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Language and Literacy in a Head Start Preschool: Understanding Practice to Inform Theory and Improve Outcomes

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LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN A HEAD START PRESCHOOL:
UNDERSTANDING PRACTICE TO INFORM THEORY
AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Curriculum & Instruction

by
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ABSTRACT

Head Start is a federally funded program providing comprehensive social and early education services to children from low-income households and their families. Seeking to boost outcomes of Head Start students, in 1998 Congress amended Head Start's statement of purpose, specifying school readiness as the program's top priority. This mission change necessitated that Head Start, long-focused on promoting social competence, shift attention to a new concern—supporting children's development in cognitive domains such as math and literacy. Data suggest that though some progress has been made, Head Start preschoolers still lag behind their peer group in assessments of early math, language, and literacy. The reasons why this problem persists are complex and may be better addressed at the local level.

This investigation—a case study of the four preschool classrooms comprising a Head Start center in the Southeastern United States—examines how teachers address early language and literacy in their practice; the extent to which literacy teaching and learning in Head Start classrooms supports emergent literacy; and the factors influencing practice decisions related to early language and literacy. Analysis of data, including teacher interviews, classroom observations, artifacts, photographs, and program quality evaluation reports, provide a rich and nuanced account of Head Start teachers' language and literacy dispositions and practices.

The study reveals the teachers support promoting language and literacy but have mixed understanding of Head Start's mandate to promote school readiness, and lack clarity regarding readiness goals for their center. The teachers attend to the domains of

language development and literacy because they feel compelled to prepare their students for the increasing demands they perceive are being made of kindergartners, rather than in response to Head Start's mandated purpose. As in previous studies, promoting phonological awareness was virtually absent from practice. The data suggests that teachers lack comprehensive knowledge of language and literacy elements comprising the domains. Further, though curriculum fidelity was outside the scope of the investigation, the evidence strongly suggests the teachers have significant gaps in their knowledge of HighScope, the curriculum used at the center.

DEDICATION

To my parents who empowered me, and my children who inspired me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This has been an incredible journey and I owe a debt of gratitude to scores of people who helped make it possible—family who supported me, friends who kept me smiling, staff who made doc life easier, and faculty who showed me the way.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

A substantial body of research indicates a strong link between children’s skills and abilities developed in preschool and later school success (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010; Gorey, 2001). Studies suggest, however, that the cognitive development of young children living in poverty lags behind that of their more affluent peers—a gap that has been observed in children as young as seven months, and that without intervention widens over time, setting the stage for learning challenges throughout their schooling (Betancourt, Brodsky, & Hunt, 2015; Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013). High quality preschool programs characterized by teachers engaged in evidence-based practice have been shown to have a positive impact on the growth and development of children living in poverty (Anders, et al., 2012; Peisner-Feinberg, et al., 2001). Head Start, which in 2016 provided early education to nearly one million children from low-income households (NHSA, 2017), is in a position to be a significant agent of change for millions of children living in poverty.

With an eye toward higher program quality and better outcomes for Head Start children, Congress passed legislation in 1998 that included initiatives aimed at improving structural aspects of Head Start, such as requiring centers to use evidence-based curricula, and increasing teacher education requirements. Moreover, it stipulated that promoting school readiness be made the primary focus of the program. Although school readiness is comprised of an array of cognitive and affective domain elements, Congress signaled a particular interest in Head Start’s efforts to promote language and literacy when it

mandated outcome data be collected for a group of skills, the majority of which were comprised by the language and literacy domains. Despite quality enhancing initiatives, and increased attention on cognitive domains, studies investigating the magnitude and longevity of the progress made by Head Start children have yielded mixed findings (Cooper & Lanza, 2014; Puma, Bell, Cook, & Heid, 2010; Puma et al., 2012). Although children who attend Head Start preschools make gains in math, language and literacy during Head Start their level of achievement upon leaving the program still falls short of norms for children their age (Aikens, Kopak Klein, Tarullo, & West, 2013). The research suggests that though structural elements of practice are viewed as necessary, they are not as predictive of child outcomes as process features such as instruction and teacher-child interactions (Bassok & Galdo, 2016).

Knowledge and beliefs have been demonstrated to impact classroom instruction in early childhood settings (Hamre, et. al., 2012; Miller & Smith, 2004; Nespor, 1987). An examination of the literature on Head Start teachers' attitudes and dispositions toward language and literacy and their language and literacy practices suggests an inconsistent interpretation of Head Start's articulated mission and a workforce relying on cognitions (i.e., a mixture of beliefs and knowledge) that are not necessarily aligned with present research (Hawken, Johnston, & McDonnell, 2005). Research investigating Head Start teachers' knowledge and beliefs, and practice decisions related to language and literacy is minimal, making it a topic ripe for investigation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to shed light on Head Start teachers' dispositions and practices regarding language and literacy and to illuminate variables that influence practice decisions. In addition to providing a snapshot of classroom language and literacy practice, it was hoped that interpreting what Head Start teachers do and say in the classroom, in consideration of identified obstacles or facilitators impacting their practice, would extend existing research or point to new strands of theory, and inform creation of site-specific, or local professional development.

Background

Head Start History

During a White House Rose Garden ceremony in the spring of 1965 President Lyndon Johnson introduced *Project Head Start* (Head Start), one of the most ambitious and far reaching federally funded programs to emerge from his “War on Poverty” (Johnson, 1969; OHS, 2015). A committee comprised of civil rights activists and experts from across disciplines associated with health, education and child development were convened to develop a summer demonstration program aimed at helping preschool children from low-income homes overcome the obstacles associated with living in poverty and reach their “full potential” (Joshi, et al., 2014, p. 2), thus improving the children’s chances for achieving future school success (Kagan, 2002; Zigler & Styfco, 2010). The results of their collaboration—a comprehensive program offering preschool education and a battery of services and social supports including nutrition guidance and access to medical and dental care to preschool age children and their families living in

poverty—was deemed a success after its first summer (Samuels, 2014; OHS, 2015). Encouraged by Head Start’s promising start and further buoyed by gains made by children in the highly touted Perry Preschool project, another 1960s era preschool intervention geared toward children living in poverty (Schweinhart, 2003), public enthusiasm for the project was strong, prompting Congress to expand Head Start (Zigler & Styfco, 2010). By the fall of 1965, Head Start’s first wave of partial-day, school year programs were up and running (OHS, 2015).

From the beginning, promoting children’s social competence was Head Start’s primary goal, and as such, social and emotional outcomes had been afforded primacy (Joshi, et al., 2014). Three decades after its launch however, a persistent gap in development between Head Start students and their more economically advantaged peers, and a lack of reliable research demonstrating lasting cognitive gains (Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007; Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2002; OHS, 1997) gave many the sense that Head Start could be doing a better job of preparing children from low-income families for success in school (Clemmitt, 2005; Gorey, 2001). Congress took note and made promoting school readiness the program’s mission and top priority when it passed the *Head Start Amendments Act* in 1998 (Public Law 105-285). Further, the 1998 Act specified that child outcome data be collected for certain skill indicators, the majority of which were affiliated with language and literacy. The legislation prompted the OHS in 2000 to create *The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework* (2000 Framework). The groundbreaking document describing cognitive, affective, and physical domains of development and learning was intended to provide grantees with guidance for curriculum

planning and assessment of child progress (OHS, 2003). (See Appendix A, *The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework*.)

School readiness was a popular concept and frequent topic of research in the 1990s, however, as a measurable construct it was not well defined (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Lewis & Baker, 1995; Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007). The 27-page OHS publication describing the 2000 Framework, *The Head Start Path to Positive Child Outcomes*, makes just three direct references to school readiness and does not offer a definition except to say given Head Start's concern with the whole child, social competence is part of school readiness (OHS, 2003). The document does however state that the framework is comprised of "building blocks that are important for school success" (p. 4), but does not suggest a meaningful change in direction in terms of the program mission. Many of those associated with Head Start chose to locate the concept within existing Head Start culture, equating school readiness with social competence, the original and longstanding focus of the Head Start program (Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004). When Head Start was reauthorized in 2007, Congress left no doubt that promoting school readiness was Head Start's priority and made it clear that school readiness should be regarded as something more than social competence. Language in the 2007 legislation, entitled *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*, specifies that the learning environment for promoting school readiness is one "...that supports children's growth in language, literacy, mathematics, science, social and emotional functioning, creative arts, physical skills, and approaches to learning" (Pub. L. 110-134, Sec. 2). In response to these more specific mandates, and in light of "new research" improving Head Start's "understanding

of school readiness” (OHS, 2010, p.4), the OHS published the *Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework* (2010 Framework). (See Appendix B, *Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework*.) Although the 2010 Framework highlighted school readiness as the aim of Head Start, an open letter introducing the 2010 Framework stated that the changes to the framework were intended to provide clarity to the domains of learning and the elements they comprised—not to be construed as new requirements for grantees (OHS, 2010).

At the same time, the OHS had taken a much stronger stance on promoting cognitive domains such as math and early language and literacy in light of significant research demonstrating their importance to school readiness and later school success (Duncan et al., 2007; OHS, 2010; Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006). Statements introducing the domains in the 2010 Framework echo the research. For example, the introduction to the mathematics domain states, “early math skills are highly predictive of later achievement in multiple subject areas” (OHS, 2010, p. 16; also see Duncan et al., 2007). Language and literacy development also receive strong endorsements. Literacy is described as “...critical for supporting a range of positive outcomes, including success in school and other environments” and language is considered “...the key to learning across all domains” (OHS, 2010, pp. 13–14). In the case of Head Start preschool children, the vast majority of whom live in poor or low-income families, supporting cognitive domains is particularly crucial.

Impact of Poverty on Growth and Development

Substantial research literature has made it increasingly evident that economically oriented gaps in development emerge very early in life. Tucker-Drob, Rhemtulla, Harden, Turkheimer, and Fask (2011) found SES-related differences in cognitive ability in children at 24 months of age. Halle et al. (2009) found such differences, along with disparities in health and social emotional development, in children 9 months old. In a recent study, Betancourt, Brodsky, and Hunt (2015) found that 7-month-old girls from lower SES households did not perform as well as their higher SES counterparts in assessments of infant language development. Similarly, Fernald, Marchman, and Weisleder (2013) found that by the age of 18 months children from low SES families lag behind their more economically privileged peers in both vocabulary and language development. In the preschool follow-up of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Birth Cohort, Chernoff, Flanagan, McPhee, and Park (2007) reported a nearly one standard deviation gap on measures of school readiness skills between children from families below the 20th percentile for SES and their middle class peers. Though findings vary regarding the precise age at which disparities are apparent, these studies when considered together with others (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2005) strongly suggest that SES gaps emerge when children are very young, and that without intervention such gaps persist, if not increase, over time.

Impact of poverty on language and literacy. As evidenced by the studies referenced above, the impact of poverty on children's language and literacy has been

observed in very young children. In terms of language development, the impact of poverty can be wide-ranging, affecting processes related to language processing, expressive language, and language comprehension (Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013; Hoff, 2006; Hoff, 2013; Huttenlocher, Vasilyeva, Cymerman, & Levine, 2002). Hoff (2013) suggests that vocabulary is particularly sensitive to the effects of a low SES environment. Though faulted for making sweeping conclusions based on data collected from an insufficient sample and interpreted from a deficit perspective, Hart and Risley's (1995) examination of the vocabulary differences in the children of professional, working class, and low SES families nonetheless bolstered the notion that factors associated with family income impacted learning and development. They found that by the age of 3, the more economically advantaged children had spoken more than 1000 words, more than double the number of words produced by children from low SES families. Similar SES-related differences have been found in other studies examining spontaneous speech as well as those assessing children's expressive and receptive vocabulary (Hoff, 2003; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1998; Rowe & Goldin-Meadow, 2009).

Poverty's impact on language and literacy development in young children extends well beyond underdeveloped vocabulary. Studies examining spontaneous speech found economically advantaged children outperformed low SES peers in measures of speech complexity and complex text comprehension, and in the variety of syntactic structures used (Dollaghan et al., 1999; Vasilyeva, Waterfall, & Huttenlocher, 2008). Similarly, Dollaghan and her colleagues (1999) also found that low SES children had lower scores than did their more affluent peers on standardized tests measuring grammar development.

Findings of SES-disparities in language development are also emerging from the field of neuroscience. For example, in studies of brain function, Hackman and Farah (2009) found neurological evidence of SES-related disparities in young children—most prominently in the areas of language and executive function. Disparities attributed to living in an impoverished environment are also present in children’s narrative skills (Vernon-Feagans, Hammer, Miccio, & Manlove, 2001); phonological awareness (Lonigan, Burgess, Anthony, & Barker, 1998; McDowell, Lonigan, & Goldstein, 2007); and word retrieval speed (Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013). High-quality preschool programs marked by research-based teaching practices and engaging teacher–child interactions yield significant long-term benefits for young children at risk for failure in school due to economic circumstances (Duncan, Ludwig, & Magnuson, 2007; Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikhart, 2005; Yoshikawa, Weiland, & Brooks-Gunn, 2016). High-quality literacy environments, which are associated with greater literacy ability (Cunningham, 2010), can mitigate the impact poverty has on language and literacy development (Sinatra, 2008; Teale, 2012; Wasik & Bond, 2001; Xu, Chin, Reed, Hutchinson, 2014).

Improving language and literacy outcomes for low SES children. Findings from studies focused on low SES children reinforce the contention that improving language and literacy outcomes is largely dependent on teachers’ implementation of research-based practices (Araujo, Carneiro, Cruz-Aguayo, & Schady, 2016; Burchinal, Roberts, Hooper, & Zeisel, 2000; Wasik & Hindman, 2011). A substantial literature suggests that children entering kindergarten with well-developed foundational language

and literacy skills are in a better position to acquire vocabulary knowledge (Dickinson & McCabe, 2001; Marchman & Fernald, 2008), phonological awareness (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000; Anthony & Lonigan, 2004), letter knowledge (Muter, Hulme, Snowling, & Stevenson, 2004; Skibbe, Connor, Morrison, & Jewkes, 2011); and for later success in reading comprehension (Lonigan et al., 2000; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network [ECCRN], 2005; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). In light of the profound body of research demonstrating that living in poverty can have a detrimental effect on young children's language and literacy, expert panels including the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) and the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP, 2008) have called for increased focus on emergent literacy in early childhood settings.

Head Start Teachers' Language And Literacy Views And Practices

There are questions regarding how Head Start teachers' regard emergent literacy and the ways language and literacy development are made present in Head Start classrooms. In a national survey of Head Starts teachers' literacy views and practices, for example, Hawken, Johnston, and McDonnell (2005) found that although most teachers regularly implemented a variety of instructional strategies focused on emergent literacy, the majority of activities focused on skills found on the lower end of the literacy development continuum (e.g., book handling and print awareness). The need for better understanding of Head Start teachers' practice is further supported by data gathered in mandatory assessments using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) instrument. The CLASS instrument measures individual program quality by rating a wide range of teacher-child interactions in a select number of classrooms at each Head Start

center. CLASS data indicate that Head Start teachers performed fairly well in the dimensions contained under the umbrella domains, “emotional support” and “classroom organization,” so indicated by having earned mean scores exceeding the high end of mid-level performance. Conversely, in the case of instructional support—the domain comprised of the dimensions most closely aligned with language and literacy development—the mean scores were at the low end or below mid-low performance (Pianta, La Paro, Hamre, 2008; OHS/ECLKC, 2016).

Effective early literacy and language practices do not happen simply because they are mandated by policy makers or training is available. Though mandates wield some influence and training may facilitate improved practice, ultimately it is in the hands of individual teachers to determine how theory is interpreted and whether or not it is implemented. Teacher practice, a substantial factor in program quality, is essentially the synthesis and animation of teacher cognition—their knowledge, beliefs, and dispositions. Understanding the nature of Head Start teachers’ practices and decision-making with respect to language and literacy helps inform interventions, policy recommendations, and program enhancements aimed at improving the quality of early education Head Start provides and the outcomes of children receiving services.

Research Questions

Specific to a Head Start program in the Southeast and its four lead teachers, the questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What characterizes the language and literacy practices of Head Start teachers?

2. To what extent do language and literacy practices in Head Start preschools address the essential elements of emergent literacy suggested by the literature?
3. What informs Head Start teachers' language and literacy decisions?

Significance of the Study

Closing the achievement gap while children are young is critical. This is particularly true in the case of emergent literacy given evidence in the research, including findings from The National Reading Panel (NRP) indicating that children's trajectories for reading achievement were fixed at an early age, potentially creating a grim prognosis for future reading success and academic achievement of preschoolers whose development in language and literacy lags behind that of their peers (2000). As the body of research touting the benefits of high-quality early childhood education continues to grow identifying and understanding the variables that enhance or diminish quality is increasingly important. Teacher practice, a process feature of early childhood settings, is among the most influential factors impacting program quality. Further, it is also useful to know how the special nature of being a Head Start preschool teacher and the interplay of Congressional mandates and OHS policy directives play out in Head Start classrooms.

Findings from an examination of the language and literacy practices implemented in a local Head Start program may lead to new understandings that inform policy and generate propositions useful in creating quality-enhancing, program-specific professional development for promoting emergent literacy. Investing in training and professional development that enrich Head Start teachers' emergent literacy practices may lead to

better student outcomes and help close the achievement gap between low-SES students and their more economically advantaged peers.

Definition of Terms

Emergent literacy, early literacy, preliteracy, early reading, and occasionally (and confusingly) *reading readiness*, have all been used, at times within the same study, to label a still loosely defined construct. Of those terms, *emergent literacy* and *early literacy* yield the most results in searches of research conducted within the past decade.

Sometimes the two are used to denote two separate, but related constructs, other times they are used interchangeably to mean the same thing. For the purpose of this framework, I treat emergent literacy and early literacy as separate but closely related elements under the broader literacy umbrella.

Emergent Literacy

For the purpose of this discussion, emergent literacy is characterized as a socio-developmental phenomenon that contributes to literacy acquisition and has given rise to the emergent literacy perspective. Informed by the work of Clay (1966, 1977); Holdaway (1979), Teale & Sulzby (1986), and Whitehurst & Lonigan (1998), I am conceptualizing emergent literacy as a process—owned and experienced by young children—in which early literacy knowledge, skills, and dispositions contributing to the development of the interrelated dimensions of conventional literacy (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) are constructed and accumulated through interaction with others and the environment. Though competing theoretical models for emergent literacy have emerged, all emanate from a belief that “legitimate, conceptual, developmental literacy learning is

occurring during the first years of life” (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, p. xxiii). Emergent literacy is child-oriented and involves both print and oral language.

Early Literacy

Early literacy is used to describe a subfield of literacy informed by emergent literacy theory. Though sometimes used interchangeably with emergent literacy, early literacy is used more broadly to denote particular people, practices, skills, abilities, and other actions, materials, and phenomena associated with the literacy of young children. Early literacy, therefore, is frequently used as a modifier to describe the array of abilities and understandings generated in the emergent literacy process, and the teaching practices educators use to support children’s emergent literacy. It would therefore be correct in the context of this paper to say, for example, that early literacy researchers are interested in identifying early literacy practices that support the emergent literacy of young children.

Early Language and Literacy

Although the terms stand alone, the phrase “early language and literacy” is frequently used in research to denote a single literacy construct. This may be due to any number of factors—whether it be an intention to emphasize the important role of language in children’s emergent literacy, the still nebulous nature of their relationship, or perhaps just force of habit. Whatever the case may be, given the wide recognition of the broader compound term, and to make clear the foundational role language plays in literacy, I am following suit and use *early language and literacy* (or *language and literacy* when context is known) as an umbrella term denoting skills, abilities, and behaviors pertaining to emergent literacy. When describing an action, event, skill or

practice that requires more specificity I use either *literacy* or *early literacy* when written language is involved, and *language* when the subject involves speaking or listening.

Summary

In this chapter I have introduced my study. I have described the problem at hand and presented background information and insight into factors influencing my decision to embark on this investigation. In addition, I have clarified the key terminology used throughout the study. In Chapter 2 I delve deeper into the research framing my study as I provide a review of the relevant literature.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter Introduction

Guided by a constructivist research orientation, the aim of my study was to understand the language and literacy practices in the classrooms of a local Head Start program in light of the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework (OHS, 2010) and essential elements of emergent literacy suggested by the literature. Further, I was interested in investigating factors that potentially influence practice in a Head Start classroom. I begin this chapter by introducing the literature that gives warrant to the present study—starting first with a brief discussion of Head Start’s mission and the research informing its evolution, followed by an overview of the changing dimensions of the Head Start teacher workforce. Next I present a synthesis of the literature addressing Head Start and other preschool teachers’ language and literacy practices before outlining research reporting on outcomes for children attending Head Start preschool programs.

In the section that follows, I introduce the research framing my inquiry of the teachers’ language and literacy practices. To that end, I discuss the research bases pertaining to: emergent literacy theory; essential skills and abilities in early language and literacy; and developmentally appropriate practice related to language and literacy. A discussion of teacher cognition research and related constructs follows, as I turn my attention to the literature informing the theoretical frame I relied on for investigating the nature of teacher practice. Last, I summarize the need for the present investigation and conclude with a preview of the remaining chapters of my dissertation.

Head Start Mission, Workforce, & Outcomes

Head Start's Emerging Identity

In the years immediately following Head Start's launch, the program's identity was shaped by a variety of stakeholders from different fields with different agendas, and disparate and often conflicting interpretations of Head Start's mission. Some stakeholders believed Head Start, which was initially funded as a community action project (CAP), should adhere to the mission of CAPS, social change through community empowerment. For this contingent, providing preschool and other services to children living in poverty was seen as beneficial, but secondary to Head Start's function as a mechanism for creating jobs and leadership development opportunities for community members (Greenberg, 2004). Others viewed Head Start primarily as a vehicle to address the needs of impoverished young children in an attempt to break "the cycle of poverty" (Richmond, 2004)—a perspective that seems to more closely align with that of the Head Start planning committee. Although the committee did not specify a mission for Head Start, the planning committee did identify a group of objectives intended to address the social, emotional, physical, mental, and educational needs of young children living in poverty (Schrag, Styfco, & Zigler, 2004). (See Appendix C, "Recommendations for a Head Start Program by a Panel of Experts," for a list of the commission's objectives.)

Social Competence Reified

In 1975 performance standards were published for the first time by the Office of Child Development-Head Start (OCD-HS, 1975). *Head Start Program Performance Standards*, which set forth program goals and objectives along with required program

performance standards, directed individual programs to create plans for implementing standards—all of which drafters of the policy expected to be “largely self-enforcing” (OCD-HS, 1975, p. 4). The policy manual states that Head Start’s overall goal is “to bring about a greater degree of social competence in children of low income families,” an ability characterized in the manual as children’s “everyday effectiveness in dealing with both present environment and later responsibilities in school and life” (p. 4). Further, it is suggested that a developmentally sound approach to promoting social competence takes into account children’s “cognitive and intellectual development, physical and mental health, nutritional needs, and other factors,” reinforcing the whole-child approach first endorsed by Head Start’s planning committee (OCD-HS, 1975, p. 4; Schrag, Styfco, & Zigler, 2004).

Multivalent Mission Mandate

As a federally funded program, the continued operation of Head Start requires periodic congressional authorization and is subject to the mandates of lawmakers. Faced with the reality of a persistent gap in development between Head Start students and their more economically advantaged peers, and informed by a surge of new early childhood research, in the 1990s and 2000s Congress passed a series of legislative acts intended to enhance program quality.

A new mission for Head Start—promoting school readiness—was introduced in the 1998 reauthorization of the program, as evidenced in the text of the Community Opportunities, Accountability, and Training and Educational Services Act of 1998 amending Head Start’s statement of purpose:

It is the purpose of this subchapter to promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of low-income children through the provision, to low-income children and their families, of health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services that are determined, based on family needs assessments, to be necessary. (Pub. L. 105-285, sec. 646)

In 2000 the OHS addressed this shift in policy by developing the *Head Start Child Outcomes Framework* (2000 Framework), a document “intended to guide Head Start programs in their curriculum planning and ongoing assessment of the progress and accomplishments of children” (OHS, 2003, p. 4). (See Appendix A for the complete text of *Head Start Child Outcomes Framework*.)

