses were available, and using developed checklist when observing and using field notes. 7. Distributed consent forms to the students. 8. Obtained demographic information from ECE and ECSE students. 9. Conducted two focus group meetings by using open-ended questions, one with ECE students and the second with ECSE students, and voice recorder was used.	1. Transcribed the individual and group interviews verbatim. 2. Saved copies of syllabi in the computer. 3. Typed all field notes of the observations and save them in the computer file. 4. Read the interviews and other documents multiple times to make sure of the accuracy. 5. A member-check procedure was used to increase the accuracy of information 6. Coded all data by utilizing Nvivo 10@ software. 7. Analyzed all data into themes. 8. Utilized a narrative passage to describe and convey the findings. 9. Interpreted the findings. 10. Developed recommendations based on the findings.

Summary of the Study Procedures (Research Question 3)

Research Questions	Participants	Source of Information	Used Procedure in collecting data	Plan for Analysis
Q3. What are the similarities and differences in the way EC and ECSE personnel preparation programs train their teacher candidates for collaboration and teaming responsibilities?	1. ECSE program coordinator and ECE senior instructor. 2. ECE and ECSE Instructors. 3. ECE and ECSE undergraduate students	1. Individual interviews with ECSE coordinator and ECE/ECSE instructors. 2. Analyses of selected course syllabi that cover professional collaboration content in the course. 3. Observation of ECE and ECSE classes, if courses are available (the length of time of each observation and the number of observations will be discussed and determined with the course instructors). 4. Focus groups with ECE and ECSE program students.	1. Contacted the participants. 2. Obtained the consent forms from the participants. 3. Obtained demographic information from the participants. 4. Interviewed the participants by using open-ended questions, and using a voice recorder. 5. Reviewed selected syllabi and extended documents of suggested EC and ECSE courses. 6. Observed suggested ECE and ECSE classes, if courses were available, and using developed checklist when observing and using field notes. 7. Distributed consent forms to the students. 8. Obtained demographic information from ECE and ECSE students. 9. Conducted two focus group meetings by using open-ended questions, one with ECE students and the second with ECSE students, and voice recorder was used.	1. Transcribed the individual and group interviews verbatim. 2. Saved copies of syllabi in the computer. 3. Typed all field notes of the observations and save them in the computer file. 4. Read the interviews and other documents multiple times to make sure of the accuracy. 5. A member-check procedure was used to increase the accuracy of information 6. Coded all data by utilizing Nvivo 10@ software. 7. Analyzed all data into themes. 8. Utilized a narrative passage to describe and convey the findings. 9. Interpreted the findings. 10. Developed recommendations based on the findings.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL
EDUCATION PROGRAM COORDINATOR AND EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SENIOR INSTRUCTOR**

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Participants Name: _____

Department of the Participant: _____

Interview Questions:

1.   Describe your program briefly.

   a.   What is the nature of the program? How many students do you currently
        have? How many credits do students need to complete the program?
   b.   What is the content of your personnel preparation program provided for
        your students?
   c.   What national or state standards do you follow in your program?
   d.   What are the anticipated outcomes of your program for the students?

2.   How are syllabi for courses developed? How are they aligned to course
        descriptions and standards you follow?

3.   Will you tell me a little bit about your role in the personnel preparation program?

4.   What are your thoughts about inclusion in early childhood settings?

5.   How do you define collaboration?

   a.   How do you define teaming?

6.   What do you think the purpose/function is of collaboration among education
        professionals?

   a.   What is the value of collaboration?
   b.   What do you think about the outcomes for preparing your students to be
        effective collaborators with other professionals at their schools?

7.   What do you consider the most valuable contributions to the field when training
        students in developing their own collaboration skills?

8.   How are your students prepared to build and promote knowledge and skills of
      collaboration among professionals in coursework and through field experiences in
      your program?

      a.   What specific knowledge and skills do you provide to your students?
      b.   To what degree do you provide these skills and knowledge of collaboration
            to your students? (e.g., whole course, sections of the course, not required
            and up to the instructors)

9.   Do you feel your students efficiently prepare to be effective collaborators with
      other educators in the real world? Please explain.

      a.   What do you find to be the challenges, if any, in preparing your students in
            your program to practice professional collaboration?

