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This exploratory study was designed to investigate how early childhood education practicum students describe their practicum experience in early childhood classrooms. Drawing on data from a larger ongoing study of practicum experiences, the current study examined how intrapersonal feelings while in the practicum setting, perceived fit with their cooperating teacher, practicum satisfaction, and teacher efficacy, and the relationships between these variables. Thirty-two undergraduates enrolled in a practicum course participated by completing multiple questionnaires at the end of the course. Practicum students generally reported fairly positive experiences though some variation existed including some students reporting feeling mild levels of frustration. Bivariate correlations revealed that feelings of being energized and relaxed and satisfied were positively associated, and frustration negatively associated, with students' perception of fit with their cooperating teacher, satisfaction with practicum, and students' sense of teaching efficacy. Hierarchical regressions considering all variables simultaneously revealed that feeling frustrated while in the practicum classroom predicted lower levels of teacher satisfaction and teacher efficacy. Additionally, feeling more satisfied in their practicum settings predicted practicum students feeling more efficacious. These findings provide insight into how practicum students perceive their practicum experience and what factors contribute to both their practicum satisfaction and teacher efficacy. Implications for future research are discussed.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PRACTICUM STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
THEIR PRACTICUM SETTING AND FACTORS LINKED TO  
SATISFACTION AND TEACHER EFFICACY

by

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Approved by

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To my family and husband who have always encouraged me to follow my heart and pursue my passion, for keeping me focused, and supporting me through every step of this journey.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

College students wanting to teach in early childhood settings need practical experience in high quality classrooms to practice their teaching skills (Koc, 2012). Most teacher education programs provide these types of experiences through practicum placements and student teaching. Practical experiences provide students hands-on experiences without the responsibility of being a lead teacher and are typically completed before the final student teaching experience. Having applied courses early on in a program may be particularly beneficial in helping preservice teachers decide whether to pursue a career in the education field and may ultimately help the field maintain high quality teachers in classrooms (Woullard, & Coats, 2004).

The overarching goal of practicum experiences is to assist practicum students as they are developing their own teaching style and set of beliefs, and evolving into effective early childhood educators. Although all practica share this goal, the specific structure and content of these experiences can vary depending on university requirements, classroom ratio, child age group, and the characteristics of cooperating teachers. Broadly practica typically involve interacting in early childhood classrooms, completing less than 10 hours per week over the course of a semester, and planning and implementing activities with large and small groups of children. For the purposes of the current study practica are defined using criteria that are specific to the teacher preparation

program in undergraduate early childhood where data was collected; practicum students complete a minimum of 6 hours per week in an early childhood classroom that has both typically developing children and children with disabilities. Another feature of practica is that they provide opportunities for students to interact with children in the classroom and plan small group activities without being responsible for the whole classroom or daily lesson planning. Practicum experiences typically take place in the second and third of a four year program. For some students, practicum placements are their first authentic experience in an early childhood classroom, for others it is their first supervised experience in the classroom and an opportunity to try new approaches and strategies with feedback and support from cooperating teachers and their professors. In essence, practicum courses lay the foundational skills needed for student teaching, therefore, and thereby playing an important role of shaping future teachers. However, despite growing knowledge about the characteristics and experiences of pre-service and novice teachers, and the student teaching experience, limited research has been done to examine practica from the student's perspective and how such experiences shape college student's development as future teachers.

One of the ways practicum experiences may influence preservice teachers' development is by contributing to their sense of efficacy in the classroom. Bandura (2001) defines self-efficacy as the belief that individuals have that they can accomplish a desired goal by using their own skills and abilities. Self-efficacy affects individuals' level of motivation and ability to persevere during challenges (Bandura, 2001). Individuals with low self efficacy are less likely to pursue an endeavor that they perceive

as challenging because they do not have the belief in themselves that they will be successful. Thus, teacher efficacy is defined as teachers' personal assessment of their own capacities to accomplish teaching-related outcomes. In other words teacher efficacy relates to the amount of influence teachers feel they have to teach children specific goals (Armor et al., 1976). Teacher efficacy has been linked to student learning outcomes and achievement (Armor et al., 1976; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Ross, 1992). Specifically, higher levels of teacher efficacy are associated with positive learning outcomes and higher academic achievement in students.

Research suggests that contextual factors such as teacher support, type of school (e.g. suburban or urban), school culture and leadership, and previous teacher training can influence level of teacher efficacy (Flores & Day, 2006; Siwatu, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Extending these findings to the practicum experience students' sense of efficacy may depend on their perceptions of classroom climate, including the nature of their interactions with cooperating teachers, the emotional awareness while in the classroom, and perceived similarities and differences in teaching style with regard to their cooperating teacher. To date, however, these associations have been unexamined for practicum students. As underscored by Woolfolk-Hoy and Spero (2005), little is known about the early years of teaching even though it is likely to be a critical period for the development of teacher efficacy beliefs.

The goal of the current study is understand the practicum experience from the students' perspective and explore aspects that may contribute to their satisfaction and sense of teacher efficacy in their practicum setting during participation in an

undergraduate early childhood teaching program. To meet this goal, the current study analyzed practicum student perceptions of fit between themselves and their cooperating teacher, as well as their intrapersonal feelings while in the classroom. Understanding the perceptions that practicum students have about their practicum placement and identifying the factors that may contribute to feelings of satisfaction and teacher efficacy can enlighten undergraduate preservice teacher education programs, administrators, and ECE faculty about how to structure the practica so that they provide the optimal experience and help develop more effective early childhood teachers.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Theory provides both a motivation and foundation for investigating a topic. Several theoretical perspectives advise the proposed study and provide a framework for understanding practicum student experiences. These include Bandura's social cognitive theory, Rotter's social learning theory, and systems theory. The contributions of each perspective in guiding this study are discussed briefly below.

#### *Social Cognitive Theory*

Social cognitive theory has been influential in the fields of education, psychology, and communication, and is the foundation for most current literature on teacher efficacy (Ross, Cousins, & Gadalla, 1996; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Woodcock, 2011). Bandura (2001) posits that individuals are both constructors and are constructed by social systems. People create their own understanding of their environment and are influenced by society and others. Consequently, practicum students have their own sets of beliefs about teaching, which are likely to continue changing through interactions with the practicum classroom environment and cooperating teachers.

Central to social cognitive theory is the concept of human agency, which encompasses intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and finally self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2001). To act with intentionality, individuals must take initiative to carry out specific actions and forethought refers to the fact that people set goals with the

anticipation of likely outcomes. In order for practicum students to integrate topics they are learning in the practicum course and complete assignments such as lesson plans they must use forethought and intentionality to integrate course content and practice multiple teaching strategies such as behavior management. Self-reactiveness refers to the motivation and self-regulation that must be present when acting with intention and forethought (Bandura, 2001). Practicum students incorporate self-reactiveness throughout the practicum experience by self-regulating their interactions with children and making adaptations as needed such as changing their tone of voice when interacting with a child. Practicum students incorporate intention and forethought when interacting with children, asking questions, explaining activities, and their overall preparation of leading a small or large group. Self-reflectiveness is the ability of individuals to self-assess their actions and functioning. In addition, to forethought and intentionality practicum students are often encouraged to reflect on their teaching skills, interactions, and lesson plans through weekly journal entries, lesson plan reflections, and conversations with classmates.

