

CREATING ONLINE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: ENHANCING PRE-SERVICE  
TEACHER GROWTH - A CASE STUDY

BY

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Curriculum and Teaching and the Graduate  
Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine pre-service teachers and their use of online community. This study explored four focal participants enrolled at Benedictine College and their perceptions about online community. The participants were completing their student teaching block during the spring 2016 semester. The data sources included transcripts from an online community situated within Blackboard, two semi-structured interviews that took place before and after the online community, and a reflective essay written by the participants. The study critically analyzed the participant's perception of their participation within online community and whether or not their participation extended their learning and understanding of educational topics. The study was framed using Wenger's Community of Practice. Seven themes emerged as participants reported that their participation within the online community (a) extended learning and understanding beyond the classroom, (b) became a place for professional support and community, (c) stimulated reflective thinking, (d) served as a place to share experiences, (e) was a flexible venue for community, (f) had benefits that outweighed the negatives, (g) and was built on relationships. Implications include suggestions for higher education and P-12 education and their use of online professional development.

*Keywords:* online community, Communities of Practice, teacher education

## Acknowledgements

What I have done is worthy of nothing but silence and forgetfulness, but what God has done for me is worthy of everlasting and thankful memory.

*Joseph Hall (1574-1656), English bishop and writer*

Without His blessings, none of this would be possible, and for that, I am forever grateful. I also am beyond lucky to share my life with a strong, supportive man whom I call my husband. Thank you, Michael, for always having my back and traveling with me on this journey; you have pushed me when I wanted to quit, coaxed me off the highest mountain, and loved me through my ugliest moments, you are my rock.

The drive began as a young girl, where my parents believed that all of us could accomplish our dreams. If they had not placed great value in education, I am not sure I would have ever discovered my passion for teaching. Their love for each of us is not measureable, but was truly the beginning of my success, and I still think of myself as a lucky girl.

My children, Spencer and Morgan, there are no words to express my love for you, only to say you make me better and for that reason, I am blessed to be your mom.

I would also like to thank each of you who have contributed to my education, beginning with my elementary teachers and finally with my professors at the University of Kansas. You have all supported me in various ways; you have pushed me to think deeply and inspired me to be a lifelong learner. My committee members, Drs. Steven White, Reva Friedman, Mary Lynn Hamilton, Heidi Hallman, and Young-Jin Lee, thank you for believing in me and for your guidance.

And last but not least, my dear friends, Dr. Jane E. Bennett and Dr. Juanita Santos, yes, I may have received a diploma out of this process, but far beyond that I was blessed with two of the best friends a person could ever ask for, and I will hold each of you close to my heart forever.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Teacher preparation programs across the nation are challenged to prepare pre-service teachers for a complex setting. The current paradigm for teacher preparation includes coursework and field experience and concludes with student teaching. Student teaching is the place for a pre-service teacher to put learning into practice while receiving support from the cooperating teacher. Teacher preparation programs recognize that this setting allows pre-service teachers the opportunity to problem solve and gain confidence.

According to Nicholson and Bond (2003), “Despite the fact that many teacher education programs integrate support systems during field-experience, the transition from considerable support to less support often leads to overwhelming defeat” (p. 260). Once students graduate, they often find themselves in a complex setting where they are struggling without a support system, they often feel overwhelmed and isolated. (Rogers & Baniski, 2002). Isolation often leads to a feeling of failure, causing many new teachers to leave the field.

Isolation and lack of support also contribute to attrition rates for new teachers; nearly 50% of teachers entering the profession leave within the first five years of teaching (Carroll & Fulton, 2004; Dewert, Babinski, & Jones, 2003; Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, & Box, 2014; Ingersoll, 2002). Retaining high-quality teachers has been identified as a significant factor undermining school improvement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007). Attrition has also been associated with additional financial costs to schools and is related to school stability and teacher trust (Guin, 2004). One could conclude that addressing the teacher attrition problem is a warranted concern.

According to Brownell, Hirsch, and Seo (2004), “Beginning teachers are the most

vulnerable to attrition and should be the target of any major retention effort” (p. 57).

Teachers often struggle with the overwhelming need to analyze data, prepare students for high-stakes tests, provide student feedback, handle classroom management, and be responsible for other additional tasks that a complex setting may require (Roehrig, Pressley, & Talotta, 2002). Today’s teachers face enormous challenges, and therefore, to retain quality educators, changes need to be made (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll, 2002; Quartz et al., 2008).

Lieberman and Mace (2010) describe a climate in which schools need to abandon “isolationist behaviors” and learn from our peers (p. 79). They suggest that educators must move from isolation to collegiality, where participants work together to make sense of teaching and learning. Darling-Hammond (2009) describes a setting “Where teachers work together and engage in continual dialogue to examine their practice and student performance while implementing more effective instructional practices along with ongoing opportunities for collegial work, teachers learn about, try out, and reflect on new practices in their specific context, sharing their individual knowledge and expertise” (p. 3).

Educators must break the bonds of isolation by working together to learn and implement new strategies to support teachers (Hargreaves, 2003; Hord, 2004). New strategies for teacher learning focused on developing practice much different than teachers may have experienced learning as students (Darling-Hammond, 1997). School districts include strategies as a part of professional development to help teachers focus on improving their teaching practice, this approach supports teachers as they create clear goals linked directly to student learning. Darling-Hammond and Mclaughlin (1995)

identify features of effective strategies for teacher professional development:

1. Experiential, engaging teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, and observation that illuminate the process of learning and development.
2. Grounded in participants' questions, inquiry, and experimentation as well as profession wide research.
3. Collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators.
4. Connected to and derived from teachers' work with their students as well as an examination of subject matter and teaching methods.
5. Sustained and intensive, supported by modeling, coaching, and problem solving around specific problems of practice.
6. Connected to other aspects of school change (p. 2).

According to Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, and Box (2014), "The 21<sup>st</sup> century setting calls for a highly specialized set of collaborative skills and if new teachers are to be prepared for this setting, teacher education programs must provide opportunity for pre-service teachers to practice the skills they need to be successful." (p. 527). Consequently, teacher preparation programs are looking for solutions to this dilemma and embracing new thinking while supporting pre-service teachers and their development of these skills and strategies (Nicholson & Bond, 2003).

Providing pre-service teachers opportunity to work side by side with an experienced licensed teacher supporting their thinking while making connections to theories and practice will help them grow within the context of their future classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This transformative approach to professional development provides social and emotional support while allowing teachers to problem solve and turn

analysis into practice. (Darling-Hammond, 2010). To have long-term benefits, it is essential for pre-service teachers to not only learn about but also to experience this type of professional collaboration within the context of schools before entering the workforce.

Professional development is critical to improve teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Guskey, 1997; Lieberman, 2007). Additionally, today's teachers are challenged with higher academic standards while focusing on individual learners across multiple curricular areas (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). The challenge is to create a community that supports student learning and teacher growth. According to Wenger (2011), "A growing number of people and organizations are focusing on communities of practice as a key to improving their performance" (p. 1). While the application of this framework can be found in multiple settings such as business and the civic arena, educational organizations are particularly drawn to Wenger's theory because of the potential benefit to generate practice, meaning, and identity (Wenger, 2001). Furthermore, Wenger's multi-layered framework fits well with new teachers entering a setting that includes multiple levels of teaching experience, plus it could also provide theoretical insight into a student teaching cohort (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011).

Wenger's Communities of Practice theory helps to explain how contextual influences and human interactions generate practice, meaning and identity (Wenger, 1998). Wenger's theory, while complex, illuminates a lens to discover current practice in schools. According to Wenger (2001), "Communities of practice are formed when people engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor, they share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as

they interact regularly" (p. 1). Wenger adds that, just because a community comes together does not necessarily mean they come together to practice. Wenger describes practice as a shared enterprise, where people mutually engage in an active environment (Wenger, 1998). According to Cuddapah and Clayton (2011), "Teaching is composed of many such practices where performance of new entrants is expected to mirror that of more experienced colleagues" (p. 64). Wenger (1998) describes this transformation as meaning-making, where newcomers experience a process of becoming (p. 215). Wenger's term of becoming describes a place in which a teacher is constantly evolving their own identity, one that is always under construction. The literature describes effective practice focused on teachers with various levels of experience (Moir, 2009). However, research investigating pre-service participants is generally limited.

In addition, to embrace the rapidly changing educational climate, it is important to provide insights into what is needed to sustain professional learning, both collectively and individually (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). According to Lieberman and Mace (2010), "Teacher learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to meet the demands of rapidly changing demographics, the globalization of the economy, as well as the technological and cultural changes that are happening around us" (p. 77). McLoughlin and Lee (2010) state that "Teachers need sound pedagogical models and social processes, but they also need informal networking, 'learning on demand' while community members have access to supportive, flexible and individualized learning tools, an option they identify as emerging from Web 2.0" (p. 21). The Internet provides an opportunity for professional development while embracing the current climate in education (Downes, 2005; McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). It can provide climate where teachers collaborate and gather

support and guidance from one another while not facing time and space constraints (Anderson, 2008; Leask & Younie, 2001; Lock, 2006).

The online community of practice is one way to address current barriers while providing support for pre-service teachers during the student teaching block and for continued professional development long term. The online support community was first identified by Lave and Wenger (1991) and later refined by Wenger in 1998. Wenger states, “For the online community to truly become a community of practice it must have a “mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire” (1998, p. 73).

According to Schlager, Farooq, Fusco, Schank, and Dwyer (2009), “Online communities to support teachers are a growing trend” (p. 86). Online communities are not constrained by schedules or settings, which is an attractive feature for most participants (Duncan-Howell, 2010). It’s important to realize that professional communities are different from general communities. Members of a professional community share norms, values, reflect, and participate in professional dialogue (Lin, Lin, & Huang, 2008). A professional virtual community can be viewed as an extended community of practice (Wenger, 1998). A community that fosters growth of specific skills supporting professional development (Kemmis, 1989).

### **Key Terms**

#### **Online Communities**

For the purpose of this study, online communities will be defined by Anderson (2008) as “Networked tools that support and encourage individuals to learn together while retaining individual control over their time, space, presence, activity, identity, and relationship” (p. 227). Specifically, in this study, the online community is a discussion

board provided for student teaching through the Blackboard course website.

### **Community of Practice**

Wenger's (1998) social learning framework is made up of a community of practice in which context influences human social endeavors, generates practice, meaning and identity. Wenger's model includes four components: community, practice, meaning, and identity, where the community is formed mutually through joint enterprise and a shared mission (p. 5).

### **Teacher Education**

Teacher education refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school, and wider community.

### **Purpose of Study**

This study investigates the benefits of online community with pre-service teachers, specifically addressing the following research questions:

1. In what ways do preservice teachers extend learning and understanding by engaging in an online community?
2. What are preservice teacher's perceptions about participating in an online community?

### **Significance of the Study**

Multiple research studies support the use of communities of practice within educational settings (Beach, 2012; Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011). However, there is a call for more research that specifically explores communities of practice within preservice teacher programs, and more specifically, studies where the participants are using online tools.



### **Summary of Chapter 1 and Orientation to Subsequent Chapters**

Chapter 1 defined the key terms relevant to this study, provided a background of the topics that underpinned the study, and explained the purpose and significance of the study. Chapter 2 will discuss the theoretical framework and review the literature related to teacher professional development, preservice teacher growth, online/virtual communities, preservice online learning, and professional development framed by communities of practice. Chapter 3 describes the methods used to address the research questions and explained how the data was collected and analyzed. Chapter 4 presents the findings, while Chapter 5 identifies the major implications, limitations, and outlines recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Teacher education programs are challenged with transitioning new teachers to the 21<sup>st</sup> century education setting, which is rapidly changing. According to Lieberman and Mace (2010), “Teacher learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has to meet the demands of rapidly changing demographics, the globalization of the economy, as well as the technological and cultural changes that are happening around us” (p. 77). While teachers still need an understanding of sound pedagogical models and social processes, they also need informal networking in a setting where they have access to supportive, flexible, and individualized learning tools, options that are often found on the Internet (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). Unfortunately, when a new teacher is lacking the skills and social support systems within the educational setting, it is difficult to retain these teachers and develop them in a way to positively impact student learning. Consequently, teacher preparation programs are looking for ways to provide additional opportunities for preservice teachers to practice using 21<sup>st</sup> century resources for support and personal professional development (Nicholson & Bond, 2003). This chapter reviews the literature supporting the answers to the research questions driving this study:

1. In what ways do pre-service teachers extend learning/understanding by engaging in an online community?
2. What are pre-service teacher’s perceptions about participating in an online community?

## **The Purpose of this Study and Its Importance**

The purpose of this study is to explore four preservice teachers' participation within an online community. Additionally, this study attempts to better understand not only the experience but possibly to provide insight for teacher education programs into providing preservice teachers an opportunity to practice these skills as they prepare for the current educational setting.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Community of Practice**

Lave and Wenger originally created the term “community of practice” in 1991. Wenger (2011) stated that they “proposed a sociocultural theory of learning to explain how context influences human social endeavors and generates practice, meaning, and identity.” Communities of practice (CoP) have evolved over time and are now key to improving performance in many different sectors (Wenger, 2011). Central to the idea is that groups of people participate in a human endeavor where they share a passion or concern and meet regularly to learn how to do it better (Wenger, 2011). Wenger (2002) said “Communities can lead to interesting, fruitful, and significant research with the potential for informing both theory and practice” (p. 223). Wenger (2002) adds there are three characteristics crucial to CoP:

- 1. The Domain.** A CoP is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain as well as a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people. The domain is not necessarily something recognized as “expertise” by the outside community. A young gang may have developed all sorts of

ways of dealing with their domain: surviving on the street and maintaining some kind of identity they can live with. They value their collective competence and learn from each other even though few people outside the group may value or even recognize their expertise.

- 2. The Community.** In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. A website in itself is not a CoP. Having the same job or the same title does not make for a CoP unless members interact and learn together. The claims processors in a large insurance company or students in United States high schools may have much in common, yet unless they interact and learn together, they do not form a CoP. But members of a CoP do not necessarily work together on a daily basis. The Impressionists, for instance, used to meet in cafes and studios to discuss the style of painting they were inventing together. These interactions were essential to making them a CoP even though they often painted alone.
- 3. The Practice.** A CoP is not merely a community of interest-people who like certain kinds of movies, for instance. Members of a CoP are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems—in short, a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction. A good conversation with a stranger on an airplane may give you all sorts of interesting insights, but it does not in itself make for a CoP. The development of a shared practice may be more or less self-conscious. The “windshield wipers” engineers at an auto manufacturer make a concerted effort to collect and document the tricks and lessons they have learned into a knowledge base. By contrast, nurses who meet regularly for

lunch in a hospital cafeteria may not realize that their lunch discussions are one of the main sources of knowledge about how to care for patients. Still, in the course of all these conversations, they have developed a set of stories and cases that have become a shared repertoire for their practice (Wenger, 2002; p. 2)

The combination of these three characteristics develops a CoP. It is important to understand the roles that CoP plays in education in relation to professional development in hopes of finding more effective ways to sustain professional development within the current educational setting. Additionally, the CoP model has gained considerable popularity in international context to support teachers' professional development (Baran & Cagiltay, 2010; Hanson-Smith, 2006; Kirschner & Lai, 2007). Studies conducted internationally also affirm that the CoP framework can reduce teacher isolation, develop and enhance teachers' reflective practice, and establish professional identity (Boulton & Hramiak, 2012; Clarke, 2009; Kelly, Gale, Wheeler, & Tucker, 2007).

### **Exploring Teacher Professional Development**

Educational reform had identified teacher professional development as the means to support change (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Wilson and Berne reviewed the early research focusing on high-quality examples of professional development that attended to both curriculum and pedagogy and also the knowledge of subject matter and students (Wilson & Berne, 1999). They evaluated research starting with the traditional workshop. Their focus was on the research that created community, the discourse of participants, and the impact on students and learning (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Several themes emerged: communities of learners are redefining teaching practice; teacher learning should not be delivered, but activated; and it is important to build trust and community to

have professional discourse (Wilson & Berne, 1999). Wilson and Berne summarized this early research, “The future of good research on teacher learning lies in our ability to weave together ideas of teacher learning, professional development, teacher knowledge, and student learning-fields that have largely operated independent of one another” (p. 204).

