

Early Childhood Education Pre-Service Teachers' Images of Teacher and Beliefs about Teaching

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore early childhood education pre-service teachers' images of an early childhood education teacher and their beliefs about teaching. 14 pre-service teachers at a Northeastern State University in the United States of America agreed to participate in the study. A survey questionnaire, participants' journal entries, and artifacts created by the participants were employed to collect the data. The categorization and coding of the data revealed that the participants' memories of their past teachers, mentor teachers, and work experience with children affected their images of an early childhood teacher. Furthermore, the data showed the relations between the participants' images of an early childhood education teacher and their beliefs about teaching. The authors made some implications for early childhood teacher education and teacher education in general.

Keywords: *Images, beliefs, pre-service teachers, early childhood education, metaphors, young children*

Early childhood period, which is from birth to eight years of a human life, is a critical time in terms of children's social-emotional, physical, and cognitive growth. This is also a period when children begin to acquire their personality traits, habits and communication skills. With increasing number of young children whose primary caretakers or parents are in the workforce, education and care of children in early childhood period requires teachers who have the professional knowledge to assess and respond to developmental and learning needs of all children. Also, those educators must have the ability to recognize and analyze their personal beliefs, which may sometimes clash and interfere with their teaching act. One of the most important implications of this reality, in regards to preparation of early childhood education (ECE) teachers in higher education institutions, is to help pre-service teachers analyze and transform their beliefs about teaching in order for them to develop deeper understanding of young children with diverse backgrounds and needs.

Beliefs about Teaching

Richardson (2005) describes beliefs as "a subset of a group of constructs that name, define, and describe the structure and content of mental states that are thought to drive a person's actions" (p. 102). According to Hamilton (1993), a person's beliefs

reflect norms and thinking style of the society in which the person has been brought up. In this case, what is “normal” is a relative term that may change from one social group to another. Regarding any profession including teaching, one’s beliefs about a subject can be different from one’s formal knowledge of the same subject. However, one’s beliefs about the subject may influence one’s professional decisions and acts. For instance, a teacher whose cultural beliefs are against divorce may avoid communication with a parent who is going through a painful divorce process. This situation becomes more detrimental to parent-teacher relations when the teacher is unaware that his beliefs affect his professional act.

A person’s belief system is formed through his upbringing, culture, and life experiences. Unlike the students in other majors, the students of teacher education form their beliefs about teaching by observing their school teachers for 12 or more years (Pajares, 1992; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000). Several studies (Aksu et al., 2010; Bullough & Stokes, 1994; Doyle, 1997; Greene & Magliaro, 2003; Lin & Spodek, 1994; Raths, 2001) indicated that pre-service teachers’ existing beliefs about teaching influence how they learn to teach. As a matter of fact, Joram and Gabrielle (1998) specified some of the preconceived beliefs about teaching that pre-service teachers might hold throughout their college education: 1) Pre-service teachers may think that the learning at job is the most effective way to learn to teach while they may devalue the theoretical knowledge that they gain in the teacher education courses. 2) Pre-service teachers’ own memories in which they remember themselves as “model” students may lead them to overestimate their future students’ abilities and learning styles, and therefore not be able to recognize the problematic learning issues their students might have. 3) Pre-service teachers may think that the skills to manage a class are the most important competencies a teacher must possess. Those candidates may lack the perspective that the effective classroom management also requires strong curriculum planning and instructional skills.

Pre-service teachers may carry their preconceived beliefs about teaching to their professional careers unless they are made aware of them. Furthermore, pre-service teachers’ beliefs may filter the valuable knowledge and change they will experience during their teacher education (Kagan, 1992).