10.   Are there any other details about your early childhood program relating to the
      topic of collaboration and teaming among education professionals that you would
      like to share?

11.   Can you name 2-3 specific courses in which you introduce and emphasize the
      topic of teaming or collaboration among educators? Will you please provide me
      with a list of instructors in your program who teach courses that support
      professionals' collaboration knowledge and skills?

12.   Are you planning to provide undergraduate courses that have at least one section
      of direct learning about professional collaboration knowledge/skills in fall 2015?
      What are these courses and instructors names?

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INSTRUCTORS OF THE
GENERAL AND SPECAL EARLY CHILDHOOD
PROGRAMS**

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Participants Name: _____

Department of the Participant: _____

Interview Questions:

1. What are your thoughts about inclusion in early childhood settings?

2. How do you define collaboration?

   a. How do you define teaming?

3. What do you think the purpose/function is of collaboration among education professionals?

   a. What is the value of collaboration?
   b. What do you think about the outcomes for preparing your students to be effective collaborators with other professionals at their schools?

4. Will you provide details about (EC/ECSE #) course/s that support "professional collaboration knowledge and skills" that you have taught?

   a. What is the content of these course/s?
   b. How do you deliver the content to your students?
   c. What are the anticipated outcomes of the course/s?

5. How do you prepare for instructional delivery to the students in way that supports knowledge and skills in teamwork, and how do you assess student learning?

   a. What specific knowledge and skills do you provide to your students?
   b. To what degree do you provide these skills and knowledge of collaboration to your students? (e.g., in every class time, in some classes, in some activities/assignments, or as needed)

6. How are your students prepared to build and promote knowledge and skills of collaboration among professionals through the course?

7. Do you feel your students efficiently prepare to be effective collaborators with other educators in the real world? Please explain.

   a. What do you find to be the challenges, if any, in preparing your students in your courses to practice professional collaboration?

8. What are other details about your course relating to the topic of collaboration among education professionals that you would like to share?

9. What are your course recommendations for improvements related to preparing your students to gain effective professional collaboration knowledge and skills?

10. Will you please provide me with a list of students enrolled in your course/s supporting professionals' collaboration knowledge and skills?

11. In case you will teach an undergraduate course that has at least one section of direct learning about professional collaboration knowledge/skills in fall 2015, would you please suggest class times for my observation?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS
(FOCUS GROUP)

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Number of Participants: _____

Name of the Participant: _____

Major of the Participant: _____

Interview Questions:

1. How do you define collaboration?

    a. How do you define teaming?

2. What do you think of the purpose/function of collaboration among education professionals?

    a. What is the value of collaboration?
    b. What do you think about the outcomes for preparing you to be effective collaborators with other professionals at inclusive schools?

3. Did you receive any training about successful inclusion within your program courses? If so, please explain.

4. What are your thoughts about inclusion in early childhood settings?

5. Do you experience any type of professional collaboration content during your study in this program? If so, please explain.

    a. What specific knowledge and skills did you learn and experience?
    b. What did you learn about building positive relationships with other educators?

6. Have you had an opportunity to practice collaboration in classrooms during field experiences or through your course assignments? What was your experience?

7. Have you had an opportunity to observe collaboration/teaming in action in classrooms? What was your experience?

8.   Do you feel you are efficiently prepared to be effective collaborators with other educators in the real world? Please explain.

9.   What more would you like to learn about collaboration knowledge and skills?

    a.   What do you find to be the challenges that prevent your understanding of collaboration knowledge and skills?

10.   What are other details about your course relating to the topic of collaboration among education professionals would you like to share?

11.   What are your recommendations for your program regarding preparation for you to be effective collaborators with other educators in inclusive settings?

APPENDIX E

CLASS OBSERVATION FORM

CLASS OBSERVATIONAL FORM

Observer name	
Course #	
Instructor Name	
Date/Time	
Subject/Topic	
Class Objectives	

Indicators of providing professional collaboration knowledge/skills	Yes	No	Evidence
Instructors presentation			
Activities during class time			
Required activities after the class			
Other			

Observer Comments:

APPENDIX F

RUBRIC FOR REVIEWING SYLLABI

Course number/title: _____

Date: _____

Reviewer: _____

Document/materials reviewed (e.g., syllabus, course artifacts; classroom observation, etc.)