Little (2002), created another study exploring CoP. The multi-level case study employed a lens to look at knowledge, practice, and learning among teachers of English. The team investigated professional development at the individual, community, and organizational level. Little also looked at teacher learning opportunities and theorized about the nature and significance of professional community for teacher development. The participants included English and mathematics teachers at two different high schools. The schools presented contrasting cases with regard to their improvement (Little, 2002). The study employed a range of data sources including observation, interviews, school documents, and finally a videotaped recording of teacher interactions with other teachers during their workday. What Little found was teachers' professional community requires tracing trajectories of participation and practice over time. She concluded that the ongoing activity and the changes that take place in action, participation, and knowledge that provide opportunity for learning to take place (Little, 2002).

Cuddapah and Clayton (2011) created a mixed method study to explore a cohort professional development experience that brought new teachers together across one urban school district. Their purpose was to examine the benefits of a cohort for new teacher support using Wenger's key elements. The participants were ten women and two men from an urban district. The researchers analyzed observation data of the cohort, and the

data supported evidence of community, specifically practice, meaning-making, and identity related to Wenger's CoP. The findings supported using cohorts to support new teachers as they engage in a novice community (Cuddahpah & Clayton, 2011).

A CoP was also explored in a study that looked for an evolution of professional development. Breen (2015) designed a study that analyzed the discourse of a series of focus group sessions. Breen's study included workshops featuring topics from literature involving a combination of theory and practice on the use of technology in the classroom. Nine experienced teachers participated in focus groups that took place after participation in the workshops. Data was collected analyzing the evolution of participants including their initial voice, cultivating a community, community taking on a life of its own, and the challenges within the community. The researcher concluded that the workshops served to spur the development of a CoP and improve teacher use of technology, but it also supported the professional lives of the teachers (Breen, 2015).

### **Exploring Pre-service Teacher Growth**

The research also explores CoP with pre-service teachers. Sim (2006) focused on a model of delivery for professional experience within courses. Each course was designed using a CoP framework, and then students evaluated the course through surveys. The author examined the surveys specific to developing a sense of professional community. After nine years of implementing the model, the data supported continuation, but areas for improvement were discovered. The researchers determined the pre-service teacher's ability to critically examine situations was not evident, which would be important to refine when addressing the nexus between theory and practice (Sim, 2006, p. 82). Sim summarized, "As teacher educators we are responsible for the

development of teacher researchers . . . Building communities of practice along with professional development is an important strategy to pursue and improve” (Sim, 2006, p. 82).

Le Cornu and Ewing (2008) continued the discussion on creating professional experiences in pre-service education to embrace the future of CoP. The authors provided a framework that combined the traditional practice where students take the knowledge of their course work and put it into practice in field experience. The pre-service teachers then reflected on teacher behaviors after feedback, but they then worked beyond reflection towards learning communities (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Research suggested that it is critical for teachers to sustain professional growth and implement reform as the schools plan for professional community (McLaughlin, 1997; Peters, 2001; Senge et al., 2000).

Jimenez-Silva Olson (2012) researched CoP in teacher education. The mixed method study was designed to better understand how or whether participation in a Teacher Learner Community (TLC) facilitated preservice teachers to deeply think about their future classroom practice specifically working with English Language Learners (ELLs) (Jimenez-Silva & Olson, 2012). The research question they explored was “How or whether participation in TLCs enabled preservice teachers’ to begin to use the theories learned in the teacher education program in their thinking about their future classroom practices with ELLs?” (Jimenez-Silva & Olson, 2012, p. 338). The study focused on two courses in which participants were enrolled. They collected data from written reflections based on Wenger and Lave’s (2001) notion of learning and development through participation and interactions within a CoP, course evaluations, and transcripts of focus



groups. The participants course evaluations were positive, but they did not provide insight about their participation within a CoP. However, the other data sources supported the use of CoP to support belonging and understanding of the preservice teachers, while the authors acknowledged potential limitations of the study, they concluded the teacher education courses that embraced the CoP framework prepares preservice teachers to extend community beyond their own network and better serve their future students (Jimenez-Silva & Olson, 2012).

### **Online and Virtual Communities**

The potential of online communities for professional development requires a shift in paradigms (Lock, 2006). A virtual or online community involves “a group of people who regularly interact online and share common goals, ideas, or values” (Owston, 1998, p. 60). Community membership can engage teachers in collaboration while making sense of their practice in a new online environment (Murphy & Laferriere, 2003). Schlager & Fusco (2003) argued that online community needs to be part of professional development. Lock (2006) concluded, “Shifting a culture and developing a learning community takes vision, dedication, perseverance, and time” (p. 675).

Research exploring online community encompasses multiple studies. The Learning School Project, initiated by Sweden, developed the use of electronic networks (Leask & Younie, 2001). Data was collected through the case study method in which researchers used questionnaires, interviews, observations, and diaries to monitor participant progress in online forums. They identified change in classrooms through pedagogy, technology, learners, and political frames. The research reported was described as a snapshot in time, but it offered information about factors inhibiting and

supporting teachers. The results suggested that teachers see the value in using online interactions, but time is needed to impact pedagogic practice and further action is needed to accelerate the process (Leask & Younie, 2001).

Providing online support to beginning teachers was explored by DeWert, Babinski, and Jones (2003) in a community called the Lighthouse Project, “Group members included 12 first-year teachers, 4 experienced teachers, and 8 teacher education faculty members” (DeWert, Babinski, & Jones, 2003, p. 311). The data was collected through messages, follow-up phone interviews, and an online survey. The mixed-method study explored thinking about practice and informed decision-making while increasing support. The results indicated “that an online support community is an effective means of providing social, emotional, practical, and professional support to beginning teachers.” (DeWert, Babinski, & Jones, 2003, p. 319).

Lin, Lin, and Huang (2008) studied knowledge sharing within a professional virtual community. The authors conducted a study guided by grounded theory in order to understand knowledge flow from different organizations, they used three coding procedures within grounded theory: open, axial, and selective coding (Lin, Lin, & Huang, 2008,). By using this process, they were able to identify and name categories, develop a deeper understanding of the relationships, and develop the theory to explain the phenomena. The researchers articulated conditions, actions, consequence, and contextual environments. Consequently, they began to explore the definition of virtual communities regarding knowledge sharing and concluded that not all postings were necessarily knowledge being shared. They added that if you include “knowledge buckles,” the flow of knowledge will improve; they define knowledge buckles as “A mechanism visible or

invisible that helps to connect (buckle up) knowledge related activities together; thereby, when a knowledge activity ends, another related process can be activated swiftly” (p. 752). The researchers also pointed out that results might differ depending upon the context of the community.

Duncan-Howell (2010) studied online communities as a source of professional development. She reported, “The participants in her study were all members of online communities for teachers.... They were a mixed cohort from a variety of teaching backgrounds, experience and locations” (p. 327). Two of the communities were based in Australia and the third was internationally based. Participants completed an online survey to gather data about their experience; the survey utilized 25 open-ended questions organized around four topics: background, professional development, online communities, information and technology use (p. 327). Duncan-Howell (2010) reported, “The findings showed that teachers were seeking participatory learning that focused on practical classroom strategies, and that the online community provided them with a rich source of professional learning” (p. 338).

According to Nistor, Schworm, and Werne (2012), “Academic help-seeking and Communities of Practice are extensively covered by psychological and educational research investigations” (p. 774). The purpose of their research was to understand how participants in a CoP construct knowledge between experts and novices. They describe conceptual artifacts as abstract artifacts that help to explain and predict the surrounding world. They wanted to understand how knowledge sharing could not only be used to respond to a call for help, but also influence participant’s acceptance into a community of practice. In addition, they explored the social context of technology use. They designed

a correlation study using one-shot transversal data collection from faculty within the University of Munich, Germany. The sample consisted of 66 CoP members, and in the first six months, the participants developed thirty-three FAQs. The helpdesk then organized hands-on training sessions of 90 minutes each based on their questions. The team measured independent variables and collected other variables by a survey. Instrument validity was proven by a factor analysis. The researchers concluded knowledge sharing and help seeking in the online CoP was fostered by the training sessions (Nistor, Schoworm, & Werner, 2012). They linked their conclusions to Wenger's negotiation of meaning and added that the online framework should look closely at the social context (Wenger, 1999). Specifically, for educators, the research stated, "The task of supporting workplace learning requires not only making help systems available, but also adopting appropriate measures and sustaining purposeful communication in the supported CoP." (Nistor, Schoworm, & Werner, 2012, p. 783).

Wesely (2013) investigated CoP specifically with world language educators using the platform of Twitter. She was challenged to fill specific gaps in the literature related to grassroots or "ground up" communities created by teachers. This qualitative study was considered to be a netnography, which is "A type of a virtual ethnography that uses participant-observational research based exclusively on online fieldwork" (Wesely, 2013, p. 308). Data collection included interviews conducted through Skype conferencing and researcher participant observation of participants' tweets. Wesely reported several key themes organized by CoP's three characteristics: domain, community, and practice. This initial study allowed her to conclude that web technologies did facilitate teacher

professional development and reinforced the connection between CoP and teacher professional development (Wesely, 2013).

Tseng and Kuo (2014) created a study exploring social participation and knowledge sharing in the teachers' online professional community of practice. This study looked closely at facilitating professional development within an online context using the platform of Wenger's Community of Practice. Their study was situated in Taiwan where they collected self-reported knowledge-sharing behaviors of 321 members. They used a semi-structured interview and survey methodology based on social capital theory and social cognitive theory to measure performance expectations. The aim was to identify critical factors that might nurture cultures of participation. What they found was the CoP members fostered a pro-social attitude that facilitated their willingness to share useful resources and help members solve problems. Additionally, the members felt enjoyment when helping others. They identified several limitations and suggestions for further research including the effect of self-efficacy. They also noted their study may not be generalized to other settings as it relied on self-selection, which could increase bias.

Booth and Kellogg's (2015) research of online communities for educators looked at the value creation framework developed by Wenger et al. (2011) as an analytical tool for understanding online communities. The value creation framework provided a detailed understanding of the different types of value members reported. A multiple case study approach was used in the collection of members stories during their participation within online communities, specifically The Center for Teaching Quality, Teacher Leaders Network, National Science Teacher Association's Learning Center, and Teach for America Net. Booth and Kellogg (2015) reported, "The primary method of data

collection was semi-structured interview” (p. 687). The researchers divided the findings into five cycles of value creation including immediate value, potential value, learning capital, human capital, and social capital (Booth & Kellogg 2015). Further analysis illustrated that members with varying perspective and levels of experience can construct new meaning and understanding that are individually and collectively valuable (Booth & Kellogg, 2015).

### **Preservice Online Learning**

This section explores the use of online learning, pre-service teachers and communities of practice. According to Nicolson and Bond (2003), “Technology in the educational setting can provide support for professional development early in a teacher’s career” (p. 1). The researchers used a qualitative study to examine discussion boards in a field-based block; there were 17 pre-service teachers participating. Nicolson and Bond (2003) examined the nature and development of the discussions over a semester and found three major benefits: “(a) computer mediated communication extends discussions beyond the classroom; (b) the discussion board became a place for professional support and community; and (c) preservice teachers’ reflective thinking developed over time as a result of the discussion board” (p. 1). The researcher’s findings led them to several questions including “how interns will use discussion boards to support reflection and professional development once they leave the class and move into student teaching” (p. 13).

Makinster, Barab, Harwood, and Andersen (2006) examined the use of electronic networking in the context of a secondary science methods course (p. 543). Students were randomly assigned to three different online settings where they wrote student teaching

reflections. The students wrote private journals, participated in an asynchronous discussion forum, and a web-based discussion within a community of teachers. What they found was the online social context impacted how the students perceived the assignment, and the students who only wrote the private journal started out strong, but over time lessened their participation. The groups that participated in the web-based discussion found the reflective assignments valuable.

Goos and Bennison (2007) designed a study to “investigate how a community of practice focused on becoming a teacher of secondary mathematics emerged during a preservice teacher education program and was sustained after students graduated and began their first year of teaching” (p. 41). The team created an online space for discussions that they analyzed using Wenger’s (1998) three defining features that included mutual engagement, negotiation of a joint enterprise, and development of a shared repertoire for creating meaning. The study took place from 2002 to 2004 and included three successive cohorts enrolled in an accelerated Bachelor of Education program. Interactions between preservice teachers and their instructors took place face-to-face and online via Yahoo Groups (Goos & Bennison, 2007). This allowed for extended access after graduation and also afforded the ability for email, discussion threads, file sharing and links to other educational sites. The goal was to encourage professional discussion outside class time and also provide support for graduates as they transitioned into teaching. Wenger’s three dimensions of CoP provided an analytical framework to discover that online community can be sustained by its members during their teacher preparation program and into their first year of teaching (Goos & Bennison, 2007). Their findings were limited to only a few cohorts of participants; the challenge

was to extend this research to create trajectories as they apply to teachers and the formation of CoP (Goos & Bennison, 2007).

Paulus and Scherff (2008) conducted a qualitative study examining online discussions of 15 pre-service teachers via Blackboard's discussion forum. The discussion focused on students' emotional engagement, responsiveness to each other, and meaning making through stories. The study was framed within a language arts methods course; the purpose was to provide students with a forum outside of class. Transcripts were analyzed to explore emergent themes and then coded by categories specific to words of encouragement. Six themes emerged: student issues, university/program concerns, curriculum, relationships with others, organization/time management and classroom concerns.

Markauskaite and Sutherland (2008) studied preservice teacher engagement within an online community. The study purpose was to discover additional information about the levels of preservice teacher interactions within the online community along with the extent of student discourse compared to the traditional setting and the how the students valued the experience. (Markauskaite & Sutherland, 2008). Participants included 226 preservice teachers that were divided into 45 smaller groups joined by a classroom teacher and a university professor. They used two data sources: the online data and a course evaluation questionnaire. (Markauskaite & Sutherland, 2008). Markauskaite and Sutherland (2008) reported, "The structural-qualitative aspects relate to participants' contributions and were examined using a theory driven discourse and content analysis technique" (p. 111). The research took place over a 12-week period within a post-graduate course of a Master of Teaching program. Included in the discussion were



experts in the field including schoolteachers and university professors. Students were given weekly reading in addition to their face-to-face seminar topics and then post a 300-word reflective summary into a group discussion forum four days prior to the class meeting. One member from each of the assigned groups would then summarize the posts and provide additional questions; at this time, the experts would respond providing comments and insight into the discussion. A follow-up discussion was addressed during the upcoming seminar class lead by the professor. While this study is large, levels of participation within the online community were low, which may be due to the enhanced timeline. What the researchers did notice was that the design of the online community may have triggered deeper discussions within the seminar class (Markauskaite & Sutherland, 2008). Their findings indicate that “Expert participation in online communities could enhance students’ involvement in professional online dialogues and improve their online experiences” (Markauskaite & Sutherland, 2008, p. 119).

Yang (2009) used the theories of critical reflection and community of practice to explore the use of blogs when preparing teachers to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Taiwan. This qualitative study included forty-three participants from two separate teacher-education programs. The study took place in the fall semester of 2005; the participants were 22-year old junior students and were enrolled in two methodology courses that covered theories, methodologies, and practical teaching. The blogs were used as a place for participants to reflect on not only the processes of learning, but also their own professional development. Data included the participants’ posts along with dialogues from the course and a survey. The data was organized into categories, analyzed, and arranged by three research questions. Yang found that the use of blogs

contributed to the discussion of teaching theories, and the blogs promoted critical reflection for the teachers. The preservice teachers admitted the usefulness and convenience of using the blogs and sharing the experience of learning to be an EFL language teacher. Additionally, the study indicated that the blog demonstrates a CoP by creating a place for discussion, to learn from each other, and to demonstrate to each other how they would act in their future teaching practice. (Shin-Hsien Yang, 2009).