The broader concept of human agency refers to peoples' capacity to make choices and implement those choices in larger social contexts. The predominant underpinning of human agency is self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief in their ability to complete a given task. People must believe they can create a specific outcome. Additionally, the degree to which individuals believe or fail to believe they can produce a specific outcome can affect how they think more generally (e.g., optimistically or pessimistically) (Bandura, 2001). Bandura argues that individuals'

perceived self- efficacy is an important contributor to the productivity and functioning of society.

In the current study, teacher efficacy was defined and measured as the degree to which practicum students' believe that they can engage with students and create learning outcomes while in their practicum placement. Ideally, practicum students practice skills with intention with the anticipation of producing specific outcomes. In addition, self-reactiveness is needed to continue learning and practicing skills in the classroom. Practicum students must have their own motivation to learn new teaching techniques and practice existing ones in the context of the classroom.

### *Social Learning Theory*

Social learning theory is also used to inform the current study. This process theory focuses on how people learn or acquire their characteristic behaviors and attitudes through interactions with others and their environment (Rotter, 1982). This is relevant to the desired outcome of practicum experiences for practicum students; that is, students learn teaching skills from observing and interacting with cooperating teachers and spending time in a developmentally appropriate classroom. Moreover, early childhood practicum settings provide a new environment for practicum students to use skills they have learned previously and develop new teaching strategies that they can use after becoming teachers.

Social learning theory postulates that people have unlearned responses to situations, however, as people experience situations and learn, new responses develop. For example, if a child has no prior experience with a classroom pet, that child may have

an unlearned response to fear the class pet. However, after having multiple experiences with the pet and watching others interact with it, the child has a new response of being interested in the class pet. Social learning theory has been examined and influenced by multiple scholars such as Alfred Adler, Kurt Lewin, Clark Hull, and Albert Bandura. However, for this study works by Julian B. Rotter and his interpretations were used to understand social learning theory.

Several core assumptions and basic principles of social learning theory include expectations, context, and reinforcement (Rotter, 1982). A key tenet of this theory is that expectancies in each current situation are determined by two different aspects; a) by the experiences in the current situation and b) by experiencing situations that individuals' perceive as similar. In other words, the expectations that individuals bring to an experience are shaped by previous and present experiences. For example, if a practicum student has worked as an assistant in a childcare classroom then their experiences being in the role of an assistant (i.e., changing diapers, taking attendance etc.) may shape their expectations of future practicum experiences. As humans, we use previous experiences to gather information and form perceptions that will later be used to understand new situations that may have similarities such as working with children. Additionally, practicum students have individual characteristics such as their temperament, family structure (e.g., siblings, children), and work experiences (e.g., nanny) that may vary their perception of the practicum experience. Therefore, the current study will explore the possible relationship between practicum teacher efficacy and having children as well as

practicum teacher efficacy and previous experience working with young children in a classroom setting.

Social learning theory also emphasizes the importance of understanding the situation (or context) in which learning takes place. A basic assumption of social learning perspective is people's experiences or interactions with their meaningful environment influence one another in ways that create unity in personality (Rotter, 1982). In other words, as individuals become more experienced and develop skills, their personality gradually becomes more stable (Caspi, & Shiner, 2006; Rotter, 1982). Moreover, the more similar experiences individuals have the more they start to give meaning to overall concepts, in this case teaching young children. Incorporating this assumption, the current study measures practicum students' sense of teacher efficacy. As students have multiple practicum experiences or opportunities to teach in early childhood, they are likely to have more stable and solidified beliefs about the EC teaching field. Throughout the semester, students' have opportunities to experience lesson planning, teacher-child interactions, and behavior management and as students have these experiences their sense of teaching efficacy is developing. Additionally, social learning theory points to environmental characteristics as important factors to consider in regards to practicum experiences. For example, practicum student's perceptions of how similar or different they are to their cooperating teachers may inform the ECE field about possible implications (i.e. level of satisfaction) and identify aspects of the cooperating teacher and practicum student dynamic that can be improved.

Reinforcement, positive or negative, can be used as cues and ultimately affects learned behavior (Rotter, 1982). Rotter argues that in social learning processes, reinforcements related to individuals' actions and behavior facilitates a behavioral response in the reinforced individuals. In regards to practicum students, receiving reinforcement from cooperating teachers can aid or hinder the overall learning experience for the practicum student. For example, if a cooperating teacher affirms how a practicum student responds to two children arguing it may positively affect how the practicum student views their teaching skills (i.e., as effective). Rotter (1982) also argues that negative reinforcement or the anticipation of negative reinforcement can cause a shift in emotions such as feelings of anger, defensiveness, and cautiousness. These negative feelings can affect the practicum students learning in current and future situations by influencing how they feel about their teaching abilities. Thus, the current study examines how practicum students feel in the classroom. Further, the current study examines practicum student satisfaction with their practicum experiences with regards to feedback, freedom to practice skills, the practicum student role, and assignment of responsibilities. If students are not satisfied in their practicum they may feel less efficacious because their experiences were negative. Collecting information about these contextual variables furthers our understanding about what factors may help or hinder the overall experience.

#### *Application of Systems Theory to Educational Setting*

An ecological perspective posits that multiple systems at different levels (i.e., the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chrono- systems) influence the well-being and development of individuals and families (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Bronfenbrenner (1986)

argues that systems are constantly interacting within and between the different levels. This framework has been very influential in terms of how researchers examine the relationship between individuals and their environments and has been applied to a variety of developmental questions. To better understand children's experiences in educational settings, Pianta (1999) has drawn on ecological theory to develop a systems model of classrooms. This model addresses both systems within classrooms as well as systems within which classrooms are embedded and each system level involves particular processes for promoting child outcomes.

Although Pianta (1999) posits that multiple systems interact and influence the child to promote learning and development, much of his work focuses specifically on the teacher-child dyad. Pianta (1999) argues the importance for assessing the teacher-child relationship because it provides an understanding of relationship dynamics and can aid in developing strategies to help resolve conflict within the dyad as one key system. Additionally, Pianta acknowledges that the social aspect of teacher-child dyads is often overlooked, despite its likely effect on children's learning. Previous literature has used measures that focus more on the educational dynamic such as academic learning and teaching strategies. Therefore, the merging of educational and developmental (defined as social emotional) components need to be explored together. The social aspect of the teacher-child relationship affects learning outcomes for children (Pianta, 1999). Consistent with other related theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), Pianta (1999) acknowledges individual characteristics from both the teacher and the child are present and relate to the perceptions and interactions of the dyadic system.

Whereas much of the literature on classroom dynamics has placed the child in the developing system (e.g., Pianta, 1999; Jeon et al., 2010), in the current study the practicum student is placed in the developing system as the focus of learning and change (see Figure 1). It is important to note that although various types of relationships (e.g., interactions with family members) and interactions with environments (e.g. culture, home, and church) are likely to influence the development of the practicum student, the examples provided for each system in the figure relate to elements of the practicum experience.

In summary, propositions from each of the theoretical perspectives described were used to identify the following constructs of interest for the current study: cooperating teacher fit (e.g. the amount of similarity or difference between practicum students and their cooperating teachers), practicum satisfaction, practicum student teacher efficacy (interchangeably referred to hereafter as teacher efficacy and practicum efficacy), and intrapersonal feelings (defined as feelings while in the practicum classroom). Current literature supports the need to examine these variables in relation to practicum students and their experiences in classrooms with cooperating teachers.

## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Multiple studies have examined efficacy across a variety of teachers (both in-service and preservice). Current research has linked higher teacher efficacy to both teacher actions and student success (Anderson, Greene, Loewen, 1988; Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy, 2000). For example, Ross (1992) found that higher teacher efficacy is related to student learning outcomes and student achievement. In addition, the findings of Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) indicate that teachers who felt more efficacious in their teaching tended to have more positive teacher behaviors related to student interactions and interactions with other teachers. While few studies have focused specifically on the development of efficacy for practicum students, several related literatures provide some useful insights for the current study.