Indicators	What element(s) of the course is this indicator covered in?					Additional Comments/Notes
	Course Description	Course Objectives	Assignment	Readings	Activities (websites videos etc.)	
Adapted from DEC Recommended Practices						
Collaboration and Teaming: Practitioners representing multiple disciplines work together as a team to plan and implement supports and services to meet the unique needs of each child and family						
Collaboration and Teaming: Practitioners work together as a team to systematically and regularly exchange expertise, knowledge, and information to build team capacity and jointly solve problems, plan, and implement interventions.						
Collaboration and Teaming: Practitioners use communication and group facilitation strategies to enhance team functioning and interpersonal relationships with and among team members.						
Collaboration and Teaming: Team members assist each other to discover and access community-based services and other informal and formal resources to meet child goals.						

Adapted from DEC Personnel Prep Standards:					
Learning Environments: professionals through collaboration with general educators and other colleagues create safe, inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments to engage individuals with exceptionalities in meaningful learning activities and social interactions.					
Assessment: professionals collaborate with colleagues to use multiple types of assessment information in making decisions about individuals with exceptionalities and participate as a team member to integrate assessment results in the development and implementation of individualized plans					
Instructional Planning and Strategies: professionals develop and implement a variety of education and transition plans for individuals with exceptionalities across a wide range of settings and different learning experiences and evaluate individualized plans in collaboration with other professionals, as a member of a team					
Collaboration: professionals collaborate with other educators and related service providers in culturally responsive ways to address the needs of individuals with exceptionalities across a range of learning experiences.					
Collaboration: professionals use the theory and elements of effective collaboration					
Collaboration: professionals serve as a collaborative resource to colleagues					
Collaboration: professionals use collaboration to promote the well-being of individuals with exceptionalities across a wide range of settings and collaborators					

Collaboration Knowledge: Structures supporting interagency collaboration, including interagency agreements, referral, and consultation					
Collaboration Skills: Apply models of team process in early childhood					
Collaborative Skills: Collaborate with professionals to support children's development and learning					
Collaborative Skills: Participate as a team member to identify and enhance team roles, communication, and problem-solving					
Collaborative Skills: collaboratively, implement processes and strategies that support transitions among settings for young children					

Adapted from NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria						
3a: Understanding the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment. Through partnerships with professional colleagues, candidates use positive assessment to identify the strengths of families and children. Practitioners demonstrate essential knowledge and core skills in team building and in communicating with colleagues from other disciplines.						
6a: Identifying and involving oneself with the early childhood field. They know about the many connections between the early childhood field and other related disciplines and professions with which they may collaborate while serving diverse young children and families.						
6c: Engaging in continuous, collaborative learning to inform practice. Candidates demonstrate understanding of and essential skills in interdisciplinary collaboration. Candidates demonstrate that they have the essential communication skills and knowledge base to engage in interdisciplinary team meetings as informed partners and to fulfill their roles as part of Individualized Education Program (IEP) team for children with developmental delays or disabilities.						

APPENDIX G

CONSENT FORMS

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHREN COLORADO
(Coordinator/Senior Instructor Consent Form)

Project Title: Building Successful Collaborative Practices among Early
Childhood Educators: Understanding the Role of Educator
Preparation Programs

Researcher: Amani Alsalman, School of Special Education, UNC
Phone Number: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
E-mail: _____@___.com
Research advisor: Dr. Rashida Banerjee
Phone Number: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
E-mail: _____@___.com

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to explore the role of
early childhood (EC) and early childhood special education (ECSE) personnel
preparation programs on preparing early childhood personnel for collaboration
knowledge and skills in inclusive school settings. You will be asked to answer open-
ended questions in an interview.

Your role: You will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher
individually. The mutually convenient time and place will be determined by email. Each
interview will be approximately 40 to 60 minutes in length. You will be asked to
complete a demographic information form before starting the interview. The researcher
will ask you questions about your experiences of how EC or ECSE personnel preparation
programs provide training on professional collaboration and teaming skills. Your
recommendations to improve this area within your program will be sought. The interview
will be recorded with a digital recorder to allow for reliable analysis later.

During the interview time, the ECSE program coordinator/ECE senior instructor will be
asked to provide suggested list of instructors who have taught courses that support
professionals' collaboration content. Follow-up interviews may be needed for added
clarification. If so, the researcher will contact you by email to request this. The follow-up
interviews will be approximately 20 to 30 minutes in length.