Clarke (2009) researched student teacher learning in the online component of an initial teacher education course. The online forums were used for three main purposes: reflective writing, sharing resources, and the hidden curriculum. According to Clark (2009), “The study was framed using part of her previous work that included Jackson’s Hidden Curriculum and Communal Constructivism.” (p. 524). She then combined her findings with Wenger’s community of practice and focused on e-learning. The participants contributed to create the curriculum of the professional development; after this, the students created an online CoP for themselves. Clarke (2009) concluded, “Learners engaging in online tasks constitute the work of a CoP which is built around a shared Domain in a Community, which binds learners together, around their professional practice as teachers” (p. 528).

Stryker (2012) explored developing an online community to support pre-service teachers. The initial design was to support pre-service teachers with the integration of technology during their student teaching experience. The online support community was a way to regularly support teachers outside of a course, or face-to-face access to peers or faculty members. Participants were undergraduate pre-service teachers who had completed the required educational technology course. Participants were sent a survey

about their interest in participating in an online community. The intention was that as these teachers become in-service teachers, they would continue to embrace participating in a community of practice. Two dominant themes emerged. One, pre-service teachers expressed a need for general help and two, they articulated a desire to extend that support group outside the class. The development of a prototype community was being explored using Yammer, Drupal and Moodle (Stryker, 2012, p. 25).

Kennedy and Archambault (2012) reported the results of a national teacher education survey looking at offering preservice teachers field experiences in K-12 online learning. They were drawn to the topic because of the growing rate of online learning, currently all 50 states offer K-12 online learning opportunities. Consequently, several states have passed legislature that mandates K-12 students participate in at least one online learning experience before graduation (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). Therefore, the team felt that it was important to explore what teacher education programs were currently doing and what was needed to prepare preservice teachers for K-12 online learning. A mixed method approach was used to gather and analyze the data. The data showed that only 1.3% of the 522 responding teacher education programs were addressing the issue (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). The researchers discussed the implications that include the mismatch of current practice of educational programs and the setting the preservice teachers are entering. Their findings support the value in teacher education programs recognizing the value in having preservice teachers practice the skills needed to work in a 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching environment.

Boyd et al. (2013) examined the practice of blogging to facilitate reflection and critique within a teacher education program. Participants in the study included 31 senior

elementary education majors at a large southeastern research university in the United States (Boyd et al, 2013, p. 3). The preservice teachers completed methods courses in the fall and student taught in the spring. During this year, the participants were asked to blog regularly, sometimes in response to prompts related to student teaching or course work and twice to two specific autobiographical prompts. Data was collected from three primary sources including blog entries, comments on the blogs and interviews with participants about their blogging. After the data was analyzed, they determined “That blogs were a mechanism for reflection” (p. 5). Participation within the blog space also allowed for community building along with a place for methods instructors to connect candidates’ past experience about teaching and transform their thinking into current practice. The researchers report that the use of blogging not only within teacher education programs but also within in-service practice can create a space for pedagogical change (Boyd et al, 2013). The researchers concluded by saying that blogs “Create a space to break the cycle of reproduction of normative schooling, a space to interact with colleagues, share ideas, and critique one another” (p. 13).

Hou (2015) studied a cohort of student teachers and their perceptions of an online learning experience. His research explored factors that contributed to learning and developing a community. An ethnographic case study was situated in an undergraduate program of pre-service teachers in China. The study took place over two academic terms while participants were undertaking an English language teaching methodology. Data was collected from six weeks of online threads, semi-structured interviews, and an end of the year evaluation. The findings of the study indicated that student teachers' sense of connectedness and encouragement was strong among online participants. The students

felt empowered, self-directed, and supported by their peers. Hou (2015) concluded, “This can help transform them into proactive, expressive and self-regulated learners” (p. 14).

Cho (2016) explored bilingual preservice teachers situated within an online community of practice. Participants included the first student cohort of five associated with CLEAR (Careers in Language Education & Academic Renewal) situated in Hawaii’s public school system. The researcher acknowledged she was the technology instructor, literacy assessment coordinator, and participated within the online discussions. The qualitative study took place over four semesters where students participated in a weekly seminar designed to support preservice teachers academic and career pursuits, included within the seminar was an online community to foster communication. Findings that emerged from the discussion data supported multiple categories, including choice of language used within the online community, mutual engagement and joint enterprise, active stance as shared repertoire, and narratives as a process of mutual engagement. Cho’s final remarks acknowledges that there are multiple studies specifically exploring communities of practice, but according to Cho (2016), “This study attempted to explicate the manner in which multiple categories (identities) of bilingual preservice teachers become emergent in the online discussion board, thereby formulating a community of practice within their own right” (p. 87). This beginning study has vast implication methodologically speaking about how participants of an online community negotiate knowledge and identity.

### **Professional Development Framed by Communities of Practice**

CoP was explored related to the professional development of geography teachers by Chalmers and Keown (2006). They argued communities of practice in education require inter-personal communication at a level rather different from the business sector (p. 113). The authors created professional development modules in an attempt to stimulate deep, authentic, teacher learning. The modules were of similar length (10-15 weeks) organized by topics. The students worked through online readings and exercises and discussions outlined by personal ideas and experience, but were encouraged to comment and question. The participants included 37 people over a two-year period. The participants completed a formal evaluation that provided the authors with valuable feedback such as the frustration they experienced with the technology or the organization of the modules. Chalmers and Keown (2006) “seek to develop a model that sustains both technological and pedagogical freshness for teachers in a shrinking world” (p. 115).

Monaghan and Columbaro (2009) designed a qualitative study that helped educators understand how integrating CoP into the classroom can help students become more engaged in lifelong learning (2009, p. 413). Students involved in the study were enrolled in two different graduate courses. The following questions guided their study:

1. How did the learners’ experience of CoP in a graduate level class affect their learning and professional development?
2. How does this experience of CoP compare to other types of collaborative learning? (p. 413).

Monaghan and Columbaro’s purpose was to provide an assessment of the potential effect on the way learners engage in learning and professional development in higher education.

Findings indicated that “Despite the often individualistic nature and constrained graduate course environment, participants felt that the use of CoP was beneficial for enhancing relationship skills and acquiring knowledge about topics of interest quickly and effectively” (p. 413). They also reported that the CoP model for professional development is being used by many organizations. Monaghan and Columbaro concluded the CoP model can “help students link their education to their career and their careers to engagement in professional development and lifelong learning” (2009, p. 421).

The evolution of teacher CoP was also explored in a large qualitative study that took place in a small rural school in Australia (Borg, 2012). The school’s enrollment fluctuated around 200 K-12 students and many students came from low socio-economic backgrounds. The participants were middle school teachers from 2001-2008, which included Tracey Borg the school principal (Borg, 2012). Borg was seeking to understand a phenomenon where he was situated. Borg stated (2012), “As a participant researcher, I wanted to make sense of the relationships, practices, and learning that occurred for a group of teachers as they were caught up in the evolutionary processes of a natal community of practice” (p. 304). Borg looked closely at teacher voice in their lived experience hoping to discover what factors influenced the development and evolution of teacher community of practice. Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data along with observations and teacher documents; Borg used a grounded theoretical approach to analyze the data and identified twelve facilitating factors including, “strong interpersonal relationship, opportunities for professional development, teacher personal attributes, seeing purpose in the work of the community, being recognized for successes; support from the community and significant others, the school context leadership, the

availability of financial support; school structures and the threat of balkanization” (Borg, 2012, p. 306). Borg’s conclusion included discussion on supporting a system implementing a community of practice, proper leadership, and shared responsibility. Borg also challenged researchers to explore CoP in hopes to fully understand how schools might embrace and sustain this approach to teacher professional development (Borg, 2012).

Caudle and Moran (2013) designed a study to explore how hybrid CoP support the development of new understanding for mentor teachers that supervise preservice teachers in the field. They employed a collective case study that included four pre-K classroom teachers as they completed a professional development initiative. The data was collected during a 12-week period by a university supervisor and included interviews, observations, and participation within an online discussion forum while the participants were mentoring preservice teachers. The team used an open-coding approach to discover not only how the CoP evolved over time but also to gain insight about mentoring new teachers. The CoP was a small size which is somewhat limiting, but their findings provided how CoP can be used with reflection, discourse and blogging for professional development. They concluded that while more research is needed, this study provided additional insight for not only P-12 education, but also had implications for higher education. After participating within the study, the mentors voiced a growing belief that the job of mentoring was difficult, yet fulfilling, worthy work (Caudle & Moran, 2013, p. 401). Participants learned how to engage in the act of theorizing that was informed by the experience that had direct implications to their individual professional development (Caudle & Moran, 2013).



## Summary of Chapter 2

The CoP model has gained considerable popularity supporting teachers' professional development (Baran & Cagiltay, 2010; Hanson-Smith, 2006; Kirschner & Lai, 2007). Additionally, the CoP framework has been used to reduce teacher isolation, develop and enhance teachers' reflective practice, and establish professional identity (Boulton & Hramiak, 2012; Clarke, 2009; Kelly, Gale, Wheeler, & Tucker, 2007). Included in this review were studies using CoP's framework starting with professional development of teachers in the field, preservice teacher growth, preservice teachers and online professional development, and teacher's professional development within online community. While studies called for further research in the area, overwhelmingly they reported a positive connection between the CoP model and online professional development of teachers.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Methodology and Context**

Often educational research is driven by questions of value rather than facts. Qualitative inquiry is suited for the educational setting because through exploration, one can generate knowledge while attempting to make sense of or interpret certain situations through the meanings the participants bring with them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This aligns with Wenger's Communities of Practice theory, which also helps educational practice to explain how contextual influences, and human interactions generate practice, meaning and identity (Wenger, 1998).

This research was framed as a qualitative study that examined focal participants and their participation within an online community during their student teaching experience (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 1998). Pairing this qualitative case study with CoP provided the lens to discover the ways that focal participants engaged within the community, and also provided details to better understand the ways in which communities exist.

#### **Qualitative Methods**

When exploring the framework for this initial study, I was challenged as a new researcher to determine the type of qualitative study I intended to employ (Merriam & Tesdell, 2014). Different types of qualitative research methodologies appeared appropriate for my research. I focused on traditional designs: biography, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology. (Creswell, 1998). The first three were eliminated by definition: a biography traditionally studies one person and was not applicable to this research; grounded theory generates new theory, which was not the

purpose of this study; and ethnography, while appropriate for groups of people, suggested an extended time frame (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenology, however, seemed at first to be a match because it “describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept,” (Creswell, 1998, p.5) and I was studying the lived experience of the pre-service teachers as they participated within the online community. However, after exploring the case study methodology, it appeared to be a more viable approach because a case study explores phenomenon but it is also bound by time and place, which was appropriate for this research (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2005). As Merriam (2009) and Stake (1981) discuss, case study knowledge differs from other research knowledge in four key ways:

- 1) More concrete. Case study knowledge resonates with our own experience because it is more vivid, concrete, and sensory than abstract.
- 2) More contextual. Our experiences are rooted in context, as is knowledge in case studies. This knowledge is distinguishable from the abstract, formal knowledge derived from other research designs.
- 3) More developed by reader interpretation. Readers bring to a case study their own experience and understanding, which lead to generalizations when new data for the case are added to old data.
- 4) Based more on reference populations determined by the reader. In generalizing as described above, readers have some population in mind. Thus, unlike traditional research, the reader participates in extending generalization to reference populations (Stake, 1981, pp. 35-36).

I selected a qualitative case to explore the online discussions of pre-service

teachers because it is “ideal for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomenon” (Merriam, 1988, p. 2). The qualitative study provides a storied landscape for focused analysis (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Stake 1995, 2005; Yin, 2005). When considering this particular study, it was also important to reflect how Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe case study to be the most complex study, one that might include multiple methods of collecting data (p. 94). This study includes multiple methods for collecting data such as interviews, online interactions, and a reflective essay. Merriam (2009) stated the following:

The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon.

Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich holistic account of the phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand readers’ experiences. These insights can be constructed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence, case study plays an important role in advancing a field’s knowledge base. (p. 51)

This particular study was a multi-case study incorporating four focal participants and included variation between case, making it important to analyze the multiple cases individually as well as a group (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006).

### **Context**

The Benedictine College’s teacher education program represents the traditional paradigm for teacher preparation. The department identifies three overarching goals for its program: 1) to build learning communities where students and teachers make meaningful choices, communicate, and collaborate with others and think critically and

conceptually and act justly; 2) to model decision making processes that are inquiry-based, equitable, and reflect the values of Benedictine communities; and 3) to actively involve the community as a partner in the educational process. Guided by these goals, candidates follow a course study that includes a professional education core, a methods core, and a research and field experience core, all while seeking to develop the knowledge, skills, and critical understanding necessary to be an effective teacher (Benedictine College Course Catalog, 2014, p. 121).

The potential participants included the spring 2016 elementary and special education student teachers at Benedictine College. The participants fulfilled the requirements outlined by the Benedictine College Education Department and were formally accepted into the teacher education program and also formally admitted into the student teaching practicum. The Benedictine Policies and Procedures Handbook identifies the following process for full acceptance in to the Teacher Education Program: Submission of Professional Portfolio containing the following components:

1. Completing the application for the “Teacher Education Program.”
2. Submit a typewritten autobiography that includes an introduction, and explanation of career choice, and experiences working with children, and a list of pertinent interests and accomplishments.
3. Satisfactory recommendations from three faculty members outside of the department indicating a belief that the applicant possesses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to do well as a member of the teaching profession.
4. Satisfactory interview.
5. Have a minimum GPA of 2.75.

6. Minimum composite ACT score of 23 or satisfactory performance on the Professional Skills Test with a minimum score of 519.

The Committee on Teacher Education (CTE) will formally consider all student teacher applicants, based on the following:

1. Submission of updated Professional Portfolio containing the following items additional to those submitted upon entrance in to the Teacher Education Program:
  - a. Additional artifacts taken from education courses as specified in the Professional Portfolio description.
  - b. Additional evaluation sheets from pre-student teaching cooperating teachers.
  - c. Updated candidate essay upon their progress to date in meeting the six Teacher Education Program outcomes.
2. Maintaining satisfactory performance on all Teacher Education Program requirements.
3. Meeting health standards required by K.S.A. 72-5213 Certification of Health for School Personnel.

Teacher candidates shall be admitted to student teaching only if the above requirements are met; and if, in the judgment of a majority of the members of the (CTE) Furthermore, the teacher candidate must maintain satisfactory performance on all program requirements during the student teaching practicum. (p. 5).

Additionally, each participant was placed in one of the 25 partnership schools identified by Benedictine College. During the student teaching placement, elementary teacher candidates were enrolled in Ed 470, Student Teaching Seminar and special

education student teachers were enrolled in Ed 471, Special Education Student Teacher Seminar. Through these seminar courses, candidates regularly reflect and critique their experience. Assignments are required that assist the candidate in problem solving, self-assessment, and improving performance.

Student teachers are supervised and evaluated by their cooperating teacher(s), a clinical faculty member, and at least once by an Education Department co-chair. Grades for student teaching are determined by the Benedictine College faculty member assigned responsibility for the respective student teaching course (Ed 491, Ed 492). Grade recommendations from the cooperating teacher and clinical supervisor are considered in determining the student teacher's final grade.

### **Participants**

Qualitative focal case study begins with a purposeful selection of the cases to study (Merriam, 2009). The potential participants were first sent an email to introduce the study. I then made myself available during their seminar class to answer any questions they might have about participation in the research study. The potential participants were then given several days to consider their participation and turn in their consent form. While all the students who wanted to participate were encouraged to indicate their interest, the focus of the research was on four participants within the group. I was specifically looking for greater variation across the cases, which Merriam (2009) found provides a more compelling interpretation (p. 49-50). Of the twenty-four potential participants, seventeen returned the signed consent acknowledging interest in becoming a focal participant. Next, sampling decisions were made to achieve variation within data and perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The seventeen potential participants were

generally homogenous, seventeen females all from the Midwest. All of the students were traditional age college students seeking degree completion. I closely reviewed each student's Benedictine Education Department portfolio to identify participants that would provide variance. I felt it was important to select four participants that had different types of educational paths previous to Benedictine as opposed to four participants who all attended similar schools. I also looked for anything else that stood out as unique; for instance, one participant was also a Spanish major, one participant was an entrepreneur, and one participant was a transfer student. Additionally, by choosing two participants from special education and two from elementary education, the variance was increased. Meaning, the challenges of each setting are much different, allowing the participants to provide contributions to the community from a different perspective. The following section provides additional biographical and contextual information for each participant. The participants were assigned pseudonyms based on the Catholic mission of the college.