#### *Practicum Student and Cooperating Teacher Fit*

Multiple studies have noted the importance of the relationship between preservice teachers and cooperating teachers (Appl & Spenciner, 2008; Clarke & Jarvis-Selinger, 2005; O'Brian, Stoner, Appel, & House, 2007). Specifically, the relationship between the practicum student and cooperating teacher has been described as foundational to preservice teachers' development (O'Brian et al., 2007). During the practicum experience, cooperating teachers are considered master teachers and provide critical feedback to pre-service teachers. According to O'Brian and colleagues (2007)

cooperating teachers and preservice teachers have specific roles within the relationship and how each member communicates and understands the other is important to how the dyad functions. Using a sample of preschool teachers, Guo, Justice, Sawyer, and Tompkins (2010) found that having a sense of teamwork with fellow teachers was associated with higher levels of teacher efficacy. In contrast, Clarke and Jarvis-Selinger (2005) highlight that when these dyads do not facilitate openness and allow for questioning preservice teachers can feel defensive and learning is brought to a standstill.

Although research supports the importance of the preservice teacher and cooperating teacher dyad, there is a lack of research regarding how perceived characteristics of the cooperating teacher such as teaching style and communication preference may relate to practicum teachers' efficacy and level of satisfaction. How similar or different practicum students and cooperating teachers are may relate to how they interact. Appl and Spenciner (2008) used a qualitative process to examine the practicum student and cooperating teacher relationship and found that the relationship is a fluid one, with back and forth interactions that influence practicum students taking on different aspects of the teacher role. If practicum students are placed in practicum settings that are inconsistent with their beliefs about how a classroom or cooperating teacher should function it may influence how they perceive the practicum experience and ultimately their level of satisfaction with it as a learning opportunity.

### *Practicum Satisfaction*

Teacher satisfaction with their job has been measured by different factors including confirmatory statements (e.g., I am satisfied with what I achieve at work) and

feeling of collaboration with coworkers (Caprara, Barbaranellii, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003; Guo, Justice, Sawyer, & Tompkins, 2010). Research suggests that satisfaction affects teachers' assessment of efficacy (Ciftci, Ozgun, & Erden, 2011; Guo et al., 2010; Nias, 2012,). One study of undergraduate students in a teacher education program in Turkey found that teacher efficacy mediated the relationship between student teachers' needs, school adjustment (e.g., GPA), university experiences, and perceived friendships and student's teaching job satisfaction (Ciftci, Ozgun, & Erden, 2011).

Likewise, in-service teachers' perceptions of school climate and interactions with colleagues have also been explored in relation to teacher efficacy; findings suggest that having a sense of collaboration with fellow teachers is associated with higher levels of teachers' efficacy (Guo et al., 2010). A possible explanation for the often reported relationship between teacher efficacy and satisfaction is that feeling satisfied with your teaching position allows you to feel confident in the work you are doing. Building on these results, about the link between satisfaction and teacher efficacy, it is reasonable to examine the same constructs for practicum students who are beginning their formal training to become teachers. Some measures of satisfaction for in-service teachers include aspects such as pay and work hours, which may be less applicable for practicum students. Instead, measures of practicum students' should incorporate relevant factors for them such as satisfaction with their role in the classroom, feedback from cooperating teachers, and amount of practice they experience with different teaching strategies.

### *Intrapersonal Feelings*

Research supports that overall climate in schools and classrooms contribute to how teachers form professional identity (Flores & Day, 2006). How practicum students perceive their practicum settings (i.e., comfortable, welcoming) may relate to how they identify their role and how they may feel while in the practicum classroom. Kim and Danforth (2012) used a qualitative approach to interview cooperating teachers in the US in regards to cooperating teachers' beliefs about effective mentoring of student teachers. The researchers examined metaphors used by cooperating teachers in describing their supervision of student teachers. Their findings revealed that the metaphors focused on several issues including intrapersonal relationships (e.g., student teacher as a family member), power sharing, and tension and conflict (e.g., student teaching as war) (Kim & Danforth, 2012). While this study focused on the cooperating teacher perspective it suggests that tension and conflict can add stress to the student teacher– cooperating teacher relationship and create feelings of anxiety and uncertainty for student teachers. Another qualitative study found that communication and trust was a key aspect of the practicum experience (O'Brian, Stoner, Appel, & House, 2007). When these studies are taken together, it is clear that an emotional component is present during practicum experiences for practicum students.

Caires, Almeida, and colleagues have done several studies in Portugal that provide evidence that there are socioemotional components of student teaching that need to be explored to fully understand the overall teaching experience (Caires, Almeida, & Martins, 2010; Caires & Almeida, 2005; Caires, Almeida, & Vieira, 2012). Caires et al.

(2012), argue that an important component of student teaching experiences is a sense of belonging. This is supported by their findings that indicate that many students felt pressure and vulnerability while student teaching. Having a sense of belonging to the classroom and support may help counteract some of the stresses and negative feelings that come from having a new teaching experience. In an earlier study Caires et al. (2010) found that school resources, acceptance, supervisor's support and feedback, and students' feelings of career satisfaction were predictors of students' socioemotional adjustment. Moreover, the measure for socioemotional adjustment revealed that a significant amount of distress, shifts in sleeping and eating habits, and higher levels of vulnerability were felt by student teachers during their first teaching experience (Caires et al., 2010). This literature provides strong evidence that how student teachers feel while teaching is important to take into consideration when examining the overall novice teacher experience.

As noted by the theoretical models put forth by Bandura, Bronfenbrenner, and Pianta, context plays an important role in how situations are perceived and the extent to which learning takes place. Examining intrapersonal feelings using quantitative methods will strengthen researchers overall understanding of how intrapersonal feelings relates to practicum students satisfaction and teacher efficacy. The concept of intrapersonal feelings incorporates how it feels when practicum students are in their practicum placements.

### *Previous Experience*

Research indicates that previous experience interacting with children creates a point of reference that preservice teachers can refer back to when they are placed in a classroom setting and may increase their confidence in their teaching skills. Flores and Day (2006) found that both personal and professional histories such as preservice experiences are mediating factors that help determine the stability of teachers developing professional identities. This may be because previous experiences inform how individuals interpret and respond to new experiences.

Siwatu (2011) examined the influence of school contextual factors, specifically urban and suburban schools in relation to preservice teachers' sense of preparedness and culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy. Findings indicate that students felt more prepared to teach at suburban schools. A possible reason for this finding is that preservice teachers are more comfortable teaching in schools with which they are familiar (i.e., the type of schools in which they had previous teaching experiences). Similarly, practicum students who are already familiar with young children may feel more confident and efficacious in classrooms than practicum students have never been in classroom settings. Since teachers represent extra-familial caregiving relations, maternal efficacy literature may be helpful in understanding possible factors that may be associated with varying levels of efficacy. Similar to the finding in the teacher literature, mothers' previous histories of caring for children or being mothers relates to maternal efficacy (Leerkes and Crockenberg, 2002; Porter and Hsu, 2003). Moreover, having previous

experiences caring for children is related to higher maternal efficacy (Leerkes & Crockenberg, 2002; Porter & Hsu, 2003).