Image of a Teacher

Understanding one’s beliefs is not an easy task. However, one’s images, which are the reflections of one’s beliefs, can be important tools to understand one’s beliefs about a particular subject. In the same context, teacher candidates’ images of a teacher help explain their beliefs about teaching (Clandinin, 1985; Çelikten, 2006; Lin & Spodek, 1994; Pajares, 1992). Fischer and Kiefer (2001) explain that “ideal” images of past teachers, interaction with students in classrooms and general views about teaching imposed by society may affect pre-service teachers’ images of a teacher. In some cases, pre-service teachers’ existing images of a teacher may lead them to develop unrealistic learning expectations, and overlook children’s diverse personalities and learning needs. For instance, a study conducted by Cook and Young (2004) showed that the pre-service teachers were disappointed when their friendly teacher image did not quite work as they

expected, and resulted in an uncontrollable classroom atmosphere during their practicum experience.

Several research studies (Bullogh & Stokes, 1994; Efron & Joseph, 2001; Saban, 2004; Strickland & Iran-Nejad, 1994) indicated that use of metaphors is a very useful strategy to understand pre-service teachers' images of a teacher. Metaphors such as artist, sunlight, and shield can help teacher candidates concretely explore their images of a teacher, and in turn, their beliefs about teaching. Therefore, in the present study, the participants were asked to describe their images of an ECE teacher by using metaphors.

As pre-service teachers develop their philosophy of education about teaching young children, they often refer to their preconceived beliefs (Çelikten, 2006). In the absence of an effective teacher education in which pre-service teachers can understand and transform their existing beliefs, students of teaching will "learn certain techniques at a superficial level without understanding the underlying instructional rationales that would guide their use" (Anderson & Holt-Reynolds, 1995, p. 9). Therefore, teacher education becomes very crucial for teacher educators to understand pre-service teachers' beliefs, which might influence the way they perceive young children and their decisions in the classroom.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore ECE pre-service teachers' images of an ECE teacher and their beliefs about teaching. Another need for the study is that the existing research on pre-service teachers' images and beliefs focus mainly on elementary and upper level teacher education and little is known about the situation among early childhood pre-service teachers.

METHOD

Qualitative Case Study Method

A qualitative case study method was used in the present study to investigate the phenomena, which are ECE pre-service teachers' images of an ECE teacher and their beliefs about teaching. A qualitative case study is, "an exploration of a bounded system or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). This method helps researchers understand participants' views on a particular subject (Stake, 1995). The present study also fits in the instrumental case study method in which "the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else" (Stake, 2005, p.14). The participants' responses reflected through the data collection tools were instrumental to uncover their images of an ECE teacher and beliefs about teaching. Furthermore, the data helped to understand the factors impacting those images and beliefs.

Interpretation of data in a qualitative study can be affected by the researcher's own subjective experiences (Charmaz, 2005). In the present study, the phenomena studied emerged from the researchers' past experiences in which they had numerous opportunities to observe the pre-service teachers bringing their prior beliefs to teacher education classrooms, and building their professional identity based on their existing images and beliefs.

Participants

This study took place in a specific teacher education context at a Northeastern State University in the United States. Fourteen students enrolled the university course (Instruction in Early Childhood Education Derived from Development Theories), which was taught by the first author of this article in Fall 2005, provided an access to collect the data. All the students in the class agreed to participate in the study. Each participant signed an informed consent form. Additionally, a pseudonym was used for each participant throughout the data analysis and as reporting the findings.

Data Collection Instruments

The data were collected through a demographic questionnaire,¹ a journal entry (image of an ECE teacher), and artifacts.

Data Analysis

The data collected through questionnaire, journal entry and artifacts were transcribed and analyzed by using the constant comparative coding method (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The constant comparative coding method allows researcher to categorize data; form properties and attributes of each category; compare different data categories; recognize patterns through different categories; and finally write the theory. Also NVIVO qualitative research software helped the coding and the categorization of the data collected. This software saved time that might have been lost with hand-coding.

Triangulation

Triangulation is the process that, "involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). There are three types of triangulation (Stake, 1995):

1. *Data Triangulation*. A researcher checks if the case investigated appears consistent across varied data sources. In the present study, multiple data sources such as the questionnaire, journal entry and the artifacts were used to check if what was emerging from one source carried the same meaning found in another source.

2. *Investigator Triangulation*. This is the protocol that includes another researcher to study the data. The data were discussed with a professor of early childhood education

who was familiar with the issue being investigated. His interpretations of the data provided additional insights.