### **Participants' Biographies**

*Faith.* Faith considers herself an artist and entrepreneur after starting her own cupcake business in her hometown in Littleton, Colorado. She has a passion for special education and specifically aspires to teach in a functional classroom. Faith attended public school in Colorado and was active in her parish youth group. Faith embraces an active life style of hiking and camping in the Colorado mountains. She is the middle child of three children; her mother is an art teacher close to retirement and her father is a business man who travels a fair amount of the time. Faith is returning to Colorado and will be teaching in a very large public high school. She will be supporting students with learning disabilities who are included in the classroom. Faith's student teaching



placement was in a small rural school in Kansas with a caseload of eight students in the middle school and high school setting.

*Grace.* Grace was born in Wisconsin and lived there until she was seven; at that time her family relocated to Colorado. While growing up, she loved to read, and often she was referred to as the “teacher’s pet.” When she graduated from high school, she received letters from people who had watched her grow up and many of them said they knew she would someday be a teacher. She has been surrounded by education most of her life not only as a student but also because her mother is an Early Childhood Special Education teacher. Grace also said that she developed a love for education when her family went to libraries, museums, or just listening to her grandparents tell stories. Grace went to a Catholic school K-8 and a public high school. As a high schooler, Grace volunteered at Respite Care, which is a facility that looks after children with special needs and also spent many summers working at summer camp. She is dual major in Spanish and Elementary Education; she plans to teach in a diverse setting. She is passionate about the individual learner and using technology to engage students. Grace student taught in a traditional fourth grade classroom in Missouri and is seeking a teaching job in the state of Wyoming along with entering a master’s program.

*Hope.* Hope grew up in a large Nebraska family, the second oldest child of eight. Her dad is an attorney and her mother an Elementary Education and Math teacher. At the age of four, she decided that she wanted to be a teacher. She attended a charter school for Kindergarten and first grade in Northern Colorado, and after first grade, her parents made the decision to home school the children through fifth grade. The family then moved to Nebraska and enrolled their children in an intercity Catholic school for sixth through eighth

grade, Hope reported this to be culturally a shocking experience, and she was homeschooled for high school. Before coming to Benedictine College, Hope spent time working with children with Autism; she believes this was the beginning of her desire to be a special education teacher. Hope also noted that while she believes a teacher's main role is to teach, it's also a teacher's duty to bring people together in community while on their own path of learning. Additionally, she is passionate about service work, kinesthetic learning, and meeting the needs of all learners. Hope student taught in a special education dual placement setting working with upper elementary and middle school students and will be teaching 5<sup>th</sup> grade in a public school next fall.

*Mary.* Mary hails from the southwest corner of Minnesota, where she is child number five out of eight. Mary attended a private Lutheran school grades K-8 and a public high school. Mary says that learning, serving, and working with children has always been her passion. Mary says there is no doubt in her mind that her upbringing and her experience as a student and the relationships she built along the way with teachers led her to education. Additionally, she has had many opportunities to work with children including Bible camp, tutoring, and volunteering at the YMCA. Mary has also always been active in the arts and athletics including forensics, choir, drama, and basketball. She describes herself as reflective and seeks advice and mentorship from experienced teachers. Mary's student teaching placement was in the fourth grade on a military post; she will also be teaching there in the upcoming school year.

Table 1

*Focal Participants Information*

Participant	Degree Seeking	Previous School Settings	Interests
Faith	Special /Elementary Education	Public School	Entrepreneur/Functional Students
Grace	Elementary Education/Spanish	Catholic/Public School	Spanish/Diverse Settings
Hope	Special /Elementary Education	Catholic/Charter/Home School	Service Work/Kinesthetic Learners
Mary	Elementary Education	Lutheran/Public School/Transfer Student	The Arts/Athletics

**Data Sources**

Permission for this study was granted from Benedictine College and the University of Kansas's Human Subjects Committee. (See Appendix A/B). Potential participants were advised in written form via email and in person of the study, the process, and their rights. The email explained that their participation was voluntary and confidential.(See Appendix C.) Participants signed a consent form complying with Human Subjects Committee requirements. (See Appendix D.)

The data was collected through a variety of sources including individual interviews, online posts, and a reflective essay. Focal students participated in an initial interview prior to engaging in the online community and again after their participation. The participants contributed to an online community situated on Blackboard for three

weeks during the month of April 2016. Additionally, each focal student wrote a reflective essay describing his or her participation within the online community.

Table 2

*Timeline of Data Collected*

<b>Data Collected</b>	<b>Number of Days</b>	<b>Month Collected</b>
Initial Interviews Field Notes	4 days	March 2016
Participation within Online Community Field Notes	21 days	April 2016
Participant Reflective Essay Field Notes	7 days	May 2016
Final Interviews Field Notes	4 days	May 2016

**36 total**

**Focal Student Interviews.** According to Patton (2015), “The fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms” (p. 442). The purpose of the initial interview is to understand the pre-service teacher’s perceptions of online professional community. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and contained specific questions to ask each focal participant; the questions were open-ended and led to follow-up questions (Merriam, 2001). An example of an open-ended question would be, *As you begin the online community, what do you hope to experience?* Merriam (2009) states that this format “allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent and to new ideas on the topic” (p. 74).

Additionally, I considered Patton's (2015) practical advice, "Ten Interview Principles and Skills," when designing the interviews. This was another way that as a novice researcher I insured that I not only planned for a successful interview process but also administered the questions effectively. Below are Patton's ten points for interviews:

- 1) Ask open-ended questions
- 2) Be clear
- 3) Listen
- 4) Probe as appropriate
- 5) Observe
- 6) Be both empathetic and neutral
- 7) Make transitions
- 8) Distinguish types of questions
- 9) Be prepared for the unexpected
- 10) Be present throughout (p. 428).

According to Patton (2015), "An interview is an interaction, a relationship, and the interviewer's skills and experience can and do affect the quality of responses" (p. 427). As a first time researcher, it was critical for me to design questions that not only align with my purpose but also that were delivered in a way in which my interviewees feel comfortable in sharing about their experience. My goal as an interviewer was not to just listen but hear the participants' answers in a way in which I can follow up and probe for a greater depth and understanding. Qualitative researchers conduct interviews to discover additional information and clarify concepts for further analysis and to validate participants' interactions within the online community (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015).

The final interview questions were designed to understand the participants' overall perception of the online community (Merriam, 2009). The interviews were recorded and transcribed for a detailed analysis.

**The Online Community.** An essential feature of this study was the creation of an online space for participants to collaborate and ask questions while navigating their student teaching experience. This online community was situated on Blackboard and was mediated by Dr. Matthew Ramsey, the professor overseeing the Special Education seminar class. The seminar class is designed to support student teachers as they complete the student teaching block. Special Education and Elementary students both engage in a similar seminar experience. The mediator posed a new question each week for participants to respond to within the online community. Participants could also pose questions to the group as a whole. The expectations were that each week, participants were to actively respond to at least two people's post. The questions were designed to stimulate deeper thinking about the student teaching experience and were connected to a book Dr. Ramsey used as a resource, "Special Education-Policy and Practice-Accountability Instruction and Social Challenges" (Skrtic, Harris, & Shriner, 2005). The three following prompts were designed to stimulate discussion between the participants:

Prompt #1: With the goal of inclusion, including special education students alongside their non-disable peers to the maximum extent possible, general education and special-education teachers must work together even more than before. Special education no longer exists as a place, but rather a service provided to students who are first and always-general education students. The two types of teachers must collaborate not only for reporting data collection, but also for co-teaching and collaborative instructional

planning. The first line of questioning included what have you seen during your student teaching experience so far? What examples of positive collaboration have you seen? Is there anything that you have noticed that gives you pause or concern? Are there things that you will want to do in your first job to insure high quality collaboration? Please post your experiences and respond to each other's posts. Let's keep a dialog going and attempt to generate a list of best practice appropriate for collaboration between general and special education.

Prompt #2: There is quite a bit of research on the topic of emotional labor, which is the process of managing one's emotions as a requirement of employment. The topic is often broken down into two types of 'acting.' Surface acting is when one portrays an emotion that is not necessarily genuine. Think of the person who takes your order at a fast food restaurant. They may ask you how your day is going, but socially we understand that it is not necessarily a genuine question. We are to respond positively even if we are having a less than ideal day. Again, this is surface acting. The second type of acting is called deep acting. This is when an employee is required to deeply engage with a client. As teachers, we are deep actors. As part of our work, we create emotional bonds with our clients (students and families) and engage them in a professionally appropriate manner. One possible concern is if we are required to 'act' in a manner that does not portray our true feelings. This can create emotional dissonance in the actor. Over time the clash between acted emotions and felt emotions can lead to stress and even burnout for the actor (teacher). One positive result is the possibility of transformation. Transformation is the phenomenon in which the actor has an emotional transformation. They see an experience, or a student, with new eyes and appreciation.

For our discussion this week: Have you experienced either type of acting during your student teaching experience? Have you experienced any stress or frustration that might be explained to emotional labor? As professional teachers, what might you be able to do to guard against the pitfalls of emotional labor? Let's try to create a list of resources or suggestions on how first year teachers might avoid, or manage this type of stress.

Prompt #3: In a matter of weeks, you will be a professional teacher. I think there is a tendency for first year teachers to feel overwhelmed and isolated. The research is full of studies regarding teachers leaving the field, frustrations with behavior management and feelings about provided support. Often I hear back from BC graduates that they don't feel prepared for their first year of teaching and often are even "grumpy" about how they were trained in these halls. Somewhere about the third year of teaching, I begin to hear back from the same people with the message that they were in fact well prepared and while they didn't know how to problem solve, they did have the tools to engage in problem solving activities. What do you envision for your first year of teaching? What are you most excited about? What supports will you need to be successful? What have you begun to consider for ongoing professional development? Let's work towards creating a list of supports you feel necessary for first year teachers. How might this list help you craft an interview question?

**Reflective essay.** Participants wrote a reflective essay responding to the prompt: "After participating in the online community, what might you tell a preservice teacher about the experience." The essay is an additional source of data seeking to explain the participants' perceptions and feelings about their participation within the online community.



**Field Notes.** Field notes were taken during each of the eight interviews. This helped me to be more aware of behaviors that might not actually be said and hone my skills as an interviewer. The following is an example of a field note I recorded for “Mary,” one of the special education focal participants.

March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016

(4:00 pm) Mary came in and quickly dropped all of her “teacher” belongings in a heap and talked at first about her school day, she reported that her student teaching was going great and she was learning a lot from the experience. She voiced her excitement about participating in the upcoming online community. I waited and listened until I felt as if she was settled and ready to begin the questioning. First, I reminded her that while she had signed the consent form that if at any time she felt like she didn’t want to continue to let me know. I worried about the recording working correctly. I think I was more nervous than her, after the initial questions we both seemed to relax. I was surprised that she didn’t really have much experience with online community. Mary was engaged in the interview and thoughtfully responded to each of the questions. While I did probe for a deeper understanding of her previous experience, it was obvious that she really didn’t have much to report. I wondered if the other focal participants would also have limited experience with online community?

### **Data Collection**

Data collection occurred in the Spring 2016 semester and was divided into four phases. Data was continuously analyzed throughout each phase and informed subsequent parts.

**Phase 1:** Phase 1 began with an initial interview seeking to understand focal

participants' experience with community. The questions explored not only their experience with online community but also their ideas about traditional community. The initial interviews took place during the week of March 25<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The initial interview protocol can be found in Appendix E.

**Phase 2:** The second phase of data collection included the online community, which began on April 4, 2016 and ended April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Focal participants responded to prompts posed within an online community on Blackboard. The participants interacted for three weeks; during this time they could not only respond to each other, but also pose questions seeking community member's advice. Prompts used with the online community can be found in Appendix F.

**Phase 3:** The third phase of data collection included two parts. First, the students wrote a reflective essay about what they would tell a preservice teacher about the online community experience. The prompt for the reflective essay can be found in Appendix G. This was an attempt to get the participants thinking deeply about their participation and what they noticed. The second part of Phase 3 was the final interview. The final interview protocol can be found in Appendix H.

**Phase 4:** The final phase started at the end of April. At this time the raw data had been collected and the process of assembling the data had begun.

### **Analyzing the Data**

According to Patton (2015), "Qualitative analysis transforms data into finding without using a formula, guidance yes, but no recipe" (p. 521). The challenge is to make sense of the data and to be cognizant of the process at the beginning of the research (Patton, 2015). Managing data is a critical piece of a research study and it is essential to

have an organizational plan early in the study (Merriam, 2009). Often qualitative researchers use software to assist in analysis, this is generally dependent upon the amount of data they have collected and personal preference. For this study, the data was managed using a more traditional approach, mainly because the study was small and the software was costly. My management system included a three ring binder where I housed transcripts of the data by each phase in the data collection process, for example, there was a section for the first interview, final interview, online transcripts and the participant's essays. Additionally, I also had a separate section where I had another copy of the data organized by focal participant. Once this system was in place and the data was organized I was able to continue with analysis.

The next stage of my analysis was inductive as opposed to deductive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015) The data was analyzed using the constant- comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This model, like the Case Study Methodology, recognizes that data analysis is an ongoing process in which data collection and data analysis are integrated as opposed to isolated events (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2009).

The constant-comparative method allowed themes to emerge from the data. Often these themes are responsive to the research questions, specifically looking for the smallest piece of information that can facilitate the development of codes and supporting key categories (Merriam, 2009, p. 177). This part of the process involved reading through all of the transcripts multiple times, specifically looking for patterns, frequent words and phrases in the data, and in turn creating a system for coding the data. As I read the transcripts each time, I highlighted important information and recorded notes in the margins of the transcripts.

Additionally, I also conducted a cross-case analysis looking for similarities and differences, relationships and perspectives between each participant that might help answer my research questions. This process allowed me to exhaust the multiple layers of each focal participant's perceptions. I generated and assess alternative conclusions, compared and contrasted the data, kept the analysis connected to the purpose, triangulated the data with multiple sources, and looked at the findings through an alternate lens to inform findings. (Patton, 2015).

The final stage included coding the data, which is the process of organizing, labeling and sorting your data into specific categories. Codes also allow you to summarize and synthesize what is happening in your data and supports data analysis.

Coding can be done in multiple ways, however I chose to adopt a combination of identifying potential and emerging codes, meaning that I first looked closely at my research questions and similar research and made a list of potential codes, but I also looked for emerging codes as I read and analyzed the data. Initially, I identified 49 codes, but what I found was they were not all applicable to my research questions or they were similar and could be combined into one category. Through a process of refinement looking for essential information that was mentioned significantly more often and supported my specific research questions, I identified 18 codes . The coding manual can be found in Appendix I. The goal was to embrace a systematic approach to analyzing the data, which also provided credibility and authenticity of the analysis.

### **Strategies for Enhancing Credibility**

According to Patton (2002), "The credibility of qualitative research depends on three elements:

1. Rigorous methods for doing fieldwork that yield high-quality data that are systematically analyzed with attention to issues of credibility.
2. The credibility of the researcher, which is dependent on training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self.
3. Philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry, that is, a fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling, and holistic thinking. (p. 553).

These elements were addressed by beginning first with a purposeful design. Built into my design was a trustworthy system that established checks and balances enhancing credibility by counterbalancing influences of the study. The design included embracing my role as a qualitative researcher, thick description, triangulation, member checking, and enlisting a critical friend.

### **The Researcher's Role**

I acknowledge my role first as a researcher and have worked to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of my study. It is important to first understand the setting in which this study took place, which a small Catholic college employing only six full-time faculty within the education department. As the Director of Elementary Education and the methods instructor and field experience supervisor, it was impossible to state that I had no previous contact with the participants. While Marshall and Rossman (2006) might argue that “firsthand involvement” and full “immersion” are essential components of qualitative research (p. 100), other researchers might identify issues with my role. Throughout the participants’ time in the education department, I interacted with them at some level, which included evaluation of their performance. These interactions also

facilitated valuable relationships with the participants, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue is the framework for effective human research (p. 105). Authentic relationships are at the core of Wenger's CoP, and it would seem to be advantageous to embrace this component of the study.