Taken altogether, these findings suggest that practicum students' previous experiences (i.e., related to young children) can create expectations for future situations such as practicums where students also interact with children, and personal characteristics may relate to how efficacious they feel about teaching. More specifically, characteristics such as work experience, having children, and previous schooling background should be taken into consideration in regards to practicum student teacher efficacy. These findings suggest that previous experiences of teachers provide a scaffold for how they interpret new situations. For this reason, the current study will explore the possible differences in previous experiences with young children and teacher efficacy while in a practicum setting. If practicum students have already had experiences with teaching young children (i.e. teaching at a childcare) or have children themselves it may increase their confidence and teacher efficacy.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CURRENT STUDY

The main goal of the current study is to understand the practicum experience from the practicum student's perspective. In particular, the current study aims to identify factors that may contribute to student satisfaction with their practicum experience and their emerging sense of teaching efficacy while in their practicum setting. Given prior research that suggests that previous experiences relate to professional identity and level of efficacy it may be important to explore differences in prior (practicum and non-practicum) experiences working with young children. In regard to these above aims the following research questions were developed.

RQ 1. How do students in an undergraduate early childhood teacher education program describe their practicum experiences in terms of their intrapersonal feelings in the classroom, perceived fit with their cooperating teacher, level of practicum satisfaction and teacher efficacy?

RQ2. Are students intrapersonal feeling in the classroom related to their perceived fit with their cooperating teacher?

RQ 3. Are satisfaction and efficacy related to another?

*Hypothesis:* Practicum student satisfaction will be positively correlated with practicum student efficacy.

RQ 4. What aspects of the practicum experience (specifically intrapersonal feelings in the classroom and perceived fit with cooperating teacher) predict student's level of satisfaction and their sense of efficacy?

*Hypothesis:* Students' intrapersonal feelings in the classroom and perceived fit with the cooperating teacher will be positively associated with satisfaction and efficacy.

RQ 5. Do student reports of efficacy vary according to their prior experience with young children, as measured by the completion of a previous practicum, raising their own children, or being employed in an early childhood position?

*Hypothesis:* Practicum students with previous experience will have higher levels of efficacy. Specifically, practicum students who have completed a previous practicum will have higher efficacy than those who have not; students who have their own children will have higher efficacy than those who do not; and, students who have been previously employed in early childhood will have higher levels of efficacy than those who have not.

## CHAPTER V

### METHODS

#### *Sample*

Data for the current study were drawn from a larger on-going project, *Practicum Experience Project: Reflections, Relationships, and Revelations (PEP)*, focused on data collection for the larger study took place over one semester during spring term (January through May of 2012). Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through questionnaire packets and brief audio recorded mid-term interviews. Additionally, quantitative questionnaire packets were collected from practicum students' cooperating teachers including demographics, teaching experience, and practicum satisfaction.

For the purposes of this cross-sectional, secondary data analysis, only practicum students' quantitative data relevant to the current study's research questions and hypotheses were used. A description for measures used specifically for the current study will be described below. No cooperating teacher or qualitative data from the larger study will be included in the current study.

Participants were eligible to participate if they were enrolled in either Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) Practicum I (340) or Practicum II (440). Both classes are practicum courses that provide students with hands-on experience in high quality birth through kindergarten inclusive classrooms and require students to spend a minimum of 6 hours per week in their placement. Practicum I is the first formal

practicum experience for students. Assignments include: developing activities, tracking children's progress, and reflecting on personal growth. Practicum I is a pre-requisite for Practicum II. Practicum II requires more focused and detailed lesson plans, additional reflection on personal growth, and having more practice in leading large and small group activities, and transitions.

### *Procedures*

To recruit the sample, PEP project staff visited each of the two courses identified above, and the project and consent process were described to the students with a clear communication that participation was voluntary. Additional copies of the consent were provided for students' own records. An additional visit was made to each class the following week for students who were absent or took home the consent to review. During the consenting process instructors of these courses left the classroom to maintain confidentiality throughout the semester. Midway through the semester a graduate student attended the end of class and scheduled interviews with all students who were interested. Consequently, during the interviews some non-consented students consented to parts or all of the study and their quantitative data were used and are included in the totals. The questionnaire packets were included as a class assignment and were distributed to all students at the end of the semester; however, only data from students who consented to participate in the research project are included in the current study.

The analysis sample for the current study consisted of a total of 34 practicum students ranging from age 20 to 59 ( $M= 26$  years), with more than half of the group between the ages of 20 and 23 years old. The sample is made up of multiple ethnic

groups, including: African American (29%), Caucasian (53%), Hispanic (6%), and 12 percent identified as other. Thirty-eight percent of practicum students reported having their own children. Out of a total of 34 participants 53 percent report that they previously held positions working with young children in a formal setting and 13 participants completed Practicum I and 19 participants completed Practicum II. After all the questionnaires were completed, a total of 32 participants completed the course and were used in the analyses.

### *Measures*

Multiple measures were used as part of the *PEP project*. The focus of the current study is the practicum experience from the students' perspective; for this reason, only measures completed by practicum students are utilized. Each measure had acceptable reliability: as shown in Table 2 all reliability coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) had values above .70.

*Demographics.* Student demographics were collected from each student to provide a clear picture of the characteristics of participating students (See Table 1). Questions encompassed practicum students' ethnic background, level of education, age, gender, and previous experience. A question about whether students were "2-plus" (i.e., transferred with an Associate's degree) was included to better understand the educational background of students.

*Teacher efficacy.* After reviewing the literature and existing assessments of teacher efficacy, two measures—the *Teacher Efficacy Scale* (Bandura, 1997) and the *Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale* (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998) — were combined and adapted for the purposes of this study to reflect the expectations and

experiences of practicum students. This new efficacy measure ( $\alpha = .92$ ) had two separate columns that asked students to rate both their general efficacy and their efficacy while in their practicum placement on a range of items, including such questions as: “How much can you express your views freely on important classroom matters?” and, “How much can you do to keep students on task within activities?” Ratings were made on a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1= *nothing*, 3= *some*, and 5= *a great deal* in regards to the extent practicum students’ felt they had influence in that area. After confirming there were no significant differences in students’ ratings of general and practicum efficacy, only the rating for practicum efficacy was included in the current analyses. Mean scores were created for practicum efficacy, with higher scores indicating higher feelings of efficacy.

*Cooperating teacher fit.* This variable was created for this specific study and was conceptualized as how well practicum students’ views about teaching and interactions matched with their cooperating teacher’s views about teaching. In this study, fit was measured from the practicum student’s perspective. Using a 5-point rating scale (1=*strongly disagree*; 5=*strongly agree*), students rated how similar their cooperating teacher teaching style was to their own on eight different dimensions. For example, “My cooperating teacher’s behavior management strategies are similar to mine.” Two questions were not included in the current analyses because they did not statistically hang with the other questions. A mean score was created from the remaining six questions for this variable; with higher scores indicating a more positive fit with their cooperating

teacher. The 6-item Cooperating Teacher Fit measure has an acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

*Student satisfaction.* The research team created the student satisfaction survey the measure focuses on the overall experience of the practicum student in their practicum classroom. The questionnaire included a total of 10 questions and had acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Three questions were open-ended in design and were not included in the current study. Seven questions were rated on a 5-point likert scale (1 = *being not at all satisfied* and 5 = *highly satisfied*); these questions were used in the current study as the measure of satisfaction.