Informed by provisions of the Head Start Act amended in 1998; Head Start’s program performance standards and performance measures; Head Start Bureau research; and by an extensive review of documents regarding early childhood education assessment and accountability published by state agencies and national organizations, the resulting document was considered comprehensive and innovative when it was created (OHS, 2003). Legislation mandated that child progress data be collected on four of the domain elements and nine performance indicators, all but one of which were related to language and literacy (OHS, 2003).

When Congress mandated “school readiness” as Head Start’s purpose, personnel within the program did not necessarily interpret it as a call for change. Despite being a frequent topic of investigation in the research, pinning down the specific variables

comprising school readiness had proved to be a challenge (Saluja, Scott-Little, & Clifford, 2000) and consequently a consensus definition of school readiness as a measurable construct had not emerged leaving the construct open to interpretation (Britto, Fuligni, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002; Snow, 2006). In the 1990s social and emotional factors tended to outweigh cognitive variables as potential indicators of school readiness, particularly by early childhood educators. By way of example, when kindergarten teachers participating in a large-scale national survey (Heaviside & Farris, 1993) were asked to indicate the determinants of school readiness, the top three responses were “being physically healthy, rested, and well-nourished,” “having the ability to verbally communicate needs and wants,” and “being enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities” (Heaviside & Farris, p. 4). The most popular academic attribute, “knowing letters of the alphabet,” was 10th on the list—one spot above “counting,” the least popular attribute listed (Heaviside & Farris, 1993, pp. 4-6). By mandating child outcome data be collected for a particular group of language, literacy, and numeracy skills exclusively, Congress had signaled an expectation that promoting school readiness meant addressing cognitive domains in some fashion. Given the landscape suggested by Heaviside and Farris’ national survey of kindergarten teachers, however, it is not surprising that in the 1990s many in Head Start, including high-profile individuals affiliated with Head Start’s leadership—did not view a mandate to promote school readiness as a call for a new focus for Head Start, as much as a reconceptualization of social competence (Schrag et al., 2004).

Building on the 1998 mandate, the 2007 reauthorization of Head Start specified increased teacher education requirements and new program quality enhancement measures. Further, the 2007 legislation, which was conspicuously titled *The Head Start Act for School Readiness*, left no doubt of Congress's renewed and unwavering commitment to make school readiness Head Start's top priority. The 2007 reauthorization, which amended earlier legislation, also specifically identifies areas of growth that should be supported in Head Start's learning environments:

It is the purpose of this subchapter to promote the school readiness of low-income children by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development—

- (1) in a learning environment that supports children's growth in language, literacy, mathematics, science, social and emotional functioning, creative arts, physical skills, and approaches to learning; and
- (2) through the provision to low-income children and their families of health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services that are determined, based on family needs assessments, to be necessary. (Pub. L. 110-134, Sec. 2)

In response to this legislation, and informed by another decade of research on early childhood education, the OHS revised its 2000 Framework for preschool children. In a letter that accompanied the new *Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework* (2010 Framework), the director of Head Start stressed that the new framework was not specifying additional requirements for grantees, rather, the purpose of

the document was to clarify the connection between school readiness and the domain elements, and providing guidance for incorporating the elements into the preschool curriculum (OHS, 2010). The 2010 Framework (see Appendix B) is comprised of 10 domains and their associated domain elements, situated within the five essential core domains. An 11th domain addressing English language development is available to plug into the frame in settings serving dual-language learners. In total there are 37 domain elements, more than 100 examples describing “key knowledge, behavior, or skills within each element” (OHS, 2010, pp. 3-4). (See Appendix D, “2010 Framework Language & Literacy Guidance” for a more complete description of the domains.)

Today Head Start defines school readiness as “children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life” (OHS/ECLKC, n.d.). Though the definition is broad, the OHS provides grantees with resources for fostering preschool children’s school readiness and requires all program agencies to establish school readiness goals defined in the Head Start Program Standards as “the expectations of children’s status and progress across the essential core domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical health and well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development that will improve readiness for kindergarten goals” (45 CFR Chapter XIII Head Start Regulation Part 1307.2 and 1307.3 (b)(1)(i), as amended).

Head Start Workforce

In the half-century since Head Start was created, the evolution of its workforce policy has reflected “a history of compromise” as the program has reconciled the high

aspirations of its founders with practical realities of limited funding and an ever-changing political landscape (Kaplan & Mead, 2017, p. 6). Although the Head Start planning committee envisioned a high-quality comprehensive program, for a variety of reasons, staffing classrooms with well-trained teachers was not feasible, particularly in the early years (Vinovskis, 2008). Hastily established at the end of 1964, Project Head Start, scheduled to debut in the summer of 1965, was quickly on track to serve more than a half million children. The early childhood workforce at the time was simply not large enough to meet such demand and given that the Head Start initiative went from idea to operation in just six months, there was not enough time to adequately increase the supply of highly qualified teachers (Kaplan & Mead, 2017). Members of Head Start's inaugural staff, only a handful of whom had previous preschool work experience or training, received a modest 40 hours of training during which both Head Start program orientation and preschool instruction were covered.

In the early years after the summer pilot program, little was done to ensure that Head Start programs were staffed with individuals trained in early childhood education. This was due, in part, to the short supply of qualified teachers, but more so, to competing program objectives within Head Start and cultural norms of the day (U.S. Office of Education, 1969; Vinovskis, 2008). At the time Head Start was created it was widely believed that anyone could teach young children, a sentiment that has not been completely extinguished even today. Although Head Start's planning commission had agreed that the quality of each program facet was important, ultimately, they did not adequately address the need for a high-quality educational staff. Reflecting back more

than a decade after the creation of Head Start, Planning Committee member James Hymes (1979) suggested that the committee had not recognized the fact that young children living in poverty need skilled teachers and that a program of such magnitude requires “top-flight” educational leaders. He maintained that “at all levels, Head Start was never staffed to produce consistently good educational programs, and Head Start children were shortchanged because of this” (p. 97).

Given that there were no education requirements for Head Start teachers, it is not surprising that in 1965 few Head Start teachers had education credentials beyond a high school diploma. Even as attention was shifting to improving classroom quality, little could feasibly be done. The majority of Head Start teachers, who were parents and living in poverty themselves, lacked the time and resources to pursue post-secondary degrees (Kaplan & Mead, 2017). In 1972, Head Start saw an opportunity for a more accessible path to credentialing and joined with others in the field of early childhood education to support the creation of the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. The CDA, awarded to the first recipients in 1975, was intended to improve early childhood education quality through the establishment of nationally recognized standards for competency (Council for Professional Recognition, n.d.). Although the first CDAs were awarded in 1975 it was not until 1990 that every Head Start classroom was required to have at least one teacher with a CDA, early childhood degree, or an equivalent credential—the first time in the program’s 25-year history that minimum standards had been set for Head Start teachers (OHS/ECLKS, 2015). Although more recent research sparked debate by suggesting there is not a link between teacher education and child

outcomes (see, for example, Early et al., 2006), a substantial body of research in the 1990s suggested that more educated teachers in classrooms led to better child outcomes. Presented with this evidence, Congress continued to increase educational requirements, mandating in 1998 that every lead teacher have an associate's degree by 2003, and then again in 2007 stipulating that least 50 percent of all teachers have a bachelor's degree by 2013 (Pub. L. 105-285; Pub. L. 110-134) Reflecting data collected between 2012 and 2015, the *State(s) of Head Start* (2016), indicated 72% of Head Start teachers had a bachelor's degree or higher in early childhood education or a related field (Barnett & Friedman-Krauss).

The Nature of Preschool Teachers' Emergent Literacy Practices

Teachers who work with young children tend to engage in activities that foster language development more so than code-based skills associated with early literacy (e.g., Burgess, Lundgren, Lloyd, & Pianta, 2001) and have reported strong support for research-based oral language development and book sharing practices (e.g., Hindman & Wasik, 2008; Seefeldt, 2004). One of the emergent literacy practices early childhood teachers report using most frequently is sharing books—particularly reading aloud picture books (Burgess et al., 2002; Powell, Diamond, Bojczyk, & Gerde, 2008); however, with respect to Head Start classrooms in particular, Dickinson and Kloosterman (2003) found that book sharing practices often lack the quality needed to promote language development. Research suggests the quantity of book sharing experiences may be deficient as in the case of a study by Hargrave and Sénéchal (2000), who found that in some Head Start classrooms shared read-alouds happen only once or twice in a week—

too infrequently to have a significant impact on children's outcomes.

Hawken et al. (2005) examined teacher practices in a national survey of Head Start teachers' views and practices related to emergent literacy. The authors adopted a definition of emergent literacy that corresponded with the literacy knowledge and skills domain from Head Start's 2000 Framework but did not include language development. Survey data analysis revealed that 90% of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that class time should be devoted to instruction of emergent literacy on a daily basis; 7% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with having daily literacy instruction; and 2% were neutral on the subject. Though the vast majority believed early literacy should be attended to daily, seven of the 10 practices they most frequently reported using for literacy instruction supported elements in the domains of book knowledge and appreciation (e.g., children practice holding books correctly and turning pages, children predict stories), and print awareness (e.g., children are shown that text in books begins at top left corner of page and is read left to right). Activities related to alphabet knowledge and early writing were both represented among the most frequently used strategies, however, phonological awareness was not. In fact, phonological awareness was the literacy domain that received the least amount of attention overall. The lack of attention to this domain is problematic given substantial research evidence suggesting that it is essential for children to have well-developed phonological skills in order to be successful in reading (IRA & NAEYC, 1998; Justice & Pullen, 2003).

Though troubling, particularly given the increased risk for phonological delays among Head Start children due to economic status, and in many cases disabilities or

linguistic diversity (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998), it is not unexpected. A study of first-grade teachers (who tend to have more education than preschool teachers, particularly those in Head Start) found that teachers' phonological knowledge was low, particularly with respect to phonemic awareness (Brady et al., 2009). Limitations identified by Hawken and her colleagues' study (2005) raise some additional concerns about the amount of attention given to phonological awareness and optimistic teacher self-report of support for daily literacy instruction. At the time that the survey was conducted (2003) Head Start had recently revised their 2000 Framework and was highly focused on promoting emergent literacy development. Further, the survey respondents had much higher education levels relative to the education levels of Head Start teachers in general. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2003) report *Strengthening Head Start: What the Evidence Shows* suggests that teachers who have higher levels of education are more likely to implement research-based emergent literacy practices than those with lower levels of education. It is possible, therefore, that the amount of support for daily literacy instruction and self-reported use of literacy practices is an overestimation of the beliefs and practices of Head Start teachers nationally.

Focus group research conducted by Powell et al. (2008) captured the perspectives of a group of Head Start teachers whose education levels were more in line with education levels for the overall Head Start population. Similar to the findings of the Hawken et al. (2005) survey, the focus group teachers were in support of Head Start's inclusion of literacy goals. The mandate for an increased focus on literacy outcomes was "taken in stride by some teachers," while others reacted negatively or expressed

trepidation (p. 438).

When asked what literacy's relation is to other Head Start program goals, the responses of the focus group teachers settled into three thematic categories. The dominant belief was that focusing on literacy goals was more appropriate for children who had achieved competence in one or more other areas of development. The other competencies varied (e.g., knowing how to behave at school or being able to pay attention), but were generally regarded as social skills by the focus group teachers. This teacher belief that social skills or social competence have priority in the classroom is echoed in the research (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003; Zill et al., 2001), as is the notion that social competence is a prerequisite for academic success. The focus group teachers in the Powell et al. study believed that children who enter Head Start tended to have less developed social skills than most preschool children and it was common practice to delay literacy instruction until later in the school year after children had improved social and emotional skills. At least one teacher in remarked that it was pointless to begin literacy instruction before children's social and emotional skills had improved because in one teacher's words "[i]f they don't have that base, no matter how much literacy we try to teach them, it's not going to do much good" (2005, p. 441).

A second group of teachers believed that literacy and other domains should be focused on concurrently and that self-confidence impacted academic performance. Though they did not believe there was a sequenced order for attending to developmental domains, they emphasized, as did the previous group of teachers, the notion that other developmental areas—social competence and self-esteem in particular—contributed to

success in school and throughout life. The third group of teachers held that literacy was the foundation for growth and learning in all areas. Reading well was viewed as the ticket for success in all endeavors, summed up by one teacher—“once you learn to read, you can conquer all that comes along.” (Powell et al., 2008, p. 442). Teachers in this group believed children’s skill and self-efficacy in literacy contributed to their self-esteem.

The teachers participating in the survey conducted by Hawken et al. (2005) identified activities related to alphabet knowledge as the most frequently implemented literacy practice in their classroom; similarly, the focus group teachers described alphabet knowledge as a key emergent literacy skill important for promoting early literacy and essential to learning to read. Other important skills or knowledge mentioned included concepts of print (e.g., directionality, books are written by authors, books have a front and back cover), vocabulary knowledge, oral language, letter formation, and storybook comprehension.

The importance and purpose of phonological awareness was viewed with mixed regard and was mentioned less frequently in discussions of emergent literacy skills. A segment of the focus group conveyed the importance of knowing sounds of letters and words and the ability to hear beginning and end sounds. These teachers valued activities in which children listened to identify rhymes or clapped out the syllables in a word. By contrast, another group equated hearing and listening solely with the ability to follow rules, or as an area of instruction to support focusing on (and remembering) what the teacher is saying. This confusion about phonological awareness reflected teachers’ limited understanding—a troubling situation that is unfortunately well represented in the

literature (Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski, & Chard, 2001; Brady et al., 2009; Cunningham, Zibulsky, & Callahan, 2009; Moats, 1994).

Outcomes for Children in Head Start Programs

Data collection for the Head Start Impact Study (Puma, Bell, Cook, & Heid, 2010) took place between 2002 and 2006—commencing four years after the 1998 reauthorization mandating a school readiness focus, and two years after the publication of Head Start’s readiness framework. The study was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 5,000 3- and 4-year-old children eligible for Head Start. Children were randomly assigned to the group accepted into a Head Start program or the control group whose members did not have access to Head Start services. The study examined two cohorts of children, newly entering 3-year-olds and newly entering 4-year-olds.

In the case of the 4-year-old cohort, Puma and colleagues (2010) reported that compared to the control group, evidence suggested that at the end of the year the Head Start group performed better on six literacy- and language-related assessments: (1) Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) for vocabulary; (2) Woodcock-Johnson III for letter-word identification; (3) Woodcock-Johnson III for spelling; (4) Woodcock-Johnson III for preacademic skills; (5) color identification; and (6) letter naming. Parents of the Head Start students also reported that their children exhibited more emergent literacy skills than did parents of the control group children. There were no differences found in prewriting, oral comprehension, or phonological processing.

The 3-year-old cohort, when compared to the control group, scored better on five

literacy and language related assessments: (1) Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) for vocabulary; (2) Woodcock-Johnson III for letter-word identification; (3) Preschool Comprehensive Test of Phonological and Print Processing (CTOPPP) Elision; (4) letter naming; and (5) Woodcock-Johnson III for preacademic skills. Parents of the 3-year-old Head Start children reported greater emergent literacy activity than did parents of the control group children.

For both cohorts, almost all of the advantage over the control group was lost after the first year. In the case of the 3-year-old children, by the end of their second year in Head Start (as 4-year-olds) significant impacts remained only for the CTOPPP and parents' report of emergent literacy. Further, there were no impacts remaining at the end of kindergarten and the finding of an impact on oral comprehension at the end of first grade was not present either year at Head Start or after kindergarten. The 4-year-old Head Start cohort had no impacts at the end of their kindergarten year but a positive impact on vocabulary at the end of first grade.

Though there was strong evidence of significant impact on the language and literacy skills of the Head Start students compared to the control group, the Head Start group still underperformed relative to national norms for their peer group, which includes children from all SES backgrounds. For example, the 2003 average PPVT score for the 4-year-old control group was at the 27th percentile while the average score for the Head Start group was at the 31st percentile. In the case of the 3-year-old cohort, the PPVT scores of the control group were at the 29th percentile, compared to the Head Start group whose scores put them at the 31st percentile. This substantial and persistent gap is further

evidenced by the key findings of the 2009 FACES Report “Getting Ready for Kindergarten: Children’s Progress in Head Start” (Aikens et al., 2013), which states “[w]ith the exception of letter-word knowledge, children assessed in English score below norms across language, literacy, and math measures at both Head Start entry and exit” (p. iv).

Locating the Essential Elements of Emergent Literacy

Emergent Literacy

For much of the 20th century it was widely believed that the process of becoming literate—that is to say learning to read and write in the conventional sense—could not commence until children had sufficiently matured to the point that they were considered ready to read (Dolch, 1970/1951; Sanderson, 1963). Over the years this common understanding subtly evolved—shifting from a strict maturational perspective holding that learning to read was contingent on reaching a particular stage of development—typically thought to be around the age of 6 ½— to a slightly more flexible notion allowing that reading could commence once certain readiness skills had been demonstrated (Chall, 1983, Lynn, 1963; Morphett & Washburne, 1931; van Kleek and Schuele, 2010). Though consensus among researchers regarding the nature of reading readiness was lacking, the theory nonetheless shaped early childhood literacy practice for decades.

Heading into the last quarter of the 20th century, the idea that literacy was dictated by a timetable for maturation or a checklist of prerequisites began to be challenged by a new perspective, positioning literacy learning as a natural, ongoing

process beginning early in life and continuing throughout early childhood (Clay, 1977; Holdaway, 1979; van Kleeck and Schuele, 2010). This notion of “emergent literacy,” a term first introduced by Clay (1966; Teale & Sulzby, 1986), quickly gained traction in the literacy research community but trickled into practice. The early childhood field was not as eager to embrace this new perspective. At the time, promoting preschool children’s early efforts in language and literacy was a novel concept, and the manner in which it was implemented in classrooms varied widely. Concerned that preschool children were being pressed into academic tasks associated with formal schooling—something that ran counter to what was considered to be developmentally appropriate—early childhood scholars and educators pushed back (Bredekamp, 1987). By the end of the 1990s, following a surge of research informing early child development and emergent literacy, the two fields reconciled their differences, evidenced in the joint position statement *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children* (1998) published by the International Reading Association (now International Literacy Association) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children. At the close of the millennium, supporting children’s emergent literacy had become a fundamental goal of early child childhood education (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Dickinson, 2002).

Early Language-Literacy Dynamic

When emergent literacy was introduced as an alternative to reading readiness, it was largely associated with the development of reading and writing. Long considered to be primarily a visual skill, by the 1970s new theories positioning reading as a language-

based process began to emerge as researchers started to better understand the complexity of reading (van Kleeck & Shuele, 2010). Interest in language as a dimension of emergent literacy, already on the rise heading into the 21st century, was further boosted after the release of *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel* (NELP, 2008) not due to the report itself, but rather, the uproar it triggered. Across the field, scholars troubled by the report flooded the literature with a torrent of criticism addressing a wide range of perceived deficiencies—not the least of which was the panel’s missed opportunity to address the important role of language in early literacy development (Dickinson, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2010; Schickedanz & McGee, 2010). Though NELP’s meta-analysis suggested that oral language was among the predictors of future reading ability, correlation was low compared to other predictive variables—a finding the report suggests could be due to the use of simple measures of oral language in many of the studies examined. Shanahan and Lonigan (2010) explain that a variety of oral language measures were utilized across the individual studies included in its meta-analysis; however, they were considered as a group without regard to measure type. Follow-up analysis of the oral language studies sorted by measure type indicated that effect sizes were dependent on measure complexity and composition. This new analysis indicated that employing composite constructs of language, and higher level oral language assessments may have greater predictive power than constructs defined by a single, simple measure (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2010). The NELP report and critical commentary that followed reflect a body of research still shy of consensus regarding which skill, or mix of skills, comprise a language dimension, and whether language

development is properly included as part of the early literacy construct (e.g., Dickinson, McCabe, Anastopoulous, Peisner-Feinberg, & Poe, 2003) or better positioned as a separate but related construct as was done in Head Start’s frameworks.

In addition to new understandings about the relation between oral language, reading, and writing, the absence of consensus is likely related, in part, to an expanded conceptualization of literacy itself. The research suggests that becoming literate demands more than simply attaining reading and writing proficiency; it requires the ability to engage with texts in more complex ways—drawing on background knowledge to interpret, analyze, and synthesize information (van Kleeck & Scheuele, 2010; Westby, 2004). Teale, Hoffman, and Paciga (2010) connect this sentiment to the early literacy discussion, making the case that attention must be paid to developing higher level literacy skills such as listening comprehension, oral language, and composition, as well as building background knowledge to ensure that young children become capable and confident readers and writers.

Identifying the Essential Elements of Early Literacy

The starting point for identifying early literacy and language skills that contribute to overall literacy was *Developing Early Literacy*, the report issued by the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) (2008). Commissioned by the National Institute for Literacy and the National Center for Family Literacy in 2002 to examine the body of research on early literacy, NELP’s team of experts were tasked to conduct what Shanahan and Lonigan (2013) described as “an extensive synthesis of the research evidence to try to determine what should be taught to young children about literacy and to evaluate the effectiveness

of various approaches for teaching these early literacy skills” (p. 2). To a large extent, reaction to the report from scholars in the field was sharply critical, making clear that the panel’s findings fell short of a coalescence of thought regarding early literacy. Critics had numerous concerns including: the manner in which the meta-analysis study was approached, overemphasis of constrained skills, relative silence regarding issues for which empirical studies were lacking, and a lack of guidance for policy makers and practitioners on interpreting the report’s findings (McGill-Franzen, 2010; Teale, Hoffman, & Paciga, 2010). At first glance using a controversial report as a starting point for identifying critical elements of early literacy may seem like an inauspicious beginning. That would be true if the report were treated as the definitive word on early literacy. The controversy, however, and critique that stemmed from it stimulated a powerful dialogue about early literacy in the research community (see for example the special issue of *Educational Researcher* (McGill, Franzan, 2010) dedicated to the topic). Lonigan (panel member) and Shanahan (panel chair) (2010), acknowledge the report does not fully capture our knowledge of literacy development, pointing out that the product of NELP’s efforts reflects the body of research available at the time. Though critics raise valid concerns about the NELP study, the report is a significant contribution to the field, particularly in terms of its clear articulation of the variables most strongly correlated with future literacy achievement as demonstrated in experimental and quasi-experimental studies (Teale, Hoffman, & Paciga, 2010). Reaction to the NELP study in the literature—which served to temper the report’s heavy emphasis on code-based skills and bring to light more contemporary findings—gave rise to a clearer and more comprehensive

picture of the early literacy landscape. Neither the NELP report or the vigorous discussion it precipitated are the final word on early literacy, but together they help establish the variables that are essential in the emergent literacy process and identify the classroom practices that best support them. Further, the NELP report and related discourse illuminate gaps and shallow areas in the early literacy research base for future study.

The NELP report identified 10 variables demonstrating moderate to strong predictive power for proficiency in either decoding or reading comprehension: alphabet knowledge; phonological awareness; rapid automatized naming (letters or numbers); rapid automatized naming (objects or colors); writing or name writing; phonological memory; concepts about print; print knowledge; reading readiness (a combination of variables); and oral language (NELP, 2008). The panel makes clear that these variables are indicators of movement toward conventional literacy, however the panel did not necessarily recommend that teachers attend to all of these variables. Causality should not necessarily be assumed because causal relationships between variables and outcomes were not established. For example, the rapid automatized naming (RAN) variables are strongly correlated with literacy ability, however, as Shanahan and Lonigan (2010) point out, there are no studies indicating that instruction for RAN improves literacy or, for that matter, evidence that RAN could be successfully taught. As such, they advise the tasks be given little, if any, attention. The same holds true for phonological memory—a moderate predictor of literacy ability but not causally linked to literacy development (Spencer, Spencer, Goldstein, & Schneider, 2013).

Conversely, phonological awareness (PA) and alphabet knowledge (AK), particularly when taught in conjunction with PA, were strong predictors of future literacy ability and were recommended as focal areas for instruction based on studies demonstrating their benefit to children's literacy development (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2010; Spencer et al., 2013). This assertion is well established in the literature and echoes recommendations made in the influential National Reading Panel (NRP) report (2000). The NELP report has a fairly tepid stance on both writing and oral language. Though both variables were moderately correlated with decoding and comprehension, discussion and recommendations for practice were ambiguous, presumably due to variability and efficacy of the outcomes measured in the studies analyzed, or the paucity of articles available at the time that were both on point and met the panel's criteria for inclusion in the study. The variable, concepts about print, was strongly correlated with reading comprehension; however, there was little enthusiasm for the variable as a potential game-changer in literacy development. This may be due to the fact that when PA and AK were controlled, concepts of print had a much weaker correlation to comprehension, suggesting that concepts of print had an impact in the earlier stages of literacy development but was much less significant in the later stages. In an underwhelming endorsement, Shanahan and Lonigan (2010) suggest that "given the evidence it seems to make sense to familiarize children with concepts about print, to get them writing, and to try to expand their oral language ability" (p. 21). In response to the panel's report, a host of scholars lend more enthusiastic support for these practices—particularly oral language,

which researchers suggest “underpins comprehensive literacy development” (McGill-Franzen, 2010, p. 276).