However, it is also important to identify the negatives of my role, including the power the participants might identify connected to my role at the college. I was upfront with all potential participants in stating that their participation was purely voluntary. While my role may have slightly influenced their decision to participate, for the most part I think that any influence was in a positive way. For example, through my guidance as their instructor, I had already established my credibility, and they knew that I would hold myself to the same high expectations as I would my students. Their time with me previous to the study provided a trustworthy relationship, allowing them to fully engage within the community (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

**Thick Description** increases the complexity of qualitative research by providing clear details about all aspects of a study including the context, participants and experiences. When the researcher provides thick description, the context is illuminated leading to thick interpretation of the data. This ultimately allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). In this particular study, thick description was used to describe focal participants, the context, the research methodology, the data collection and analysis, and the findings.

**Triangulation** is based on the premise that no single method can adequately provide empirical evidence alone without being vulnerable to error (Patton, 2002). The

plan for this study included a thoughtful triangulation of the understandings using multiple data sources including semi-structured interviews, a reflective essay, and transcripts of an online community. Comparing the collected data from each source is a strategy that will be used in this study to reduce bias and distortion during analysis (Patton, 2002). Erlandson et al. (1993) describes triangulation as a process in which, “the researcher uses different or multiple sources of data (time, space, person), methods (observations, interviews, videotapes, photographs, documents), investigators (single or multiple), or theory (single verses multiple perspectives of analysis)” (p. 138). I triangulated my data collection by collecting my data over an extended period of time through different methods.

**Member checking** is one way to provide credibility. According to Erlandson et al., (1993) “Credibility is established by allowing members of stake-holding groups to test categories, interpretations, and conclusions” (p. 142). The guidelines for member checking include distributing copies of the draft to group participants and other people knowledgeable about the study. Members were asked to review my findings looking for inaccuracies or interpretation errors.

**A critical friend** is another way to insure the trustworthiness of research. The person that agreed to look at my work was familiar with qualitative work and also my study topic. Dr. Jane E. Bennet was able to read my study through an alternative lens and offer critique solely to improve my work (Patton, 2015).

### **Summary of Chapter 3**

The purpose of Chapter 3 was to provide an overview of the methodology, participants and data analysis. In sum, this qualitative case study included four focal

participants who were all preservice teachers at Benedictine College enrolled in the student teaching practicum. The data collected included interviews, transcripts of the online community interactions, and a reflective essay. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis design seeking to discover themes, patterns, and categories in the data. Strategies were enlisted to ensure credibility. The results of the study are presented in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Overview**

This chapter details focal participant's initial experiences with online community, their interactions within the online community during this study, and how each participant viewed this space and might see this experience impacting their future professional development. The findings reported within the next chapters will be reported as accurately as possible in order to portray their beliefs, feelings, and tensions. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is important to include an accurate representation of the participant's reality, as they perceive it, which may be different from other people's perceptions. The results of this study revealed themes connected to online community of preservice teachers. Overall, the data revealed that the online community (a) extended learning and understanding beyond the classroom, (b) became a place for professional support and community, (c) stimulated reflective thinking, (d) served as a place to share experiences, (e) was a flexible venue for community, (f) had online community benefits that outweighed the negatives, and (g) was built on relationships.

### **Initial Perceptions**

Phase 1 was intended to discover participant's experiences with online



community and illuminate their perceptions about participating in online community. This first interview took place prior to participation within the online portion of this study and revealed that all participants had little experience with online community. Detailed below are specific comments of each participant.

**Phase 1:**

**Faith.** Faith reported little to no previous experience with professional online community. She drew parallels to social media where people interact and communicate but was unsure if she would consider that online community. Faith reported participating within an online discussion board during a previous history class, which she considered to be a form of community. As she reflected on her minimal experience, she reported positives and negatives about the experience. First, she noted that while some might define this online experience as community, she felt as if the relationship aspect was missing. She commented that she never actually met the professor or any of the other people: "I didn't like that I didn't really get to know the other participants." She described an adjustment period from communicating in person to the online setting. Faith added that removing the personal component could also be a good thing as topics are more clearly stated without emotion. Faith added that people often are braver in an online community and they are more willing to say things that they might not say in person. One positive note that she reported was the flexible time frame where members do not necessarily have to be participating at same time as opposed to a traditional community where all people have to be present in a particular place. Faith also appreciated that the online piece served as a documented script; she often went back to the online discussion board during her history course after she had time to think more

deeply about the topics. She also liked the convenience of referring back to what had been said before leaving her comment on a thread. Overall, although Faith articulated several negatives about her previous experience, she reported an interest in participating in online community again and was excited about the upcoming experience. She added, “I expect this community to be more personal because I already know most of the people and it will be nice to have a moderator to start the conversation.”

**Grace.** I began the interview by asking, “Do you have any professional experience with online community?” Grace didn’t really have what she would consider professional experience, as in professional development, but she had participated in online discussions that she considered to be community for previous classwork. She described a setting where a teacher would pose a question and the students would answer and respond to other people’s responses. She felt as if it was mostly an assignment-based interaction, but it did have some personal responses validating people’s interactions. Grace added, “Online discussion is different than in person where you can banter back and forth, instead you comment at 6:00 and then maybe get a response the next day, there’s definitely a time stamp issue.” While she missed the authentic conversation that often takes place face to face, she thought it forced her to take more time to think before posting. She felt as if it was important to make sure online community was not anonymous, which she thought made it more authentic. Grace additionally talked about how the teachers that she knows “beg, borrow, and steal” from each other, and she thought that the opportunity to interact with the special education preservice teachers was exciting and she wanted to know more about their experiences. She also liked that she could ask for advice with problems she might be facing. Grace added, “We only get to

see each other for an hour a week at seminar, I'm already on technology all of the time, this might be something that is easily accessible for all of us.”

**Hope.** Hope quickly reported that she had no previous experience with online community outside of social media. She described online community as the same as when you're interacting with someone in person, but it takes place online. She felt as if her generation would support moving community to the online venue because they are more willing to try things similar to social media. Hope was looking for social interactions: “The amount of time people spend on their phones proves that we're meant to have an internal conversation.” She talked about how writing was easier for her at times than talking, and she described interactions with her brother and how she generally sent him a quick text, which she felt was easier than calling. Hope appreciated the flexibility of online interactions and felt it worked well for busy people. Hope also talked about referring back to an interaction online or a text if she did not remember what was said, as “It's right there, I can screen shot it and pull it up on my phone anywhere.” She feels comfortable interacting with someone in that type of atmosphere. Hope did point out the differences between online and traditional community and she believed that the online space offered a freedom that the traditional setting may not offer people. While some people might think they can say whatever they want to online, she thought most people would see it as an opportunity to think about what they were posting. Even though Hope reported having more experience with face to face community and building relationships, she thinks it is very possible to develop those same types of relationships online. She sees it as an opportunity to grow, ask experienced teachers for help, bounce ideas off people, and even feel support and influence other people's teaching. She does

have her concerns, as she questions whether people will fully engage in the experience, “They may just get on, say their piece, and not really actively participate.” She wants to share her ideas with other aspiring teachers, and gather strategies for her future teaching career. Hope thinks the online community will give a voice to people that don’t usually get to speak in the seminar class, and she is excited to see how far people take it. Hope commented, “I hope it’s not just a place to vent, I’d like to see it on the professional side, I hope people have set boundaries on how to interact online.”

**Mary.** While Mary reports her online community experience is limited, she is seeking a space for professional development verses just a place to interact and share your life like social media. Mary liked the mix of preservice teachers in the online community, for she saw it as a chance to practice interactions between the two groups. She felt like this is a community that could be pushed beyond the student teaching experience and into the first year of teaching. Mary stated, “I think that it might be easier to interact with people that you don’t have a personal relationship with in an online setting.” She continued, “The seminar class is often too rushed, I’m hoping that the online piece gives everyone another opportunity for their voice to be heard.” She wanted to get a better grasp on what other people were experiencing and learn from them.”

## **Phase 2**

Phase 2 took place starting April 4, 2016 and ended April 25, 2016. This part was designed to give participants more experience interacting within an “online community” and to develop thinking about their participation. Again, their interactions were guided by three purposeful prompts but were not limited to those three topics. This phase was reported in a way to describe not only the participants’ contributions but also how others

might have interacted with their comments. It is important to remember that not all contributions were by focal participants but also included other members of the online community. As a reminder, two of the focal participants were student teaching in the special education setting (Faith and Hope) and two were in the general education classroom (Grace and Mary).

**Prompt #1:** With the goal of inclusion, including special education students alongside their non-disable peers to the maximum extent possible, general education and special-education teachers must work together even more than before. Special education no longer exists as a place, but rather a service provided to students who are first and always-general education students. The two types of teachers must collaborate not only for reporting data collection, but also for co-teaching and collaborative instructional planning. The first line of questioning included what have you seen during your student teaching experience so far? What examples of positive collaboration have you seen? Is there anything that you have noticed that gives you pause or concern? Are there things that you will want to do in your first job to insure high quality collaboration? Please post your experiences and respond to each other's posts. Let's keep a dialog going and attempt to generate a list of best practice appropriate for collaboration between general and special education.

The first prompt was designed to stimulate discussion about collaboration, specifically between special education and classroom teachers. The question was posed in a way that the participants could pull from what they've already experienced or are experiencing in the classroom, but also think deeply about how that will look in their future setting.

**Faith.** Faith described her special education student teaching setting as a place where she works with mostly pullout students that had very little to no time in a general education setting. She admits to struggling with the situation and attributes many of the scheduling issues to the lack of collaborating between the two groups of teachers. Faith talks also about how teachers might think it is easier to keep these students in the special education classroom because of their academic struggles: “Many teachers don’t know how to include them and it’s simpler to just separate them into their own class.” Faith described a constant battle between special education and general education teachers and noticed that the teachers often did not agree about student’s needs, their IEP, or even how the IEP works. She went on to agree with other comments, stating, “I agree that a strong, professional, and positive relationship with other educators will definitely help with communication and collaboration.” She also stated that routine was key and communication was necessary to accomplish collaboration between educators. Faith stated she was frustrated and admitted to struggling with finding a balance of keeping her students in the classroom with their peers and pulling them out for instruction. Coincidentally, the follow-up interaction was from a fellow focal participant, Grace.

**Grace.** She first acknowledged Faith’s comments and agreed that the struggles of teaching can be not only frustrating, but challenging. Grace described her current situation, which is in a fourth grade classroom with several lower-functioning special education students, where she strived for all students to experience success but also develop social skills. She added, “These students also mainly get instruction from the special education teacher, it’s really hard to see the staff at my school not believe in students and limit their instruction.” Looking to the future, Grace hoped that she will

always be willing to try new things to help every child while educating the whole child. After her statement, several other community members chimed in with comments similar to this, “I really wish that we had a ‘like’ button.” In another thread, Grace described her setting in greater detail including a breakdown of her students IEPs and her desire for including all students in her classroom. She said that she personally reached out to the special education teachers to find ideas to meet the needs of students, but she added that her cooperating teacher is from the traditional mindset and often did not do that: “We do have an all-staff meeting once and month, and then collaboration twice a week, which doesn’t always happen.” She went on to say that the meetings were very logistical and didn’t include a lot of “sharing ideas and strategies for working with all students.” She talked about her future desire to work with teachers and differentiate instruction for students and how she would need to find a good mentor to support this process: “I think there are many strategies that can be utilized for the collaboration of teachers in schools, one that I’ve learned about this semester is ‘google forms’ this allows teachers to quickly share information, such as behavior feedback information.” Grace then shared an article on Google that discussed strategies for collaboration between teachers.

**Hope.** Hope described a placement for special education where she co-taught with her cooperating teacher. She described an adjustment period that went from horrible to the best co-teaching experience she has had. Hope attributed this to extensive collaboration and brainstorming with her teaching partner. Hope’s interactions for this first prompt were mainly in response to other’s comments. For example, within the community discussion on IEPs, she stated “I want to have a thorough meeting at the beginning of the year with my regular education teachers and go over everything in each

student's IEP.” When one student described a ten-minute meeting with the principal and each teacher during the week, Hope responded, “I’m sure that ten-minute meeting with the administrator helped to keep everyone on the same page.”

**Mary.** Mary’s interaction was in response to how difficult it is to get everyone on the same page and how long this process can be to implement change. Mary shared a particular incident at the beginning of her student teaching in a 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom where she witnessed a high level of collaboration between both groups. She felt that this required a huge willingness and commitment to communication, which then led to improvement in the student’s overall plan. Mary went on to admit to feeling ill prepared in the special education area as a general education teacher. She said for that reason, “I will have to rely heavily on the expertise of the special education teachers and be able to dialogue back and forth to understand clearly how to implement elements of a particular IEP.” That constant and open communication is what Mary sees in her placement currently, as each week they meet with their grade level Professional Learning Communities which includes the special education teachers. During these meetings, Mary commented, “The special education teacher is able to advise us on steps to be taken in the general education classroom that will support our students on IEPs or recommendations for general education students.” She also described interactions between the group where they problem solve and plan according so issues don’t escalate. She concluded by saying, “I agree with what everyone here has said about communication and creating relationships between professionals, if we aren’t openly communicating there is no way students are going to receive the best possible opportunities.”



**Prompt #2:** There is quite a bit of research on the topic of emotional labor, which is the process of managing one's emotions as a requirement of employment. The topic is often broken down into two types of 'acting.' Surface acting is when one portrays an emotion that is not necessarily genuine. Think of the person who takes your order at a fast food restaurant. They may ask you how your day is going, but socially we understand that it is not necessarily a genuine question. We are to respond positively even if we are having a less than ideal day. Again, this is surface acting. The second type of acting is called deep acting. This is when an employee is required to deeply engage with a client. As teachers, we are deep actors. As part of our work, we create emotional bonds with our clients (students and families) and engage them in a professionally appropriate manner. One possible concern is if we are required to 'act' in a manner that does not portray our true feelings. This can create emotional dissonance in the actor. Over time the clash between acted emotions and felt emotions can lead to stress and even burnout for the actor (teacher). One positive result is the possibility of transformation. Transformation is the phenomenon in which the actor has an emotional transformation. They see an experience, or a student, with new eyes and appreciation. For our discussion this week: Have you experienced either type of acting during your student teaching experience? Have you experienced any stress or frustration that might be explained to emotional labor? As professional teachers, what might you be able to do to guard against the pitfalls of emotional labor? Let's try to create a list of resources or suggestions on how first year teachers might avoid, or manage this type of stress.

The second prompt was designed to explore the topic of emotional labor and explore how they as future teachers might guard against the pitfalls of emotional labor

and manage stress.

The prompt was initially addressed by a community member first speaking to her experience who offered suggestions for the community as they move forward in their careers. **Grace** was the next to respond, and she first agreed with her peer and added that it is essential that you take time to build authentic, intentional relationships. She added that she too had experienced both types of emotional labor and how she had invested her whole self in a student to create a learning relationship. She also described a time in which she did not necessarily agree with a person's actions, but she kept quiet and just went with the flow: "I think as first year teachers; emotional labor is definitely something that we will need to handle to be successful." She went on to reflect on interactions she'd had within her current setting, "I have worked to build relationships with all the teachers in my school, but also my students." Grace had several students that were struggling with issues such as a parent with cancer or a difficult home life, and she added, "those interactions can also be emotionally draining." A community participant furthered the discussion by talking about how it is important to find a setting where you feel comfortable and enjoy the people you work with, so that it is not just a job. She then challenged the group to find something to relieve stress "something that works best for you individually, maybe a hobby, exercise, a quiet place, the key is to find something that's right for you."

**Hope.** Hope started her comments with this statement, "I believe that emotional labor is one of the most difficult challenges for a first year teacher." Hope described interactions with paraprofessionals within her special education classroom as less than ideal, mainly because the paraprofessionals did not respect her as a real teacher in the

classroom. This led to stress and frustration between home and school for Hope, so she then added suggestions for the group, “I believe professional boundaries are critical and stress management needs to be deliberate using multiple avenues to remove the burden of work from the mind.” For example, she listed working out, praying, appropriate venting, collaborating work, writing personal reflections and humor. She ended by saying, “Teachers have to continuously look outside of school to bring hope back into the school.”