3. *Theory Triangulation.* A researcher tries to prove that different investigators from various theoretical orientations gave the same meaning to the phenomenon investigated. In the present study, ECE pre-service teacher education literature and studies of other teacher education were searched to benefit from how others interpreted the meanings rooted in the pre-service teachers' images and beliefs about teaching.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Answers given to the first part of the questionnaire provided the participants' demographics (see Table 1). The data collected through the second part of the questionnaire, journal entry and the artifacts were coded and categorized. The data revealed the major categories that helped the authors understand the pre-service teachers' images of an ECE teacher and their beliefs about teaching. Those categories are as follows: a) Image of an ECE teacher, b) factors affecting images of ECE teacher, and c) teaching philosophy.

Table 1
Participants' Demographics

Participants	Semester Standing	Gender	Age	Degree sought	Ethnicity
Tina	7	F	21	Elem/K ^a	White
Melody	5 junior	F	19	Elem/K	African American
Nina	5 Junior	F	18-20	Elem/K HDFS minor	European American
May	5 Junior	F	18-20	Elem/K	Caucasian
Cindy	5 Junior	F	18-20	Elem/K	Caucasian
Diane	5 Junior	F	18-20	HDFS ^b	Caucasian
Glen	7	F	21-23	Elem/K	White
Fiona	7	F	21-23	Elem/K	White
Abby	5 Junior	F	21-23	Elem/K	White
Ally	5 Junior	F	18-20	ELem/K	White
Kaylee	5 Junior	F	18-20	Elem/K	Caucasian
Liz	5 Junior	F	20	Elem/K	Caucasian
Loren	5 Junior	F	20	Elem/K	Caucasia
Lilian	5 Junior	F	21-23	Elem/K	Caucasian

^aElementary/Kindergarten. ^bHuman Development and Family Studies

Image of an ECE Teacher

Eleven participants used various metaphors to describe their images of an ECE teacher (see Table 2). Three participants chose to use character traits (e.g., patient, warm, nurturing, caring, loving, etc.) instead of metaphors to describe their images of an ECE teacher. Majority of the metaphors represented an ECE teacher as a "guide" who was also described as the source of knowledge and skills to help children find their path in life. While some of the metaphors (e.g., sunshine and water, ocean, flower)

originated directly from nature, some were inspired by professions (e.g., gardener) and objects (e.g., water can, sail, sailboat, bridge, sponge) related to nature.

Table 2
Metaphors Used to Describe the Image of an ECE Teacher

Number of Students used the metaphor	Metaphors
1	Sail
3	Gardener
1	Guide
1	Water can
1	Friend
1	Sunshine/water
1	Story writer
1	Bridge
1	Ocean

T=11

Sunshine and Water

Kaylee stated that, “*As the student is like a flower, the ECE teacher is like the sunshine and water that nourishes and guides the child...*” In Kaylee’s metaphor, sunshine and water represent the vital knowledge an ECE teacher must possess to help young children reach their optimum development.

Gardener

Nina explained that, “*Like a gardener, a teacher must create an optimal environment for learning and growth.... Just as a flower bud needs sunlight and water..., a child needs love, care, and nurture among other things to develop....*” In her metaphor, a teacher must have the knowledge and the skills to nourish a child’s development. Nina’s image of an ECE teacher points to an important aspect of early childhood education: Nurturing and caring relations between teachers and children. This aspect is more important in teaching very young children than it is in any other grade level since children in early childhood period still demand close guidance from adults in their surroundings.

Sail

As Lillian used the sailboat metaphor to describe her image of a young child, she used the sail metaphor to represent her image of an ECE teacher:

...a child is a sailboat braving open waters and continuing a journey that we lead them to adulthood. The teacher, to me, is the sail . . . The teacher, just as the parents are, are there to guide the child, foster imagination in the child, lead them to see the right and wrong in situations and to lead them the right way on the path of discovery.