*Intrapersonal feelings.* This measure was designed by the research team to capture how frequently students' experience a variety of feelings in the practicum classroom. *Anxious, energized, frustrated, quiet, and relaxed* were the words given on a likert scale ranging from 1 = *never*, 3 = *sometimes*, and 5 = *most of the time*. First, a factor analysis was computed to understand if feelings loaded on two factors (positive or negative); quiet did clearly load as positive or negative. Additionally, quiet did not correlate with any other variables and was subsequently not included in any further analyses because it was uncertain how students interpreted the term quiet. In the end, it was decided that the best approach was to examine each feeling independently; therefore, separate scores for anxious, energized, frustrated, and relaxed were used in each separate analysis.

### *Data Analyses Plan*

The current study is organized around four research questions that were each examined in separate analyses as described below.

*RQ1 analyses.* First, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and range) were computed to explore how practicum students describe their experience in terms of Intrapersonal Feelings and Cooperating Teacher Fit. Additionally, descriptive statistics were computed in order to examine what level of satisfaction and efficacy students report regarding their practicum experience.

*RQ 2 analyses.* Bivariate correlations were computed among the four types of intrapersonal feelings (Anxious, Energized, Frustrated, and Relaxed) and Cooperating Teacher Fit in the classroom was computed.

*RQ 3 analyses.* Bivariate correlations were computed among satisfaction and practicum efficacy variables.

*RQ 4 analyses.* Two hierarchical regressions were computed to examine the possible predictors of students' level of practicum satisfaction and sense teacher efficacy. The first will regress Satisfaction on Intrapersonal Feelings in the classroom and Cooperating Teacher Fit. The second set of regressions will regress Efficacy on Intrapersonal Feelings in the classroom and Cooperating Teacher Fit. Given the exploratory nature of the current study, two models examining predictors of satisfaction and efficacy will help to better understand the contributions of each variable. The first set of models, Model 1 will include the feelings of energized, frustrated and relaxed in relation to satisfaction. In Model 2 the three feeling variables from model one will be

included with the addition of a second variable, Cooperating teacher fit. In the second set of models examines the relationship between the variables and efficacy, Model 1 will regress the feelings energized, frustrated, and relaxed with efficacy and Model 2 will include the feelings entered into Model 1 and build on the model by including Cooperating teacher fit.

*RQ 5 analyses.* To understand if students' amount of practical experience relates to their level of practicum satisfaction and practicum teacher efficacy, practicum students were first categorized into three groups: measured by the completion of a previous practicum, raising their own children, or being employed in an early childhood position. Then three separate t-tests comparing efficacy scores across those with and without types of prior experience were computed.

## CHAPTER VI

### RESULTS

#### *Research Question 1*

To address the first research question, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and range) were calculated to explore how students in an undergraduate early childhood teacher education program (identified here as practicum students) describe their practicum experiences in terms of their intrapersonal feelings in the classroom (referred to hereafter as Feelings) and perceived fit with their cooperating teacher (referred to hereafter as Fit). As shown in Table 3, practicum students generally reported having fairly positive experiences in the practicum setting. On average, students reported that they “often” felt energized ( $M=3.94$ ), and relaxed ( $M=4.09$ ) while in their practicum setting and “rarely” felt anxious ( $M=2.06$ ) and frustrated ( $M=1.91$ ). Interestingly, no students reported “never” feeling energized and relaxed while in the practicum setting. Additionally, students tended to report feeling that their cooperating teachers were similar to them on items such as teaching style, ideas about best practices and behavior management strategies ( $M=4.00$ ). While the average mean levels of these variables suggest positive experiences on average, there was variation in students’ responses and experiences. In regards to students’ sense of satisfaction and efficacy, on average, reported being moderately satisfied ( $M = 4.23, SD = .69$ ) with their practicum classroom, and student reported as if they had “some influence” ( $M = 3.6, SD = .55$ ) in their

practicum classrooms (see Table 4). Although there was variation in students' responses no students reported very low levels of satisfaction or practicum efficacy. In other words no students reported being "not at all satisfied" or feeling as if they had no influence in their practicum classroom.

### *Research Question 2*

To answer research question two, simple bivariate correlations were computed between the Feelings and Fit (shown in Table 5). Findings indicate that students' sense of fit with cooperating teacher is significantly and positively correlated with feeling Relaxed ( $r = .38, p < .05$ ) and Energized ( $r = .37, p < .05$ ). In other words, the better the fit students perceived between their cooperating teacher and themselves, the more they reported feeling relaxed and energized in the classroom. Moreover, a significant negative relationship was found between Fit of Cooperating Teacher and the intrapersonal feeling of Frustrated ( $r = -.42, p < .05$ ). In contrast, feeling anxious while in their practicum placement was not correlated with perceived fit with cooperating teacher, or any other variables and was subsequently dropped from any further analyses.

### *Research Question 3*

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, results (see Table 5) indicate a significant positive correlation between practicum satisfaction and practicum efficacy ( $r = .56, p < .001$ ); the more satisfied students reported being, the higher their sense of efficacy in the classroom.

### *Research Question 4*

The fourth set of research questions organizing this study asked about the associations between two aspects of the practicum experience (perceived fit and

intrapersonal feelings) and student reports of satisfaction and efficacy at the end of the term. To address these questions two sets of hierarchical OLS regressions were conducted (one predicting satisfaction and one predicting practicum efficacy). In the first set of models (shown in Table 6), student satisfaction was first regressed on the three measures of intrapersonal feelings (Energized, Frustrated, and Relaxed) (Model 1), and then students' perceived fit with the cooperating teacher was added to the model as an additional predictor (Model 2). These analyses revealed several significant associations. As shown in Table 6 Model 1, Energized and Frustrated are significant predictors of practicum student satisfaction. That is, the more energized students feel in their practicum classroom the higher their reported level of satisfaction, ( $\beta = .53, p < .001$ ). In contrast, Frustrated is significantly negatively associated ( $\beta = -.39, p < .001$ ) with satisfaction. Thus, the more frustrated practicum students reported feeling, the less satisfied they were with their practicum placements. The associations detected in Model 1 are quite strong, accounting for 58% of the variability ( $R^2$ ) in practicum students' satisfaction, ( $F_{(3, 28)} = 13.1, p < .001$ ). Although Fit was significantly correlated with Practicum Student Satisfaction at the bivariate level ( $r = .45, p < .01$ , as shown in Table 5), when Fit is added to a model that includes Energized, Relaxed, and Frustrated (Model 2 in Table 6), it is no longer a significant predictor of Satisfaction ( $\beta = .11, p = .43$ ). Moreover, Fit does not contribute uniquely, over and above the Feelings variables and is confirmed by the finding that Model 2 does not account for a significantly greater amount of variability ( $R^2$ ) in students' satisfaction (59%) than Model 1.

As mentioned above, a series of hierarchical regression models were computed to examine the associations between two aspects of the practicum experience (perceived fit and intrapersonal feelings) and students' reports of efficacy, using three models as shown in Table 7. In Model 1 (see Table 7) reported efficacy was regressed on three intrapersonal feelings (Energized, Frustrated, and Relaxed). This model accounts for 19.7% of the variability ( $R^2$ ) in practicum students' sense of efficacy and points to several significant relationships. Among all the predictors, Frustrated appeared to be the most closely associated, at trend level, ( $\beta = -.320$ ,  $p < .10$ ) students who feel frustrated report lower levels of efficacy. The second model in this series adds Fit, but the non-significant results suggest it does not help to explain any additional variation (See Model 2, Table 7). The overall model is not significant ( $F_{(4,27)} = 1.69$ ) and neither are any of the predictors; furthermore, the model does not account (see Model 2, Table 7) for significantly more of the variability ( $R^2$ ) in the practicum students' sense of efficacy than Model 1, which contains only the feelings variables.