Finally, reading readiness and print knowledge are both composite variables, comprising a variety of skills from among the other variables mentioned. Given the irregularity of measures used across studies, despite moderate to strong correlation, they offer little practical guidance for isolating crucial elements of early literacy.

Reconciling NELP and its critics

Phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, writing, and oral language all emerged as moderately to strongly correlated with decoding and reading comprehension in the NELP study (2008). Establishment of this evidence was a needed and important contribution to the field in its own right. It was, however, the impassioned critique of the report, and subsequent rebuttal, that illuminated the substantial literature evidencing PA, AK, writing, and oral language as each having a causal relation to early literacy—thus, separating these particular variables from the rest and distinguishing them as essential elements of early literacy development (Spencer et al., 2013). The conversation about emergent literacy and early literacy classroom practice triggered by the NELP report also clarified, extended, and, in some cases, questioned report recommendations, thus mediating potential interpretation of the report by educators and policy makers as a mandate for drills, decontextualized instruction of skills, and practice of tasks that may predict, but not contribute to, early literacy (Teale, Hoffman, & Paciga, 2010).

Much of this concern arises from criticism suggesting the panel overemphasizes what Paris (2005) identifies as constrained skills. Constrained skills are those skills for

which mastery or high achievement is reached early in the literacy development process—for example, alphabet knowledge and name writing. Constrained skills, typically print-based or decoding activities, are necessary, but not sufficient for higher level literacy ability (Stahl, 2011), suggesting that their predictive value beyond the early years could be limited. Researchers engaged in the NELP dialogue suggest that increased emphasis should be placed on unconstrained skills, abilities acquired and improved upon over a lifetime—such as oral language and reading comprehension—that show greater payoff in the grades beyond the primary years (Snow & Matthews, 2016; Teale, Hoffman, & Paciga, 2010). The NELP panel did examine both of these variables but found them to be no better than low-moderate predictors of literacy ability. In secondary analyses NELP took steps to separate simple variable constructs from more complex ones, and look at the literacy outcomes in later grades (2008). This examination resulted in substantially improved correlations; however, discussion in the report gives little insight about these findings or recommendations for future research (Teale et al., 2010). The lackluster treatment of oral language was especially frustrating given the considerable research available (by the time the NELP report was published) supporting language development’s crucial contribution to literacy (Dickinson et al., 2010; Heath, 1983; Snow & Matthews, 2016) particularly for children who are dual language learners or whose language development has been impacted by living in poverty (Pace, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2016).

What seems to be missing from the NELP report is clarity and balance. Van Kleeck and Schuele (2010) suggest that most balanced approaches to early literacy attend

to two sets of early literacy skills—one building a foundation for decoding and the other laying the groundwork for comprehension and higher level language skills. Although critically important variables in early literacy development are identified in the NELP report, the panel does not adequately distinguished them from those variables that, while predictive of literacy ability, do little if anything to support literacy ability. Further, the study design favored outcomes measured in the early primary grades—the years for which correlations between code-based skills and literacy ability are strongest—and comprehension, an outcome more dependent on meaning-based skills, has traditionally been hard to measure. It is not surprising then, that findings and recommendations from NELP’s report tilt heavily in favor of more constrained skills. The commentary and debate among literacy scholars addressing the report’s ambivalence toward unconstrained literacy elements, however, helps to balance the weight of the report in the literature. This negotiated understanding of what is needed to best support emergent literacy in young children is captured by Teale, Hoffman, and Paciga, who assert that although alphabet knowledge, concepts about print, and phonological awareness are critical to literacy development, there are other components of literacy that are equally important. Young children, they contend, “must have systematic and sustained instruction in listening comprehension, oral language, composing, as well as development of rich and varied content knowledge to make it maximally likely that they will be capable readers and writers in the later years of elementary school and beyond” (Teale et al., 2010, p. 312; Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman, 2007).

Essential Elements of Early Literacy Practice

The discourse on fostering literacy development that followed the NELP report fleshed out a crucial proposition: when teachers of young children focus predominately on the important, but finite, skill sets that empower children to decode and encode text at the expense of promoting oral language and other meaning-making elements of literacy the outcomes can be problematic. In the case of young children living in poverty, the outcomes can be devastating (Pace et al., 2016). Children who have early literacy experiences that reflect this lopsided approach and master code-related skills while they are in preschool frequently perform well in many measures of literacy in kindergarten and first grade. However, the literacy competency of these children may be hollow—prone to collapse as the children move into later grades if they lack experience with the crucial meaning-oriented elements of literacy. As such, the previous section makes the case for a model of early literacy predicated on balance. A review of the literature suggests five early literacy components necessary for both emergent and later literacy development in young children: concepts about print, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, writing, and oral language. The order of these elements, summarized below, is loosely associated with the degree to which each element is constrained. As the elements are both overlapping and essential, the order is not meant to denote significance, nor a location on a developmental continuum.

Concepts about print. The construct, concepts of print, refers to the knowledge of print conventions, concepts, and functions (Casbergue & Strickland, 2016; NELP, 2008). Largely a constrained variable in literacy acquisition, children’s concepts about

print begin developing early in the emergent literacy process and are considered particularly influential in the mastery of code-related skills and knowledge (Paris, 2005; Phillips & Piasta, 2010). Conceptually, young children come to learn that print has meaning and that there is a relationship between print and speech. They begin to comprehend that letters have names and distinct shapes, letters make words, and that words make sentences that end with punctuation. Children also discover the structure of books and how text is read from left to right and from top to bottom. With experience they begin to comprehend that print can be used for different purposes.

Phonological awareness. Phonological awareness, long considered essential to cracking the code of written language, is succinctly described as “the ability to detect and manipulate the sound structure of words independent of their meaning” (Phillips, Clancy-Menchetti, & Lonigan, 2008, p. 3). An increasingly sophisticated capacity, phonological awareness begins as an understanding that words are made up of smaller bits of sound, such as syllables, onsets, rimes, and phonemes. This knowledge informs competency in more complex phonological tasks such as segmenting, blending, subtracting, and substituting smaller sound elements—activities that contribute to children’s later reading (Phillips, Clancy-Menchetti, & Lonigan, 2008; Phillips & Piasta, 2010).

Alphabet knowledge. Described as “a hallmark of early literacy” (Piasta & Wagner, 2010), alphabet knowledge is conceptualized as “the recognition and production of the names and sounds of letters” (Phillips & Piasta, 2010). There is considerable research suggesting that alphabet knowledge is a strong and reliable predictor of future literacy ability (e.g., NELP, 2008; Piasta & Wagner, 2010). A growing body of research

(e.g., Foorman et al., 2003; Phillips & Torgesen, 2006; Piasta & Wagner, 2010) indicates that alphabet knowledge should be taught in conjunction with phonological awareness in order to foster emergent literacy.

Oral language. Oral language refers to the ability to produce and understand spoken language. In contrast to code-based elements of literacy, oral language is a meaning-oriented variable for which competency is dependent on knowledge of syntax and vocabulary in concert with listening comprehension (Hogan, Cain, & Bridges, 2013; Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; Morrow, Roskos, & Gambrell, 2016; Pace et al., 2016; Pearson, & Hiebert, 2010). Comprehension of language, which begins developing at birth, is at the heart of emergent literacy. Good oral language comprehension, which is necessary for young children to later become skilled readers, is promoted by fostering higher level language skills such as inferencing, monitoring meaning, and accessing knowledge of text structures (Hogan et al., 2013).

Writing. Despite having a smaller body of accumulated research than other elements of emergent literacy, there is considerable evidence suggesting that writing is an influential variable in young children's literacy development (Diamond, Gerde, & Powell, 2008; Gerde, Bingham, & Wasik, 2012; Puranik & Lonigan, 2012). Writing can be conceptualized as young children's efforts to generate text, as well as their knowledge about the status and function of generated texts (Diamond et al., 2008; Roskos, Christie, & Richgels, 2003). Children exhibit their early writing capacity in multiple ways, including the formation of letters, endeavors with name writing, and the production of graphic messages. Young children begin to understand that writing has meaning through

their interaction with print and oral language. They come to know, for example, that a written name signifies ownership (Diamond et al., 2008). They also discover that writing can have permanence and portability, thus extending the capacity of their speech in terms of expressing feelings, influencing others, and providing information (Roskos et al., 2003). Valued as a predictor of future literacy ability, the practice of writing supports emergent literacy by encouraging young children to marshal an array of early literacy skills as they make the effort to put their message in print (Diamond et al., 2008).

Factors Impacting Teacher Practice

Overview

In the present study I was interested in the factors that impact the language and literacy practices of the Piedmont Head Start teachers. The theoretical frame I used for this investigation is informed by research suggesting that teacher practice is influenced by mediated teacher cognition. That is to say, what teachers do is impacted by what they think (Clark & Yinger, 1977), and how they apply what they think to enact practice is shaped by the interaction of their knowledge and beliefs interpreted in light of “social, psychological, and environmental factors” present (Borg, 2006). In this section I will provide an overview of the research grounding my frame and present a model suggested by Borg (1997, 2003, 2006), which I have modified for this study.

The Thinking Teacher

As recently as the 1970s, it was assumed that the practice of early childhood teachers was the enactment of child development science, mediated by the objectives of local stakeholders (Katz, 1984; Spodek, 1988). By the end of the decade, however,

researchers were beginning to recognize that teachers are not technicians and that teaching is a complex enterprise dependent in some way on the thinking of teachers (Clark & Yinger, 1977). Harste and Burke (1977) were early contributors to the research on teacher cognition, and among the first in the literacy community to suggest a link between teachers' beliefs and their practice, suggesting that teachers' practice decisions are filtered through their theoretical orientations toward literacy. Theoretical orientation, which Harste and Burke describe as "knowledge, beliefs, and philosophical principals," frame teachers' expectations and guide their decisions about reading instruction (1977, p. 135). Similarly, Spodek (1988) makes the case that early childhood teachers make practice decisions filtered through their personal *implicit theories* of early childhood education. Implicit theories are considered by researchers to be perceptions and beliefs about early childhood education informed by past experience, personal values, and common sense (Borg, 2015; Eraut, 2000; Spodek, 1988). Clandinin (1985), informed by the work of Elbaz (1981), follows a similar line of teacher thinking inquiry in his investigation of "personal practice knowledge." Characterized as "value-laden, purposeful, and oriented to practice," personal practice knowledge is regarded as being "imbued with all the experiences that make up a person's being" (1985, pp. 364, 362). Although personal practice knowledge is framed in terms of what teachers know, and implicit theories emphasize what teachers believe, both constructs suggest an interplay between knowledge and beliefs (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992; Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2001).

Teacher Cognition as Beliefs and Knowledge

Although many studies in the field of literacy tacitly, if not explicitly, suggest such a connection, studies in the field examining the relationship between teacher cognition and practice accumulated over the past two decades have typically treated beliefs and knowledge as separate constructs. Moreover, researchers seeking even finer distinction have differentiated between types or even subtypes of knowledge and beliefs teachers may possess. Drawing on Charlesworth and colleagues' research examining the beliefs and practices of kindergarten teachers (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991; Charlesworth et al., 1993), as well as Diane DeFord's (1985) study validating the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP), Hindman and Wasik (2008) provide a comprehensive operational definition for considering early childhood teachers' language and literacy beliefs, stating "teachers' beliefs about literacy can be understood as including what they assume, think, and know about how young children develop literacy skills; what they perceive a teacher's role in this process to be; and how they feel they should implement these practices in the classroom" (p. 480).

Shulman (1986; 1987) set the standard for categorizing knowledge possessed by educators, identifying at least seven types of knowledge applicable to teaching: content knowledge; general pedagogical knowledge; curriculum knowledge; pedagogical content knowledge; knowledge of learners; knowledge of educational contexts; and knowledge of educational goals. Of these categories of knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge is the most comprehensive in terms of capturing the essence of teaching practices. Shulman characterized pedagogical content knowledge as "the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized,

represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (1987, p. 8). Park and Oliver (2008), in consideration of two decades of research examining the construct, offer a reconceptualized description that attempts to portray pedagogical content knowledge as both knowledge and action and operationalize the concept in a way that is more easily taught and measured. Thus, Park and Oliver conceptualize professional content knowledge as “teachers’ understanding and enactment of how to help a group of students understand specific subject matter using multiple instructional strategies, representations, and assessments while working within the contextual, cultural, and social limitations in the learning environment” (2008, p. 264).

In recent years, researchers (e.g., Fives & Buehl, 2012; Borg, 2006; Schachter, Spear, Piasta, Justice, & Logan, 2015) have raised concerns about the extent to which these constructs are being parsed. Overlapping construct descriptions, differences in construct measurement, inconsistent terminology use, and conflicting typologies have made it challenging to compare studies or draw conclusions from findings across the literature, which may be leading to inconsistencies and anomalies in the extant body of research examining teacher cognition (Borg, 2006; Schachter et al., 2015). Borg (2006), while acknowledging the potential need for a wide range of differentiation to account for the complexity of the beliefs and knowledge, also questions the wisdom of the microdeconstruction of beliefs and knowledge that has resulted in “a proliferation of specialized terminologies” that he asserts “obscure the recurrent characteristics” found in the literature (p. 35). The issue is illustrated in Fives and Buehl’s (2012) extensive review of the literature on teacher beliefs. The authors’ report that despite an empirical research

base comprised of more than 700 articles, “the lack of cohesion and clear definitions has limited the explanatory and predictive potential of teachers’ beliefs” (p. 471). Fives and Buehl lament the troubling fact that in many studies researchers have not linked findings to the empirical or theoretical literature, nor attempted “to move the field forward in a meaningful way” (2012, p. 489).

Variation of constructs and measures extend to studies investigating associations between teacher cognition (i.e., beliefs/theories and knowledge) and practices in early childhood settings, including Head Start (Dickinson, 2001; Justice et al. 2008; Powell et al., 2008). In a study of potential factors impacting the quality and quantity of early language and literacy practices, Schachter, Spear, Piasta, Justice, and Logan (2016) found that studies in the literature examining beliefs, knowledge, and other teacher characteristics such as education and years of experience, “have not always illuminated the connections between educator’s characteristics and instruction” (p. 282). As a potential explanation for this phenomenon, like Borg (2006), and Fives and Buehl (2012), Schachter and her colleagues point to a literature base in which beliefs and knowledge have been dissected, defined, and measured in a myriad of ways. Although findings in the literature are equivocal, Spear, Piasta, Yeomans-Maldonado, Ottley, Justice, and O’Connell (2018) suggest “there is widespread agreement that beliefs and knowledge influence practice” (p. 364), a sentiment echoed in the field (Fives & Buehl, 2012). Increasingly, researchers have theorized that the way in which teacher thinking impacts decisions about practice is more complex than initially thought (Schachter et al., 2016; Spear-Swerling & Cheesman, 2012; Spear et al., 2018; Trivette, Dunst, Hamby, & Meter,

2012). This complexity calls for the use of a multifaceted approach to conceptualize and study teacher thinking, “to address concerns that multiple types of beliefs or knowledge may interact to impact practice” (Spear et al., 2018, p. 364), and account for contextual variables, that may directly or indirectly impact practice (Borg, 2006).

Theory emerging from a strand of research investigating the link between teacher cognition and practice in second language instruction has proven particularly useful in conceptualizing a frame for this study. This body of work is informed by, and contributes to, a substantial literature addressing the topic generated by researchers in mainstream education over the past 40 years, the vast majority of whom come from the field of literacy (Borg, 2006). Borg (2003) positions teachers as “active, thinking decision makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs” (p. 81). Although he acknowledges that the diversity of concepts and terms associated with teacher cognition are likely useful for addressing some of the complexities associated with teacher cognitions, he is wary of the confusion it creates and opts for an inclusive description of teacher thinking that accommodates the intertwined nature of beliefs and knowledge. This fits well with the objectives of this study, which seeks to understand practice and potential factors that impact it, as opposed to categorizing beliefs or knowledge or describing the way particular aspects of teacher cognition influence practice.

Borg (2006) characterizes teacher cognitions as “an often tacit, personally based, practical system of mental constructs held by teachers,” adding that these “dynamic

constructs are defined and redefined on the basis of educational and professional experiences” (p. 35). According to Borg (2006) teacher cognitions “may often be distinguished at the level of theoretical or philosophical debate;” however, at the same time, Borg notes that these mental constructs “seem to defy compartmentalization when teachers’ practices and cognitions are examined empirically” (p. 35). Borg (1997, 2003, 2006) offers a framework for inquiry “grounded in an analysis of mainstream educational research” for investigating factors that impact and are informed, by teacher cognition in praxis—teacher education (i.e., school and professional education), classroom practice, and contextual factors (p. 41).

Summary

The research suggests that the perspectives provided by the Head Start teachers in Powell et al. (2008) are illustrative of beliefs held by many teachers who work in Head Start programs across the country (Hawken et al., 2005). Head Start teachers are knowledgeable about the children and families they serve and the communities they live in. They are passionate about helping children—building their self-esteem, creating a safe environment for learning, and supporting their families. The literature suggests that early educators are not fully equipped to effectively support early language and literacy of their students (Mather, Bos, & Babur, 2001). Head Start has responded to congressional mandates aimed at improving Head Start quality and to the evolving body of research on child development and literacy and language instruction in early childhood settings. They have embraced a more cognitively oriented interpretation of school readiness as their mission, as evidenced by their website, publications, and communications, and in

particular through the development of the 2010 Framework.

A tremendous shift in Head Start's culture was required when Congress mandated that school readiness—or more precisely, a skill-oriented interpretation of school readiness—be Head Start's top priority. It should be acknowledged that in a program serving close to 1 million children each year, accommodating such a shift in culture might be a long and challenging process. It is important to know the ways in which early language and literacy are being actively promoted in Head Start classrooms on a daily basis, and how well instruction attends to the essential elements of emergent literacy. Understanding the decision making of teachers is therefore essential.

This understanding also has practical applications for those who create professional development for the Head Start workforce, as well the designers of early childhood teacher preparation programs. The literature base in this area is expanding, but the field is in great need of additional research to help develop a clearer picture of the current situation and to inform our understanding of what seems to be a disconnect between Head Start's message and teachers' practice.

In this chapter I have presented the research relevant to this study. Contextual information about Head Start pertaining to its origin, the legislation that shaped the program, and program outcomes has been provided. In addition I have described the literature depicting the dispositions and attitudes of Head Start teachers and other early childhood educators related to promoting language and literacy. I have also summarized the literature on teachers' knowledge and beliefs—more broadly considered teacher cognition—that framed my research. In Chapter 3 I will provide a detailed description of

the methodology I used to conduct my study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Introduction

In this chapter I set the stage for a discussion of my research design by first revisiting the purpose of the study and questions being investigated. I then provide a rationale for selecting a qualitative research approach, leading into a discussion of case study and why it is an appropriate strategy choice. Next I describe the contextual elements specific to the case before explaining my role as a researcher and detailing my subjectivities. Last I speak to the issues of research quality and integrity. I describe the approach I took to ensure rigor—or as it is frequently characterized in qualitative research literature, trustworthiness.

Research Purpose

Suggesting that research purposes are informed by personal, practical, and intellectual goals, Maxwell (2013) encourages researchers to consider the underlying motives of their research. Doing so helps establish the path for research and avoid threats to validity. Personal goals typically provide motivation for research, and are associated with personal experience or causes. Though personal goals may be what keep researchers interested in a study, they are not appropriate to include in the design. They frequently reflect biases, and as such they should be regarded with caution and addressed in a discussion of subjectivities. Practical goals speak to what researchers hope will be accomplished by conducting a study. Research questions should not simply ask how is a desired change or improvement achieved. Such questions are not answerable and do not provide adequate guidance for conducting the study. Rather, research questions should be

crafted in a way that yields data useful in meeting one's practical goals (Glesne, 2010; Maxwell, 2013). Intellectual goals are those goals related to larger aims or scholarship. Intellectual goals bridge practical goals and the questions that the study seeks to investigate. Below I describe the purpose of the present study in terms of the personal, practical, and intellectual goals at play and reintroduce my resulting research questions.

I am personally interested in the language and literacy practices of preschool teachers because I am a former preschool teacher myself. I have strong beliefs that early childhood education is important, but generally not well understood despite the increased attention it has received. In addition, as a graduate student, I have also spent a great deal of time on research teams conducting studies of Head Start programs in upstate South Carolina. Visiting these schools, I became aware of burdens Head Start teachers have that were not typical of conditions I observed in non-Head Start programs. I detail the implications of my personal interests more fully in a description of my subjectivities, found later in this chapter.

Practically speaking, with an eye toward enhancing the quality of early language and literacy practices, I was interested in this study because of its potential to inform professional development fitted to the particular needs of the local Head Start program where the research was conducted, something that might translate to similar programs in the region.

My intellectual goals were threefold. First, I wanted to describe the current language and literacy practice in a local South Carolina Head Start program and situate it within the evidence-based framework for promoting emergent literacy. Second, I aimed

to identify factors that play into decisions that lead to practice or an absence of practice.

Last, I sought to understand the extent to which particular factors were influential.

Although the number of studies in these areas is beginning to increase, the literature base is still thin—particularly examinations focusing on the decision making of preschool teachers. These scholarly goals led to the creation of the research questions that guided my study.

Research Questions

In qualitative studies, researchers seek to make meaning through the process of inquiry. Research questions, therefore, should not be leading or suggest presuppositions, but rather, serve as a tool to provide focus—similar to the way the lens of a steady-cam is used to “frame and follow a specific set of events or actions in the broader terrain (Agee, 2009, pp. 441-442). Questions that are too narrowly focused, however, run the risk of creating “tunnel vision” that “can inhibit a researcher’s analysis and understanding” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 67). Agee describes good qualitative research questions as being “dynamic and multidirectional.” In other words, good research questions both guide readers’ attention to a topic of significance, and serve as lenses “directed outward by the researcher to capture the nuances of the lives, experiences, and perspectives of others” (p. 446). As I was interested in the particular practices of a local Head Start program in upstate South Carolina, the following questions pertain to an investigation of the four classrooms comprising the Piedmont Head Start Center (Piedmont).

1. What characterizes the language and literacy practices of Head Start teachers?

2. To what extent do language and literacy practices in Head Start preschools address the essential elements of emergent literacy suggested by the literature?
3. What informs Head Start teachers' language and literacy decisions?

Research Design

Philosophically oriented in the interpretivist camp, my aim was to gain contextual understanding of Head Start teachers' dispositions and practices related to language and literacy, and the factors impacting their practice decisions. Yin states that case study “. . . allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (2009, p. 4). My desire to make meaning of the authentic actions occurring at a local Head Start program with multiple classrooms led me to use a qualitative research approach featuring a single case study with multiple embedded units (Yin, 2011; 2014; Yin & Davis, 2007).

Although case study is a widely used approach in qualitative research, consensus among researchers regarding the protocol for conducting a case study is lacking (Yazan, 2015). Case study literature reveals a wide range of perspectives regarding the way in which case study research should be approached, yielding an array of choices at each step in the study. Well-established lines of work from methodologists such as Yin, Stake, and Merriam share some common foundational elements; however, there are still considerable philosophical differences informing their approaches. As a novice case study researcher, I found it helpful to revisit my theoretical orientation during different stages of my research. Squaring components of the design with my research aims and my

fundamental beliefs about research and ways of knowing enabled me to establish an intellectually honest logic for my approach. Though I was informed by numerous researchers, I relied most on the work of Merriam and Yin to craft an investigation positioning case study research as a blend of art and science.