An ECE teacher as a sail must foresee the difficulties and the obstacles children may encounter in life. Therefore, a teacher must possess the knowledge and the skills to help children navigate through the rough waters, which represent the challenges encountered in life. Without help from teacher child is lost. According to this metaphor, as teacher is the sole power to guide and educate a child, she is also held accountable for the child's failure or success. One cannot deny that it is the expectation of families and society that teachers must master great knowledge in order to be entrusted with teaching young generations. However, in case of a teacher whose professional knowledge and skills are limited, a child, who is in the care of that teacher, might be considered lost forever.

Water Can

Abby and Melody used the water can metaphor in their artifacts (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) to represent the knowledge and the skills an ECE teacher “pours” on young children. Also, Melody's artifact (Figure 2) represented the young child as a sponge. Water can and sponge metaphors reflect an image of a teacher who assumes that young children can absorb all the information they are provided with or exposed to. Such view disregards the children's ability to think and critically question concepts, and select to learn what they are more interested in. Furthermore, the act of watering observed in Abby's and Melody's artifacts embodies the delivery of the knowledge to the child.

These images reflect the centuries-long traditional view of education that the teaching act is unidirectional in which the teacher transmits the necessary information to children.

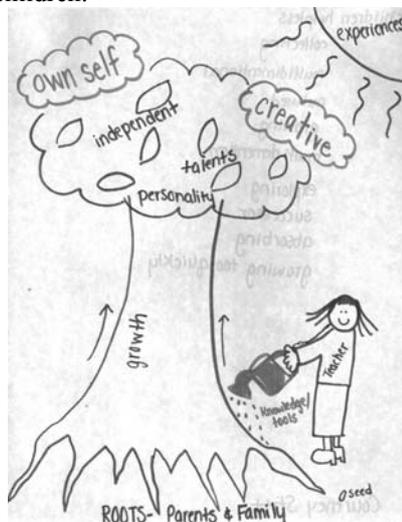


Figure 1. Abby's artifact



Figure 2. Melody's artifact

Bridge

May explained that,

ECE teachers are serving as the bridge between their [children's] lives at home to this point, and their lives in their full-time [classrooms]....Often this [relation with ECE teacher] is the first experience these children have had with an adult who is not their parent, and so besides the academic lessons they are also learning classroom behavior and what is expected of them by society.

ECE teachers play a critical role in shaping young children's attitudes toward school and learning, which might greatly affect the children's academic performance in the future. May's image supports the fact that an ECE teacher needs to build a strong connection between school and home environment in order for young children to successfully transition to early childhood education as this is a new concept entering the lives of children after their primary social surroundings.

Ocean

Diane mentioned that,

I believe that the early childhood education teacher can be described as an ocean. The ocean is an inviting place; it can be calm and warm to those who visit it. It is also a world of discovery.... As children play in the sand, the ocean splashes against the sand giving them a sense of security.... An early childhood education teacher is reminiscent of the ocean because the early childhood education teacher like the ocean is also is diverse, engaging, and peaceful.

In her metaphor, an ECE teacher's knowledge repertoire is vast and waits to be discovered just like an ocean. Also, character traits such as being warm, calm and welcoming are favored as important qualities of an ECE teacher in Diane's metaphor.

Teacher as a Friend

Loren identified an ECE teacher as a friend to young children: "My years in school were amazing because the teachers I had were not just teachers but they acted as a friend as well." Similarly, Cindy explained that, "I remember my teacher that looked like a Barbie Doll—she was always warm and friendly." Both students idealized their images of an ECE teacher based on their memories of past schooling. This could be because people tend to remember only affective aspects of their childhood memories, and then idealize and romanticize them in time (Clandinin, 1985).

Story Writer

Another metaphor, although not directly referred, emerged from May's journal entry and her artifact (see Figure 3), and represented teachers as one of the social agents helping to write a child's "life story." She explained that,

I compared the child to an unwritten book, where they come into the classroom with some background information but for the most part the pages of their story are blank. It takes the influence of everything in the child's environment - family, teachers, peers, school, church, as well as community - to write the story of each individual child's life, and that story never ends as long as the child continues to learn from and interact with their environment.