Given my hypothesis that satisfaction and efficacy would be related and evidence that they are associated at the bivariate level as shown in Table 5, practicum satisfaction was added in a third model to examine its' association with efficacy after taking into account the other measures of students' practicum experiences (i.e., Feelings and Fit). As shown in Model 3 in Table 7, Satisfaction is a significant positive predictor of practicum efficacy, ( $\beta = .597$ ,  $p = .02$ ). Moreover, Model 3 accounts for 34% of the variability ( $R^2$ ) in practicum students' sense of efficacy ( $F(5) = 2.74$ ,  $p < .05$ ), a statistically significant improvement in prediction over Model 2.

### *Research Question 5*

To test whether efficacy scores vary by students' prior experience with young children (research question 4), three separate t-tests were conducted, comparing practicum efficacy scores across students with and without each type of prior experience with children (completion of a previous practicum, raising their own children, or being employed) were calculated. These analyses (presented in Table 8) generally suggest that prior experience is not associated with significant differences in efficacy scores. However, the test for differences in practicum efficacy according to participation in a previous practicum was closest to being significant at the trend level ( $t = 1.65, p = .109$ ) for differences in level of Practicum Efficacy. Interestingly, the group mean values indicate that students with no previous experiences (with a practicum, raising their own children, or being employed) reported higher levels of teaching efficacy than students who had some type of experience.

## CHAPTER VII

### DISCUSSION

The goal of the current study was to understand the practicum experience from the perspective of practicum students and identify possible factors that may contribute to student satisfaction and their sense of teacher efficacy in their practicum setting.

Woodcock (2011) emphasized the importance in teacher preparation programs of assessing students' level of teaching efficacy and identifying ways to improve efficacy levels through the program. The current study contributes to the limited body of literature exploring the undergraduate practicum experience that occurs before student teaching. The existing literature on teaching has noted that the first year of lead teaching can be an eye-opener into the reality of teaching and can dishearten novice teachers (Siwatu, 2011; Weinstein, 1988; Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005). A possible explanation for this is that novice teachers may feel unprepared to teach in a setting that is different from their preservice experiences. Therefore, examining what influences efficacy during teacher preparation and education may inform programs of how to provide a meaningful learning experience that will provide teachers with a good foundation so that when they start their teaching career they feel they can be successful. Studies have shown that teacher's level of efficacy is associated with student achievement (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Ross, 1992). With teacher research affirming the importance of efficacy in relation to high quality teaching and overall teacher outcomes it is imperative

that we examine factors that may influence teacher efficacy in the early stages of teacher development such as during the first practical experiences (i.e., practicums). Yet, to date, few studies have examined how aspects of early, supervised, practical classroom experiences lead to the development of teacher efficacy.

The current study is particularly noteworthy because, up until this point, very few studies have examined practicum experiences, from the perspective of the practicum students. In addition to providing new information about practicum students' levels of teacher efficacy, this study allows for a first look into aspects of the practicum experience that may influence the development of efficacy. As mentioned by Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy and Hoy (1998) few studies have examined the development of efficacy in regards to novice teachers (teachers in their first year). Moreover, to my knowledge, the present study is the first in early childhood practicum literature (at least in the U.S.) to examine students' intrapersonal feelings while in the practicum classroom and their perceptions of the fit with their cooperating teacher as well as how these factors relate to both practicum satisfaction and practicum efficacy.

When examining the descriptive results from this study, a general picture of practicum students' experiences emerges. On average, practicum students often felt energized and relaxed and rarely felt anxious or frustrated while in their practicum classrooms. Additionally, on average, students also reported being similar to their cooperating teachers in terms of teaching style, ideas about best practices, and behavior management. And, although some students reported feeling frustrated from time to time while in their practicum classroom, it is notable that none felt frustrated often or the

majority of the time while in their practicum classroom. Interestingly, even at low levels and with a restricted range frustration was still found to be significantly negatively associated with satisfaction and efficacy. Feeling frustrated while in the practicum classroom, even at low levels, may be picking up on aspects of the practicum experience that may be negatively affecting the practicum students; difficulty interacting with children in the classroom, not understanding their role while in the classroom, or a lack of communication with cooperating teacher are all experiences that may evoke feelings of frustration and could ultimately decrease satisfaction with their practicum and make them feel less efficacious about teaching. Given that feeling frustrated is associated with lower levels of satisfaction and teacher efficacy; an important next step would be to identify circumstances that lead to or prevent frustration related to the practicum experience.

On average, students were moderately satisfied in their practicum classroom with some students being mildly satisfied and some students being highly satisfied. Similarly, on average students reported feeling a moderate level of efficacy within their practicum classroom, meaning they felt they could have some influence in their practicum classroom. A possible explanation for why practicum students in this sample tended to have overall positive experiences is that the early childhood teacher preparation program where thesis data were collected is purposeful, intentional, and individualized to try to provide a meaningful experience for practicum students. For example, instructors most often use early childhood classrooms that are specifically chosen because they are high-quality. Additionally, cooperating teachers typically have a four-year degree in either education or early childhood and would have similar practica experiences that allow them

to relate to practicum students. In addition, university instructors of the practicum courses make a concerted effort to take into consideration students' preferences (e.g., child age or type of setting) and needs (e.g., placing commuter students in classrooms closer to their home) when making placement decisions. Instructors also take time throughout the semester to "check-in" with practicum students about how placements, interactions with children, and cooperating teachers are going. If practicum students feel like their interests and preferences are taken into consideration, they may feel more satisfied with the experience.

Correlations were used in the current study to provide some understanding of relationships between different aspects of the practicum experience (e.g., intrapersonal feelings and fit with cooperating teacher). Students' intrapersonal feelings of energized, frustrated, and relaxed and their sense of fit with their cooperating teacher were moderately correlated. More specifically, students who felt energized and relaxed felt they had more similarities with their cooperating teacher (i.e., a better fit). In contrast, students feeling frustrated while in the classroom did not feel a sense of fit with cooperating teachers. This set of associations may reflect the importance of the presence or absence of cohesiveness between practicum students and their cooperating teachers. Individuals that are members of a cohesive group or pair tend to have better emotional adjustment and a decrease of negative emotions such as anxiety and tension (Anderson & Keltner, 2004). Cohesion incorporates the idea that when two or more individuals find commonalities, it creates a bond that links them together. For example, if practicum students feel that their teaching style is similar to that of their cooperating teacher, they

may feel a common bond and sense of belonging with their cooperating teachers, and in turn, may experience more positive feelings while in the classroom such as relaxed and energized. However, if practicum students' perceive a mismatch in fit with their cooperating teacher, they may be less likely to feel cohesion and have more negative feelings (e.g., frustration) while in the classroom.

An unexpected finding pertains to the intrapersonal feeling, Relaxed. Relaxed was positively correlated with both practicum satisfaction and practicum efficacy. However, when Relaxed was regressed with the additional feelings of Energized and Frustrated, and Cooperating Teacher fit, Relaxed becomes negatively related to both Practicum Satisfaction and Practicum Efficacy. A possible explanation for this finding is that feeling energized may be accounting for some of the positive aspects of feeling relaxed (i.e., feeling less anxious and more comfortable) in the regression and the remaining variance of feeling relaxed may be picking up on aspects of relaxed such as feeling loosened up, resting, and carelessness that in practicum settings may be more negative because it may mean the students are less engaged in the practicum experience.