Page 1 of 2_____
(Participant initials here)

At the interview with you has been transcribed, you will receive a copy of your transcribed interview so that you may review it for accuracy. If you feel that information that you provided is recorded inaccurately, you may contact the researcher; thus the researcher can correct any inaccuracies prior to the writing the results of the study.

Confidentiality: The researcher will take every precaution in order to protect the confidentiality of your participation. When I report data, your name will not be used. The researcher will use pseudonym in order to protect confidentiality. All collected data for this study will be kept in a locked cabinet, which is only accessible by the researcher; and will be stored in the researcher's personal computer, which is locked with a password. Once the interview transcriptions are completed, the audio recordings will be deleted.

Potential Risk and Benefits: There is minimal risk that any person may recognize information you provide. Therefore, gathered data from this study should not impact your professional status or relationships. Your participation will provide helpful information for the field to move forward.

Participation is voluntary: You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Please feel free to phone or email the researcher if you have any questions or concerns about this research. Thank you for assisting me in my research.

Sincerely,

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   Date

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHREN COLORADO
(Instructors Consent Form)

Project Title:	Building Successful Collaborative Practices among Early Childhood Educators: Understanding the Role of Educator Preparation Programs
Researcher:	Amani Alsalman, School of Special Education, UNCO
Phone Number:	(xxx) xxx-xxxx
E-mail:	_____@___.com
Research advisor:	Dr. Rashida Banerjee
Phone Number:	(xxx) xxx-xxxx
E-mail:	_____@___.com

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to explore the role of early childhood (EC) and early childhood special education (ECSE) personnel preparation programs on preparing early childhood personnel for collaboration knowledge and skills in inclusive school settings. You will be asked to answer open-ended questions in an interview and will be observed in selected classes, if you are teaching the selected courses in the same semester of conducting the study.

Your role: You will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher individually. The mutually convenient time and place will be determined by email. Each interview will be approximately 40 to 60 minutes in length. You will be asked to complete a demographic information form before starting the interview. The researcher will ask you questions about your experiences of how EC or ECSE personnel preparation programs provide training on professional collaboration and teaming skills. Your recommendations to improve this area within your program will be sought. The interview will be recorded with a digital recorder to allow for reliable analysis later.

During the interview time, EC and ECSE instructors will be asked to facilitate communication between the researcher and the students in order to invite them to participate in a focus group. The instructors will be asked to provide the course documents/materials (e.g., syllabus, course artifacts, etc.) to the researcher for review.

Page 1 of 2_____
(Participant initials here)

The researcher will observe some classes of selected courses, if those courses are available at the same semester of conducting the study. In order to gain the maximum benefit of observations, the length of time of each observation and the number of observations will be discussed and determined with the course instructors.

At the interview with you has been transcribed, you will receive a copy of your transcribed interview so that you may review it for accuracy. If you feel that information that you provided is recorded inaccurately, you may contact the researcher; thus the researcher can correct any inaccuracies prior to the writing the results of the study.

Confidentiality: The researcher will take every precaution in order to protect the confidentiality of your participation. When I report data, your name will not be used. The researcher will use pseudonym in order to protect confidentiality. All collected data for this study will be kept in a locked cabinet, which is only accessible by the researcher; and will be stored in the researcher's personal computer, which is locked with a password. Once the interview transcriptions are completed, the audio recordings will be deleted.

Potential Risk and Benefits: There is minimal risk that any person may recognize information you provide. Therefore, gathered data from this study should not impact your professional status or relationships. Your participation will provide helpful information for the field to move forward.

Participation is voluntary: You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.
Please feel free to phone or email the researcher if you have any questions or concerns about this research. Thank you for assisting me in my research.

Sincerely,

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   Date

UNIVERSITY *of*
NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHREN COLORADO
(Student Consent Form)

Project Title:	Building Successful Collaborative Practices among Early Childhood Educators: Understanding the Role of Educator Preparation Programs

Researcher:	Amani Alsalman, School of Special Education, UNC
Phone Number:	(xxx) xxx-xxxx
E-mail:	_____@___.com
Research advisor:	Dr. Rashida Banerjee
Phone Number:	(xxx) xxx-xxxx
E-mail:	_____@___.com

Purpose and Description: The primary purpose of this study is to explore the role of early childhood (EC) and early childhood special education (ECSE) personnel preparation programs on preparing early childhood personnel for collaboration knowledge and skills in inclusive school settings. You will be asked o answer open-ended questions in a focus group interview.