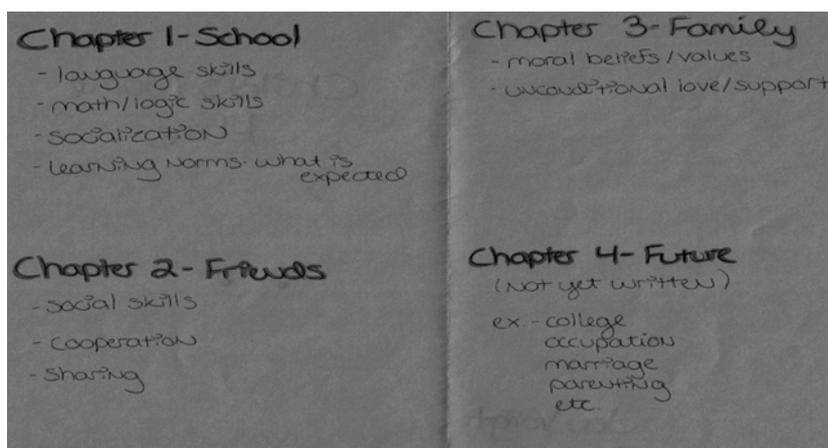


Figure 3. Child as an unwritten book.

The image of a child as an unwritten book coincided with 17th Century Educator John Locke's idea of *Tabula Rasa*. He used this term in his book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* to describe young children's minds as blank slates that needed to be filled with knowledge and skills to be a good citizen to society. It is interesting to see that the views about education from the 17th Century continue to influence how pre-service teachers perceive the education of young children in the present time.

Factors Affecting Image of an ECE Teacher and Beliefs about Teaching

The data collected showed that the participants' early memories of their teachers, work experience with young children, and their mentor teachers were the factors that affected the ECE pre-service teachers' images of an ECE teacher and beliefs about teaching.

Memories of Their Teachers

Kaylee's preschool teachers had a positive influence on her image of an ECE teacher: "They were very patient, gentle, and kind. I had two preschool teachers. I remember I loved the way they read to us at story time. They were older, soft spoken." On the other hand, Kaylee's first grade teacher set a negative image about how an ECE teacher should not be: "I remember walking in scared many days in first grade because

my teacher had a temper and she could sometimes get very loud and angry. Because of these negative experiences, I know what kind of a teacher I want to be.”

Nina’s kindergarten teachers carried positive traits similar to Kaylee’s preschool teachers: *“I always admired them and tried to be on my best behavior for them . . . Some of the earliest memories of my teachers were their warm and caring nature.”* Loren’s memories of her teachers affected her image of a teacher: *“My educators were not just teachers but also guides, helpers, and friends.”* Ally described her teachers as good teachers:

I think I had really good teachers because they were very creative and knew what the best way to teach was. They were always caring which is good for young children to feel. My teachers were always willing to help, explain it different, [and] offer more explanations.

Lillian’s teacher made learning “fun” for her and her classmates: *“Mrs. Paul was always planning fun activities, joining in on play time if wanted and was always finding ways to make learning fun.”*

The nurturing and caring dimension of early childhood teaching appears to outweigh the professional knowledge dimension of teaching in the memories of past teachers the participants described. The critical point that needs to be taken into consideration is that pre-service teachers, based on the memories of their past teachers, may possess the belief that being nurturing and caring is the most important quality to teach young children. In turn, such beliefs may undermine the professional knowledge and skills required for quality teaching in early childhood education.

Mentor Teachers

The participants of the present study had the opportunity to observe their mentor teachers’ teaching skills during a 21-hour-practicum as part of their course work in the ECE program. Fiona stated that,

Miss [X] is always positive towards her students, their parents, and other staff in the room.... She will always take time to talk to you. I feel this quality is necessary so she knows that all staff and parents are on the same page about what’s going on in their child’s classroom....Positive attitude, patience, having up-to-date education, having the ability to apply this education to practice, having opportunities to develop professionally are just some of the key qualities I feel an early childhood teacher should have. I have witnessed many of these qualities in my mentor teachers within my field experience course.