Similar to the findings of Cifti, Ozgun, and Erden (2011) satisfaction and teacher efficacy were highly correlated in these data. A possible explanation for the strong correlation between satisfaction and efficacy is that when students feel fulfilled regarding specific aspects of practica such as the feedback provided by their cooperating teachers, their role in classrooms, and the amount of practice they had to work on teaching skills, they may feel more confident in their abilities to teach young children and in turn have a higher sense of teacher efficacy.

Two sets of hierarchical regression models provided evidence of what factors contribute to or are associated with both satisfaction and efficacy. These analyses suggested a strong relationship between practicum satisfaction and practicum efficacy, even after accounting for other variables (e.g. fit with cooperating teacher). Model 2 of satisfaction accounted for 59% of the variances and Model 3 of efficacy, that included satisfaction as a predictor, accounted for 35% of the variances. While the variables in the current study cannot account for all of the variances of practicum teacher satisfaction and practicum teacher efficacy it contributes to further our understanding of what aspects predict these two aspects of the practicum experience. Consistent with the limited literature on the predictors of early pre-service teacher's efficacy, the current study supports previous research findings (Cifti, Ozgun, & Erden, 2011), that positive satisfaction is related to pre-service teachers' higher assessment of efficacy. In contrast, to finding such a strong relationship with Feelings on Satisfaction and Efficacy, Fit with cooperating teacher did not add to either satisfaction or efficacy models over and above feelings in the classroom.

In partial support for Hypothesis 3 that, perceived fit with the cooperating teacher and students' intrapersonal feelings in the classroom would be positively associated with satisfaction and efficacy, practicum student participants in this study who reported feeling more energized also reported higher levels of practicum efficacy and satisfaction. In contrast, students who felt frustrated in their practicum, reported lower levels of practicum efficacy and satisfaction. It is also important to note that these findings also indicate that students have a range of emotions that happen throughout their experience.

When examining the efficacy regression models, it is clear that a portion of efficacy is explained by feelings, however when satisfaction is added to the model (See Model 3, Table 7), satisfaction becomes the key predictor.

One interesting observation is the possible meditational role of practicum satisfaction. Although not hypothesized, when satisfaction was added to Model 3 of practicum efficacy it was significant. In other words, satisfaction was the largest and most significant predictor of practicum efficacy over and above Feelings and Fit. That is, how satisfied students are in their practicum predicts how efficacious they feel. When combining the finding that intrapersonal feelings (energized, frustrated, relax) predict practicum satisfaction and that satisfaction predicts practicum efficacy, a possible mediation of satisfaction may be occurring. This observation is in contrast, to Cifti, Ozgun, and Erden (2011), who confirmed a meditational impact of efficacy on pre-service teachers' satisfaction and the predictor variables (e.g., perception of classmates). A possible explanation is that a bidirectional relationship exists between satisfaction and teacher efficacy. Regardless, the current study seems to underscore the importance of understanding practicum students' perceptions of satisfaction and sense of efficacy.

As mentioned in the results, many hypotheses were supported with analyses however the current study did not find support of variation in practicum teacher efficacy by previous experiences. More specifically, both hypotheses: practicum students who have completed a previous practicum will have higher efficacy than those who have not and practicum students who have their own children will have higher efficacy than those who do not, was not supported by the analyses (i.e., non-significant t-tests). However,

close to trend level ( $p=.109$ ) significant variation, practicum students who have previously completed a practicum tend to have lower levels of teacher efficacy while in the practicum than students who have not previously completed a practicum. It's possible that because practicums differ by instructor, course content (e.g., assignments and topics), and different practicum classroom placement (i.e., different school or age group) that students who have previously completed a practicum may have difficulty adjusting to new expectations and it may feel like a new experience and, in turn, account for having lower levels of teacher efficacy. Learning to teach is a process that takes time and may cause fluctuation in practicum students' level of teacher efficacy during the beginning stages of teacher development.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

Despite the contributions the current study makes to the ECE field it is not without limitations. One of the primary limitations of the current study is the small sample size ( $N= 32$ ), which in turn, limits its generalizability to larger populations. Moreover, the participants were a convenience sample drawn from two practicum courses located at the same university as the primary investigator and members of the research team. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that the data used in this study came from a larger study that was piloting the measures used; replication of measures is needed to provide a better understanding of what each measure is contributing. Having a larger sample size may allow for other constructs to be better understood (i.e., trend level significance findings) in relation to practicum satisfaction and practicum efficacy. Although, in the discussion a possible mediation of satisfaction between feelings and

practicum efficacy is suggested, the current study lacks enough statistical power to confidently say this relationship exists, more power is needed.

Another limitation of the current study is measure related. More specifically, the intrapersonal feelings measure consisted of only one-word indicators (e.g. anxious, frustrated, energized, relaxed). Only using one word indicators limited the ability to understand how each word is defined by practicum students. Therefore, it makes it difficult to even understand if these feeling words are identifying positive or negative emotions. While the current intrapersonal feelings measure needs improvement, it is important to note that it provides tentative evidence that practicum student's feelings while in the practicum setting are associated with both their satisfaction and teacher efficacy. In future studies it may be helpful to use multiple "I" statements that describe types of feelings in the classroom such as "I feel tense when working in my practicum classroom" (Caires, Almeida, & Vieira, 2012). The other measures developed specifically for the current study (Cooperating Teacher Practicum Student Fit and Practicum Satisfaction) also need to be tested and validated in similar samples of practicum students.

The current study suggests several directions for future research. First, future researchers should closely examine how to disentangle possible types of intrapersonal feelings that occur while in the practicum classroom, that is, understanding "feelings" more descriptively and how feelings affect the student while in the practicum classroom. For example, quiet was a descriptor word used in the Intrapersonal Feelings measure and it did not clearly load as a positive or negative term. What were students thinking and

feeling who identified with “feeling quiet in the practicum classroom?” A possibility may be that quiet is identifying multiple feeling such as shy or calm, but with the current set of measures it is unclear. Incorporating multiple descriptions of possible feelings instead of using one-word indicators will add complexity to the current limited understanding of intrapersonal feelings while in a practicum classroom.

Communication between practicum students and cooperating teachers is an aspect of the experience that may be an important indicator of practicum students’ intrapersonal feelings while in the practicum classroom. When analyzing reliability of the cooperating teacher fit, in the current study, the question regarding practicum student and cooperating teacher communication did not hang with the other questions so it was dropped out of the measure to strengthen the alpha level, however this does not rule out the possibility that communication may be an important construct to explore. Therefore, the second suggestion for future research is to consider creating a separate measure for communication (i.e., between cooperating teachers and practicum students) that may help the ECE field deconstruct how communication relates to intrapersonal feelings in the classroom, practicum satisfaction, and practicum efficacy and how communication differs from cooperating teacher fit. For example, if cooperating teachers are welcoming and communicate regularly with their practicum students it may help the practicum student to feel energized or excited to be in the classroom, in contrast, if cooperating teachers speak negatively to the practicum students and does not provide feedback of any kind, those practicum students may have different feelings while in the practicum classroom. Therefore, the third recommendation for future research is to explore in

greater detail the dynamics of the cooperating teacher and practicum student relationship. Aspects of this relationship that may be useful to measure include the quality of feedback provided to practicum students, the value cooperating teachers put on these relationships, and the perceived attitude of cooperating teacher (e.g., welcoming, angry). Including some student aspects such as whether students feel like the relationship drains their energy may help researchers understand aspects of the students' attitude that relate to the quality of the cooperating teacher and practicum student relationship.