Your role: You will be asked to participate in a focus group interview. The convenient time and place to meet will be determined by Email. The focus group interview will be approximately 30 to 60 minutes in length. You will be asked to complete a demographic information form before starting the interview. The researcher will ask you few questions about your perspectives and experiences of how you received training on professional collaboration and teaming skills during your learning in previous courses. The focus group interview will include about 10 questions. The focus group interview will be recorded with a digital recorder.

At the completion of transcribing focus group interview, you will receive a copy of the transcribed focus group interview so that you may check and review it for accuracy. If you feel that information that you provided is recorded inaccurately, you may contact the researcher; thus the researcher can correct any inaccuracies prior to the completion of the study.

Page 1 of 2_____
(Participant initials here)

Confidentiality: The researcher will take every precaution in order to protect the confidentiality of your participation. When I report data, your name will not be used. The researcher will use pseudonym in order to protect confidentiality. All collected data for this study will be kept in a locked cabinet, which is only accessible by the researcher; and will be stored in the researcher's personal computer, which is locked with a password. Once the interview transcriptions are completed, the audio recordings will be deleted.

Potential Risk and Benefits: Potential risks in this project are minimal. There is minimal risk that any person may recognize information you provide and therefore gathered data from this study should not impact your educational status, grades, or your personal relationships. Your participation will provide helpful information for the field to move forward. Refreshments will be provided, and upon completion focus group interview, all participants will receive a $20 gift card.

Participation is voluntary: You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Please feel free to phone or email the researcher if you have any questions or concerns about this research. After the researcher received the consent form, the researcher will contact the participant to decide convenient time and place to conduct focus group.

Sincerely,

Please provide your preferred mode of communication:

Email: _____
       Or
Phone: _____

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   Date

APPENDIX H

SUMMARY CONTENT FOR THE SIX COURSES

Course One:

Course elements	Description
Course title	Administration: Human Relations For Early Childhood Education
Course descriptions	The focus of this course is on the human relations' component of an early child hood professional's responsibilities. Course content includes director-staff relationships, parent-professional partnerships, staff development, leadership strategies, and community interaction.
Course objectives	1. Define communication. 2. Define human relations. 3. Interpret the State Department of Human Services' Rules for licensing childcare centers as they relate to staff, governing board, and client issues/relations. 4. Compare the State Department of Human Services' Rules for licensing childcare centers, The NAEYC Accreditation Standards, Qualistar Profile, and the State Quality Standards for Early Childhood Programs. 5. Identify requirements for early childhood staff. 6. Assess job descriptions. 7. Assess the quality of an early childhood program from a human relations standpoint. 8. Assess a parent handbook to determine if it complies with various laws. 9. Assess a parent handbook to determine if it complies with laws and standards for early childhood programs. 10. Analyze mentoring strategies.
Course topics that are related to collaboration/teaming	• Issues-Professional Relationships o Coaching/Collaboration/Consulting with staff and other professionals (Team building process)
Course assignments that have at least one component of collaboration/teaming	• Team building activities
Others	

Course Two:

Course elements	Description
Course title	Administration of ECE Programs
Course descriptions	Students will be examined and interpret State's requirements pertaining to the establishment and operation of centers for young children. Course content will include regulations concerning site selection, policy formation, administrative forms, staffing needs and patterns, fiscal management, selection of appropriate equipment, program development and evaluation, and administrative styles and techniques.
Course objectives	1. Demonstrate skills needed to start a new early childhood center. 2. Apply the State minimum rules and regulations to typical problems occurring in early childhood centers 3. Identify the quality standards for programs for young children using nationally recognized systems used to rate quality. 4. Identify and be familiar with the administrative skills needed for a teacher in an early childhood setting including the process of policy formation, goals, policies & procedures. 5. Determine staffing needs, staff qualifications, staff handbook, and job descriptions. 6. Examine the cost of operating and early childhood center. 7. Choose appropriate indoor and outdoor equipment. 8. Examine program development and evaluation. 9. Assess health, hygiene, and safety issues in early childhood centers.
Course topics that are related to collaboration	• Staffing & Supervision/Developing Relationships
Course assignments that are related to collaboration	N/A
Others	In one class activity during observation, a brief part of the reading included professional collaboration elements