Diane observed the lead teacher in her practicum classroom:

There is one particular teacher who is kind, careful, and loving in each conversation and exchange she has with a child.... this particular teacher wants to know who the child is, what the child wants, and how the child interacts with

their peers, family, and other teachers. She is truly an example that I would love and take great pleasure in living up to.

Melody stated that, *“During my practicum at the [X] center I observed that the teachers provide a variety of experiences and opportunities for their pre-kindergarten students. As a teacher I hope to provide this to my students as well.”*

Similar to the previous factor affecting ECE pre-service teachers' images and beliefs, the nurturing and caring dimension of teaching appears more important in the participants' observations of their mentor teachers. It should not be surprising to see that the pre-service teachers, whose images of an ECE teacher revolve around the nurturing and caring dimension, value the same aspect in their mentor teachers' teaching practice.

Formal and Informal Teaching Experience

The pre-service teachers' formal (e.g., pre-K to 12, summer school enrichment or a daycare program) and informal (e.g., tutoring, volunteering, summer camp) teaching experiences had an influence on their beliefs about teaching. For instance, Glen mentioned that, *“I began volunteering, working, and observing in early childhood centers. This experience has allowed me to come into contact with a plethora of various ECE teachers and has forced me to extend my image of the ECE teacher.”*

Liz's observations of inappropriate teaching practice during her work experience helped shape her image of a teacher:

When I was present in this classroom the teacher was degrading, domineering, impatient, careless, and very inattentive to the children. As the summer went on, I began interacting with the children a lot more than the head teacher; and in a way I became a mediator between the children and the head teacher.... In doing this, I developed the view that an ECE teacher should be enthusiastic, caring, expressive, assertive and active in the class, among other qualities.

Kaylee's work experience influenced her views about the qualities of an ECE teacher: *“After working with children of all ages (birth to 15) in various settings, it's vital to provide them with support, guidance, and care for their maximum development.”*

Another participant, Diane, described her experience very positively:

I know that I am there [preschool classroom that she works in] to teach, but what I learned rather suddenly was that I was there as a student as well. I found out that although every day I was enrolled in academic courses shaping my future career, I could come to the preschool and learn that play is essential, a smile is a Band-Aid, and no matter how many spills or accidents there are, we can still recover and have fun.

Past or current work experience these pre-service teachers had at the time the study conducted helped them confirm and extend their existing beliefs about teaching that they carried throughout their schooling. Specifically, Diane was surprised to see the importance of play in young children's learning. Although Diane was introduced to this concept through her college work, she did not become aware of it until she experienced it in her part time job at a daycare center.

Teaching Philosophy

Some of the participants' statements in their journal entries revealed their teaching philosophies as they envisioned themselves in their future classrooms teaching young children. Also, the philosophy of education statements were closely tied to the participants' responses to the questionnaire and the images they used to describe an ECE teacher. For instance, Lilian acknowledged the impact of an ECE teacher in a young child's life and described what kind of a teacher she wanted to be:

As an early childhood educator, I realize that I have them at a pivotal time in their development.... I hope to be exactly what Rachael Carson stated above, "[an] adult who can share it, rediscovering with him [the child] the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in." If I do this, I know I will have succeeded.

May perceived herself as a change agent in children's life as her philosophy coincided with her reflected image of a teacher, which was a story writer: "I want to make a difference as a teacher to have my students enjoy my class but walk away having learned something as well and maybe to someone else what my teachers were to me." Her image of an ideal teacher that was originated from her memories of past teachers influenced May's teaching philosophy. Nina's teaching philosophy was parallel to her image of a teacher as a gardener:

I hope to create a classroom environment similar to the environment a gardener provides for their plants. My goal is to encourage in them an enthusiasm for learning and a desire to explore the world around them. If I can accomplish a little of this, then I have become a gardener for the plantlike children in my classroom.

Glen adopted an eclectic approach to teaching:

I do not think my teaching style or approach is exactly like any one I have seen. It is more of a combination and modification of many of the styles I have seen.... I will use a variety of teaching techniques that are geared toward different children and learning styles.