Merriam (1998) contends that a research design functions much like an architectural blueprint: “. . .it’s a plan for assembling, organizing, and integrating information (data), and it results in a specific end product (research findings)” (p. 6). Case studies, like other well-tested research designs, serve as a blueprint for systematic inquiry. Yin suggests researchers consider greater specificity within the case study design, and offers four basic design models: two single case designs—one “holistic” (having a single unit of analysis) and one in which multiple units of analysis are embedded, and two multicase designs—one considering multiple holistic cases and one considering multiple cases with embedded units. (See Yin, 2014, p. 50.) Acknowledging that formal designs have not always been associated with case study and that it is possible to proceed successfully without one, Yin suggests that case studies are stronger when a formal case study design is used (2014). As a novice attracted to case study research and looking for structure, I abided by Yin’s suggestion and incorporated a formal design. In addition to making the study stronger, it provides a predictable structure offering readers schema for following the logic of the case report. Yin suggests three purposes for research: exploration, description, or explanation (2014). In the process of designing my study, I considered my aims in light of Yin’s typology, an act that help me sharpen my focus and refine my research questions. My goals situated my research most comfortably

as a descriptive study, the purpose of which is to inform researchers regarding the “what” and “how” of particular phenomena being investigated (Yin, 2009). In the present study, the “what and how” concern the language and literacy practice at the center. Although my purpose was largely to describe, it felt very restrictive to approach my study as purely descriptive. Merriam (1998) prompted me to consider framing purpose more broadly, stating that, “[i]rrespective of disciplinary orientation or area of specific interest, case studies can also be described by the nature of the final report” (p. 27). Whereas Yin is concerned about the purpose for undertaking the study, Merriam has suggested researchers also consider what purpose the study served in the end. Considering “purpose” from two perspectives was a better fit for my approach to research. It gave me a starting point for embarking on my study as well as the flexibility to expand or alter plans as necessary. The end product of this study has both descriptive and interpretive qualities.

Case and Units of Analysis

Yin suggests that single case study is an appropriate choice when the case selected is representative or typical. The understandings gained from such studies are, as Yin puts it, “. . . assumed to be informative about the experiences of the average person or institution” (2009, p. 48). In the present study, the case is the Piedmont Head Start Center. Piedmont is typical of the Head Start programs operated by “Southland,” a community action agency in upstate South Carolina. To protect the privacy of those affiliated with the center, Southland and Piedmont, like the names of the staff members and children mentioned in this report are pseudonyms. Nije and Asimirian (2014) state,

“[t]he case study is a demarcation of a group, area or a situation for the purposes of concentrating intrinsically on it to understand and explain how it is living its case of interest” (2014, p. 37). To improve the research design, it is therefore useful to make the boundaries clear. Binding the case, in manners such as time, place, activity, definition, or context helps define the study focus and manage the scope of the investigation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Nije and Asimirian, 2014; Stake, 2005). To sharpen the focus of my study I have incorporated contextual, activity, and temporal boundaries. Thus, my bounded case is language and literacy practice at the Piedmont Head Start Center between November 2014 and January 2015.

“Minicases” comprised of each classroom’s practices are embedded within the larger holistic case. Data collected regarding the practices of these individual classrooms will be analyzed as cases unto themselves and also as part of an amalgam of data used to develop the overarching single case. In addition to adding to the detail of the overall case, including the embedded cases presents an opportunity for including multiple data sources and helps to address construct validity through triangulation of data (Yin, 2009).

Context for Study

The study was conducted at a Head Start preschool center in a rural section of a small city in the southeastern United States. The center operates under the umbrella of Southland, a community action agency serving three contiguous counties in the area. According to America Community Survey data, the community in which the center is situated is 74% white, 12.6% black, 4.9% Asian with 4.7% of the community identify as “some other race.” Almost 17% of people living in the area identified themselves as

Hispanic or Latino. More than 45% of children under the age of 18 in this community are living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Setting

The investigation was conducted at the Piedmont Head Start Center. There are four preschool classrooms at Piedmont. The two 3-year-old classrooms each serve 17 children. The 4-year-old class and 3- and 4-year-old mixed age class each serve 20 children. All classrooms were staffed with one lead and one assistant teacher. All of Southland's Head Start preschools operate from September to May, and are open Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. All data was collected while the program was in session during normal operating hours.

Participants

The participants in this research study were the center director and all four lead teachers. Given that my interest was in teachers' classroom practice, data was collected in the natural environment of the classrooms and center during the normal school day. As such, actors other than the lead teachers were almost always present. The words, actions, or presence of such individuals—students, assistant teachers, and classroom visitors, for example—were recorded in my field notes, as part of the environment. I did not actively collect data from or about these individuals. Additional attention was paid to individual children when the teachers were interacting with them. In those cases children's responses and behaviors were taken into account in order to accurately reflect and interpret the teacher data; however, I did not attempt to make distinctions among the children as individual actors.

Selection of Case

The act of selecting the particular site, participants, or other objects of interests for study in qualitative research is commonly referred to as sampling (Ishak & Bakar, 2014). In the case study literature, one of the most often-mentioned approaches to sampling is *purposeful sampling* (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Patton, 2015). Patton, who has been influential in this discussion, states that he introduced purposeful sampling (sometimes referred to in the literature as purposive sampling) to offer a “specifically qualitative approach to case selection” (1980; 2015, p. 265). Patton asserts, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (2015, p. 264). Thus, sampling is regarded as purposeful because the purpose of the inquiry is the defining factor in the sampling selection strategy. Patton has identified 40 subcategories for purposive sampling selection strategies, up from 16 in 2002 (Patton 2002, 2015). Although there is broad support in the research for purposeful sampling as an appropriate nonprobability approach (something typically required due to the nature of qualitative research), ambiguities and inconsistencies in the literature suggest that purposeful sampling, and moreover, sampling in general, are still-evolving constructs in qualitative research (Gentles et al., 2015). Some in the field are critical of characterizing the selection of cases and/or data sources for study as purposeful sampling. Lincoln and Guba (1985), for example, point out that all sampling is in some way purposeful. Yin (2014) on the other

hand, opposes associating the term sampling with case study. Framing case selection as a reciprocal informant of research design, Yin cautions researchers that the use of the word sampling runs the risk of “misleading others into thinking that the case comes from some larger universe or population of like-cases, undesirably reigniting the specter of statistical generalizations” (2016, p. 40). Though Yin rejects the notion of sampling, the rationales he offers for selecting a single case design bear some similarity to purposeful sampling selection strategies mentioned in the literature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton 2015; Yin, 2014).

The goal of my inquiry was to understand the literacy and language dispositions of Head Start preschool teachers in the region, and the factors impacting their decisions about their literacy and language practice. It was my hope that findings could be used to inform the design of local level professional development tailored to the needs of programs proximate to the research university located in the region. To that end, I was interested in choosing a single case that would be typical of the 22 Head Start programs Southland operates across the four counties closest to the University. This is in keeping with Yin (2014) who identifies the typical, or *common* case as he refers to it, as a rationale for choosing a single case study design “when the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation” as is the case in the present study (p. 52). Similarly, this strategy is supported by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), who regard typical sampling as a type of purposeful sampling, suggesting that a sample is typical if it “reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 97). Patton (2015), who includes typical cases in his typology of purposeful sampling

strategies, asserts, “a site is specifically selected because it is not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual” (p. 284).

The criteria I based my selection on reflect the literature. Two programs situated in public schools, as well as several programs located in centers also offering Early Head Start, were removed from contention to create a more uniform pool to choose from. I also wanted to avoid selecting a program with substitutes serving as lead teachers as well as any program I had observed for an earlier, unrelated research project. Though it was not a criteria for selection, given I was a research team of one, as a matter of practicality I strived to find a center that was located within a 30-minute drive of my university.

After obtaining approval for the study from my university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), I consulted with the Early Childhood Services Facilitator of Southland to identify potential centers. Among her recommendations was the Piedmont Head Start Center. I met with the center manager, “Mrs. Bright,” to discuss my research plans and the way in which I hoped to include Piedmont. She agreed to have the study at Piedmont after obtaining consent from the lead teachers.

Protection of Participants

The privacy of the study participants was of the utmost importance. All data, including observation field notes, surveys, instrument measurements, audio recordings, and artifacts, along with consents and all related work product collected was securely stored—either on my password-protected computer or in a locked file cabinet in my office on the campus of Clemson University. Any and all identifying information was removed as soon as was practical. The school, community action agency, and all of the

informants appearing in the study report are identified by pseudonyms. All participants were provided with information about the proposed study along with copies of signed study participation forms. The participants were told verbally and in writing that they were free to consent or decline to participate without consequence. No participant was coerced or manipulated into consenting to the study and all were free to withdraw from the study at any time. There were no known dangers or risks associated with this project. Prior to commencing this study, all research protocol was approved by Clemson's Institutional Review Board (IRB), validating stated assurances regarding participants' health and safety. Though the children at the center were not the focus of the study, their privacy was a prime consideration. As such, no photographs were taken when children were present.

Role as Researcher

First and foremost, I see my role as that of learner and nonexpert in the context of my study. To avoid a subconscious desire to cherry-pick data to complement my suppositions, I needed to come to the study with open eyes and an open mind. As the “primary instrument for data collection” of this investigation, it was incumbent on me to capture the data I needed to gain understanding, not just prove myself right (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Qualitative researchers (Glesne, 2010; and Merriam, 1998, for example) suggest that researchers doing field observations fall on a continuum ranging from pure observation to full participation. During my fieldwork in the classroom collecting data, I positioned myself as an observer as participant. This meant attempting to have as little interaction as possible in order to avoid influencing classroom phenomena and to enable

me to focus on the case at hand. Though I tried to be unobtrusive, the children were aware of my presence and communicated with me in some fashion at each of my visits—for example, asking me to read them books, which I did when appropriate, or questioning me about what I was writing in my field notes journal. I did not however, teach, direct, or assist in any way during the time I was in the classroom.

Subjectivities

As part of the team collecting data for a previous, unrelated study, I had limited contact with several dozen Southland Head Start teachers and center managers. Much of my involvement was administrative—collecting names and contact information and preparing information packets for the teachers. I did not spend time in any classroom other than to retrieve or drop off forms. These interactions did not provide me with any particular insight into the teachers’ literacy activities, attitudes, or dispositions. In addition to administrative duties, however, I was trained to be a CLASS observer and called upon to evaluate digital recordings of teacher-child interactions of many Southland teachers. Given that CLASS is the instrument Head Start uses to assess program quality, my experience and familiarity with CLASS and knowledge of program performance for many of the centers is important to acknowledge. My experience rating other Southland preschools has likely contributed to an initial proposition brought to my research: Head Start teachers do not consistently demonstrate evidence-based practice. Acknowledging my subjectivities and being mindful of them through the research process helped avoid the pitfall of favoring data that confirmed my bias. As an added safeguard to this and any

unrecognized subjectivities, I enlisted the help of peer second readers to review and discuss my conceptual framework and sample text from transcripts and my field notes.

Data Collection

Informed by Denzin (1970), Merriam states that “[t]he opportunity to use multiple methods of data collection is a major strength of case study research . . .” (1988, p. 69). Multiple data sources give researchers a broader picture (Yin, 2014). Information from one source may be used to supply data missing in another source (Merriam, 1998). Yin (2014) argues that the greatest benefit of using multiple methods of data collection is the ability of researchers to triangulate the data by drawing “converging lines of inquiry” (p. 120). Multiple intersecting data points make findings more convincing (Yin, 2014). The importance of data triangulation in case study is one premise that has nearly unanimous support among case study methodologists. In this spirit, I collected five primary types of data: observation, individual interviews, lesson plans, photographs of the environment, and CLASS scores for each of the teachers comprising the program quality assessment. In addition, a variety of documents (e.g., letters to parents, a scholastic book order form) and artifacts (e.g., child work samples) were spontaneously given to me by the teachers. (See Appendix E, “Data Collected at Piedmont Head Start Center” which identifies the data that was collected for the study and the purpose for including it.)

Observation. My observations began informally in November 2014 during two initial visits to meet with and collect forms from the teachers and meet with Mrs. Bright to schedule my visits. During my first visit in November, I spent 15-20 minutes in each classroom introducing myself to the lead and assistant teacher, getting acquainted with

the general layout, and dropping off informed consents to be signed and collected at my subsequent visit.

Mrs. Bright and I planned 3 three-hour observation periods per class for a total of 36 hours of observation spread over a five-week span from December 2014 through January 2015. The observation schedule was reviewed with the teachers at the introductory meeting, and adjustments were made as needed. The order of observations was not a concern and was driven by the teachers' needs. Following each observation, I checked in with the teacher coming up next on the schedule to remind them of my upcoming visit. On one occasion a teacher asked to reschedule (which I did) due to uncertain family circumstances that may have kept her out of school on a planned observation day. The observations commenced between 8:00 a.m. and 8:45 a.m. and lasted between 2.5 and 3.5 hours. Due to persistent illness of the students and teachers in one classroom, only two observations were possible.

As an observer-participant I tried to stay out of the hub of activity. I usually sat on the floor against a wall and around the room infrequently, but as necessary. I came to the school as unencumbered as possible, bringing only a camera to take digital photos of the classrooms and a lined journal in which I recorded all of my field notes. At the conclusion of each observation I completed a modified version of the contact summary sheet described by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 53). They suggest that though it is a useful tool for early data analysis—particularly to identify concepts, themes, and issues for code development and add to overall case analysis, the forms can also be used to inform future contacts such as observations and interviews—as was the case in my study.

Use of such a form straddles the line between data collection and data analysis—if in fact there is a line at all. Merriam (1998; 2009), for example, suggests that in qualitative research data collection and data analysis happen simultaneously.

Interviews. Each teacher agreed to a 30- to 45-minute individual interview. The interview followed a semi-structured format (see Appendix F, “Language and Literacy in Head Start Preschool Classrooms: Semistructured Interview Instrument”) to allow for a more natural conversation to occur. Each interview was conducted in a private location at the school—either in the main office or in an empty classroom—and recorded using an iPhone app called Rev. I attempted to include all of my initial questions, but at the same time let the teachers dictate the length of time spent on each question. I did not try to curtail their answers in any way and teachers were not pressed to complete the interview within a 30- to 45-minute span if they wished to take more time. A portion of one teacher’s interview recording was lost due to a settings glitch (the do not disturb function was overridden). Though I had written notes from the interview, the teacher graciously offered to be re-interviewed when she learned of the mishap.

Immediately following each interview the digital recording was sent electronically to Rev for transcription. Written transcripts were produced and returned to me within 24 hours. Each written transcript was checked against its recording, and the few minor errors found were corrected. All of the teachers were sent, via email, copies of their interview transcripts for approval and offered the opportunity to add or amend the comments. No changes or amendments were requested.

CLASS scores. Mrs. Bright provided me with the CLASS scores from the teachers' most recent assessments. It should be noted that although there was a copy machine in the office at the center the scores were hand-copied from the original score sheet and do not include supplemental information that might be available on the original.

Photographs. Pictures of each classroom, from multiple angles and perspectives, were taken. The photographs were of environmental features only. This included walls, floors, artwork, posters, signs, furnishings, materials, children's work, and cubbies. No children or adults were photographed.

Artifacts. Over the course of the time I was engaged in data collection I was offered, and accepted, a miscellany of artifacts. These items given to me by children, teachers, assistants, or the center manager were offered spontaneously and include items such as children's work samples, lesson plans, Department of Social Services training forms, and class schedules. Each item was stored with other data from the class it had come from.

Data Analysis

Case study data management. Prior to commencing my study, I established systems for organizing and storing both hard copies and digital copies of the data I planned to collect for the study. Organizing and archiving the data in this way makes it possible for a reader to inspect the data apart from the case report. Yin (2014) stresses that the creation of such a data storage system—which he refers to as a case study database—“markedly increases the reliability of your entire case study” (p. 124). Patton (1980) suggests a similar construct in his description of case record.

I purchased a portable filing case to organize and store my data in. I brought the filing case with me when I visited Piedmont and left it locked in my car while I was in the center. When I returned to my car any data I collected on a given day was promptly filed before leaving the school grounds. Copies of transcripts and photographs were added as soon as they were available. The majority of the hard data—interview transcripts, CLASS scores, photographs, and various artifacts—were filed according to teacher. Data that pertained to the school in general and my field notebook with all classroom observation notes were filed under the tab Piedmont Program in the same filing case.

In addition to the paper files, I also created a digital filing system for the data. I made two digital copies of each item in the paper files so that I could create a set of digital folders filtered by teacher/program, as I had done with the original data, and also individual folders for each data type. For example, the digital folder labeled *Interview Transcripts* contains a copy of each teacher transcript. The contents of the teacher/program folders mirrored the contents of the hard data in the portable file case, with one exception. My field journal contains notes for all of my observations. Given that, I felt it was important to keep the journal intact and not remove any pages. I filed the original field journal with general program data. For the purpose of the digital storage system, the handwritten field notes were scanned and saved as eight separate digital observation notes files, then sorted into the teachers' folders. The digital data is stored on my computer and backed up on an external hard drive. The hard copies are kept in the

original file case that when not physically with me is stored in a locked drawer with my data analysis work product.

Early data analysis. Merriam posits that data collection and data analysis happen simultaneously in qualitative research, stating that “[e]merging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn leads to refinement or reformulation of one’s questions, and so on” (1998, p. 123; 2009). During my observations I jotted such insights, hunches, and hypotheses in the margin of my field notes and in the contact summary forms I had created for that purpose. Merriam recommends that researchers conduct data collection and analysis simultaneously, suggesting it yields data that “are both parsimonious and illuminating” (1998, p. 124). Reporting that my early analysis generated “parsimonious and illuminating data” would be a bold claim. I can state, however, that reflecting on and mentally sifting the data helped keep my data collection focused and likely made my data analysis slightly less overwhelming.

Intensive data analysis. After my data collection concluded I shifted into more intensive data analysis. Early data analysis generated thoughts and ideas that served to moderate the volume, quality, and relevance of the data amassed during data collection, resulting in a somewhat refined body of data. The aim in my intensive data analysis was to derive understanding from the coalesced data that would answer the questions posed in this study. To accomplish this I began to systematically process the gathered data to organize and make meaning of it.

Informed by Merriam (1998), I started my analysis by rereading and reviewing the data in order to generate tentative data categories. After sorting the data by type I began reading the field notes from my first observation, taking note of items that particularly stood out. I had not establish a priori codes, in part, due to my fluency with the preschool context, but more so, because I wanted to take an inductive approach to analysis and make meaning of the data “from the ground up” (Yin, 2014, p. 138). As I read through the observation notes for the first time, I mined the text for nuggets of meaning. Reminiscent of the virtual conversation with the data that Merriam (1998) suggests should happen during this activity, I made notes on index cards, jotting down significant thoughts, recurring themes, and queries as they entered my head, adding the data type and source for later reference. Afterward, I pondered the notes on the cards. I physically sorted them in various ways—combining some, discarding others, and noting extremes, holes, and repeated thoughts—engaging in the kind of “play” Yin regards as helpful in charting a path for analysis (2014, p. 235). “Playing” with the cards helped me identify a group of salient thoughts—information that was transferred to a running master list to use going forward with the rest of the data. I clipped the group of index card notes to the observation field note pages and then repeated the same process with the field notes from the second observation. I jotted thoughts, ideas, and questions on a second set of index card and then sorted, combined, and reduced my thoughts, as was done with the first set of cards, and compared them to the new running master list, noting areas of overlap. The salient thoughts from the second group of cards were then merged into the running master list. One item at a time, I continued processing the data in this way—

recording thoughts of interest on note cards, sorting and consolidating the note card information, comparing it to the growing running master list and then merging new information into the cumulative working master document.

At the end of this process I had a set of note cards for each piece of data and a cumulative master list of possible themes, “a-ha” thoughts, and other noteworthy information culled from the cards. The next step in my analysis was to develop categories for grouping information in the data by looking for patterns in the information on my master list. I transferred the information from the master list to individual index cards so that I could physically manipulate the information to more easily see patterns and connections leading to my findings. The categories were descriptive of the data, not the data themselves, which is in keeping with Merriam, who stresses that the categories are not the data but rather abstractions suggested by the data (1998).

In a second reading of the data, I began actively looking for the *units of information*, a term used by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to describe “the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself” (pp. 344-345). In other words, a segment of text—whether it is a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph—may qualify as a unit of information as long as the reader understands its meaning within the context of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During my first reading, numerous units of information were identified and recorded; however, the identification of these was incidental to the activity guiding my primary purpose. My approach had been to consider the data more broadly to get a sense of themes in the data. During the second scan of the data I concentrated on identifying meaningful passages, underlining each unit of information

and transcribing it onto an index card, if it had not been captured previously, along with codes identifying the data type and source. After I reviewed each piece of data to gather units of information, I began sorting the units into the categories I had developed. At times this prompted new thoughts about the meaning or significance of a particular unit of information, which I noted on the associated card. Analysis of patterns within categories as well as between categories were used to determine whether categories should be collapsed, expanded, or altered in some other way, ultimately yielding themes for discussion.

Ensuring Quality

Whether or not research is worthwhile to the field or even a single reader hinges on the rigor of planning, design, and execution of the investigation—factors that determine whether the endeavor is considered valid and reliable. Validity and reliability are well known as quantitative research concerns, and addressing threats to validity and reliability is routine in quantitative studies. Guba & Lincoln (1981) emphatically state that for qualitative studies it is “not a whit different” (p. 378). While it is true that validity and reliability are important concerns for both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the words have become terms of art in the quantitative tradition and are operationally defined by a research paradigm that is significantly different than the paradigm framing naturalistic studies (Merriam, 1998). The constructs of validity and reliability as they apply to qualitative studies and the way in which they are effectively addressed is a particularly unsettled aspect of case study designs and of qualitative research in general (Merriam, 1998).

As a novice qualitative researcher it would be comforting to think that today, almost two decades into the 21st century, my work would be held in the same regard as that of my quantitatively minded peers. The field of education, however—though increasingly enlightened—is not yet there. It would be a challenge to make it out of a doctoral program without an awareness of the emperor status quantitative researchers have traditionally asserted. Although qualitative methodologists have made great strides toward dismantling the notion of a research hierarchy, questions of legitimacy still smolder in the literature. Given the historical primacy of quantitative research, issues of validity and reliability in qualitative studies have typically been framed in terms of how they relate to or align with well-established quantitative approaches.

Two of the most oft-cited approaches for addressing issues of validity and reliability in qualitative studies come from different philosophical camps. Yin's recommendations for addressing issues of reliability and validity reflect his position that case study is an equal among options available for social science research, making no distinction between qualitative and quantitative approaches. He points to the commonality of social science research methods as the rationale for subjecting case studies to tests "commonly used to establish the quality of any empirical social research" (Yin, 2014, p. 45). These tests, which assess construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability, are typically associated with quantitative research. Other methodologists, including Merriam (1998), have used similar, if not the same terms in their reliability and validity constructs, tailoring the description to the qualitative approach. Yin's (2014) assertion that one framework can be interpreted for use in all

social science research in some ways erodes the essence of what a case study is or why a researcher would choose the method in the first place. For example, in his description of external validity, Yin reasonably offers analytical generalizability as an alternative to statistical generalizability. Even with that accommodation, he acknowledges that for some types of case studies, analytical generalization may be challenging and suggests in those cases to consider asking a different type of question (2014, p. 48). Something that comes across as an unnecessary burden, given the test is a contrivance.

Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba (2007) have expressed a different perspective on matters of validity and reliability. Rather than ignore or blur distinctions among methods of social science research, the pair drew on those distinctions to adapt the traditional positivist tests for rigor in a way that considers the nature of qualitative research and the manner in which it is conducted. Under the umbrella of “trustworthiness,” the qualitative analog they suggest for rigor, Lincoln and Guba introduced the constructs “credibility,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “confirmability.” These constructs parallel traditional tests of rigor—internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, which they interpret as concerning “truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 18). Lincoln and Guba have recommended steps that researchers can take to guard against erosion of trustworthiness, some of which are similar to techniques suggested by Yin, for example, triangulation of data, member checking, peer debriefing, chain of evidence, and negative case analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2014). Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007), among others, have suggested that qualitative research needs

to move to a more organic approach for addressing quality, one that relies on a new paradigm that fully considers the nature of qualitative research absent the traditional positivist model. Presently, however, trustworthiness and the criteria it comprises, along with other qualitative interpretations of traditional standards for rigor, are more fully formed approaches and better established in the literature.