Course Three:

Course elements	Description
Course title	The Exceptional Child
Course descriptions	Presents an overview of critical elements related to educating young children with disabilities in the early childhood setting. Topics include the following: typical and atypical development, legal requirements, and research based practices related to inclusion, and accommodations and adaptations. Students will learn how a disability will impact a young child's learning process.
Course objectives	1. Students will examine strategies for children with special needs in an early childhood setting. Students will demonstrate of the knowledge of the issues surrounding inclusion practices. 2. Students will recognize components of effective inclusion practices. 3. Students will explore a variety of methods for facilitating growth and learning in each area of development. 4. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the role of adults in supporting children and families with special needs. 5. Students will demonstrate knowledge of specific disabilities and the possible implications for children and families. 6. Students will demonstrate knowledge of community resources and support available to children and families. 7. Students will exhibit accurate observation and recording skills. 8. Students will determine specific adaptations necessary for inclusion of children with disabilities.
Course topics that are related to collaboration	• Teaming: Collaboration, Problem Solving, and Consultation.
Course assignments that are related to collaboration	• Class topic presentations (one of the listed topics is Teaming: Collaboration, Problem Solving, and Consultation)
Others	Reading chapter 10 of the required book (Teaming: Collaboration, Problem Solving, and Consultation.)

Course Four:

Course elements	Description
Course title	Evidence-based Practices for Preschool Learners, 3-5 Years
Course descriptions	The course explores instructional strategies and recommended practices for inclusive education of young children age 3 to 5 with development concerns. Developmentally appropriate, individually responsive, cross-disciplinary, and evidence-based practices are the five (social-emotional, adaptive, cognitive, physical/movement, communication) development domains are included.
Course objectives	1. Instructional Planning: A. Articulate strategies for instructional planning to address the development and learning of all children including those from diverse populations. B. Prepare and organize instructional materials.
	2. Individual Differences and Diversity: A. Apply knowledge of how young children differ in their knowledge acquisition. B. Articulate strategies for instructing culturally and linguistically diverse learners.
	3. Intervention: A. Describe intervention strategies that support a response to intervention (RtI) model.
	4. Curriculum, Instruction, Content, and Standards: A. Incorporate standards-based curriculum into content learning. B. Develop and adapt developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction for children with diverse learning needs including those with individual can be generalized across settings. C. Integrate child-imitated and play-based learning strategies into standards-based content learning.
	5. Social Skills: A. Articulate strategies for developing supportive relationships and social skills. B. Describe strategies for increasing self-awareness, self-management, self-control, self-reliance, and self-esteem. C. Compared strategies for teaching social skill and conflicts resolution that can be applied across a variety of settings.
	6. Strategy Instruction: A. Investigate a wide variety of instructional strategies including cognitive, problem solving, and self0assessment strategies. B. Select and adapt strategies based on student characteristics and individual needs.
	7. Cooperation and Collaboration: A. Recommend strategies for facilitating and participating in cooperative and collaborative multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary teams that include families and caregivers.
	8. Learning Environments; Classroom organization and Management: A. Articulate learning conditions which promote positive development and learning. B. Develop plans that address learning in a variety of modalities while integrating the curriculum with IEPs and IFSPs. C. Recommend classroom organizational strategies that encourage active involvement, cooperation, play, and learning. D. Devise classroom management strategies that support safe and engaging learning.

	9. Behavior Management: A. Evaluating and recommend preventative and reductive strategies to address challenging behaviors. 10. Health, Safety, and Nutrition: A. Describe basic health, nutrition, and safety management strategies and procedures. 11. Technology: A. Formulate strategies for integrating assistive and instructional technologies into a stimulus-rich educational program.
Course topics that are related to collaboration	• Teaming: Collaboration, Problem Solving, and Consultation
Course assignments that are related to collaboration	N/A
Others	Reading chapter 10 of the required book (Teaming: Collaboration, Problem Solving, and Consultation.)