Diane's teaching philosophy reflected the qualities of an ECE teacher that she stated for her image of a teacher as an ocean:

I want to be playful and exciting in my planning and implementation of lesson plans. I hope to introduce new concepts that engage the children and allow them to be individuals and also be a part of a group.... I would like myself to be welcoming and vibrant in my enthusiasm for meeting and teaching the children

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of the present study was to discover ECE pre-service teachers' images of an ECE teacher and beliefs about ECE teaching. The findings of the study can be only generalized to ECE teacher education. However, the study may have important implications for other research efforts investigating pre-service teachers' images and beliefs.

Images and Metaphors

In the present study, metaphors were used as one of the tools to understand the participants' images of an ECE teacher. Also, those images helped the researchers understand the participants' beliefs about teaching. The majority of the metaphors used by the participants represented an ECE teacher as a guide who is the source of the essential knowledge and skills to help young children find their path in life. Along the same line, the metaphor of a story writer revealed in May's image of an ECE teacher granted teachers the sole power for children's learning. This image disregards the valuable and rich cultural experience children bring in the learning environment.

While it is an important professional standard that an ECE teacher must possess high level of expertise to teach children, pre-service teachers need to be aware of that learning process is bidirectional in which a child influences teacher as well as teacher influences child. Children bring their own perspectives about the world surrounding them, their experiences and interests, and their capabilities in the learning process. Therefore, a teacher as a guide first needs to assess children's knowledge level, interests and specific learning needs, and then use his/her professional knowledge to create a learning environment conducive to those needs.

Similarly, metaphors such as water can, gardener and sponge reflected a teaching-learning process in which teacher is the active deliverer of the knowledge while child is the passive receiver. Such a view fails to recognize children's selective nature and ability to question and think as they learn new concepts. To critically address this point, teacher education course contents can include discussions about the circumstances affecting children's learning. Among those circumstances are individual learning interest, motivation level, special learning needs, developmental delays, poverty, and problems at home. In addition, those courses not only include the theoretical basis for learning process, but also integrate practical experiences in which ECE pre-service teachers can analyze scenarios or real cases; observe children and their families in their natural environments; and interview with adults taking care of children.

Two participants of the present study used “friend” metaphor to represent their images of an ECE teacher. Two implications arise from this. First, possessing such romanticized views about teaching may interfere with the realities of real classroom situations in which teacher candidates may need to analyze problem behavior and apply different strategies to guide children’s behavior instead of just being friendly to them. This implication is closely related to the second implication that pre-service teachers may confuse building friendship with students with creating a friendly classroom atmosphere. An effective ECE teacher education content needs to emphasize and integrate the knowledge about children’s social-emotional development, conflict resolution strategies, teaching self-regulation and prosocial behaviors, and most importantly incorporating behavior management strategies in teaching instruction.

Factors Affecting Images of an ECE Teacher and Beliefs about ECE Teaching

Formal (e.g., tutoring in pre-k to 12 setting, teacher’s assistant, summer enrichment program) and informal teaching experiences (e.g., private tutoring, summer camp counseling, babysitting and volunteering) that the participants of the present study had prior to and during their college education affected their beliefs about ECE teaching. The participants rarely referred to their college education as an effect in their beliefs about teaching. Joram and Gabrielle (1998) indicate that teacher candidates will rely on their experiences to make instructional decisions instead of the knowledge and the skills that they gained in their teacher education programs unless they realize the importance of their college education. Implication of this point is that teacher education programs may need to assess their candidates’ formal and informal teaching experiences. Also, through the course work, pre-service teachers can analyze and discuss what they have gained during their formal and informal work experience and how they can benefit from them while gaining valuable professional knowledge and skills in their college education. Furthermore, practicing new knowledge and skills during practicum and field experience in various early childhood education settings is an effective way to help teacher candidates compare their work experience with the one they gain in their practicum classrooms. As a matter of fact, some of the participants in the present study described their mentor teachers in their practicum sites as the model teachers that they would like to become in the future. ECE teacher education programs can coordinate with public school and non-public school programs to assign ECE teacher candidates to the mentor teachers who possess both model character traits and high professional knowledge in their field.