**Mary** began by affirming Hope’s comment on professional boundaries and added how important it was to have a personal relationship with several members of your team, which she felt lessened the stress. She expanded by saying, “The people you work with may be the only people who truly understand what is going on in the school and classroom and that can be an outlet when you feel overwhelmed.” She added that she didn’t really like the term deep acting because it implies there is superficiality to the relationships we are building with people that are in our care. She described days where she feels emotionally stressed and that she just goes home and sits in silence for twenty minutes or so, and then she feels able to function or engage with friends or even prepare for the next day: “The constant pinging of students calling your name, or asking questions is demanding on any level, but when you add into the equation the genuine desire to hear and respond to each student, and make them feel valued, it quickly becomes exhausting.” She then asked the group, “Do any of you have advice or methods to have a healthier detachment from your job and your students, or a way to remain attached but allows you to let things go when you get home?” She continued by explaining instances in which she had taken part in “surface acting” and questions

whether she had actually experienced “deep acting.” She ended by posing this thought, “I wonder if the amount of emotional labor teachers experience depends on the life situations their students are dealing with and bring to school?”

**Faith’s** initial response to Hope’s question above, was Yes! Yes! Yes! She too has experienced both types of emotional labor, and she recalled interactions specifically with the building principal when she would walk through and ask, “How are you?” She went on to describe her current setting as a soap opera, one where she feels as if she’s acting on a deeper level. Faith understands that teachers vent, and she often finds herself sympathizing, rationalizing or understanding their frustrations. The problems occur when the next person comes in with the opposing feelings and again you feel obligated to concur. Faith commented, “It creates a very tense and dishonest environment.” She went on to explain that sometimes you have to “act” with students, but those interactions felt valuable to the student’s success: “Acting in relationships with students and families helps keep a positive environment and maintain clear communications.” The remainder of the interactions came from other community members reporting similar experiences and speaking to how they deal with emotional labor currently and hope to in the future.

**Non-prompt interaction.** In between prompt #2 and prompt #3, **Hope** posed a question to the group, “I have found myself student teaching in a place where technology is almost non-existent. Do you have any ideas for teaching grammar to sixth graders without using worksheets? Most of my students understand nouns, verbs, and adjectives, but they really struggle with capital letters, ending punctuation, and subject-verb agreement.”

**Grace** quickly offered support by challenging **Hope** to do something with centers.

She went on to offer resources for ideas and even talked about what she is using in her current fourth grade placement. Her interaction was positive and ended with, “Hopefully this helps, and let me know if you need ideas later this week.”

**Prompt #3:** In a matter of weeks, you will be a professional teacher. I think there is a tendency for first year teachers to feel overwhelmed and isolated. The research is full of studies regarding teachers leaving the field, frustrations with behavior management and feelings about provided support. Often I hear back from BC graduates that they don’t feel prepared for their first year of teaching and often are even “grumpy” about how they were trained in these halls. Somewhere about the third year of teaching, I begin to hear back from the same people with the message that they were in fact well prepared and while they didn’t know how to problem solve, they did have the tools to engage in problem solving activities. What do you envision for your first year of teaching? What are you most excited about? What supports will you need to be successful? What have you begun to consider for ongoing professional development? Let’s work towards creating a list of supports you feel necessary for first year teachers. How might this list help you craft an interview question?

The final prompt served as a segue between the excitement of student teaching and their future role as a professional teacher.

The first response was that of a community member who posted comments about feeling prepared for her first teaching job. She included three specific pieces of advice: persevere, ask for help and balance. Additionally, she included a list of ideas for professional development that included keeping in touch with other first year teachers in order to feel like you are not alone in your struggles. **Grace** responded back in

agreement especially about balance; she also responded to another member who discussed including your personality in your classroom and creating an inviting atmosphere. The member also added to the previous members' list of ideas for professional development by including reading professional books. Grace added to the discussion by explaining how she keeps her future reading material for professional development organized using an app on her phone. She continued with four bullets answering questions from the prompt. Grace reported being excited about her future teaching opportunities, and while she was concerned about working with parents, she felt like she had the skills to do it. She commented, "I think I'll keep in touch with my BC friends and others who have mentored me throughout my college career." As far as professional development, Grace added, "Read A-LOT including articles and resources online." She also shared a new teacher checklist with the group for their first year of teaching.

**Mary** started her response admitting to her fears, "The fact that I'll be standing in front of a room of kids who are completely my responsibility is nothing short of terrifying." She went on to share nightmares she has had about the kids not talking to her or the awkward silence she may experience because no one really knows what to do. Mary went on to explain that she knew that she did have the knowledge and resources available to her including the staff where she will be teaching. She is also excited about creating her own learning environment in her future classroom, which will include rules and procedures to provide structure in her classroom. She described her future classroom as a safe place where students can take risks and feel accomplished while feeling a sense of belonging. She closed her post with, "There is no way to really prepare for your first

year as a teacher, but taking advantage of your resources, and reaching out to those with experience will hopefully make the transition easier. **Grace** commented, “I wish there was a like button!” Other members also painted their vision for the future and listed concerns and areas for professional development, others also voiced their fear of working with parents. **Grace** shared an app that her cooperating teacher uses to communicate with parents, without giving out her personal phone number. She used the app to send out a daily message to parents including homework or other classroom reminders. Grace added, “I think we’ve avoided some issues just by reminding parents of upcoming events, they feel like they’re in the loop.” **Mary** agreed and cautioned the group to always remain professional even if they are having an issue with a parent. She mentioned to avoid emotional words in emails and she suggested that someone always proofread your email before you send it to a parent. She added that it was important to stick to the facts and not to make a personal attack. She also described her interactions with helicopter parents, “Don’t let them push you around, find a common ground to use to come to a solution.” **Faith** joined the discussion also sharing mixed emotions, “I feel excited, anxious, nervous, and to be honest, I’m incredibly scared.” She went on to talk about the uncertainty of not knowing where she’ll be teaching next year and how that can be stressful at the same time she feels prepared: “I hope to develop a strong working community with respect from students, I know this won’t happen overnight, but it can happen because I’ve seen it.” She plans to get involved in her school community by going to games, plays, or concerts. As far as professional development, “I know I will continue taking classes, going to conferences, reading articles, the possibilities are endless, I’m on the edge of my seat thinking about next year!” Another member

concluded and added how helpful it was that others were saying the same things that she is also feeling.

**Hope** anticipates that her first year of teaching will be a struggle: “I think that first year teachers feel stuck with whatever has started at the beginning of the year-and I know better than that.” She went on to share how she planned to rearrange or toss out what wasn’t working and develop a new plan, and she felt excited about implementing her own ideas.” She is a little worried about administration support, or speaking out when she should not as a new teacher: “I’m going to need the support of encouraging people to tell me that I’m still a good teacher, but also will help me get better.” She hoped to have Skype parties with those also in their first year from Benedictine College, and she identified this as part of her professional development. She talked about being mentally prepared for the challenges and also not being afraid to ask people questions. She concluded by saying, “You also have to develop your own habits of forgiveness, or this job will eat you up.”

**Phase Three** of data collection included two parts. First the students wrote a reflective essay about what they would tell a preservice teacher about the online community experience. This was an attempt to get the participants to think deeply about their participation and what they noticed before the final interview. The second part of Phase Three was the final interview. The final interview focused on the individual participants’ perceptions of their engagement, benefits, or challenges they experienced, and the role of online community in their future teaching career.

**Reflective Essay Prompt:**

*After participating in the online community, what would you tell a preservice*



*teacher about the experience?*

**Faith.** Faith first shared that the online community was interesting and she could see how this type of community could benefit the educational setting. She said the online community allowed the participants to discuss relevant questions and receive advice on situations they were facing. She added that while they met in person for the seminar class once a week, the online community was more accessible during the week. She described the seminar class as limiting because of the time frame: “Meeting with people is great, but you don’t have enough time to touch base with all the topics you need to.” She did suggest that an online community would even be better if you could set aside times during the week to read the entries. Faith also believed that by typing out her responses, she was forced to think more deeply about the topics: “You do miss a lot of hidden language when you are reading things instead of hearing them in person.” Overall, Faith reported that she would tell a preservice teacher to stay active in community, and while there are pros and cons with the online venue, she would suggest they try it to see if it works for them.

**Grace.** Grace also reported the online community was helpful for her and that she could see professional development moving towards this format in the near future. She believes that to be a good teacher, you need to be a lifelong learner and seek professional development. She stated, “I think it was mainly effective because we already had relationships with the people in the group.” She also said that she preferred commenting online versus in person, and she added that the format made it easy and convenient. Grace also liked that people could post when they wanted instead of trying to coordinate times to meet each week. She also felt like a shy person might be more inclined to share

in the online community as opposed to the seminar class. Finally, she added, “The amount you give is the amount you will get, if you invest in yourself, your classroom, your students and professional development you will reap what you sow.”

**Hope.** After briefly participating in this online community, Hope would advise a new teacher to try the online community in addition to any other system that provides support. Hope felt as though the online community exposed her to new points of view on subjects. Even though some posts she read she considered meaningless, it was still a way to give your opinion freely in a non-gossiping way: “A new teacher should be able to see that the online community is a place for personal benefit, not necessarily the coddling comfort of a mother’s arms.” She also pointed out that some online communities could be a place to vent, but she thought it was a better place to problem solve and remain positive. Hope concluded by stating, “By sharing or reading other’s opinions on aspects in education, someone new can be reminded that they are not alone in the struggle.”

**Mary.** Mary starts her response, “Entering this experience I had no teaching experience at all, much less experience participating in an online community with preservice teachers like myself.” She went on to add that after the three-week experience, she gained insights, which she explained in detail. First, she said that you have to put effort into something to get something back from it, and therefore she saw the opportunity as a valuable experience to talk with preservice teachers that might be experiencing something much different than herself. The online community also gave her a chance to collaborate with not only K-6 teachers but also special education teachers, which she found to be interesting. It helped her to practice interacting with future professionals, which is an essential skill to have moving forward into her teaching career.

Mary commented, “I followed the discussion board, and was willing to not only post my own thoughts, but to comment on other threads as well, the more engaged I was in the discussion, the more meaningful the experiences of other preservice teachers became.” While she felt the prompts started the conversations, she believed that the real meaning took place within the discussion itself: “These experiences meant something beyond a simple reflection piece, because they addressed real and authentic struggles or fears within the classroom.” Mary felt comforted when her peers also had the same concerns or questions, even if she had not verbalized her concerns. For Mary, the most meaningful part of the experience was not so much the learning, although she did learn, but it was seeing that she was not alone in what she was feeling and trying to do. She went on to state as a rookie, “It’s imperative not to isolate yourself.” She described a setting in which that could easily happen and felt a supportive community would be key to survival. Mary identified the third prompt as being the one that she felt the most interested in, as it was personal and she could relate and feel reassured: “I think that participating in a community such as this one is a valuable opportunity, I would recommend that other preservice teachers look for similar types of professional development, along with meaningful relationships with fellow teachers as well.”

### **Final Interview**

**Faith.** Faith’s early motivation to participate in the online community was because it was part of the seminar class and she was expected to participate. She also felt motivated to share her ideas about current topics in education with her peers. When reflecting back on the discussion, she felt reassured that while people may have said things in different manners, the community for the most part agreed, which was

interesting to her.

Faith explained that her engagement each week was dependent upon how busy she was with student teaching: “It takes a lot of time to go in and read them all, you want to know what everyone is saying-so you’re not repeating.” Her engagement was influenced by the topic of the prompts, and when something was personal or resonated with a current experience, she was more likely to contribute. She appreciated the time to interact with the different seminar class, which she believed connected the online piece to their overall student teaching experience verses the seminar class. When asked if the online experience extended her learning on topics in the seminar class, she answered, “It definitely extended my thinking because it opened my eyes up to more opinions, more viewpoints.” While Faith reported she did not necessarily have the opportunity to problem solve, she did witness others problem solving, and that was beneficial for her.

Faith liked that the online community was accessible to her whenever she was available, as she felt as if she had a problem she could have turned to the community at any time. Even though the feedback might not have been immediate, she still felt as though it was faster than waiting for the upcoming seminar class. She did feel that at times she was just too busy with student teaching to participate.

When asked if her contributions were representative of who she was as a community member she said, “No, it takes me too long to read and type, I’d rather be actively involved in a conversation.” She went on to add that it was hard to follow people’s train of thought at times and she was missing the affirmation of a traditional community. While she did admit that she has improved getting her thoughts down in a written format, Faith said she still struggles with what is in her head and how to say it

clearly. She learned, that because of this struggle, she prefers traditional community even though she liked the conveniences of online community.

Even though Faith preferred the traditional setting, she would participate in another online community in the future: “I would if it was in addition to a traditional, personal community.” She added that she did enjoy the online community and felt as if the topics were an extension from their student teaching experience and the seminar class. She added, “The seminar class was a community because we were all there for a common purpose and we all care about each other’s experience, but at the same time we can relate because we’re all in the same boat.” She felt as if the seminar community was able to share its concerns through the online community, even though it took her a week or so to get into the format. She added that the online community was different from normal “social groups” because people were engaged with a purpose in mind.

**Grace.** Initially Grace was looking for support from the online community and to build deeper relationships with people she already knew. She felt as though the online piece gave her an opportunity to interact with people and hear about their experiences and also explore different perspectives from diverse settings. Grace spends her time looking for new ideas for her future classroom, and she saw this space as another place to find this information: “I can totally see this as future professional development that would work for me.” She felt as the topics would be deeper in that setting because currently student teachers are primarily struggling with cooperating teachers as opposed to improving their teaching practice.

Grace reflected on a time when a peer reached out to the community with a problem: “I felt like I was more of a support person for her, even though I offered her

some suggestions.” Grace felt as if they were all lacking experience and that made it difficult to offer suggestions supported in what they had experienced or read about. She liked the organization of the online community and felt as if the prompts gave them a starting point, but she also felt that with time and experience, it would be valuable for the group to bring the topics to the community.

Schedules are a problem for most communities, and while the online community opened the time frame up, it was still important for everyone to interact within the same time period. For example, “On the first day I posted something, but no one else had posted and then I had to remember to go back and look at the post, or I would then miss the interaction.” Grace felt because she had previous relationships with several participants they held more outside conversations. She reported that she talked with participants about the prompt in person and even reminded each other to log back in and interact. She felt as if the relationships were key to the success of the community and that the online piece extended the conversations of the seminar class. Grace felt by developing relationships with people it is possible to have deeper conversations and actually learn more from each other as opposed to participating with people you do not know personally. She also felt that the online piece added a reflective piece for her that is valuable to all teachers, “the structure of the online community provided an established routine for me to reflect about my practice.” The organization was supportive and she felt like maybe adding some guiding questions each week for the sole purpose would benefit new teachers.

Grace likes the opportunities that technology has to offer classrooms, and she also believes that Blackboard is somewhat limiting and would explore other options such as

Edmodo or Facebook for the classroom. She wants more options similar to social media, “Our generation thinks more like social media, not the traditional discussion board setting.” She would like to participate in this type of experience again, “Contingent on the fact that I have built relationships with the people.” She described times when she has been on Pinterest or blogs to find ideas, and she admitted that she could not really see herself conversing with these people, or working closely with them to answer questions and improve her teaching. She felt it was similar to “How do I get this organized, that’s not a community.” Even though she could feel supported by people she did not know personally for resources, she didn’t think they could help her with certain situations with say a particular student: “Even though the Benedictine group right now are in different settings, we still have commonalities, but most importantly authentic relationships.” She hopes to participate in what she called “a future guided professional development” similar to the online experience.

**Hope.** Hope came from a different place than the other participants, as she had already seen the value in online community from her previous “stalking” of teacher blogs. She found the interactions from random strangers to be interesting and informative and she wanted to know more about online community experience.