Future research should also consider the potential role of previous experiences in shaping students' experiences in practicum settings. At a trend level, some support for such differences was found in the current study; students who previously completed a practicum had lower levels of teacher efficacy. In the broader literature, studies indicate that the stability of professional identities (e.g., teaching effectiveness) is mediated by pre-service training and professional histories (Flores & Day, 2006). Examining this possible influence in a larger sample will help the ECE field to understand the importance of previous educational experience in the context of practicum experiences.

Finally, the results from the current study suggest that the general concept of cohesion may be relevant for understanding practicum experiences and should be further examined. Literature has linked cohesion and cohesive groups to having higher satisfaction, greater motivation, experiencing better emotional adjustment (e.g. less anxiety), and higher self-efficacy (McMahon & Wernsman, 2009; Tiedens, Sutton, & Fong, 2004). Students who experience cohesion in their practicum setting may experience similar outcomes. For example, practicum students' perceptions of how well

they "fit" with their cooperating teacher, the age group of children with whom they are working, and the type of classroom setting (i.e. public or private, Montessori or observation-based planning) they are in are all likely to relate to students' feeling a sense of community and comfort. In general, cohesion should be considered in future studies about practicum experiences to have a better understanding of how multiple factors ultimately create a sense of cohesiveness in the practicum experience that allows practicum students to feel more comfortable to practice teaching skills.

#### *Implications for Practice and Conclusion*

When examining the results, several implications for practice should be considered. First, understanding what type of relationship qualities (e.g., respectfulness, provides feedback, and shows personal interest) are valued by practicum students and that may be associated with teacher efficacy may help early childhood teacher preparation programs to match practicum students and cooperating teachers for the most beneficial outcomes. Second, the results from this study indicate that students experiencing higher levels of frustration within their practicum also experience lower levels of efficacy. Incorporating strategies for appropriately communicating and addressing frustration into class coursework or lessons may help increase students' satisfaction and efficacy. Possible strategies include role playing, "if/-then" scenarios, and providing opportunities for practicum students to "vent" through journal entries. Finally, communicating with cooperating teachers about the impact the practica experience has on practicum students can keep them engaged and focused on aspects that are important to practicum students. For example, the current findings that intrapersonal

feelings are linked to satisfaction and efficacy may point to the benefits of cooperating teachers working on building rapport with students and creating an environment that is warm and open.

It is important to recognize that practicum students' experiences vary and may depend upon multiple factors, including the age of children being served (and how this aligns with practicum student preferences and skills), cooperating teacher teaching style, and school and classroom philosophies. The current study specifically examined intrapersonal feelings while in the classroom and perceived fit with cooperating teachers as predictors of practicum satisfaction and practicum efficacy. Replication of this study is needed with additional consideration of more measures (e.g. practicum student and cooperating teacher communication and relationship measure) and using larger sample sizes. The current study provides a starting point from which researchers can add critical pieces of the puzzle to understand the development of efficacy in practicum settings.

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APPENDIX A

TABLES

**Table 1. Demographic of Sample (N=34)**

Practicum Students Characteristics	M (sd) or %
Ethnic Background	
African American/Black	29%
Caucasian	53%
Latino/Hispanic	6%
Other	12%
Age (20-59 years)	26.21(9.55)
25 years or younger	73.5%
26 or older	26.5%
Female	94%
2-Plus Student	26.5%
Has completed a practicum previously	53%
Has child(ren) of their own	38%
Has held a paid position working in a formal Birth- Kindergarten program (e.g., childcare, school)	52.9%
Years of previous experience <sup>a</sup> (0-20 years)	3.38(5.19)
Has worked with Infants <sup>a</sup>	35.3%
Has worked with Toddlers <sup>a</sup>	41.2%
Has worked with Preschool <sup>a</sup>	50.0%
Has worked with Kindergarten <sup>a</sup>	26.5%
Has worked with Disabilities <sup>a</sup>	41.2%

<sup>a</sup> Answered by participants who responded yes to having previously worked

**Table 2. Alpha Levels for Study Measures**

Name Of Measure	Alpha Level
Practicum Student Satisfaction Survey	.88
In Practicum Efficacy	.92
Cooperating Teacher Fit	.88

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Predictor Variables**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Possible Range</i>	<i>Actual Range</i>
Intrapersonal Feelings <sup>a</sup>				
Anxious	2.06	.75	1-5	1.00-4.00
Energized	3.94	.80	1-5	2.00-5.00
Frustrated	1.91	.73	1-5	1.00-3.00
Relaxed	4.09	.78	1-5	3.00-5.00
Fit with Cooperating Teacher <sup>b</sup>	4.00	.82	1-5	1.17-5.00

Note. *N* = 32

<sup>a</sup> Range: 1 Never, 2 Rarely, 3 Sometimes, 4 Often, 5 Most of the time

<sup>b</sup> Range: 1 Strongly Disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Unsure, 4 Agree, 5 Strongly Agree

**Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Practicum Efficacy and Satisfaction**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Possible Range</i>	<i>Actual Range</i>
Practicum Efficacy	3.60	.55	1-5	2.4-4.56
Practicum Satisfaction	4.23	.69	1-5	2.57-5.00

Note. *N* = 32

**Table 5. Zero Order Correlations Between Practicum Efficacy, Satisfaction, and Predictor Variables**

<i>Variables</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Practicum Teacher Efficacy		.56***	.19	.31	-.37*	.12	.23
2. Satisfaction			-.02	.67***	-.57***	.47**	.45**
3. Anxious				-.15	-.05	-.23	-.24
4. Energized					-.34	.63**	.37*
5. Frustrated						-.32	-.42*
6. Relaxed							.38*
7. Fit of CT Teacher							

*Note.*  $N = 32$  \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ , two-tailed.

**Table 6. Hierarchical Regression Models Predicting Practicum Satisfaction**

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE B	Beta	B	SE B	Beta
1. Energized	.455	.138	.528 **	.442	.140	.512 **
2. Frustrated	-.367	.123	-.390 **	-.334	.131	-.355 *
3. Relaxed	.012	.141	.014	-.008	.144	-.009
4. Fit with Cooperating Teacher				.096	.120	.114
R <sup>2</sup>		.584**			.594**	
F		13.098***			9.856***	
ΔR <sup>2</sup>					.010	

Note: † $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 7. Hierarchical Regression Models Predicting Practicum Efficacy**

Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	F	B	SE B	Beta
Model 1	.197†		2.29†			
Energized				.223	.152	.326
Frustrated				-.239	.136	-.320†
Relaxed				-.135	.156	-.191
Model 2	.200	.003	1.688			
Energized				.217	.156	.317
Frustrated				-.224	.146	-.204
Relaxed				-.144	.161	-.204
Fit with Cooperating Teacher				.041	.134	.062
Model 3	.345*	.145	2.738*			
Energized				.008	.168	.011
Frustrated				-.066	.150	-.089
Relaxed				-.140	.149	-.198
Fit with Cooperating Teacher				-.004	.125	-.006
Practicum Satisfaction				.474	.198	.597*

Note: †p < .10, \*p < .05

**Table 8. T-tests between Practicum Efficacy and Various Types of Previous Experience with Children**

Type of Experience	Practicum Student Involvement		<i>t</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>df</i>
	No	Yes			
Previous Practicum	3.77 (.46)	3.46 (.59)	1.65	.109	30
Have Own Children	3.70 (.50)	3.45 (.60)	1.27	.214	30
Employment	3.68 (.44)	3.55 (.61)	.680	.501	30

APPENDIX B

FIGURE

Figure 1. Context of Development for Practicum Students. Adapted from Pianta (1999).