The participants’ memories of their teachers affected the qualities that they attributed to an ECE teacher. Because people tend to preserve the memories that have emotional values it is possible that the participants recalled the qualities related to characters of their past teachers who had profound emotional impact on them rather than recalling the qualities related to professional knowledge. To address what makes an effective teacher, ECE teacher education programs can involve pre-service teachers in discussions on effective teaching and the professional standards of teaching in early childhood education. Most importantly, students can analyze and discuss their images of past teachers and how those images affect their beliefs about what makes an effective

ECE teacher. This course of action can help teacher candidates review and transform their teaching philosophies.

Relations between Images and Beliefs

In the present study, similar patterns appeared throughout the categories that emerged from the coding and the categorization of the data. Specifically the participants' images of an ECE teacher were inspired by their early memories of their teachers, their work experience with young children and their mentor teachers. Implication of this is that pre-service teachers' existing images about teacher and teaching that they already formed and brought to their college education may affect their receptiveness toward emerging new trends and strategies in education of young children. Pre-service teachers may rely on their personal memories to validate their observations of existing practices in today's early childhood education classrooms. As a result, certain teaching patterns and practices remain unchanged from generation to generation. Therefore, teacher education programs need to help pre-service teachers question and analyze their existing images and how those images inform their beliefs in relation to different contexts of education today, such as student diversity, and pedagogical and instructional changes.

In conclusion, the school is the first and foremost place to deliver the values of a culture (McLaren, 2003). In the school system, there is a more critical element: Teacher. The teacher is the one who delivers those values to students through his/her teaching practices. Therefore, it is very important for teacher education programs to create an environment that enables ECE pre-service teachers to discuss, question, and analyze their existing images and beliefs about the teaching profession. Furthermore, early childhood teacher education programs can design more effective instruction to help teacher candidates challenge and alter any stereotypic thinking that they might bring to their college education. With such instruction, students can see the potential connections between their existing images and their beliefs about teaching. Unless pre-service teachers are made aware of their preexisting beliefs, it is likely that teacher education programs will continue to produce teachers who lack the skills to understand and respond to the needs of a diverse student population.

Suggestions for Teacher Education

1. To create a change in teacher candidates' beliefs, teacher education programs can involve candidates in discussions about their beliefs, analyzing scenarios and real life cases, examining images of children from different cultures, and watching documentaries portraying contemporary issues in children's lives.
2. This study found that the memories of past teachers strongly influenced the participants' beliefs about the qualities of an ECE teacher. Discussions about similarities and differences between their past teachers' practices and teaching models reflected in their teacher education program can help teacher candidates transform their beliefs about teaching. Furthermore, observing recent teaching practices and reflecting on them, and assigning pre-service

- teachers to mentor teachers who are innovative in their teaching practices can help teacher candidates transform their beliefs about teaching.
3. The participants' responses consistently focused on the nurturing and caring dimension of ECE teaching. In order to address this issue, teacher education programs can emphasize that having a good personality will not be sufficient to help young children develop and learn optimally. Conducting discussions on what makes an effective teacher, working on planning learning activities in which teacher candidates can use what they have learned about planning, instruction, and classroom management, and practicing those learning activities in real classroom environments can help pre-service teachers understand the importance of professional knowledge in teaching.
 4. Finally, beliefs are not easy to change in one course of action as they are deep rooted in all facets of society. Therefore, entirety of a teacher education program needs to address pre-service teachers' images and beliefs about teaching throughout all program courses.

Further Steps in the Study

The findings of the present study helped eliminate the gap in the research literature about ECE pre-service teachers' beliefs. However, one of the limitations of this study was the inability to include participants who were diverse in gender, race, language, and socio-economic status. A possible next step would be to compare the images and beliefs of ECE pre-service teachers in two different cultures to investigate the phenomena in a broader spectrum.

Notes: The questionnaire is available upon request from Jale Aldemir, PhD, at JAldemir@moc.edu

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