The approach I took to address rigor, or trustworthiness, falls somewhere in the middle of those suggested by Yin and Lincoln and Guba and is largely in line with the strategy offered by Merriam (1998). Merriam's (1998) pragmatic approach is prefaced by a frank assessment of the qualitative research landscape in which she raises two important points. First, she argues that despite the fact that the debate among scholars regarding the most appropriate approach for qualitative research is unsettled, researchers are not standing by waiting for the dust to settle. The need for some established criteria for addressing validity and reliability is immediate. Without it, she contends, knowledge gained in qualitative studies may be at risk. Second, she bluntly reminds us that a bias against qualitative research is still something with which we must contend, stating that, "qualitative researchers need to respond to the concerns of outsiders, many of whom may be unfamiliar with or blatantly challenging of the credibility of qualitative research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 201). Merriam describes three constructs that reflect the intent of the traditional criteria for rigor, but in a manner that is responsive to and reflective of the qualitative research paradigm. By operationally defining constructs in methodologically neutral language and linking the constructs to the traditional positivist terms, *internal validity*, *external validity*, and *reliability*, Merriam's approach offers quantitative

researchers, and those less familiar with qualitative methods, a framework for interpreting the criteria used to gauge rigor (1998). Further, the theory-based constructs are not overly prescriptive nor are they tied to a particular design, allowing for a tailored approach specific to the design and purpose of the study. Below I describe the constructs comprising rigor used in the present study and list the particular research-supported procedures that were implemented to enhance each of them.

Internal validity. According to Merriam (1998) internal validity focuses on the alignment between research findings and the reality that actually exists. Researchers across methods promote quality by ensuring that what they intend to measure and what they actually measure are the same. Further, they implement procedures for establishing that “findings capture what is really there” (p. 201), in other words, are the findings credible?” to use language suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The following strategies were used to address internal validity:

- Triangulation of data: Multiple types of data were collected from multiple sources in order to get a “holistic understanding” of the case and confirm and crosscheck data.
- Member checks: Transcripts of the teachers’ interviews were provided to each interviewee for review and approval to ensure that the conversation we had was accurately captured in the text of the transcription.
- Repeated observations: I made more than 12 visits to Piedmont, logging in more than 32 hours of classroom time and approximately 5 hours in the office or other parts of the program site.

- Reporting researcher biases: Earlier in this chapter, I addressed my philosophy, my research purpose, and my subjectivities so that the reader of my study would have a good idea of my perspective and any biases I might hold.

Reliability. The construct of reliability speaks to a study's ability to be repeated and yield the same findings. Premised on the existence of a single reality, quantitative research yields causal connections between isolated variables and axioms to explain phenomena. For studies of this nature, reliability is essential. In the case of qualitative research variables are not studied in isolation, rather, understanding is sought in fluid, multi-faceted contexts. This is not to say that qualitative studies are exempt from expectations of reliability; however, the nature of qualitative research demands reliability be considered through a different lens. Lincoln and Guba (1985) frame the expectation as dependability. This perspective suggests we ask, will the research design consistently yield findings, or understandings, that when interpreted by another investigator make sense given the living context studied? The following strategies were used to address reliability:

- Triangulation of data: Important to promoting internal validity, triangulation of data also strengthens the reliability of my case study. Multiple types of data were collected from multiple sources in order to get a "holistic understanding" of the case and confirm and crosscheck data.
- Reporting researcher biases: As with internal validity, addressing my perspective as researcher and my relevant personal views as I have done

earlier in this chapter provided insight into the way I approached this study. Knowing what lens was applied when interpreting the data is useful for gauging how dependable the study is.

- Chain of evidence: As suggested by Yin (2014), the description of my study creates a chain of evidence explicitly linking data from collection, to analysis, and then findings. This along with the creation of a case study database—also thought of as a case record (Patton, 2002)—enables others to retrace my steps and follow the logic that resulted in my findings.

External validity. For a quantitative researcher, external validity is most often thought of as generalizability. This construct is a challenge to interpret in qualitative studies because what is studied would not constitute a suitable sample for generalizability due to insufficiencies in terms of “sample” size and method used for sampling. Moreover, rarely is it the aim of a qualitative study to make claims about a population. Studies are conducted at the local level to understand phenomena in a particular context. Causal connections or explanations may be sought in a qualitative investigation, as in the explanatory case described by Yin (2014), but in ways that are contextualized at the local level. Findings from qualitative studies also have value outside of the studied context in their ability to be transferred to other locations with similar contexts. Lincoln and Guba refer this as transferability (1985). The following strategies were used to address external validity:

- Rich thick description: In the present study I have dedicated a chapter to contextual information prefacing my findings. In it I have provided a

thorough description of the setting and participants and, as suggested by Merriam & Tisdell (2016), have incorporated quoted textual evidence.

- Selection of typical case: I have taken steps through my selection criteria to choose a case to study that is a common example, or typical of cases around the region.
- Study boundaries: In accordance with suggestions of Shenton (2004), in addition to identifying the bounded case, information describing my data collection methods, the number and length of interviews and observations I conducted, and the time frame for collecting the data has also been included.

Summary

In Chapter 3 I introduce my methodology, describing the rationale for use of qualitative methods, and my reasons for conducting my investigation as a case study. I presented a detailed description of the research design I created to frame my investigation and discuss the measures taken to ensure integrity of the study. In Chapter 4 I present my findings as a detailed case narrative. Following my narrative findings, in Chapter 5 I provide analysis and synthesis of my findings. I conclude my dissertation with discussion of implications resulting from my study and recommendations for research and practice in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Chapter Introduction

In this chapter I begin by briefly outlining the warrant for this study and restating the research question steering my inquiry. Next I give substance to the Piedmont Head Start Center and its language and literacy dispositions and practices by describing the overall setting of the center, the instructional environment, and program quality assessments. Afterward I characterize the language and literacy climate in each of the four classrooms. To that end, I provide a description of the environment, a vignette depicting the classroom in action, and a narrative portrait of each teacher. For narrative continuity, this descriptive report of Piedmont's practice solely comprises Chapter 4. Patterns and themes that emerged during my analysis are addressed in Chapter 5.

Study Overview

I conducted this investigation seeking to contribute to a small but growing body of research examining the nature of teachers' language and literacy practice in early childhood settings, and more specifically, in Head Start preschool programs. The first strand of this examination addresses the nature of Head Start language and literacy practices, something prior research indicates has not aligned well with evidence-based practice. Head Start preschools, in particular, merit inquiry given actions taken by the Office of Head Start (OHS) in the last two decades to help grantees align their programs with extant emergent literacy research. The second strand of this examination surveys factors influencing Head Start teachers' practices related to language and literacy. It is widely accepted that teachers' thinking impacts what teachers do in their classrooms.

Teacher thinking, also referred to as teacher cognition, is largely regarded as being comprised of multiple constructs, most notably knowledge and beliefs—with beliefs receiving the most attention in the literacy research. Despite the prevalence of studies interrogating the connection between teachers’ beliefs and practice, findings across the literature are inconsistent, suggesting a need to rethink the way we conceptualize teacher cognition and account for other potentially mediating variables, such as teachers’ personal characteristics and program context.

My case study investigation addressed the following questions specific to the preschool program and lead teachers at Piedmont Head Start Center.

1. What characterizes the language and literacy practices of Head Start teachers?
2. To what extent do language and literacy practices in Head Start preschools address the essential elements of emergent literacy suggested by the literature?
3. What informs Head Start teachers’ language and literacy decisions?

The Case: Piedmont Head Start Center

Setting

The campus of the Piedmont Head Start Center is comprised of two small one-story buildings separated by a small, partially paved parking lot and driveway. The main building, a tidy brick structure, contains the office, a commercial kitchen, and three classrooms. Doors from each classroom lead to a large grassy playground enclosed by a four-foot high chain-link fence, and outfitted with a wooden climber and two tire swings.

The second smaller structure adjacent to the main building is used as the fourth classroom. The white wood-sided building, with several petite rooms and a partial kitchen, is house-like in appearance both inside and out. There is a grassy yard fenced-in behind the little house. Both buildings are locked and accessible by a buzzer system except during the busy morning drop-off period.

The interior of the center is plain but cheerful. The wall space of the single corridor contains information for parents as well as brightly colored motivational posters. The kitchen, in which food is prepared for the children at Piedmont and another Head Start center nearby, is located at the end of the narrow hall. The office, entered by doors on the right, stretches the length of the hallway. The three classrooms are across the hall from the office and comprise the length of the back of the building. The doors of the classrooms are decorated—reflecting themes drawn from holidays and seasons, popular movies such as *Frozen*, and favorite books like *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*.

Instructional Environment

The OHS does require grantees to implement a particular curriculum; rather it provides guidelines for choosing an effective research-based early learning curriculum aligned with Head Start’s framework and state early learning standards, when applicable. To that end, Piedmont, and all of the Head Start centers under the Southland umbrella use the HighScope curriculum.

Each week the teachers at Piedmont complete a “Weekly Curriculum Plan,” a two-page form used at all of the Southland Head Start preschools.. The first page specifies activities for each of the seven structured components on the daily schedule for

each day of the week. These components, reflective of the HighScope curriculum, include a morning and afternoon Circle Time, Planning Time, Work Time, Recall Time, Small Group Time, and Outside Time. The second page is used to indicate learning foci for the week (i.e., Head Start Domains to be Explored/State Early Learning Standards), plans for individualization, transition methods, special classroom activities (primarily related to health and safety), and materials to add to centers. Though in some cases teachers completed the form with greater specificity, their interpretation of the components of the Weekly Curriculum Plans appeared to be uniform, with one exception. The type of information provided in the block titled “Head Start Domains to be Explored/State Early Learning Standards” differed from teacher to teacher, and also week to week for each teacher individually in terms of quantity and/or combination of Head Start domains and state standards described. (See Appendix G, “Types of Information Provided by Teachers in Weekly Curriculum Plans” for the range of responses, with examples from the text of the Weekly Curriculum Plans.)

The “Head Start Domains to be Explored/State Early Learning Standards” block of the Weekly Curriculum Plans along with a second block entitled “Individualization” provided some specific insight regarding the extent to which specific language and literacy experiences are planned. In the individualization section of the plan the Piedmont teachers typically arranged the students into two or three small groups. Each group was assigned a skill or concept area to be addressed. The targeted areas identified ranged from very specific physical skills to very broad conceptual understandings. One teacher

occasionally offered examples of how a particular goal would be addressed; however, that was atypical.

Of the nine domains/standards identified across nine curriculum planning forms, four of them addressed language and literacy development, however, three of the four pertained to a single class while one class had. Similarly, with respect to Individualization, eight of twenty-six skills or concepts pertained to literacy and, or language development, but five of the eight were attributed to one class. When reviewing the 286 activities planned for the instructional components of the daily schedule fewer than five seemed to be aligned with the specific Head Start domains or state standards mentioned. The instructional goals for supporting children's literacy identified under Individualization were either very broad (e.g., "Literacy Skills") or vaguely defined (e.g., "Letter Sounds"). As such they may be slightly better represented (up to 20 more activities) but it is difficult to ascertain their objectives with names such as "Message Board," "Letter of the Week," "ABC Song," "Alphabet Collage," "First Name," "Find the Letter," and "Letters."

This description of the lesson plan activities only speaks to teacher planning that was recorded on the weekly curriculum planning forms, not what was actually implemented in the classrooms. It is not necessarily inclusive of all planning or preparation that occurred, and does not speak to any unplanned practices supporting language and literacy that transpired.

Program quality and assessment. The Piedmont Head Start Center is accredited by the National Association for the Education for Young Children (NAEYC), a

professional membership organization committed to promoting high-quality early learning. The intensive accreditation process, which can take several months to a year, requires a site visit by NAEYC accreditation staff and the construction of a comprehensive program portfolio addressing 10 evidence-based standards, including standards for curriculum and teaching. Fewer than 10% of early childhood education programs in the United States earn accreditation, which must be renewed every five years.

As a Head Start grantee program, Piedmont is also subject to assessments of program quality using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System: PreK (CLASS). The CLASS instrument measures classroom quality by evaluating 10 teacher-student interaction dimensions organized under the domains of Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Each dimension is scored on a scale of 1 to 7, with a score of 1 indicating the observation of few if any defining characteristics of the dimension and a score of 7 suggesting that observed interactions were highly characteristic of the dimension (Pianta, La Paro, & Hambre, 2008). Of the three domains, Instructional Support—which is comprised of the dimensions Concept Development, Quality of Feedback, and Language Modeling—is most closely associated with literacy outcomes (Howes et. al. 2008). Although individual classrooms undergo evaluation, Head Start uses CLASS to examine program quality rather than individual classroom quality. Thus, program scores are expressed as the mean of the individual classroom scores taken together. Data from three observations in each classroom provided to me by Piedmont’s director, Ms. Bright, indicate that Piedmont’s score for the dimension of

Instructional Support was a 3.19. This score, considered to be at the low end of CLASS's middle scoring range, was one half of a standard deviation above the Head Start 2014 national average of 2.90.

Piedmont Classrooms

Mixed-Age (3K/4K) Classroom: Ms. March

The environment. There is a cacophony of color and print in Ms. March's mixed-age classroom. From floor to ceiling, the walls are covered in commercial posters, handmade signs, material labels, charts, alphabet letters, rules, how-to instructions, children's work product, family pictures, birthdates, shapes, colors, schedules, calendars, and other texts and images. The bright primary colors are not unexpected, but the volume of print, frequently presented in both English and Spanish, is overpowering. In one corner of the room, taped to the wall a few inches from the 8-foot ceiling, there is a bright yellow sign with a blue border announcing, "HAPPY BIRTHDAY!" Twenty multicolored cupcakes bearing the names and birthdates of the children in the class are scattered below the sign, well above the heads of the children. In fact, almost all of the text and artifacts that are most relevant to the children are posted well above their heads, including items such as family photos, name labels for cubbies, children's writing, photographs of the children at school, and children's artwork. Conversely, many of the items hung at the children's eye level seem less meaningful to 3K and 4K children—for instance, the text of questions that the teachers are encouraged to ask the children to promote the children's critical thinking (e.g., How do you do that?) or a promotional sign filled with lines of fine print outlining rules for riding a bus, or large posters of the

numerals 1 through 10, each followed by a corresponding, and sometimes forced, rhyme (e.g., “10—First a one, then a zero again. That makes 10.”). The centers and many of the materials are labeled as well—something desired by accrediting organizations like NAEYC—however, they are almost invisible competing with all of the other text.

The book area in Ms. March’s room is cozy and welcoming. There are a variety of child-sized pillows and chairs available on the oval rainbow-striped rug, making it a nice place for children to relax and get comfortable while reading a book. The selection of texts on the front-facing bookshelf is a mix of well-regarded children’s books, children’s magazines, text generated from television programs and movies, and a few inexpensive “drugstore” books. The books are a little worn, but overall they are in good shape.

Although the classroom centers are well defined and stocked with materials, loose paper, forms, magazines, plastic tubs of materials, books, and other items are stacked on counters and desks and are beginning to encroach on a few of the centers. Some of the shelf space in the center is tightly packed, making it hard to access a particular item.

One area where this is particularly true is in the writing center. Although there are remnants of organization, it appears as if that has not been a priority of late and consequently, the mixed-up, worn materials make the center one of the least inviting in the classroom. Each child has a pencil box stored in the writing center. The boxes, filled with a hodgepodge of writing and drawing implements, are stacked one on top of the other on a low shelf and are a little difficult to access. The center also contains materials that seem more appropriately suited for the art center (e.g., collage scraps and glue). I am

somewhat surprised when I see one quadrant of the writing center shelf piled high with coloring books, materials research has long held to be inappropriate for childhood settings (Lowenfeld, 1957).

Classroom in action. Christmas is just a few weeks away and the excitement of Ms. March's children is high. A group of five exuberant children are examining a stack of paper Santa Claus puppets made by the class the previous day. The crayon-decorated Santas, which had been glued to Popsicle sticks and left to dry on a shelf in the center of the room, are impossible to resist. Within a minute the five children, each with at least one Santa in hand, are singing a song they learned earlier in the week with much gusto, "Where is Santa? Where is Santa?" One of the children suggests they make a play. Ms. March's assistant teacher, Ms. Green, approaches the group. Without explanation she takes the puppets from the children and informs them matter-of-factly, "Santas will go home today." The children take the disruption in stride and head off in several different directions.

Later that morning, the 20 children in Ms. March's classroom are playfully jostling for position around the perimeter of the royal blue rug anchoring the block center. They have gathered for Circle Time, a 15-minute whole group activity scheduled twice a day. Ms. March is seated in a chair at the end of the rug near the wall. She begins the first Circle Time of the day by asking the children to tell her the letter of the week. Reflexively, Ms. March immediately prompts the children, hinting at the answer she is looking for, "e-e." Most of the children chime in, saying in unison, "e-e-s-s-s-s-s-s." Ms. March, replies, "Yes, S. Our letter this week is S. What are some words that start with "e-

s-s-s?” Ms. March draws the children’s attention to the busy white board next to her. A group of clip art pictures of objects that begin with *S* is posted in the corner, framed by a large calendar, a days-of-the-week poster, and a weather chart. As Ms. March points at the images one at a time, some of the children say the name of the object aloud, some join in after their peers start the word, and a few say nothing. Next, Ms. March shows the children cards with pictures of objects starting with *S* and asks the children to name the object. The children seem less familiar with these pictures and are a little slower to respond, so Ms. March gives the children clues, ”What is something in your cereal?” A few of the children guess milk. Ms. March scaffolds further: “Straw-w-w-w.” The catch on and shout, “Strawberry!” Ms. March continues with the cards. She continues to provide hints when the cards prove challenging, as was the case for the picture of a salad. She probes the children to think of their own *S*-word, and again, reflexively offers a clue to a word she has in mind, saying, “When you think of *hat*, you think of . . .” The children make several non-*S*-word guesses before arriving at the correct answer, scarf.

After the letter of the week activity is finished, Ms. March brings out a book and asks her wiggly students to make sure “our ears are turned on.” After Ms. March holds up the book, *Even Monsters Get Haircuts*, I am surprised to hear the voice of a recorded narrator. Without saying a word, Ms. March opens the book so that the children can see the pictures and continues to turn the pages when signaled. Ms. March’s expression is pleasant but detached, reminding me of a flight attendant going through the motions of a recorded preflight safety announcement. The children are shifting around on the rug when she pauses the recording to excitedly report that she has heard an *S*-word. Right

away she provides a clue, “What is the stuff you put on your hair?” Some of the kids shout “Shampoo!” Either not noticing, or hoping for a wider response, Ms. March continues, “It makes bubbles . . .” This time many children shout, “Shampoo, shampoo!” Ms. March acknowledges the group’s answer and resumes playing the recording. At the conclusion of the recording, Ms. March asks the children “Who cuts hair?” One of the children offers, “Hair styler,” but is not acknowledged. Ms. March begins to tell a story about cutting her husband’s hair. Another child responds to her story, saying, “Just like my dad did a while ago.” Ms. March replies, “Yes, just like your dad.” Circle Time is now winding down. Ms. Green is having a conversation with several children, asking them if they get their hair cut at a place like the one in the book. The children respond, but not all are acknowledged. Ms. March calls for Ms. Green’s group to go to one of the tables. Half of the children scramble up to go to the table. The remaining children stay with Ms. March on the rug. Ms. Green and her group have a discussion about fall. She asks, “How do you know it’s fall?” The children provide numerous answers and Ms. Green responds and probes further. The talk becomes a brainstorm of ideas that ultimately lead to an extensive conversation about trees and whether or not they hibernate.

The small group of children with Ms. March is being shown a stack of cards with the children’s names. Ms. March shows them the cards one at a time and asks the children to say the name aloud. Fairly quickly, the attention of the group dissolves. Ms. March tells the children they have “ants in their pants,” before gently reminding them of the rules. Afterward she says, “Now don’t forget our rules.” Almost immediately, a

teacher from another classroom walks in. Ms. March—still in the Circle Time area with the children—has a brief conversation with the teacher regarding administrative matters. While Ms. March and the visiting teacher talk, some of the children start moving blocks around and then begin putting them on the rug. There are more than a dozen blocks on the floor when Ms. March finishes her conversation. Turning her attention back to the group, she begins dismissing students to go to centers based on clothing colors. By the time all of the children have been dismissed, most of the blocks have ended up on the floor. Ms. March gets the attention of the responsible children and expresses her displeasure, saying, “I hope you remember that you took all of those blocks off of the shelf, because I will remember. What did I tell you about these blocks?” As far as I can see, the children involved look up for a moment but do not return to the block center.

During the time the children are in centers (referred to as Work Time on the class schedule), the room is bustling with activity. Ms. March’s children move from activity to activity without restriction. It seems as though they are free to leave materials spread out on the ground or table where they had been using them. Several times I see children dump a basket of materials and dart away without ever using them. One child is “skating” on puzzle pieces that another child is working on. Ms. March and Ms. Green occasionally remind the children of the rules, but there is little effort made to direct or control the children in any way.

Today I position myself in the writing center, where a number of children are working with stencils. There are stencils of a variety of shapes and sizes, featuring common animals and objects (e.g., cow, house). There are also plastic cards with raised

figures for “rubblings.” One child is trying to use a marker to make a rubbing, but the result is an unsatisfying blob. I notice the frustration and suggest a pencil, which has much better results. Generally speaking, the children would probably enjoy these activities more and get more benefit from them if the stencils and cards for rubbing were paired with writing implements that matched the task.

Several children express an interest about what I am writing in my notebook. From previous visits, they know that I am in school, like they are, and that I am studying what teachers do in classrooms so that I can help other teachers. They ask to write their names in my book, which I allow. Both of the children printed their first names in upper- and lowercase letters. They drew pictures of turkeys and the people who were at the table. The children ask if I am writing about their behavior, which I assure them I am not. One child, expressing mock concern, says, “Please don’t tell my momma.”

On this day, Ms. March is in the book area reading to a small group of students. She is very animated and the children are listening intently. This scene is typical of what I see when I am in the classroom. Ms. March and Ms. Green are very much a part of the activity happening during Work Time. In addition to reading to small groups of children, I have observed them role-playing in the housekeeping area, helping to build a structure in blocks, working on a puzzle, and playing with manipulatives. The two teachers seem to engage in more sustained and more authentic conversations when they are with individual children or in small groups during Work Time. I have also observed that the children are more focused and more responsive when Ms. March or Ms. Green are reading to them (as opposed to hearing taped narration) and also when one of the teachers

is telling a personal story. One instance that stood out in particular happened the last day I visited the classroom. The children were seated at three long tables using crayons to decorate mitten shapes cut from pink and red paper. With contagious enthusiasm, Ms. March retells a portion of the story from a book they have recently read, *The Mitten* by Jan Brett. She gets the children involved, asking them questions to help them remember the details and describe what happened next. At first the children answer as a group but before long, they begin spontaneously adding their thoughts about the animals in the mittens. The children are very engaged and there is lots of chatter about the book among the students and between the students and their two teachers, now engaged in conversation with different groups of children. The questions asked ranged from closed, looking for a yes or no response, “Is it cold without mittens?,” to ended questions requiring critical thinking, “What would happen to your hands if you weren’t wearing mittens in the snow?”

One of the richest conversations I observed was between two of the children and Ms. March’s assistant Ms. Green. While the children were coloring pages from a coloring book, Ms. Green told the children a story from her childhood involving a favorite pair of red boots. The children listened with fascination and asked probing questions. What started off as a story about boots ended up including details about lakes and oceans, and places they had been or wanted to visit.

The Educator: Ms. March. Ms. March has been in early childhood education for 25 years. She has been a Head Start teacher for 14 years—the last 13 of which she has taught at Piedmont. When Ms. March came to Piedmont she held a certificate in early

childhood education, the only credential required to teach young children when she first entered the field in 1989. After it was mandated that Head Start increase educational requirements for teachers, Ms. March returned to school, first earning an associate's degree at a local technical college. She has since earned her bachelor's degree through an online program offered by a Midwestern regional college. Both degrees were funded by Head Start, which was pivotal to Ms. March attending school. Although she was interested in obtaining more education, without Head Start's financial assistance she would have been unable to attend.