Course Five:

Course elements	Description
Course title	Appropriate Assessment in Early Childhood Special Education
Course descriptions	The course focuses on assessment procedures for use with children with or at-risk for disabilities aged birth to eight years. It will familiarize students with a wide range of assessment approaches and includes discussion on both effective formal and informal assessment techniques. Cross-disciplinary approaches, matching assessments procedures to the intended purpose, and liken assessment/planning systems are emphasized.
Course objectives	1. Acquire knowledge of procedure, terminology and best practices in assessment: A. Demonstrate knowledge of basic terminology used in assessment. B. Demonstrate knowledge of legal provision and ethical principles regarding assessment of young children with disabilities. C. Demonstrate knowledge of the different purpose of assessment (e.g., screening, diagnosis, individual planning, progress monitoring). D. Demonstrate understanding of how professionals from a variety of disciplines participate in transdisciplinary assessments. E. Align assessment with curriculum, content standards, and local, state, and federal regulations. 2. Develop skills in developmental assessment: A. Select and match the assessment purpose with the type of assessment methods. B. List the use and limitations of assessment instruments for young children with disabilities. C. Demonstrate knowledge of adaptations and accommodations in assessment and evaluation. D. Select, administer, score, and interpret common assessment materials used in programs for young children with disabilities. E. Involve families as active participants in the assessment process. F. Write assessment report that communicate the results of the assessment to families and other professionals. 3. Develop knowledge and skills related to individual planning: A. Use assessment findings across disciplines to develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and/or Individualized Education Program (IEP). B. Identify a process to conduct ongoing assessment, monitor accomplishment of individual plan outcomes, and modify plans. C. Create and maintain records. D. Plan for educational transitions.
Course topics that are related to collaboration	N/A
Course assignments that are related to collaboration	N/A
Others	

Course Six:

Course elements	Description
Course title	Collaborative Practice with Families and Professionals
Course descriptions	This course examines principles of collaborative practices in working with families and professionals within early childhood special education context.
Course objectives	1. Acquire and use knowledge about family and community relationships. A. Family systems theories, including family structures and supportive roles and relationships within families. B. Effects of societal influences on families and young children. C. Effects of stress on families and young children. D. Demonstrate respect for individual family structure(s), social and cultural backgrounds, and linguistic differences. E Legal and ethical basis for collaboration between families and professionals. F. Models and ethical strategies of consultation and collaboration. 2. Implement effective practice in collaboration with families, professionals, and community members: A. Respect for diversity within and among families. B. Utilize family systems theories in planning and implementing services. C. Assist families transitioning among service delivery systems. D. Demonstrate ability to work collaboratively with colleagues. E. Articulate CEC and NAEYC codes of ethics. F. Elicit and support family participation in service delivery. G. Understand team process and use a multidisciplinary approach to service delivery, curriculum development and implementation in early childhood programs and services. H. Use communication strategies to elicit family and professional support. I. Address family structure(s), social and cultural backgrounds, and linguistic differences when planning for children's development and learning. J. Work to improve the quality of programs and services, including strengthening the skills and expertise of other professionals and paraducators. 3. Develop knowledge of community resources: A. Provide information about resources and programs to families. B. Understand and articulate the roles, rights, and responsibilities of family members, professionals, agencies, and community resources. C. Recognize signs of emotional distress, neglect, and abuse and following reporting procedures. D. Recognize when the nutritional and health needs of children may be compromised, and connect families with appropriate resources. E. Participate in activities of professional organization relevant to early childhood special education and early intervention. F. Articulate legal, ethical, and policy issues related to educational developmental, and medical services for infants and young children, and their families. G. Advocate on behalf of infants and young children and their families.

Course topics that are related to collaboration	- Introduction to course and course members. Foundation of Collaboration - Principles of Partnerships - Preparing for Team based approach - Writing Functional IFSP using team approach - Joint Home Visits and Team Meetings - Principles of school based Collaboration and teaming - Introduction to coaching - Research on coaching - Effective coaching - Coaching Process - Coaching Teachers
Course assignments that are related to collaboration	- Child Plan assignment: working in team of three on assessment intervention and transition planning - Compare and contrast the roles and responsibilities of various team members. - Observe a team meeting and evaluate the teaming process based on DEC Recommended Practices.
Others	Required readings related to collaboration and teaming: - Who moved my cheese? - The early childhood coaching handbook. - The early childhood teaming handbook.