She was quickly disappointed by people’s initial interactions: “People treated it like a homework assignment where they wanted to just get done and out of there.” Hope felt as if most people put considerable effort into the first thread and less so as the three weeks continued. She added, “You can tell how motivated certain people were to participate just by reading what they said.” She also felt that because they already had a community in place that the group was not really relying completely on the online

community for support. She discussed that she also thought they move into their first year of teaching, the isolation phase, she believes this could play a huge part in whether new teachers feel supported. Additionally, she sees this as a way for teachers across the country to connect: “Being a teacher in the profession generally makes you a part of a community, everyone knows what that is and offer you advice.” She sees the online piece playing a big role in connecting the world and the larger community.

While she felt engaged within the community, she wanted the conversation to progress to a deeper level not necessarily just about experiences. She added, “I tried to start a personal thread with a problem and only one person responded.” Hope continued, “I felt like why am I putting effort into something that clearly nobody else wants to do?” She felt as though not everyone was interested in the online community, and to make it valuable you have to create a community in which everyone is there for the same purpose.

Hope liked that the online piece was connected to the seminar class and included elementary student teachers. The special education group extended the prompt discussion beyond the online venue and discussed the topics outside in social gatherings, and she was surprised to hear the regular education teacher’s opinions on certain prompts. Hope noted that this experience between the two groups was not only valuable to her as a future teacher, but it could also provide the education department with insights to how to improve their program.

The first thread Hope reported to have the most meaningful interactions, but there were other posts in the three weeks that interested her. She reported that when she read the post on parent interactions, she spent the entire day rolling the thread over in her mind trying to think about how she felt as a future teacher: “It made me think more deeply



about the topic and also sparked questions about my future setting.”

As far as benefits or challenges within the setting, Hope enjoyed reading the comments and reported it only took her about 30 minutes to take in the conversations. She said that it sparked outside conversations and even sharing between peers when one of the other participants sent her an additional video on a topic. She felt supported by the community, stating that “It was nice to know that we were all going through the same thing.”

Hope felt as if the online interactions were representative of who she is as a community member, and she felt included within the community. She does not care for typing, but doing so made her think about what she was posting. She did say that at times she wanted to be sarcastic and felt like she could not because someone might have interpreted it wrong: “I guess that I learned that maybe I really don’t want to communicate sarcastically professionally.” Hope looks forward to participating in online community in the future as she found it to be beneficial. While she thinks that sometimes the online interactions are not necessarily personal she was ok with that, she thinks it is powerful when several people report the same findings about a problem she has posed. To her, it is more about the engagement, “Community for me is about engaging with a human being about a topic we are both passionate about and seeking advice and solving problems.”

**Mary.** Mary admits to not being motivated to join the online community, but she thought the subject was interesting and warranted her time. She felt as though the initial conversation was forced which she attributes to the somewhat “stiff” prompts. Mary thought by posing prompts you were eliciting answers verses a dialogue. She also

thought she was a little disconnected from the Special Education seminar, even though there were several participating from her seminar class. She rated her initial engagement on a scale of 1-10 as a solid two that grew into a seven over time. Mary felt more engaged within the dialogue as opposed to answering the prompts. She felt somewhat intimidated at times, “I didn’t want to be that person that was responding to every single post, especially because I wasn’t as well versed as other participants.” She added that while she felt less engaged in the moment, she had deep conversations about the topics with another participant that she carpoled with back and forth to her student teaching placement. She described times where they would both participate in the online community, then get in the car, talk about it, and take the conversation back to the online community. Mary added, “I definitely think my participation made me think more deeply about the topics and extended the conversation with my peers.”

The seminar class for her was disconnected from the online community, but she believed the student teaching experience was connected. People posed questions with the online community, and while they offered suggestions, she was unable to judge whether their problems or questions were actually solved. She did add that people may have used the information online to support solving questions, but it was difficult to judge if that happened or not. Mary added that it helped her to avoid potential problems. She then discussed the dialogue about burnout and how it helped her to potentially avoid that happening to her in her future teaching career. That particular topic sparked some anger in Mary that caused her to think more deeply about the topic, as she felt as if the question was posed as a simple question but really it was very complex. She felt awareness within the experience and supported when other participants had similar experiences.

Mary felt challenged by the moderator's questions, and she wished that participants would have taken over more and the moderator would have stepped back from guiding the conversation: "I would have liked the students to have moderated the conversation more, which would have been reflective of a true community." She thought the dialogue was formal, but the personal conversations she had about the topics were more real, and she attributed that to having a deeper relationship with the participant she rode with each day. Mary did not feel as if her online interactions were representative of who she had been as a traditional community member: "I felt super under qualified to comment at times." She felt as if she was almost stalking people as could be done on social media: "It just wasn't as authentic." She did add that the experience was extremely eye opening, and she began to realize that she had a great student teaching placement, unlike some of her peers. More than anything, "I realized how very important it is to dialogue between general education and special education." She added that she experienced this dialogue first hand within her placement and to hear from others that it did not always happen that way was disturbing to her.

When asked if she had the opportunity to problem solve within the online community, she answered, "I don't think if I had a pressing issue I would have posted it, that would not have been my first resource." However, she felt as though the opportunity "to watch" other people's responses allowed her to realize that it would be ok to reach out for help in a similar experience. Mary felt as if exploring a larger community that was not necessarily connected to her setting would be useful for her in the future: "There are people outside of my building that could help me develop as a teacher." Mary felt as if the online experience helped her to see that as a possibility.

## Summary of Chapter 4

Chapter 4 presented the findings in detail for each participant starting with their initial perceptions about online community and ending with their thoughts about the online experience and the implications for their future career. Chapter 5 will connect the finding to the research questions and discuss the implication and the limitations of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 will make suggestions for further research and present final thoughts.

## Chapter 5

Central to this study is the idea that people who form a group, share a passion or concern, and meet regularly consequently learn how to do what they do better (Wenger, 2011). Teacher preparation programs across the nation are challenged with preparing preservice teachers for a complex setting. Creating opportunity for preservice teachers to practice professional collaboration using 21<sup>st</sup> century resources is critical to their success. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore preservice teacher's perception about participating in online community and determine whether their participation extended their learning and understanding of essential topics. The following section will address the findings in relation to the research questions.

### Major Findings

**Question One:** In what ways do pre-service teachers extend learning/understanding by engaging in an online community?

Multiple findings emerged from the data. First, all focal participants reported that their participation within the online community extended their learning and understanding. While several of the participants felt as if the prompts narrowed the

topics discussed, they still felt as if their learning was extended beyond the seminar class and their student teaching experience. Each participant cited specific examples, including, “I definitely think my participation made me think more deeply about the topics and discuss with my peers my understanding,” and “I woke up in the morning after reading the post and started to think about how I want to handle parent interactions.” One participant mentioned that her participation also sparked further questions she had about topics that were discussed within the online community, which lead to outside conversations with not only her peers but also her mentor. Interestingly, the two special education participants and the two elementary education participants each commented that they learned more about the other group. Hope commented, “I thought it was interesting to see the opinions of the regular education group.” All participants found value in practicing this type of dialogue similar to ones they will have in their future teaching career.

Second, participants stated that they felt supported within a community. Each of them noted that while their experiences were often different from others, they were also similar. This provided each of them with a sense that they were not alone in the challenges of student teaching. Mary commented, “It was affirming to see other people struggle, it’s like it’s not just me.” In addition, while each participant had different “words” or characteristics to describe the experience community, they all agreed that it was a form of community.

Third, participants reported that their participation stimulated “reflective thinking” not only about their student teaching experience but also their future career as a teacher. Participants appreciated the opportunity to reflect about topics such as emotional

labor and balancing home life with a teaching career, which are topics that will impact their effectiveness as a teacher. For example, “We talk about reflection in our methods courses, and this was just another good way to see how reflection might work.” This particular finding is especially important to participants’ future career, where effective teaching is routinely linked to reflective thinking dating back to John Dewey (Farrah, 1988).

The fourth finding related to the participants’ ability to share their experience and problem solve within the online community. All four participants found value in not only sharing their experiences, but also in reading about their peers’ experiences. Particularly, during the prompt about “Emotional Labor,” they liked hearing about other’s thoughts and experiences. Additionally, each of the participants discussed varying levels of problem solving within the community, and several mentioned interactions where people were able to get advice or share ideas; all felt as if they benefited from either contributing to the problem solving process or as an observer.

Table 3  
*Themes, Meaning, and Example Statements Derived from Focal Participants Data  
 Supporting Question 1*

Theme	Meaning	Examples
Extended learning and understanding beyond the classroom.	Focal participants understood that their interactions within the online community extended their learning and understanding about educational topics.	<p><b>Faith:</b>  <i>“The discussion made me think because I was able to hear other people’s opinions.”</i></p> <p><b>Hope:</b>  <i>“I think my participation made me think deeply about topics beyond the classroom.”</i></p> <p><b>Mary:</b>  <i>“The discussion I had in person with people was pushed by the topics we discussed in the online community.”</i></p>
Became a place for professional support and community.	Focal participants felt supported within the community.	<p><b>Faith:</b>  <i>“We were all there for a common purpose.”</i></p> <p><b>Hope:</b>  <i>“I was really surprised and pleased with how professional everybody was, even if their comment was negative, it was still professional.”</i></p> <p><b>Mary:</b>  <i>“It was nice to see when people were like this is something that’s hard for me and I thought man I’m not the only one feeling this.”</i></p>

Participation stimulated reflective thought.	Focal participants understood that reflective thought is a part of growing.	<p><b>Grace:</b>  <i>“I think it’s very important for us to have opportunity to reflect on our own practice.”</i></p> <p><b>Mary:</b>  <i>“Definitely thinking about some of those things on a deeper level, the burnout surface level question really bothered me, he was posing a simple question-but it wasn’t really simple. I reflected on that one a lot because it made me angry.”</i></p>
Served as a place to share experiences.	Focal participants saw value in sharing experiences with other members.	<p><b>Faith:</b>  <i>“It allowed us to have the opportunity to discuss relevant topics and share our experiences.”</i></p> <p><b>Grace:</b>  <i>“It was good to hear experiences that your peers were having, especially the special education teachers.”</i></p> <p><b>Hope:</b>  <i>“I feel like teachers who have been in the field a long time seem out of date.”</i></p>

**Question Two:** What are preservice teacher’s perceptions about participating in an online community?

Three additional findings emerged connected to question two. First, each of the participants felt as if the online community provided a flexible venue for professional development. Participants initially reported that from their limited experience, they noticed one main benefit between online community and traditional community and that was the flexibility to come and go and contribute when their schedule permitted. After participating with the study, they conferred that this was beneficial. The participants also



felt as if it embraced the reality of their generation, “We’re already on technology, which makes it easy for us to access the community.” Even though one participant found the flexibility to be a benefit, she did suggest adding parameters to participation, such as respond by a certain date or checking in each day.

Next, each participant reported that the online community was built on relationships and mutual engagement. The participants’ perception stemmed from the fact that they all had previous relationships within the seminar class; they believed that this transferred to the online community. They believed this made interacting within the online community easier and provided depth to the conversation. While they admit that it was possible to build relationships online with people you didn’t previously know, they found that knowing the participants added to their engagement. Additionally, each participant reported different levels of engagement, and they attributed this to their busy schedule, stress within their student teaching placement, or their interest in the prompt presented.

Finally, overall the participants reported that the benefits of participating within an online community far outweigh the negatives, and each of them would consider participating within an online community in the future. One participant did add that she would only participate if the online piece was in addition to a personal community. Benefits the participants reported included opportunity to discuss relevant topics, a place to seek advice, flexible venue, supportive and encouraging community, the extension of understanding and learning, documentation of interactions, and the opportunity to discuss different viewpoints from other future teachers. Challenges the participants faced included lack of mutual engagement, difficult to stay on top of all the posts when they

were busy, prompts created feeling of homework verses authentic posts, and a dislike of Blackboard as the online tool.

Table 4

*Themes, Meaning and Example Statement Derived from Focal Participants Data  
Supporting Question 2*

Theme	Meaning	Examples
Flexible venue for community.	Focal participants appreciated the flexibility of participating in online community.	<p><b>Faith:</b> <i>“I like how it’s accessible anytime.”</i></p> <p><b>Hope:</b> <i>“What’s nice about being online is that you can go back and re-read it, you don’t have to remember it exactly it’s documented.”</i></p> <p><b>Hope:</b> <i>The internet is powerful and I want to embrace the resource.”</i></p> <p><b>Mary:</b> <i>“I like that it opens community up to outside of your building.”</i></p>
Online community benefits outweigh the negatives.	The focal participants would participate within an online community again.	<p><b>Faith:</b> <i>“I don’t want to get stuck in a rut, I want to look outside my community to get ideas.”</i></p> <p><b>Mary:</b> <i>“I think one of the benefits was just being more aware, realizing truly what goes in special education.”</i></p>
Built on relationships.	Focal participants identified relationships as being key to engagement in online community.	<p><b>Grace:</b> <i>“I would participate again, contingent on the fact that I developed relationships with the people, that’s key.”</i></p> <p><b>Mary:</b> <i>“It’s important to build relationships in a community...”</i></p>

## Implications

This study has several implications for teacher education programs. First, there is power in providing preservice teachers opportunity to not only practice skills, such as participating within an online community, but to also think deeply about using these skills in their future teaching career. Participants in this study reported little experience with online community during the initial interview. But after their participation, they embraced this 21<sup>st</sup> Century example of community. The challenge is to adjust traditional teacher education paradigms to provide similar opportunities that would also be present in their future teaching setting (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, & Box, 2014; Nicholson & Bond, 2003). Using this study as a frame, I provide the following suggestions:

1. Provide opportunities for preservice teachers to practice skills that represent the demands of their future setting. This study provided participants opportunity to collaborate within an online community and the participants unanimously stated that the benefits outweighed the negatives. It is critical that teacher education programs provide similar opportunities.
2. Design opportunities that extend learning and understanding about current educational topics. Within this study, teachers were prompted to discuss current educational topics pertaining to not only their seminar course, but also the student teaching experience. Participants reported thinking deeply about educational topics and consequently, extended their learning beyond the classroom.
3. Plan opportunities that include collaboration between peers, mentors, and outside stakeholders. Participants identified multiple benefits from the collaboration they

- experienced online, they also concluded it would be important to seek ideas and professional growth from people outside of your current setting. While this study was an opportunity to collaborate with peers and mentors, it would be important to include outside community members in the future.
4. Assist preservice teachers in setting professional goals and finding 21<sup>st</sup> century resources to reach their goals. The second prompt about surface acting was designed to pique their interest, reflect on their current practice and think deeply about their plan or goals for the future and where they might look to answer questions they have about improving their practice.
  5. Include reflection within each opportunity to maximize preservice teacher growth. Specific to this study was the reflective essay, the essay was a place for participants to reflect in a written format about their online experience before the final interview, the essay was a precursor for articulation of their understanding of the online community.

According to Glenda E. Partee (2012) at the Center for American Progress, “Consensus is elusive when it comes to improving our nation’s public schools, except for one key point, teacher effectiveness.” (p. 57). Retention is at the root of this issue and beginning teachers are the most vulnerable (Brownell, Hirsch, and Seo, 2004). *How do we not only prepare, but also support new teachers in a way that they don’t feel isolated and overwhelmed by the demands of a complex setting?* One way to address these issues is to design opportunities for preservice teachers to practice 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Additionally, we have to solve the problem of new teachers feeling isolated and overwhelmed. Wenger’s multi-layered framework fits well with the educational setting

because schools include multiple levels of teaching experience (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011). Situating Wenger's COP online for preservice teachers to practice and adding similar opportunities at the P-12 level could possibly address both of these issues, ultimately improving retention and teacher effectiveness.

In conclusion, Lieberman and Mace (2010) argue that until we address the retention issue, it is difficult to retain effective teachers. It is essential that teacher education programs adjust the current paradigm to mirror the educational climate and prepare preservice teachers for the challenge. As quoted by John F. Kennedy, "Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are sure to miss the future.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Preservice teachers' participation within an online community may actually provide valuable opportunity to experience the benefits of using online tools for future professional development. However, more research is needed to understand if that is actually the case.

More specifically, within a constantly changing educational climate it is necessary to have more understanding about providing experience with the most applicable tools. For example, this study used Blackboard as a tool; it needs to be explored if there are there more current tools available to teachers, including tools that are more user friendly and provide a more authentic experience.