Each year Ms. March has several children with diagnosed special needs. This year was unusual because it was the first in which there were "no other disabilities besides speech." All of the children at Piedmont are screened for speech delays at the beginning of the year by the Piedmont County School District. It seems that having some number of children in the class with speech disabilities is a given. Ms. March reports having as many as six in her class one year. In addition to children with speech delays, typically Ms. March's class has one or two children with other special needs, such as cerebral palsy, autism, or behavioral issues. In consultation with parents and district personnel, Individualized Education Programs (IEP) are developed for those children diagnosed with special needs, and services provided by the district are scheduled. For example, children with speech delays receive one 30-minute session with a speech therapist each week. The therapist also provides the teachers with activities to work on in the classroom. Ms. March stresses that they do these activities with a small group of children rather than singling out the child receiving therapy.

Ms. March peppers conversation in the class with a Spanish word or two. When I ask about the home languages of the children, she reports that one child in the class is Hispanic, but the child and her family speak English primarily.

Ms. March agrees that literacy development is something that is important to focus on every day because the children need to know more than "...the 'yes' or the 'no,' or the 'that's the ball because when they go out in the community, or they move up to public school, they're going to hear more developed language." She believes it is important to try to introduce more complex words to the children she teaches. When the topic of literacy development came up in her interview, Ms. March agreed that it should be addressed daily. Although she was struggling to find the right words, Ms. March did offer some ideas about her thinking. She informed me that she and her assistant (whom she regards as a co-teacher) "want to introduce [the children] to letters because letters and letter sounds and making words all develop into language. We definitely want to introduce that and get them used to it, get them recognizing words." When I asked Ms. March who decides what kind of literacy development practice happens in the classroom, she told me that she and her assistant "kind of team teach." She reported that all of the teachers in the school share ideas and offer suggestions about what worked or didn't work in their classrooms, adding, "We all work together."

Ms. March suggests that the teachers are free to choose what they do in class. Although there is no specific directive coming from any individual or entity, Ms. March mentioned that she and the other teachers make a lesson plan and "have all of our domains . . . and the standards" (which I confirmed were Head Start domains and

elements), seeming to suggest that she and the other teachers referred to the Head Start Framework (OHS, 2010) or had some awareness of the skills and behaviors it describes.

All of the teachers at Piedmont use the same two-page weekly lesson plan template provided by Southland. The first page of the plan provides a general overview of the week and includes learning goals, and individualization materials to be emphasized. The plan describes special classroom activities, indicates the Head Start Domains to be Explored/State Early Learning Standards, individualization, transitions, and instruction goals. Head Start domains are a consideration for each lesson. Ms. March offers that the plans are a starting point. The teachers don't always follow the plan, because sometimes the children's interests cause activity to shift. Ms. March seemed to have difficulty responding when I asked her what she thought were more appropriate ways to promote literacy and language development for the children in her classroom. She appeared to draw a blank. Offering her time to mull it over, I shifted gears to talk about Head Start as an agency.

Ms. March believes that the purpose of Head Start is to help families, stating, "We definitely help families. Wow, we help families. We help some of our families grow up. ...like I said, kind of grow up a little bit, because we do have young parents." Ms. March speaks passionately about the impact that she and her fellow teachers have on parents noting, "There have been plenty of families that we've helped grow up... plenty of parents that we've showed them how to parent, and helped them kind of grow up and they thrive better. They've come back and told us, 'Thank you so much. You don't know how much you've helped us.'" Ms. March adds that she and the other teachers help

children get a head start on school, either by helping them learn things before they get to school, or in some instances, by identifying delays that the parents have not noticed and helping the parents start the process for getting services—before kids go to public school and are, in her words, “just bombarded with expectations.”

Ms. March tells me that Piedmont has a lot of trainings to provide teachers with information about what Head Start wants them to do in terms of policies, procedures, and mandates. When I ask what their mandate is, Ms. March replies, “Help [the children] to learn through play. Because we’re not teaching them like elementary, they’re learning through play.” Ms. March also identified HighScope, the curriculum used by Piedmont and all of the Southland Head Start programs as something they were mandated to use. When Ms. March came to Piedmont 14 years ago she was not given a formal introduction to the HighScope curriculum, nor did she receive HighScope training. “Live and learn,” was the response she gave when I asked how she got her HighScope training. She thinks comprehensive HighScope training may be available to new teachers as they are hired, in part because so many teachers who came in the past, like Ms. March, complained, “we don’t know how to do it.” Though some of the professional development she receives is related to HighScope, Ms. March believes that it is too late for her to receive comprehensive training.

I asked Ms. March to tell me more about the way HighScope is used in her classroom. She wondered aloud who would find out what she said to me, and then hesitated for a moment before stating, “I think HighScope is great.” The rise in her voice when she said “great” suggested a caveat. She positioned HighScope as a kind of learning

through play, more specifically, the time the children are in centers, and provided examples about the learning she associated with it, “If we’re in the house area, we talk about food on the table cooking. We talk about the vegetables, fruit, the meat, like the food groups or colors . . . or in the block area if they are building a house, we talk about all the long blocks or the short blocks.” Then she reveals her frustration, “But through HighScope, how are they going to learn to write their name?” Her perception is that there is an expectation with the HighScope curriculum that all learning should happen spontaneously or incidental to children’s play. For example, although Ms. March has pencils, pens, and paper available, in theory, children could not be directed to use the materials to write their names. They could, however, make the choice to do so as part of their play. Her perception is that strict adherence to the curriculum does not permit teachers to work with children individually to help them address specific skills. Though there is much about HighScope that she likes, she confesses to momentarily deviating from HighScope (as she has interpreted it) to spend time individually with students who need it. She describes her issue with HighScope like this: “There kind of needs to be, not necessarily teaching time, but maybe like one-on-one time [for] the ones that don’t quite have their colors, or don’t quite recognize what their name looks like, or maybe getting the square and the rectangle mixed up, kind of working one-on-one direct with them, maybe pulling them out of the High Scope for a few minutes, kind of working, not for a long time, just for a few minutes. . . .”

The training that they receive sometime leaves Ms. March and her colleagues frustrated. She recalled the conversation they had, saying, “We all just look at each other

and go, ‘How can we do that?’ ‘How can we do that?’” She adds that she and her co-teachers believe that the trainers have forgotten what it’s like to be in the classroom— or, in some instances, have never been in a classroom. Pointing to strategies that they found impractical for use in an actual classroom, Ms. March remarked, ”Yeah, it looks good on paper, but doing it is a different story.” Ms. March reports that some of the training is more applicable or has been of interest to her, but the ideas have mixed results when they get back to the classroom. None of the trainings that she mentions are related to literacy or language development. Behavior management training is mentioned several times as something that Head Start is interested in seeing them focus on—particularly “redirecting children” with challenging behavior.

When I ask Ms. March specifically about literacy concepts, she provides this synopsis:

“When we start out, we try to get them to recognize their name, in that first letter in that name—try to associate that letters go with their name. And then we’ve introduced letters and letter sounds. Some of them get it, some of them don’t. That’s okay, we don’t try to ... Maybe with the older ones we try to work a little bit more at it, because we know they’re going to kindergarten and they’ve got to know it then. And then just progressively working up, like letters and letter sounds, or recognizing their names, then maybe looking at little words. Like if we’re looking at a book, we’re reading a book, like the word *at*. And going *a-t* and putting the sounds together, the ones who are more developmentally along.”

Ms. March suggests most of the discussion about letters and letter sounds happens during Circle Time. Generally, she does not “push the concepts,” but if some children seem to “catch on” she continues to engage those particular students and help increase their understanding. Throughout our conversation, Ms. March avoids using the words *teach* or *learn*, seeming to suggest it might be developmentally inappropriate to do so. For example, Ms. March said this of introducing literacy concepts with the younger children: “We introduce it, and we try to get them interested or try to get them to, not learn it, but catch on to it. And if they don’t, we just kind of back off for a while.” When I ask about her avoidance of “teach and “learn,” she indicated she had always been told that those were things that were inappropriate for 3-year-olds.

On several occasions, Ms. March brought up the children’s development, which she seemed to view from a maturationalist perspective. She suggested that when children did not “catch on” or happen to express interest in literacy concepts discussed, it was frequently because they “just want to play” and “have no interest in learning.” She offered that children often benefited from having “time to develop.” Ms. March offered several examples of children for whom this was the case, including several children from Piedmont who benefited from repeating kindergarten, because they were further along in their development and started getting more interested in learning. Ms. March’s comments suggest that she is conflicted. Time and time again she refers to children who want to play and aren’t ready for learning, but she is cognizant of the expectations for them when they reach kindergarten. She struggles with HighScope because she want to “teach” these children and feels she has to “pull them out” of HighScope when she does so.

Ms. March believes that most of the children in her class are ready for school when they leave. There is no formal readiness assessment. Rather, she uses criteria from a kindergarten progress report from one of the local schools to inform her evaluation of the children leaving her class. Ms. March spoke frequently about development but never in terms of the children's emergent literacy. She seemed to connect development to social and emotional growth. Children were viewed as ready to go to school if they had developed sufficiently and had acquired the academic skills required of them in kindergarten.

Ms. March is keenly aware of how different the expectations in early childhood education settings are now compared to when she entered the field. She had this to say when I asked her how views regarding language and literacy had changed since then: "It's definitely more important. Well, not more important but more it's important that they learn it earlier. Back in 89, I remember I was working at the day care. And it seems like the only thing then, with the four and five year olds, was colors and shapes. Now it's you've got to know your letters, you've got to be able to count to a hundred, you've got to know the letter sounds, you've got to be able to put those other sounds together to make words because you're going to be learning words in kindergarten. . . . Things are getting more. . . . They're expecting more of the children than then.

She expressed reservations about whether the current expectations were developmentally appropriate. To some extent she thought they were but also had this to say, "Developmentally, maybe not so much for some of them, because some of them, just four and five year olds, don't care anything about learning. They're more into playing." Ms.

March believes her children are learning but she also feels like she could be doing better to support their language and literacy development. She describes her struggle this way: “I feel most of our children are learning, but some of them have no interest in learning. And I feel like there’s something that I can do, but I don’t know what it is, to pull everybody in. But I don’t know what it is.”

Three-Year-Old Class A: Ms. April

The environment. Ms. April’s classroom is open and airy. A 12' x 20' denim blue rug runs parallel to the children’s cubbies. Several low shelving units and other child-oriented furniture pieces are arranged on the rug to create two large, separate play areas—housekeeping and blocks—and material and supply stations for two other centers—art and science. Other centers dedicated to writing, books, and manipulatives are set up against the walls on two sides of the room. The names of the centers are written on large signs hanging from the ceiling above each activity area. Open wall space is broken up by pops of color from thoughtfully placed pictures, posters, and children’s artwork labeled with their names.

The majority of the text and artifacts at child eye level is personal to the children. Children can easily see their artwork, writing, class job assignments, and large name cards that identify their work and label their cubbies. Other kinds of print are strategically posted around the room. For instance, days of the week, posters of shapes and colors, and other frequent topics of group discussion are positioned around the area designated for Circle Time. Nearby, lines from “Humpty Dumpty,” a class favorite, are printed on sentence strips hanging next to a large hand-drawn replica of the nursery rhyme’s title

character. In this classroom there are also numerous seasonal decorations: a large paper fireplace with construction paper stockings decorated by the children and labeled with their names; and a Christmas tree, which the class has painted green and adorned with a variety of colorful foam shapes. A large bulletin board mounted close to the floor is titled “Must be Olaf,” and populated with each child’s version of Olaf the snowman, a character from a popular Disney movie. All information for parents is posted on bulletin boards covered in muted pastel paper hung at adult eye level.

A small blue oval rug against the back wall is closed in with shelving to create a cozy book area. In addition to floor space, a petite, round table with padded blue stools and diminutive blue sofa provide multiple seating options for children using the center. The forward-facing bookshelf is neatly arranged and full, but not overcrowded. The majority of the books are high-quality, in some cases award-winning, text. Most of the books are narrative; however, informational text is represented. Materials for writing are kept in an area adjacent to the art center. Supplies such as blank white paper, pencils, crayons, stencils, colored pencils, and magazines, each with a picture and word label, are neatly organized on low shelves. The layout of the center makes it easy for children to find and return materials.

Classroom in action. Morning Circle Time is about to begin and the last of the 17 children in Ms. April’s 3K class are making their way to the meeting area in the front of the room. Ms. April begins a chant. and the children quickly join in, “Criss-Cross, applesauce; Hands on lap, gingersnap; Back straight, chocolate shake; On my rear, root beer; Lips zipped, cool whip; Shhhhhhhh!” With everyone now seated, Ms. April begins

with a cheerful “good morning” and suggests that they sing their “hello song,” a favorite of the class, in which a brief greeting is repeated for each of the children while they stand and dance. After the song, Ms. April announces that it’s time for the weather. She chooses a “meteorologist,” who goes to the window to look outside before reporting the weather. Next it’s time for calendar activities. Days of the week cards are hung in a column on the wall behind Ms. April. After reading through the cards, the children are prompted to recall the day of the week. The children make several guesses before landing on the correct day, Thursday. One of the children is invited to move a clothespin from “Wednesday” to “Thursday.” The color of the month is next on the agenda. Ms. April turns on the CD player and asks the children to listen to the song she is playing so that they can guess the color. The children are getting wiggly and only a few respond when the singer asks, “Do you know what color this is?,” followed a second later with, “Green? Yes!” At the conclusion of the song, Ms. April introduces a gingerbread-themed counting book, and the children’s interest rises. They are chatty and animated as she reads and then leads them in counting the members of their class. Some of the children make comments about the gingerbread. Ms. April does not respond but makes a general statement about making gingerbread at home before shifting gears and beginning the transition to the morning Work Time. The children settle down when Ms. April shows them a plastic snowflake and announces that they are getting reading to go to centers. She passes the snowflake to one of the children and asks them to tell her where they would like to go and what they will be doing. After they talk about their plans they are invited to pass the snowflake to a friend and go to their chosen center. The children enjoy having a turn with

the snowflake. Most of them name a destination without trouble, but describing what they plan to do when they get there is a challenge for many. Ms. April tries to scaffold their efforts by providing options. The children choose from the options but more as a ticket to leave the circle than a plan of action.

Ms. April's assistant, Ms. Plum, notices a potential problem in the book center and makes her way to the back of the room. There are no established limits on the number of children who may be in a center at one time, and today there are so many children in the book center that it is hard to get to the bookshelf or find a spot to sit down. Ms. Plum approaches the children and politely asks if they know what the word *crowded* means. They are responsive to her question and have a brief conversation about solving the problem of the crowded center. Several children willingly head to the art center.

Throughout Work Time, the buzz of lively chatter fills the classroom—at the sensory table, a popular center location, several children are talking to one another as they scoop and pour dried pasta; Ms. Plum is reading to children in the meeting area; children in the block center are role playing taking a lion to the doctor; and a child in the book area is “reading” a Winnie the Pooh book to friends. One student at a table in the science area is playing with a tub of toy frogs. As he manipulates the frogs in different ways, he makes frog sounds and occasionally utters a line of narration in his imaginary play. When Ms. Plum sits down next to the child and enthusiastically asks, “What’s happening here?,” the boy excitedly explains the narrative about the frogs that he has in mind. The assistant teacher brings up the topic of baby frogs and they discuss tadpoles for a moment before Ms. Plum leaves. The boy goes back to his play, becoming deeply

engrossed in acting out his narrative. Though he is still acting out scenes with the frogs when Ms. April stops by a few minutes later, she asks him about dinosaurs—an interest of his. He stops his imaginary play with the frogs and responds to her questions.

After the book area thins out a bit, I stop by to make a note of the books on the shelves. One of the three remaining children asks me to read a book to them, which I agree to do. She hands me a book titled *I Heard Said the Bird*, a story set in a barnyard. After I finish, one of the children takes another farm-themed book off of the shelf. She rapidly flips to a page she has in mind. Pointing at the page, she says “horse,” then turns to point to an illustration of a horse in the book I am holding. She goes back and forth matching the animals in the two books and then notices something is missing from her book. “No pig,” she points out.

Overall, the children in this classroom are very considerate; they invite friends to join them in their work, put materials back on shelves before going to a new center, and say please and thank you as a matter of practice. Ms. April and Ms. Plum treat the children with respect and model good manners with each other and the children. When it is cleanup time, the children jump into action. They put away their work and help one another without being prompted.

After each Work Time period the children regroup on the meeting rug to review what they did in the centers—the third segment of the HighScope “plan-do-review” sequence. Ms. April readily scaffolds the children in their attempts to describe what they have done, frequently relating it to something in their lives outside of school or something that happened in the class during a previous Work Time period. Most of the

children are engaged for at least a portion of the 10-minute meeting; however, this is a challenging activity for a few of the children, who grow restless waiting for each of their classmates to have a turn.

“Can you show me how to tiptoe to the tables?” The children quietly tiptoe to the tables and sit down, ready for their next activity. Although the children are at two tables, small group time is more of a whole group session. Ms. April is holding a book in her hands, “Do you remember the book we read called *Chicka, Chicka, Boom, Boom*? What was it about?” The children call out together, “Let-ters!” Ms. April responds, “Yes, letters! Today we are going to make a letter collage.” Ms. Plum hands out paper, and Ms. April puts a pile of letters and several bottles of glue in the center of each table. “How much glue do we put on the paper? One raindrop, not a mud puddle.” The children patiently share the glue, carefully applying it to the paper a drop at a time. Ms. April comments, “I see you are using red, yellow, green, on your paper. . . all the colors of the rainbow.” Then responding to one of the children, she adds, “You’re right, Mallory, you need rain to make a rainbow.” As the children glued the letters onto the paper, Ms. April began to call attention to a few of the letters, “Here’s an *M*. Can you say *M*? *M* for Mallory.” Ms. April picks up another letter, “Do you know what letter this is? Yes, *B*, good job!” One of the children picks up a letter and exclaims, “I know what this is, *A*, for Anabel!” Suddenly both tables of children erupt in conversation about the names of the letters and whose name matches each letter.

After Small Group time, Ms. April invites the children to wash their hands and go to the meeting rug for a game. When everyone gathers, Ms. April draws the children’s

attention to the child-sized paper Humpty Dumpty and text of the Humpty Dumpty nursery rhyme taped to the wall behind her. The children have recited the poem with Ms. April before, but today there's a twist—Humpty is now a real, hard-cooked egg. Pointing to each word as she goes, Ms. Plum leads the children in “reading” the verse aloud. As they speak, Ms. April places the unblemished egg on top of a wall of blocks and, at the appropriate moment, knocks the egg to a large baking pan on the floor. The children laugh, squeal, and wonder aloud about the integrity of the egg. The egg suffers only a minor crack, and after it is bandaged they repeat the nursery rhyme. Again, the egg goes tumbling to the pan on the ground and again the children gasp and giggle. Ms. April picks up the egg and declares that Humpty is doing okay and suggests they recite the verse one more time. Slyly, Ms. April replaces the bandaged hard-cooked egg with an identical raw egg. This time Humpty's “great fall” ends with a splat! The children gasp in astonishment at the sight of the busted egg. Some of the children are acting out Humpty's fate as Ms. Plum whisks the egg away to the “doctor,” as the children discuss what happened.

Later in the day, the “Library Lady” stops by for a visit. She does not have an assigned time, but rather pops in unannounced once a week. The children who are in the middle of their afternoon Work Time happily leave what they are doing in centers to gather on the meeting rug for an impromptu story time. As the Library Lady introduces the book she has brought to class, she makes an effort to engage the children by asking them questions—mostly follow-up to comments she makes with obvious yes or no answers, for example, “This story is about a lady with a large number of cats. Twenty-

five cats! Is that a lot?" She reads the story very rapidly so as not to lose the children's interest.

The Educator: Ms. April. After working for seven years at nearby Eastern Head Start Center, this year Ms. April returned to Piedmont, the center where she began her early childhood teaching career 15 years ago. Ms. April has a CDA, and an associate's degree from a local technical college. To be in compliance with Head Start's mandates for teacher educational requirements, Ms. April returned to school to get her bachelor's degree. She is currently enrolled in an online program offered through Kittzen College, a regional institution in the Midwest. She receives financial assistance from Head Start to cover the cost of books and tuition costs not covered by financial aid. At the end of the current semester Ms. April will earn a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, with a concentration in special needs.

This year is unusual in that Ms. April does not have children with special needs in her classroom. Ms. April comments that in the past she has had children with special needs due to a wide variety of issues including: visual impairments; hearing loss; social and emotional challenges; speech delays; intellectual disabilities; autism; developmental delays; and health problems. English is the home language for all of the children in Ms. April's class, including one Hispanic child. Though the child's father speaks Spanish, he is bilingual, and he and the rest of the family speak English at home.

When Ms. April came to Head Start she received training in the HighScope Curriculum. Ms. April's description of what is, or is not permitted in HighScope presents the curriculum as highly child-centric. For example, during center time, which lasts one

hour, the children are free to go into any center they want for as long as they want no matter the number of children present in that area. When I asked what happens when nine children are in the small book area, her reply was, “You can kind of encourage the children and redirect, but you can't actually tell them that they can't go to that center.”

In terms of promoting language and literacy in her classroom, Ms. April had this to say: “We have books that we read to the children daily; we also send bags home with books in it. Another thing we do each month, we send Scholastic Book Club home for the parents to look over and see if they want to order any books for the children. We also do The Letter People each week.” Ms. April has acquainted the teachers at Piedmont with *The Letter People*, a literacy program and PBS television series created in the early 1970s that features a different puppet character for each letter (e.g., Mr. Beautiful Buttons for *B*, Mr. Tall Teeth for *T*). Each week Ms. April introduces her class to a new letter using the Letter People songs and character puppets, frequently integrating the characters with the book *Chick, Chick, Boom, Boom*. “I actually use my letter people with *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*. I kind of incorporate it all in. I go, ‘Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, who’s here today?’ Then, we’ll go through and then they’ll be like Mr. Beautiful Buttons, Mr. Tall Teeth.” Ms. April adds, “I don't expect the children to really know the letters, but a lot of them will get it.”

I asked Ms. April how she decides what to read to her children and how she goes about introducing children to books she reads aloud. Ms. April replies, “I always consider the length of the book for the age, there again for it to be developmentally appropriate. When I read the book I usually introduce the front cover and the back cover, and show

the spine to the children.” Ms. April also queries the children about what is happening in the book as she reads, but her reasoning suggests she considers it more of a classroom tool than a practice to promote language or critical thinking: “Throughout the book I ask questions and let the children interact with the book, that way it keeps them interested and they won’t just be all jittery and want to keep moving around.” Ms. April adds that she feels like the children respond the read-aloud better when she incorporates questions than they do when she reads the book straight through. When I asked Ms. April what kind of questions she asks when she reads aloud, she replied, “more like open-ended questions,” but did not elaborate. Open-ended questions are the kinds of questions preferred in the CLASS assessment.

Ms. April looks for ways to improve her practice. She told me about a new practice she does in which she says to the children, “I see a . . .,” and holds up a picture of an animal or object with the word underneath that the children name. She is very enthusiastic about this activity because it has captured the children’s interest. They are very eager to play the “I see a” game. I am curious to know in what way she sees the children’s emergent literacy being promoted through the game. Ms. April explains, “They’re getting both language and literacy, because they’re seeing words and they’re also saying the words through the language. . . . I was just really looking back and thinking, ‘What can I do to help promote more language in the classroom?’ Because I do feel it is important, and I was like, ‘Hmm okay, maybe I can use these simple words to get children to use that language that they need to use,’ [Okay?] and they’re getting the literacy as far as letters and stuff with it too.”

When I ask Ms. April what the expectations are for the children in her 3K class, she tells me that she and the other teachers have school readiness goals provided by Head Start “that they have to go by.” When I ask her what Head Start’s mission or goal is, she says unhesitatingly, “to get children ready for public school.” Informed by her education and training, Ms. April believes the most important component of getting children ready for school is “. . . pretty much teaching them social skills, math skills, science skills, literacy skills, language skills, writing skills.” Ms. April also mentioned helping ensure children are healthy as an objective of Head Start. One way she contributes to the children’s health is complying with a school requirement that children brush their teeth twice a day in school. Though time consuming, she finds it valuable because it is not a regular practice at home for some children.

Ms. April agreed that language and literacy should be promoted in preschool every day; however, she was tentative in her response and offered broad reasons as to why she felt that way, stating, “It helps the children to be social among other things. Language development, I don’t know, it’s just very important that a child is verbal. . . . Young children later in life they’re going to need the social skills to be able to communicate with people and the literacy skills to be able to read and write.” Ms. April is not aware of any specific communication from Head Start (via Head Start’s website, app, or otherwise) regarding specific activities the Office suggests would be useful for promoting literacy and/or language development. She offered that perhaps such suggestions were sent to Southland and they received the information in training, but she didn’t necessarily connect the OHS with the training she was receiving. In addition to trainings concerning

Head Start mandates, Ms. April and her colleague also receive training related to HighScope (the curriculum used); NAEYC requirements (their accrediting organization); and CLASS domains and elements (the assessment being used by Head Start to assess program quality).

Like other teachers at Piedmont, Ms. April believes that the children in her class are ready when they move to 4K. She thinks Piedmont is above average compared to Head Start programs in general, and that Piedmont does a good job of getting children ready for school. Piedmont is one of three Head Start schools in the immediate area that are accredited by NAEYC. When I asked her what came to mind when she thought of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)—a construct highly associated with NAEYC—Ms. April said, “. . . giving children hands-on experience. It’s not making them sit down and do ditto sheets.” She believes that developmentally appropriate practice is important, but her rationale, though not baseless, is framed in a way that emphasizes gratification of children’s desires more so than support of children’s growth and development. “Developmentally appropriate practice is very important because young children aren’t going to want to sit and have somebody, just teacher, directing, ‘Okay, put this here, put this here, put this here.’ They want to have their own creativity,” she says. Ms. April also framed DAP considerations for toys and materials in terms of whether or not they were safe for children to use. Ms. April seems to have the gist of developmentally appropriate practice, but she veered away from explaining what it means to be developmentally appropriate, offering examples of it instead. In some instances she seemed to suggest that a particular practice was required in order to be developmentally

appropriate. In one case, for example, Ms. April stated that everything in the house center needed to be labeled and at eye level to be developmentally appropriate. Although the practices are considered developmentally appropriate, it does not mean a house center is developmentally inappropriate without those features. Those are criteria that NAEYC teams look for when they are accrediting programs, and it may be that Ms. April is at times confusing the DAP in the abstract with specific accreditation criteria.

Ms. April explains that mandates and directives from the OHS are addressed to Southland, the community action agency overseeing the Piedmont. Southland in turn, transmits the information to the teachers through trainings.

Three-Year-Old Class B: Ms. May

The environment. The walls in Ms. May's classroom are colorfully papered with artwork and an array of printed material. Most of the children's art—paintings, collages, drawings, for example—are grouped together by type. A few items are at child-eye level, but much of the artwork is hung on high mounted bulletin boards or on open space above the heads of the children, often interspersed with information for parents. The perpendicular walls forming the backdrop for the meeting area in the back corner of the classroom are particularly busy with text and other printed material. Calendars, signs about rules, and posters identifying frequently discussed concepts such as colors, shapes, and days of the week, dominate the area.

Four long, low shelves, laid end to end with just corners touching, form an s-curve stretching from the middle of the room to the center of the back wall. Centers, marked by neon-colored signs hanging overhead, are positioned on either side of the

curving shelves and along the perimeter of the room. The book center is tucked in a sunlit corner of the room. Two forward-facing bookshelf units under the window contain an assortment of books ranging from rich children's literature to mass-produced lower quality texts. The bright, carpeted area is inviting but lacks soft seating and can be cramped at times because it is also home to the class computer.

The writing center is just around the corner from the book area. Supplies for the center—including pencils, crayons, stencils, colored pencils, magazines, catalogs, chalk, glue, paper, and scissors—are labeled in English and Spanish and displayed in baskets on long, low shelves against the wall. There is a small table and chair next to the shelves and a larger table nearby at which children may work. The shelves are perpendicular to a long built-in counter where Ms. May keeps administrative materials and classroom supplies. Although the center is organized, stray tote bags, file folders, and unrelated paper sometimes drift onto the shelf and table making the center seem a little cluttered at times.

Classroom in action. It is the first Circle Time of the day and Ms. May's class is singing the ABC song. Today's performance, though enthusiastic, is peppered with the coughs and sneezes of several children in the class. At the conclusion of the song, Ms. May talked about germs and what the children should do to keep germs from getting on their friends when they cough or sneeze. After reviewing the procedure several times, Ms. May switched gears and led the children in singing a song about the days of the week. When the song is over, Ms. May moves on to take attendance, calling each child's first and last name. After roll call, Ms. May suggests, "Let's count our friends!" The children, Ms. May, and Ms. Silver, the assistant teacher, count in unison as Ms. May

points to each child in the circle. The rapid pace of circle activities continues as Ms. May chooses a meteorologist from among the children and then asks, “What’s the weather today?” The meteorologist of the day reports, “Cold.” Ms. May agrees that it is cold and then changes the conversation, saying, “We’ve been covering several colors.” Let’s see what colors you know.” Pointing to a picture of an apple, she asks, “What color is this?” The children reply together, “*R-e-d.*” After repeating the question with several more pictures and objects, Ms. May declares, “Colors are all around us everyday!”

The children are getting wiggly. Ms. May refocuses them by playfully directing, “Clean your ears out, wipe your eyes off, and cross those legs.” The children dutifully sit up and act out the mock command. Now that she has their attention, Ms. May announces that she is going to talk about Tommy Triangle. Pointing at a large blue triangle with a face, gloved hands, and sneakers, she suggests, “Let’s count sides!” Together they count the three sides of the triangle and then the sides of several triangular objects—a slice of pizza, a yield sign, a piece of pie. Moving on to the next activity, Ms. May cues up the song *Silly Willy* on the CD player. She invites the children to stand up and dance and get out their “silly willies.” The children jump up and begin dancing, following the directions given in the song. When the music ends, the children fall back onto their spots on the rug.

Ms. May announces that she is going to read *Bear Stays Up*, a book one of the children has brought from home. She shows the children the front cover, the back cover, and the spine of the text and then begins an enthusiastic and engaging presentation of the story. Ms. May asks the children a variety of open and closed questions as she reads, allowing her students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding. Most times Ms.

May gives the children ample time to respond rather than answering her own questions. She also pauses to model think-alouds as she is reading. For example, she says of the sleeping bear, “He looks awfully cozy!” The read-aloud is where Ms. May really shines. The pace of the Circle Time has become much more relaxed and the children are very responsive to her questions and comments. The story ends quietly, with Bear now sleeping. Very softly, Ms. May announces, “We are going to whisper into centers.” Playing off of the quiet ending to make the transition from Circle Time to Work Time, Ms. May calls each child by their full name and asks them to whisper the name of the center they plan to go to. One by one, the children disperse into the activity areas around the room.

Ms. Silver is at the large table near the writing center. She and several of the children are using an assortment of stencils, cookie cutters, pencils, and crayons from the center to write and draw. Ms. Silver is casually chatting with the children as she draws and traces stencils but does not talk about what she is doing nor does she inquire about their work. When I visit the table most of the children are tracing the stencils or cookie cutters to make pictures. I notice that one child is making a string of hash marks. She tells me she is making letters when I ask what she is working on.

There is a small commotion in the book center around the corner. A child who is new to the class is jumping on a stack of books, causing some distress among the other children in the center. As I am heading over, Ms. May arrives and gently plucks the jumping boy up and away from the books. She calmly explains that jumping on books hurts them as she directs him to another center. After they leave, one of the children asks

me to sit down and then brings me a book about Mickey Mouse. He flips through the pages randomly, showing me pictures that he likes. When he is finished, he puts the book away and brings back a square board book. Just as Ms. May did during Circle Time, the boy shows me the front cover, the back cover, and the spine of the book before he begins flipping through the pages.

Ms. May has brought out a basket of foam letters. She and the child who was jumping on books are sitting together at one of the large tables. She hands him letters, some of which he is able to name. When Ms. May gives him the letters *d*, *o*, and *g* and asks him to put them together, he forms the word *dog*. Ms. May tries to get him to recognize the word he made, giving him clues, but the boy does not seem to understand what she is asking of him.

Ms. Silver is now in the book center reading a book about colors to two of the students. There is a lot of interaction between the students and Ms. Silver as she asks questions about the colors, “What other things are red?” Ms. Silver also finds the opportunity to focus on a letter that is special to one of the children. Pointing to the *b* in “balloon,” Ms. Silver asks the children, “What does *b* say?” The children respond, “buh-buh” and then one of them shouts, “Hey, that’s *my* letter!” Ms. Silver responds, “Yes, that *is* your letter.” Knowing that *b* is the next letter of the week, she adds, “Soon we will see a lot of these!”

[CLAP-CLAP, CLAP-CLAP-CLAP] “Stop what you’re doing. We need to stop what we’re doing and clap hands. We are getting a little loud. We have 10 minutes until cleanup.” Ms. May frequently uses clapping to get the attention of the children. Although

the children have been productive throughout the Work Time period and the volume in the class does not seem exceptionally loud, Ms. May commented on the noise level several times. It's possible that Ms. May has a low tolerance for noise and movement in the classroom, but I think it is more likely that the presence of an outside observer is making her overly sensitive to the children's behavior.

Ms. May resumes working with four children at one of the large tables. She hands each child a large card face down. On each card is a photograph or clip art picture of some kind of food. It seems as though the activity is related to vocabulary; however, it is not clear just from watching what the objective of this activity is. One at a time, the children are invited to turn their cards over. When the first child reveals her picture, which appears to be a plate of pasta, Ms. May asks her what it is. The girl replies, "noodles." This is not the response that Ms. May is looking for. Ms. May does not give her feedback about her answer and instead offers a clue (which happens to be inaccurate) to lead the girl to a different response: "What do you have when you have meatballs and noodles together? What's that dish called?" Ms. May waits a second and then says, "Spaghetti!" The girl repeats, "Spaghetti." A similar scenario plays out with each picture that is revealed—a strawberry with legs, followed by grapes, and then a glass of milk. Ms. May is doing most of the talking during this activity. She asks lots of questions but the majority of them are closed or there is little wait time before she answers the question herself.

[CLAP-CLAP, CLAP-CLAP-CLAP] "If you can hear me, clap your hands." At the moment, only a few of the students echo her clapping. When Ms. May asks, "What

time is it?” just one child replies “cleanup time.” The message, however, was received and the children begin putting away materials with little direction. Not wanting to end his play, one of the children has a meltdown. Ms. May comforts him, holding him in her lap as she acknowledges his feelings. The class gathers on the meeting rug, and Ms. May asks each child to tell her one thing that they did today. The children manage this request with mixed results. The boy in Ms. May’s lap says that he played DS (a Nintendo game console). Ms. May smiles and says that was at home. Rather than press him, she moves on to the next child who says that he helped the babies that were fighting. Ms. May asks how he helped the babies and the boy slapped his own arm. Ms. May seemed shocked. When she asked him who does that, the boy shrugged his shoulders. Ms. May asks the two boys to go find seats at the small group tables. Then one by one, she asks the rest of the children what they did, then sends them to find a seat.

Normally the children would be heading to the playground for outdoor play; however, it is raining so the children are having an extra small group activity instead. Ms. Silver’s group is given paper, paint, and sponge paintbrushes. After being told they may make whatever they like, they quickly cover the paper and are completely finished in a matter of minutes. After washing their hands, they are invited to get a book and go to the large rug in the meeting area. Ms. May’s group is still lingering at their table, exploring small mountains of shaving cream Ms. May has sprayed in front of them. For many of the children, this is the first time they have touched or even seen the creamy white lather and many of the children are very interested in exploring its properties. When Ms. May’s group finishes they join the rest of the children who are listening to Ms. Silver read *If You*

Give a Moose a Muffin. One of the children makes a comment about the story, but Ms. Silver does not seem to notice. Ms. Silver also comments and asks questions, but she doesn't really allow enough time for the children to respond.

Ms. May, who has now joined the group, asks the kids if they know what *afraid*, one of the words from the book, means. There is some discussion to help scaffold the children that has the effect of unsettling them more than informing their understanding. For example, Ms. May asks, "If a stranger came into the classroom, would you be afraid?" From the time that the children left centers there has been an increasing amount of redirection talk (e.g., "sit down," "find a seat," "wait your turn," "stand right here," "listen," "Marcus, Marcus, Mar-cus"). Ms. May, trying to switch into Circle Time provides a lengthy review of the Circle Time rules. Ms. May resumes the conversation about the word *afraid*, asking each of the children what they are afraid of. Many of the children are not sure how to respond and say things that happen to be in pictures nearby like "apple," "bees," and "wind." Ms. May says that she is afraid of kids getting hurt because they are not listening.

Ms. May asks all the children to stand and directs the children's attention to the nursery rhyme, Humpty Dumpty, printed on a poster next to her. Some of the children join in as Ms. May recites the poem. She asks the children what would happen if they fell instead of Humpty Dumpty, would they break apart? The children flop to the floor but do not really respond. When Ms. May turns on the CD player and the children hear the song, *Silly Willies*, they are on their feet at once. The children are happily dancing and then form a train behind Ms. May, who leads them around the classroom and back to the rug.

After they sit down, Ms. May tells the children about an event that happened earlier in the day in which a child from another class ran into the road after a parent. The children show an intense interest in the real and relevant story Ms. May tells them.

Throughout the Work Time, both Ms. May and Ms. Silver circulate around the classroom and engage with the children, either in small groups or one-on-one. Typically, the teachers are entering the play of the children already in progress rather than directing them to an activity. There is a lot of conversation among the students as well as between the students and the teachers. The children seek out the teachers during the Work Time period to ask questions and also to show the teachers work they are proud of.

The Educator: Ms. May. Ms. May has worked for Head Start for 16 years. She spent three years as an assistant before becoming a lead teacher. Ms. May earned her associate's degree from a local community college. Prior to the mandate increasing the education requirements of Head Start teachers, Ms. May enrolled in an online program offered by Kittzen College, a regional college in the Midwest. She now has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. Ms. May views education as important to her job. Although she has had to put education on hold for personal reasons, Ms. March has also done online coursework for a master's program as well. Enrolling in graduate course work was done on her own initiative. She had this to say about her master's program: "That's not required. I just wanted to keep going; I feel like the more I know the better I can help my children." She was animated as she told me about the program "touching base on" NAEYC and CLASS, and on different observations you can do with children so you can do positive things with them." Though she seems a little sad when she tells me

she would have graduated at the end of the semester, she feels she made the right decision. Her passion for her work is evident as she explains what drove her decision: “I didn’t want to fail a class and fail what I’m learning to bring to the class, if that makes any sense. . . . Failing is not something I set out to do. I want to succeed and I want to bring it in here for these kids to succeed.”

Three of the 17 students in Ms. May’s room are newcomers to the class, replacements for students who have moved and left Piedmont. Ms. May suspects that all three children have speech delays; however, they will not receive services this year. The new children had just turned 3 and were ineligible for Head Start at the start of the school year. They were allowed to enroll in December because there were no legal 3-year-olds (i.e., turned 3 before September 1) on the waiting list. The children’s status as “legal” 2-year-olds means they will repeat the 3-year-old class. If their speech delays persist, they will receive services when they return to school in the fall. Currently Ms. May has one child in her class who has diagnosed speech delays and receives service. She believes the 30-minute weekly therapy sessions the children at Piedmont receive are very important and impresses upon parents that barring illness, they should make every effort to have their child at school on therapy days.

Ms. May notes that language difficulties present challenges for both the students who have them and for Ms. May, who wants to be able to help. The children in her class who have problems with speech have trouble understanding and communicating with their classmates, and frequently with Ms. May as well. This difficulty is a source of aggravation for these children, which at times causes them to act out in frustration. When

language delays go unchecked, children are frequently viewed as having behavior problems, or some other social and emotional issue, and are treated accordingly. Ms. May describes the experience of one girl currently repeating 3K with Ms. May: “This year she’s probably going to get services. I don’t know if it’s because she has a speech problem or she’s very, very shy. She’s not very talkative. When she talks you’ve got to be [very close] to hear it. I don’t want to let her down by not being able to understand her.” Expressing concern regarding how this student is perceived, Ms. May related the student’s situation to that of another of her students: “I have seen behavior issues with one of mine, and it turned out that he qualified for speech therapy. I told his mom I feel like it’s not an issue of a bad behavior, [the other children] are just not understanding him.” In this particular situation, Ms. May essentially trained herself to be his translator. She learned to understand him better by repeating back what she thought he said and asking him to tell her whether or not she got it right by saying yes or no. Ms. May, happy that he is finally receiving services, seemed resigned to the realities that administrative hurdles and limited resources imposed. Five months into his second year of 3K, this particular child has had two speech therapy sessions.

Ms. May believes that promoting the language and literacy of young children is very important. Ms. May is very enthusiastic about the special “book bags” she uses to share books with the families so they can read to their children at home: “I think language and literacy is the key to our success in education. I taught my own children that. That’s why I feel like the book bag that I send home is important. It gives parents one-on-one time with their child. In the beginning of the school year we talk about how important

reading is at our school; reading to children is the best way to develop their reading and language. You get to talk about the day. You get to talk about the book. That’s something we choose to do.” Ms. May often enhances the book bag experience by purchasing small items at the dollar store that can be used for extension activities. In addition to the book and props, Ms. May also sends the parents tips for reading aloud, such as asking questions about what might happen next, and following the text with a finger to show children how we read from left to right. Sending books home for parents to share via the book bag system is at the heart of Ms. May’s practice and it is clear that Piedmont considers it important as well. At the end of the school year Piedmont recognizes the accomplishment of those children and parents who have regularly logged in reading hours each week.

Ms. May says that she decides on her literacy and language practice in the classroom using the children as a guide—meaning they guide her in the moment—perhaps to steer the conversation in a particular direction or maybe make the decision to postpone or change a planned activity. Ms. May talked several visitors who come to the class into reading to the children on a regular basis. One of them, the “Library Lady,” is a particular favorite of the children. Ms. May encourages the children and their families to visit the library so the children can see all of the books. She mentioned resources available at the library that she thought would be useful to parents like puppets and CDs of books.

When I asked Ms. May what she thought were the most appropriate activities for promoting language and literacy development, she had this to say: “Wow. I know it’s

books. I know it's puppets, but I also know working with children here in their centers and talking with them, just having conversations promotes language, because, one [child] I had in here was very upset over the blocks this morning. 'Okay, you're upset about the blocks, but why?' Then he didn't want to use his words. He finally told me. I said, 'Just tell me, you want to build a bridge or these [blocks] are ice cubes. Tell your friends. Don't always just scream out. Use your words, your language.' Language to me is in all areas. Even at the table. We talk at the table coming in in the morning and leaving in the afternoon."

Ms. May sees opportunities to promote language and literacy across all of the activities that she and the children engage in: "Basically, language to me is in the classroom everywhere. I don't feel like it's a one-place thing. Even when we're pottyng. They may need my help, okay. Tell me what you need me to help you do. 'Unsnap my pants.' There's language everywhere we go, even on the playground." Ms. May also places an emphasis on building good relationships with the parents of her children. By creating a good foundation for parent-teacher communication, and having daily conversations, Ms. May believes she is modeling effective communication and providing a platform for children to practice newly learned communication skills. She believes this is particularly important for the many children in her classroom who come from situations where children are discouraged from talking.

The speech therapist who provides services at Piedmont gives Ms. May strategies and activities to do during the week to support the children in therapy. Ms. May often finds these suggestions useful for the whole class and incorporates them into her

instruction. The therapist's emphasis on phonological skills seems to inform Ms. May's practice. One strategy Ms. May uses to boost children's understanding of sound-letter relationship is exposing them to *The Letter People*, a literacy program developed in the early 1970s and the basis for a PBS television program of the same name in which there is a character to represent each letter. They had recently been focusing on the letter *m* with the help of the letter person character, "Mr. Munchy." Another teacher in the school has puppets that they share and Ms. May has downloaded *Letter People* videos and songs from the Internet. Years earlier they had the children doing worksheets that went along with each letter character but have since stopped, deeming it inappropriate for class. Interestingly, they do send some of these sheets home for children to work on. For example, the children have been taking home coloring pages of Letter People to "decorate" and ultimately put into books of letters and numbers that the children will take home at the end of the school year. With an eye toward fall, the books are put together "so they'll know what letters they covered" and so "we don't drop the ball during that three-month break." Ms. May also incorporates literature to promote phonological awareness, particularly books that grab the children's interest. This was the case when she used a favorite book of the children to introduce a new letter: "When we touched on *b* two weeks ago, I didn't use the Letter People, I used *Pete the Cat and His Four Groovy Buttons*. "My buttons, my buttons, my four groovy buttons," that's all we sang. Every child in my room knows the letter *b* now. I think it needs to be related to something that they care about, or something they like. Food we eat. You give them lunch. Your mouth

is going to munch all the time, so we use Mr. Munchy. We just started with *t* today. ‘Mr. Tall Teeth, we brush our teeth,’ you know.”

Books and book reading were frequent topics in our conversation. When we talked about book introductions, Ms. May said that before she reads to her students, she talks about the physical features, (e.g., cover, spine) of books and the importance of being gentle with books and not “misusing” them. She did not mention introducing the children to any other features of the text, such as illustrations, characters, or plot. Given her interest in reading aloud and the fact that she was using text to introduce letters, I wondered what else she thought kids got from books. She provided a broad response that touched on general knowledge, social expectations, critical thinking, and comprehension: “I think you can learn about the world. You can learn about animals. We can learn about how we take turns in talking in a conversation. I may read a page and ask a question. We learn to take turns during a conversation. I feel like they get that. I feel like they get the insight of what’s going on in a story.”

When the conversation shifts to Head Start, Ms. May’s passion for her job and the premium she puts on her education are very clear. She has this to say about Head Start’s mission and purpose: “When I talk to parents, and I do run into people who have young children, and you strike up that conversation, it just kind of leads into things and you talk to them about Head Start. I tell them it is not daycare. We’re a preschool. The teachers have degrees. Head Start has mandates. I can’t sit in here and teach your child without a degree. It’s expected of me to keep up my education in order to teach your child. It’s not like going to a daycare where they put them down for a nap; they do whatever. They send

us to school to get our education so we can bring it to the classroom. You can walk off the street and work in a daycare. I'm basically getting your child ready for school. That's what I feel like Head Start is for. Head Start is here to put these things in your child's life, to expose them to what they need to know so that they can be ready when they get through with us."

The topic of the HighScope curriculum comes up, but Ms. May does not dwell on it. It does not seem to frame her thinking as much as her personal philosophy and specific things that she learned in training. Her priority is to do her part to get her children ready for the next step in what she views as a continuing process of growth and development. She wants them to be prepared when they move from 3k to 4k and then when they leave Head Start and go to kindergarten: "I need to get the basics down—colors, shapes, and the first letter of their name. I feel like that is my major, major thing, along with conversations and what not. I feel like we need to get to the point where we can use our words to describe our feelings, instead of our hands. We can use our words to express ourselves." Ms. May tells me about Head Start's website and how she checks in there every week or two. She is also registered with the National Head Start Association Quality Initiative to receive updates on her phone. Among them are memos from an instructional series designed to give teachers the tools they need to get children ready for school, "at the end of the series' get you to the point that you need to be, so we can get these kids to where they need to be."

Ms. May expresses concern about staying in compliance and doing all that is expected, especially with the new CLASS assessments. Many of their trainings are

related to elements of the CLASS. She said Ms. Bright provides some of the trainings and they learn from each other as well. She is interested in seeing how things are done at other schools in Head Start.

4K Classroom: Ms. June

The environment. Formerly a house, the little building occupied by the 4K class still has a very homey feel. The space is comprised of four connected rooms. The first room, a small vestibule, is entered through the front door. Parent information and the children's cubbies are located in this area. A second door in the vestibule leads into the main classroom area—three open rooms linked together in a U-shape. The first room is a kitchen outfitted with basic appliances and two long tables where the children have meals and meet for small group activities. The kitchen leads into the left side of a long room where the book center and computer table and meeting area are located. The right side of the room is home to a spacious and sunny dramatic play area. The third room, which extends from the dramatic play area, parallel to the kitchen, is the location of a large block area, art and science centers, and a sensory table.

The 4K classroom has more windows and lower ceilings than the classrooms in the main school building and as such, there is less wall space available for children's work and printed material. The majority of commercially printed material is in the area where the children gather for Circle Time. A large calendar, weather chart, and a days-of-the-week poster are pinned to the bulletin board anchoring the area. A poster featuring shapes and colors is attached to a white board to the side of the bulletin board. Children's

artwork is scattered throughout the room wherever there is space available. The centers and many of the materials in the shelves are labeled in English and Spanish.