Finally, because it is clear that 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies are changing in the blink of an eye, how can we support effective collaboration between teacher education programs and P-12 settings to design opportunities to practice these tools while including both groups? It would be interesting to create an online community that not only

included preservice teachers but also their cooperating teachers and university faculty.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A good researcher identifies possible limitations to their work, and this study includes several limitations. First, this study is small, and in addition, the four focal participants were all enrolled at a small Catholic, liberal arts college and came from similar backgrounds. Therefore, the findings should only be generalized to similar situations.

Next, my role within the setting could have influenced participation and results within the study. While I embraced my role as a researcher, it was difficult to erase previous experiences students may or may not have had with me. This research design included triangulation in an attempt to provide a lens to discover possible flaws in the data.

Finally, in addition to the small nature of this study, the timeline was short and only included part of a semester. This suggests that a more extensive study would provide more data for additional insights about the participants' online experience.

### **Final Thoughts**

Teaching is one of the most challenging yet rewarding careers one might choose. Teacher educators need to provide preservice teachers with the skills, understanding, and practice they need to be successful. Preservice teachers need opportunity to practice skills using tools and resources from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ideally in conjunction with professional growth. While this study found that preservice teachers benefited from their participation within an online community, this is a small piece of the overall puzzle. It is important to be mindful of the current stakes in the educational system and continue to explore other

opportunities to support preservice teachers not only as they prepare to teach but also as they navigate the first years of their teaching career.

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## Appendix A

### Benedictine College IRB Approval



Notification of Approval  
Approval date: January 4, 2016  
IRB project # 15-14

Piper Wentz  
Education Department  
Benedictine College

Dear Piper,

The Benedictine College Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your research application "Creating Online Communities of Practice and Enhancing Pre-Service Teacher Growth: A Mixed-Methods Study" and found that it complies with policies established by the College for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

1. You must provide the IRB with an annual status report to maintain approval.
2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure as described must be reviewed by the IRB prior to altering the research.
3. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in the original application.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the IRB immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the Principal Investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed Informed Consent form, provide a copy to subjects at the time of consent.
6. IRB approval and expiration dates must be included on all Informed Consent forms.

7. If this is funded research, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform the IRB when this project is terminated. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after the approval date. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Douglas Brothers, Ph.D.  
Chair, Benedictine College IRB  
brothers@benedictine.edu  
913-360-7430

## Appendix B

### University of Kansas IRB Approval



#### APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

March 16, 2016

Piper Wentz  
p977w302@ku.edu

Dear Piper Wentz:

On 3/16/2016, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Creating Online Communities of Practice and Enhancing Pre-service Teacher Growth: A Case Study
Investigator:	Piper Wentz
IRB ID:	STUDY00003539
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• CreatingOnlineConsent.docx, • Piper Wentz, • Response to clarification.docx, • Email for recruitment , • Interview Protocol

The IRB approved the study on 3/16/2016.

1. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in the original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at [https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human\\_subjects\\_compliance\\_training](https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human_subjects_compliance_training).
2. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported immediately.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.

Continuing review is not required for this project, however you are required to report any significant changes to the protocol prior to altering the project.

Please note university data security and handling requirements for your project:  
<https://documents.ku.edu/policies/IT/DataClassificationandHandlingProceduresGuide.htm>

You must use the final, watermarked version of the consent form, available under the "Documents" tab in eCompliance.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Dyson Elms, MPA  
IRB Administrator, KU Lawrence Campus

## Appendix C

### Email to Potential Participants

Dear Potential Participants,

I'm sending this email to let each of you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study exploring online community specifically with preservice teachers.

This study was designed for my doctoral work at the University of Kansas. I am reaching out to all elementary and special education student teachers in the spring 2016 semester.

All participants will take part in an online discussion via Blackboard. Participants will pose questions or make comments about their student teaching experience and respond to each other's contributions. Dr. Matthew Ramsey will serve as a moderator and will provide guidance within the online experience. The participants will be expected to interact for three weeks beginning at the beginning of April, 2016.

Participating within this study will in no way affect your student teaching evaluation or expectation to graduate. If you decide to participate you will sign a consent letter, however if at any time you decide you do not want to participate you may opt out of this study.

Thank you for considering this opportunity. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation, please don't hesitate to contact me. Additionally, I will be available during seminar March 23rd to further explain the study and to answer your questions.

Sincerely,

Piper Wentz

## **Appendix D**

### **Consent Form**

#### **CREATING ONLINE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: ENHANCING PRE-SERVICE TEACHER GROWTH - A CASE STUDY**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

The Department of Curriculum and Teaching at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection of human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate; you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from the study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide for you, or the University of Kansas.

##### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study investigates the benefits of online community with pre-service teachers.

##### **PROCEDURES**

You must be enrolled in either ED 491 or ED 492 to participate in this research. Participants will take part in an online community via Blackboard for three weeks starting April 4<sup>th</sup> and ending April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016. The interactions within the online community traditionally take place within the student teaching seminar block, but will shift to the online venue for this research. You will be expected to participate daily within the time frame and respond to specific topics posed by Dr. Ramsey the moderator. The topics that will be explored include but are not limited to collaboration, emotional labor, and expectations of the first year of teaching. Additionally, four of you will be selected as a representative for the group, as a focal participant you will be interviewed individually at the beginning and end of the student teaching block. The interviews will be semi-structured in nature containing specific questions about online community. The four focal participants will also write a reflective type essay at the end of the three weeks. Piper Wentz will be doing the audio-recorded interviews and will also be responsible for transcribing the interviews. A participant will have the option of stopping the audio recording at any time. Piper Wentz will be the only person who has access to the recordings and they will be destroyed after transcription.



## RISKS

There are no risks anticipated for this study, however it is possible, with Internet communications, that through intent or accident someone other than the intended recipient may see your response.

## BENEFITS

You will potentially benefit from participating in the online community through extended support beyond the classroom.

## PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

There will be no payment to participants.

## PARTICIPANTS CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation of the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher will use a study pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless law requires it or university policy or you have given written permission. Students enrolled in ED 491/492, Dr. Ramsey, and Piper Wentz will know your identity within the online community. The purpose of disclosing your identity within the online community is to capitalize on the relationships needed for community.

If a parent or adult student requests, the school will provide him or her with a copy of the records disclosed.

## REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You're are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and may refuse to do so without affection your right to services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

## CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Piper Wentz, FAC #210, 1020 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Atchison, KS 66020.

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researcher will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher listed at the end of this consent form.

## PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to any questions I had regarding this study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call

(785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email [irb@ku.edu](mailto:irb@ku.edu).

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

\_\_\_\_\_ Type/Print Participant's Name

\_\_\_\_\_ Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

## Researcher Contact Information

Piper Wentz  
Principal Investigator  
Education Department  
1020 N. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street #210  
Atchison, KS 66002  
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Steven White, Ph. D.  
Faculty Supervisor  
Department of Curriculum and Teaching  
1122 W. Campus Road #330  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
(785) 864-4435

## Appendix E

### First Interview Protocol

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Interviewer: Today I will be asking you about your past experience working with others, you have plenty of time to think about your answers. If the question doesn't apply to your experience that's fine just say so or if you don't feel comfortable sharing that's fine too. Additionally, if there's something you want to add or talk about please let me know. I'm just trying to understand more about your initial experiences with community.*

1. Tell me about your experiences working with a community.
2. Thinking back to your experience, why did you consider it a community?
3. Do you have any experience with online community?
4. What about professional online community?
5. Can you share with me what that looked like?
6. When reflecting on your previous experiences, can you describe how online community and traditional community are the same or different?
7. In a few short days, you will be participating in an online community as part of this research, what expectations do you have for this experience?
8. Can you think of anything else about your previous experiences that you think would be important to think about before participating within an online community?

## Appendix F

### Online Prompts

**Prompt #1:** With the goal of inclusion, including special education students alongside their non-disable peers to the maximum extent possible, general education and special-education teachers must work together even more than before. Special education no longer exists as a place, but rather a service provided to students who are first and always-general education students. The two types of teachers must collaborate not only for reporting data collection, but also for co-teaching and collaborative instructional planning. For the first line of questioning, what have you seen during your student teaching experience so far? What examples of positive collaboration have you seen? Is there anything that you have noticed that gives you pause or concern? Are there things that you will want to do in your first job to insure high quality collaboration?

Please post your experiences and respond to each other's posts. Let's keep a dialog going and attempt to generate a list of best practice appropriate for collaboration between general and special education.

**Prompt #2:** There is quite a bit of research on the topic of emotional labor; the process of managing one's emotions as a requirement of employment. The topic is often broken down into two types of "acting." Surface acting is one portrays an emotion that is not necessarily genuine. Think of the person who takes your order at a fast food restaurant. They may ask you how your day is going, but socially we understand that it is not necessarily a genuine question. We are to respond positively even if we are having a less than ideal day. Again, this is surface acting. The second type of acting is called deep acting. This is when an employee is required to deeply engage with a client. As teachers

we are deep actors. As part of our work we create emotional bonds with our clients (students and families) and engage them in a professionally appropriate manner. One possible concern is if we are required to “act” in a manner that does not portray our true feelings. This can create emotional dissonance in the actor. Over time the clash between acted emotions and felt emotions can lead to stress and even burnout for the actor (teacher). One positive result is the possibility of transformation. Transformation is the phenomenon in which the actor has an emotional transformation. They see an experience, or a student, with new eyes and appreciation. For our discussion this week: Have you experienced either type of acting during your student teaching experience? Have you experienced any stress or frustration that might be explained to emotional labor? As professional teachers what might you be able to do to guard against the pitfalls of emotional labor? Let’s try to create a list of resources or suggestions on how first year teachers might avoid, or manage this type of stress.

**Prompt #3:** In a matter of weeks, you will be a professional teacher. I think there is a tendency for first year teachers to feel overwhelmed and isolated. The research is full of studies regarding teachers leaving the field, frustrations with behavior management and feelings about provided support. Often I hear back from BC graduates that they don’t feel prepared for their first year of teaching and often are even “grumpy” about how they were trained in these halls. Somewhere about the third year of teaching I begin to hear back from the same people with the message that they were in fact well prepared and while they didn’t know how to problem solve they did have the tools to engage in problem solving activities. What do you envision for your first year of teaching? What are you most excited about? What supports will you need to be successful? What have

you begun to consider for ongoing professional development? Let's work towards creating a list of supports you feel necessary for first year teachers. How might this list help you craft and interview question

**Appendix G**  
**Reflective Essay**

**Participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Participants: This essay will not be graded and will not in any way affect your student teaching evaluation. This is just another way to gather more information about the online experience. Your response may be handwritten or typed, please attach this as a cover to your final document.

*After participating in the online community, what would you tell a preservice teacher about your experience?*

## Appendix H

### Final Interview Protocol

**Participants Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Interviewer: Today I will be asking you questions about your experience participating within the online community for this study. Again, you have plenty of time to think about your answers. If the question doesn't apply to your experience that's fine just say so or if you don't feel comfortable sharing that's fine too. Additionally, if there's something you want to add or talk about please let me know. I'm just trying to understand more about your participation within the online community.*

1. What motivated you to initially participate within the online community?
2. What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think back to the online experience?
3. How would you rate your overall engagement with the online community? Why?
4. Do you think the online community was connected to the seminar class or the student teaching experience?
5. When thinking back to the experience, do you remember a time when either yourself or a member shared a problem with the group? What do you remember about that interaction?
6. After participating within the online community, could you share the benefits and challenges you faced?
7. Think of an interaction you had within the community, would you consider those interactions to be representative of who you are as a community member, why or why not?
8. Did you learn anything about yourself from participating?
9. Would you consider participating within an online community in your future teaching career? How do you think that might look?



**10.** Is there anything else that you would like to add about the online experience that would be relevant to this research?

**Appendix I**  
**Coding Manual**

	Interaction/Response	Code	Example
1	Participant request for information from community	RI	<p>Hope:  <i>“Does anyone have any ideas for teaching grammar to six graders without using worksheets?”</i></p>
2	Mapping/generating knowledge	MGK	<p>Grace:  <i>“We’ve talked about this together before, but I really like the way you put that.”</i></p>
3	Practice based concern or problem	PR	<p>Mary:  <i>“As someone who hasn’t been trained in special education at all, I don’t feel prepared.”</i></p> <p>Faith:  <i>“I’m struggling to find the balance of keeping them in the classroom with their peers and pulling them out.”</i></p>
4	Guidance & resources	GR	<p>Mary:  <i>“There is no way to really prepare for your first year as a teacher, but taking advantage of your resources makes the transition easier.”</i></p> <p>Grace:  <i>“New teacher checklist”</i></p> <p>Hope:  <i>“My favorite interview question so far has been-What do you like about this district?”</i></p>

- |   |  |     |   |
|---|--|-----|---|
| 5 | Seeking experience                         | SE  | <p>Grace:<br/> <i>“Parents are something that scares me, my teacher uses an app called “remind me” which allows texts without sharing numbers, has anyone else noticed any good tips for working with parents?”</i></p>   |
| 6 | Coordination and synergy                   | CS  | <p>Grace:<br/> <i>“It’s so awesome that you have PLC’s with the sped teacher, I think that would be so helpful.”</i></p> <p>Mary:<br/> <i>“It made me realize that there needs to be a dialogue between the two departments, I saw how frustrated members were, and it made me feel blessed to be in the situation I am.”</i></p> |
| 7 | Deeply thinking about topics or reflection | TR  | <p>Grace:<br/> <i>“I thought it was an opportunity to reflect, like at the end of the week I’ll reflect on ...”</i></p> <p>Hope:<br/> <i>“It really made me think about the topic deeply.”</i></p> <p>Mary:<br/> <i>Definitely thinking about some of those things on a deeper level.”</i></p>                                    |
| 8 | Renewing themselves                        | RT  | <p>Grace:<br/> <i>“We need to remember to not give up and there will be good days and bad days.”</i></p>  |
| 9 | Discussion beyond the classroom            | DBC | <p>Grace:<br/> <i>“I think it did extend the time because it wouldn’t have been discussed in the 1 hour seminar class.”</i></p> <p>Mary:</p>  |

			<i>"We drive together and we actually ended up talking about the questions in the car."</i>
10	Community characteristics	CC	Grace: <i>"I think it will be good to keep in touch with BC friends and other people who have been mentors to me here at BC."</i>
			Hope: <i>"I consider this community because I'm engaging with another human being."</i>
11	Benefits of online community	BOC	Faith: <i>"I like how it's accessible anytime, it's not like you have to go this time or this day or whatever."</i>
			Grace: <i>I liked being able to comment on other people's threads and just have that interaction."</i>
12	Challenges of online community	COC	Faith: <i>"One week I was extremely busy, I had a free moment and I went on to see 11 posts, I was overwhelmed."</i>
			Grace: <i>"I feel like if we didn't have previous relationships with members it wouldn't have been effective."</i>
			Mary: <i>"I think the way it was moderated was less than ideal."</i>
13	Connection to social media	CSM	Mary: <i>"Mary likes this comment."</i>

- Grace:  
*“Wish there was a like button!”*
- 14 Extending learning and understanding of educational topics ELU Grace:  
*“It was a mix of opportunities, prompts and question/answer, more like a guided professional development.”*
- Hope:  
*“We even mentioned the interactions in person and talked about the questions, it was really interesting.”*
- Mary:  
*“The topics were authentic to the student teaching experience.”*
- 15 Personal interaction PI Faith:  
*“I agree that a strong, professional positive relationship with other educators will definitely help with communications and collaboration.”*
- Grace:  
*“Support from my peers for sure.”*
- 16 Non-personal interaction NPI Hope:  
*“I think people treated it like a homework, assignment, it wasn’t real personal.”*
- Mary:  
*“The prompts were too formal to make it real personal.”*
- 17 Mutual engagement ME Faith:  
*“You’re actually talking with people who are in the same boat, it’s safety in numbers.”*
- Mary:  
*“Sometimes I wanted to respond,*

*but I didn't want to be that person who comments on everything."*

18 Not engaging

NE

Hope:  
*"Some of the prompts weren't very engaging because we were lacking the knowledge about the topics."*

Mary:  
*"I felt like the discussions were a little bit forced because of the questions being asked."*

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