The book center is in a quiet corner of the room adjacent to the kitchen. The open space offers a few pillows but is a little dark compared to the rest of the room and set apart from the other centers. The books on the forward-facing bookshelf are all fiction, and are predominately texts derived from Disney movies and Sesame Street characters. High-quality picture books with rich language are absent from the shelves.

On the other side of the classroom space, in the back of the room parallel to the kitchen is a nook dedicated to art and writing. There is a large round table positioned between two sets of shelves—one stocked with supplies primarily used for art and the other containing a variety of writing materials. In addition to different sizes and types of paper, the shelves dedicated to writing hold baskets of pencils, crayons, markers, magazines, white boards, receipt pads, and letter stencils.

Classroom in action. The 4K students are finishing breakfast and making their way to the meeting rug for their morning Circle Time. As they arrive and get settled, Ms. June tells the children that Ms. March has given her a book. The children, spying the character on the cover, begin to shout out, “Pete the Cat! Pete the Cat! It’s a Christmas Pete the Cat book!” Ms. June, who is still removing the plastic wrap from the new book, smiles and says, “You beat me to it!” Ms. White, the 4K assistant, adds, “The title of the book is *Pete the Cat Saves Christmas*.” With the plastic wrap removed and all of the children seated, Ms. June points to the cover of the book and whispers, “What’s this?” The children, in unison, respond, “The-ti-tle-page.” Ms. June tries again. “The fr-o-o-n-t.

. . . The children seem perplexed. Ms. June observes aloud, “You’re following Ms. White. It’s the front of the book, the front cover.” The children are bouncing with excitement, so Ms. June skips the rest of the introduction and begins the story. Ms. June reads the book with enthusiasm and great expression, periodically asking questions or making comments about the text. The children are extremely engaged and responsive throughout the reading. Ms. June does not acknowledge the majority of comments and questions coming from the children. She seems a little concerned that they are too chatty and several times asks them to stop talking and listen. As Ms. June finishes reading, the children beg, “Can we do that again? Can we do that again, please?” Ms. June suggests that perhaps they can read it in small groups when they are in centers.

Ms. June plays a listening game with the children to get them refocused and ready to move to their next activity. “Stand up. Put your hands up. Put your hands behind your backs. Put your hands beside you. Put your finger between your eyes. Put your hands above your head. Put your hands in front of your tummy. Put your hands down. Use one hand and go around your head. Now walk to the tables and find the envelope with your name.” The children make their way to the long tables in the kitchen where Ms. White has put an envelope out for each child. Without being told, the children sit down with their envelopes and decorate their envelopes with Christmas-themed stickers Ms. June is passing out to them. The children inform me that the envelopes are for money they will receive from Ms. June and Ms. White for “being good.” After the children finish decorating, Ms. White gives them a few pieces of play money and then collects their

envelopes. Ms. June checks in with each child, asking which center they are planning to visit before sending them off.

Due to the unusual layout of the space, Ms. June and Ms. White must stay in separate areas of the classroom to ensure that all centers are monitored or move children into areas that are in their line of sight. Ms. June joins a group of children in the dramatic play area. One of the children brings a phone to Ms. June and informs her that it is the “fire truck guy.” Ms. June takes the phone and begins to speak as if she were talking to the local fire chief. The children in the center stop what they are doing and listen in earnest to Ms. June’s realistic-sounding conversation about “a fire down the road.” Ms. June passes the phone back to one of the children and they take turns having similar conversations with the fire truck guy. Soon all of the children have moved into the side of the classroom space where dramatic play is located. One of the children who entered the area is shoving children and trying to grab the phone. He begins loudly crying, sobbing that he wants a turn. Ms. June is talking to him, but he is not easily settled. Ms. White, noticing the crowded center and the child’s increasing agitation, gently picks him up and carries him to an area away from the hub of activity.

When the boy is calm, Ms. White brings him to the round table used for writing and art where several of his classmates are working with white boards. The boy and Ms. White each take a white board. Ms. White begins to write the boy’s name on the white board, slowly saying each letter as she writes it, “*B-e-e, A-r-r, A-a-y, D-e-e. Brad!*” After Ms. White does this for each of the children at the table, she invites them to try doing it themselves. Ms. White offer some assistance to the boy she brought to the table by

slowly saying the letters of his name as he writes them. He writes two of the letters in his name and then adds a string of mock letters. Ms. White praises his effort, “Good job! I like the way you wrote your name!” The child excitedly gets up and finds Ms. June. She offers more feedback, “That’s a lot of writing!”

In the meeting area two children wearing headphones are sitting at a desk using the class computer. The two tell me that they are learning their letters but are having trouble hearing and ask for my help. When I sit down I discover that the children have been watching French-made online videos of nursery rhymes sung in heavily accented English. When I restart the online video that they have been watching, several pharmaceutical commercials play before the content begins. Ms. White stops by to check on the children at the computer. She tells me how much the children love to work on the computer and how the nursery rhymes really help them learn letter sounds. The children watch the videos passively, so it is unclear to me what kind of learning is taking place while they watch the clips.

The other side of the classroom is getting noisier. Generally speaking, there is a high tolerance for movement and sound in the 4K classroom; however, today it seems the activity level is higher than usual. Over the course of Center Time the behavior of a few of the children has become increasingly disruptive. For most of the period, these students go unchecked as they move from center to center, snatching things from their classmates, dumping materials, and throwing the containers. When a boy pours heaping cups of flour on the head of another child, Ms. White intervenes and tells him, “You are being rude and disrespectful to your friend.” She sends the flour-covered child to the bathroom and

guides the boy in cleaning up the flour on the floor. Ms. June, noticing what has transpired, signals to the class that it is time to clean up.

Following Center Time, the children gather on the meeting rug and Ms. June cues up a DVD Pete the Cat book on the classroom computer. Ms. June and Ms. White sit on chairs near the children and watch along with them. Three at a time, children are sent to the bathroom to brush their teeth—a task they do twice each day. When the narration ends, a number of children still need to brush their teeth, so a second Pete the Cat DVD is played. At the end of the narration, a song is played. The children are familiar with the tune and begin to sing and dance. When the song ends, the children are happily jumping around. Ms. White has returned from the vestibule with the children's coats, and Ms. June is beginning to call the children—by shirt color— to line up for outside time.

Aside from behavioral cues, I observe minimal teacher-child conversation, or teacher direction during large group times. When the children come to the meeting rug for circle time or other meetings, they almost exclusively watch videos or recorded books on the computer or listen to songs. On the occasions when either Ms. June or Ms. White read a book aloud, the children are extremely engaged and responsive. Interestingly, I did not observe anyone visit the book area at any time during my observations.

Ms. June and Ms. White use language with the children that overall is very natural and authentic—it does not come across as teacher-ease. Though frequently teacher speech is geared toward classroom management, there are also real conversations happening between children and teachers. The two educators have a flexible and dynamic relationship, functioning more as co-teachers than lead and assistant.

The Educator: Ms. June. Ms. June has been in early childhood education for 17 years. She worked at Head Start as a substitute before being offered a full-time position almost 13 years ago. Prior to working at Piedmont, Ms. June as worked at Riverview, another Head Start program in the local area. Ms. June entered the field with a CDA credential before earning an associate's degree. After Congress mandated increased educational requirements for Head Start teachers, Ms. June returned to school to earn a bachelor's degree in early childhood education through an online program offered by Kittzen College. Ms. June's books and a portion of her tuition at Kittzen were paid for by Head Start.

Of the 20 in Ms. June's four-year-old classroom, six have been diagnosed with disabilities. Currently, three children receive services for speech delays, and three children receive behavioral therapy for attention issues. English is the first language of all of the children in Ms. June's class. She reports that though Piedmont has had children in the program whose home language was something other than English, it is not a regular occurrence.

Ms. June thinks promoting language development every day is important. It was interesting that, despite her years of experience and training in early childhood education, it seemed to be a movie that informed her thinking on language development the most: "I had watched a movie, and there was something in there about language and reading, about the effect it has if you don't have language in your life. It kind of takes away everything else. It kind of eliminates any other aspect if you don't know how to communicate or even read something simple."

I asked Ms. June to tell me about the ways she promotes children's language development in her classroom. The first thing she brought up was an activity on the computer, suggesting that children's language development was supported because they had to follow directions in the game. This was not surprising because I had observed that the classroom computer is frequently relied on, almost in the capacity of a third teacher. Without pointing to specific benefits, Ms. June also raised teacher-child conversations as a way in which language development is promoted: "It might be we see them doing something and we ask an open-ended question, try to get them to just keep on, just talk, just make you have a conversation, and just keep talking—regardless of where it goes. You may start on you're going to the beach and end up that you're at a store trying on clothes or something. Just try to always talk to them."

Like language development, Ms. June believes that promoting literacy every day is also important. Her philosophy is that the language and literacy of her children are promoted by capitalizing on opportunities emerging from the natural activity of the classroom. She bristles a little when I ask about literacy instruction: "I just think that language and literacy both, you just kind of fall into it. You try to find your teachable moments. You talk, you have books in the block area. You have books in the art area. You never know where we might be sitting down reading. I try to have posters around the room that makes them question what does this say?' or 'what does that say?'"

Ms. June goes on to explain the reason for having the printed text in all of the centers, a practice borne out of NAEYC accreditation: "They [NAEYC] want books and reading materials everywhere. And we try to gear it toward that area. Like where the

trucks are there may be a couple of magazines or little board books about trucks and stuff like that.” Ms. June stated that the most appropriate activities for promoting language and literacy development in her classroom were those activities that keep the children's attention the longest so they can get the most out of it. She did not believe that there were any particular literacy skills that should be promoted with her 4-year-old class. Rather, Ms. June describes the focus of her practice this way: “Just trying to get them interested in and keep them interested in language and literacy.”

Ms. June describes activity bags that she sends home with the children as homework to do with their parents. She has 20 prepared bags with activities related to a variety of concepts. Frequently she pairs the activity with a related book. The children have a week to work on them before returning them. According to Ms. June, the practice of assigning homework is something that comes from Head Start, meant to encourage parents to engage with their children and connect families to what is happening in school. Ms. June is supportive of this practice because it helps to “bring the parents into what we are doing.” She feels that parents are integral to their children’s success: “The parents need to be. . . they’re actually, they’re the first teacher. They have to be involved. If we don’t work as a team, it’s not going to happen. We can do everything we can do here all day long from the time they get here first thing in the morning until the time they leave in the afternoon, and if the parents aren’t helping us cement those concepts, they may not keep that. They might not keep the concept.” Getting parents onboard with the homework is sometimes an effort. She laments, “Today’s parents just don’t seem to have the time to work with their children.”

Head Start's domains and the state learning standards inform Ms. June's decisions regarding the language and literacy practices in her classroom. HighScope, Piedmont's curriculum, is used more or less as a guide, rather than something that is strictly followed. Ms. June contrasts HighScope activities with other classroom practices such as including worksheets in homework activity bags, suggesting that implementing the HighScope curriculum, regarded as learning through play, is one facet of her practice: "I think HighScope is kind of like a guideline, because children learn through play, but then again, in some of the homework bags there may be a sheet to do or to practice. Which is not technically HighScope, but it gives the children something to practice and something to just. . . an extension of the classroom encounter." When I ask whether or not she had training on HighScope when she came to Head Start, Ms. June gave the impression that her introduction to the curriculum was fairly informal: "They kind of taught me, told me what HighScope entailed. Then when I got my degree they talked about what HighScope is. Simply put it, it's basically learn through play. There is no 'sit down and this is your paper, this is your pencil, do this and don't do that.'"

When I ask Ms. June to tell me about the ways she promotes language and literacy in her class, a question similar to an earlier query, she expresses a little frustration that I am asking her about material already covered. I apologize for the redundancy and explain it is just a way of making sure I don't miss anything. She goes on to describe her promotion of language and literacy like this: "Just if the children want to read a book, we read a book. If, and there's always. . . there's books and magazines, there's newspapers everywhere in the house area, in the block area. Just read if they want

to read, talk if they want to talk.” When I suggest perhaps the children set the pace, she agrees, adding, “Because if you’re standing and just talking to them and they don’t care anything about what you’re saying, they’re not going to pay attention anyway.”

From her description, one might conclude that Ms. June’s literacy practice is limited to reading books and having books and magazines available. Later in our conversation, however, when we are talking about DAP, something Ms. June discusses with ease, I ask her a similar question about promoting language and literacy, but frame it in terms of identifying practices that are developmentally appropriate for her class. Ms. June’s response reveals more about her practice, and for the first time she mentions the children’s writing: “I was thinking about when I was doing the lesson plans for this week. I have some children, like I say, that can write their name with no problem. Then I have other children that can trace their names very well and do fairly well at writing them underneath that. Then I have some that do good to draw a straight line. So a lesson might be to work on, let these others that are beyond, you can kind of go around maybe and find a word and write that word down or something. But then the other ones that still need work, it may be that we sit and we just draw lines and circles and like we’re just playing. They’re all writing, but it’s just the different levels of writing.”

We turn to questions about Head Start and more specifically how the OHS policies reach the teachers at Piedmont. Ms. June suggests that the vast majority of information she has about OHS goals and directives come from their sponsor, Southland. She is aware of Head Start’s website and though she visits it occasionally, she relies on Southland to filter and transmit information coming from the OHS, as she reflects in the

following statement: “Instead of having 50,000 pages—and 90% of those are irrelevant to the teachers in a classroom—they kind of weed through and go ‘Oh, okay, this talks about this, so they may need that in their classroom.’” This information is passed on to teachers through trainings provided by Southland. Ms. June does not recall anything different happening after the 2010 framework was released, nor does she remember any guidance coming from OHS regarding how teachers can or should support language and literacy of Head Start children.

Ms. June is more willing than the other teachers to express her feelings about the OHS. She feels that, at the national level, Head Start may be a little out of touch with what is actually going on in the classroom—in particular, the burden of the administrative component of a Head Start teacher’s job. She expresses her thoughts about the challenges it presents this way: “Sometimes you’re spending more time doing paperwork or spending more time making sure this is covered or that’s covered. . . you’re teaching to the test, basically. I guess in simple terms, you’ve got to make sure all the record keeping is covered, but your students are also supposed to get from A to Z within a certain time frame, but in between A and Z you’ve got this, this, this, this, this, this, this, this, and this that’s got to be turned in. There’s just a lot of it to put together. I mean, I do understand the reasoning for a lot of the paperwork. Because it is a government agency and it is federally funded, you do have to make sure all of your i’s are dotted and your t’s are crossed. Because this is a lot of money and it’s a lot of taxpayer’s money. And so many [people] have been caught cheating and lying and spending taxpayer’s money on stuff that they’re not supposed to. So I kind of understand it, but sometimes it’s time-

consuming.” She reflects on how nice it would be to be able to just sit on the floor with the kids playing dominoes, “having fun with your kids while they’re learning,” something Ms. June feels is out of reach because of the amount of paperwork required for each child.

Acknowledging that she might be biased, Ms. June believes that Piedmont is one of the better Head Start programs because the education level of the staff is high—something she believes makes a difference in the classroom. Ms. June details several ways that the children are assessed, including the Dial-4 and periodic work samples. In terms of meeting Head Start’s goals, Ms. June suggests that her classroom “is finally getting there as far as early writing abilities and math domains.” She thinks that most of her students are meeting literacy and language goals and are ready for school. In the case of students who are not ready, Ms. June suggests that the parents could do more to help their children, stressing that she needed to figure out a way to get the parents to understand how important it is for their children to develop the skills they need for school.

Ms. June described Head Start’s primary goal to be advocates for the children it serves. To Ms. June this means offering an array of services that enable the Head Start program to attend to the specific needs of each child rather than focusing solely on education services. As she puts it, “. . . I mean this child may need something different than this child. That’s why I’m just saying advocates, it’s not one specific situation, like providing educational opportunity for children. Well, this child over here may not

necessarily need the educational opportunity. They may need somebody to take them to the dentist.”

Summary and Introduction to Analysis and Synthesis

In this chapter I have provided a narrative portrait of the Piedmont Head Start Center’s language and literacy environment and practices, and the related cognitions of each of the four teachers. In Chapter 5 I interpret the practices described in the essential elements of emergent literacy suggested by the literature, and shed light on patterns and themes emerging from the data collected.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

Chapter Introduction

In the previous chapter I presented a narrative description of the case—that is to say, the early literacy and language dispositions and practices at the Piedmont Head Start Preschool—drawn from analysis of observation field notes, interview transcripts, photographs, and program artifacts gathered during the data collecting portion of my study. The results of analysis and synthesis of the data yielded four major themes related to language and literacy:

1. Cloudy understanding of Head Start’s mission.
2. Gaps in content knowledge.
3. Preference for indirect instruction.
4. Erroneous beliefs and incomplete knowledge about curriculum.

In this chapter I describe each of these themes after which I provide a summary statement addressing the research questions guiding the study.

Theme One: Cloudy Understanding of Head Start’s Mission

—And we have all of our domains and our...I just went blank again

They Get Head Start’s Message . . . Generally Speaking

Piedmont’s teachers understand that as Head Start teachers they are tasked with helping prepare children for success when they enter public school. The way in which they perceive this responsibility, however, varies. Take, for example, Ms. March, the lead teacher of the mixed-age class. When asked what she perceived Head Start’s primary objective to be, the 15-year Head Start veteran stated, “To help families, we definitely

help families. We help some of our families grow up.” Later in the conversation, she added, “We help children to get a head start on school. Introduce them to the school routine and maybe help them learn things before they get to school, and just helping them. Just helping the family all together.” The 4-year-old class teacher, Ms. June, a Head Start teacher for 13 years, emphasized goals of equity and advocacy. She believed Head Start’s main objective was “to make sure all children have equal educational opportunities.” While acknowledging the educational component of Head Start, she positioned it as one of any number of services a child may or may not require. Head Start’s main goal, she stressed, was “to be advocates for children,” which to Ms. June meant addressing each child’s particular needs, whether that be preschool education or dental care. When I asked how she came to know this, Ms. June had this to say: “Well, I don’t know what Head Start thinks. That’s just how they make me feel because I have to keep up with all [the children’s] health, their physicals and shots and all of that. It means something to [Head Start] for some reason.” Although helping families and advocating for children both fit within the spirit of the Head Start program’s origins, both sidestep the program’s stated purpose mandated in 1998—promoting school readiness.

In contrast, the two 3-year-old teachers, Ms. April and Ms. May, employed as Head Start teachers for 15 and 13 years, respectively, both identified school readiness as Head Start’s main objective, which Ms. April believes requires the teachers at Piedmont to “teach them [the children] social skills, math skills, science skills, literacy skills, language skills, and writing skills.” Though she stated that it was not a problem for her class, Ms. April identified attending to health-related issues, such as brushing teeth, as a

secondary goal of Head Start, “because some children don’t get that health experience at home.”

Since 1998, Head Start’s mission has been to promote the school readiness of economically disadvantaged children. Thus far, the OHS has left the establishment of school readiness goals to individual grantees and developed early learning frameworks to provide guidance for doing so. In the present case, there is a lack of clarity with respect to the teachers’ understanding of Piedmont’s school readiness goals. This vagueness adds to evidence indicating that teachers at Piedmont interpret the domains of the 2010 Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework as their readiness goals. For example, when asked about guidelines or expectations for children learning letter sounds, Ms. April stated, “We do have school readiness goals that we have to go by. Head Start has given us the school readiness goals.” In another instance, when asked what the expectations were for children learning particular letter sounds in terms of meeting Head Start’s goals, Ms. April responded, “As far as Head Start’s domains, I think my class is doing very well with that,” substituting goals with domains in her reply. That is not to say relying on the 2010 Framework is necessarily improper. There is precedent in the literature for Head Start programs adopting domains or domain elements as their readiness goals (Isaacs et al., 2015) and it may have been Southland’s intention to use the domains in that way. The lesson planning template, which is used by all Southland Head Start programs, makes no mention of school readiness goals but does include a category entitled “Head Start Domains to be Explored/State Early Learning Standards,” another

suggestion that the domains of the Framework are treated as, or are considered part of, school readiness goals for the program.

The domains of the 2010 Framework may comprise Piedmont’s school readiness goals, however the evidence also suggests that teachers are not well acquainted with the elements of the Framework’s domains. When the teachers described their language and literacy practices and sources of guidance, there was no mention of a framework and scattered reference to domains. Like Ms. April, the other teachers referred to the domains in general terms. Only Ms. June specified a particular domain by name (early writing) but provided limited information regarding the nature of the activity. Her comment also spoke to the layers of authority shaping practice in the classroom. Asked who made decisions about language and literacy practices in the classroom, Ms. June explained, “Because I have to follow a specific curriculum, I know how they want it taught, but I basically get to decide the activity. Like, if I want to do an early writing activity, I don’t have to have it approved, but I know it’s covered under my domains, my Head Start domains and stuff like that and the State Standards.”

Theme Two: Gaps in Content and Pedagogical Knowledge

–I think all centers are language...we might add books or magazines to add that little oomph of literacy.

Incomplete Grasp of Language and Literacy Elements

The comment introducing this discussion is reflective of the broad brushstrokes used by the teachers to paint a picture of the language and literacy practices at Piedmont. Ms. May, for example, on addressing school readiness: “ If we get them talking and we

bring that language in, and then you get that literacy in. . . . That's going to trigger something and we're going to have them ready hopefully." Ms. April on her thoughts about trying an activity in which children identified the names of animals on cards: "Maybe I can use these simple words to get children to use that language they need to use and they're also getting the literacy as far as letters and stuff too with that;" and Ms. March on the importance of addressing literacy every day: "We want to introduce them to the letter sounds and making words—all that develops into the language. We definitely want to introduce that and get them used to it."

The teachers at Piedmont value language and literacy and are supportive, if not passionate, about promoting it daily. Ms. May's comment illustrates this sentiment, "I really do think it needs to be promoted every day because I think language and literacy is the key to our success in education. I taught my own children that." Although interview and observational data suggest Piedmont teachers regard the domains as important, the data also revealed that the teachers had a tendency to shy away from describing specific concepts, had difficulty at times linking concepts to particular practices, and implemented a modest repertoire of strategies. Together, these data suggest weaknesses in the teachers' capacity related to language and literacy. In this section I interpret the language and literacy practices at Piedmont in light of five essential elements of emergent literacy—concepts about print, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, oral language, and writing. These elements, which are suggested by the literature described in Chapter 2 herein, have parallel domain elements identified in Head Start's guiding document, *The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework* (OHS, 2010). From

teacher to teacher, there was little deviation with respect to their cognition of language and literacy. In a few instances, some minor misunderstandings related to content emerged, but by and large the evidence indicated incomplete knowledge, as opposed to incorrect knowledge.

Oral language development. At Piedmont language development is regarded as something that happens throughout the classroom and across the day—as Ms. May expressed: “Basically, language to me is in the classroom everywhere. I don’t feel like it’s in one place. It’s there even there when we are pottyng. They may need my help. ‘Okay, tell me what you need me to help you do?’ ‘Unsnap my pants.’ There’s language everywhere we go, even on the playground.” To the teachers, language development is largely associated with “teaching children to talk,” or, similarly, “helping children learn to use their language,” and is promoted primarily during routine teacher-child interactions during the course of the day. This may mean asking open-ended questions of children in the housekeeping center, helping children find the words to describe feelings instead of using their hands on the playground, or encouraging children to share happenings at home during Circle Time. Similar to her colleagues, Ms. June described her approach to language development as “a matter of grasping your teachable moment.”

The teachers emphasized the pragmatics of oral language, expressing the belief that promoting the children’s language development was important because it enabled children to better communicate their wants and needs and appropriately express their feelings—social skills that would serve them now and into the future. The teachers strongly associated language development with social skills—so much so for Ms. April

that when I asked her whether language development needed to be promoted every day, she responded by saying, “Yes, because young children later in life they’re going to need the social skills to be able to communicate with people,” seeming to suggest social skills and language development were interchangeable.

The Piedmont teachers were not incorrect about the impact of language development on social competence; however, their knowledge of the domain appeared to be either incomplete or insecure for several reasons. The Piedmont teachers’ described beliefs and practices that emphasized the importance of getting children to use words—their expressive language—but helping children understand, or comprehend, words—their receptive learning—received scant attention from the group as a whole. That is not to say that receptive language development was not promoted at Piedmont. Numerous potential language-building activities were observed, including, for example, read-alouds and nursery rhyme readings, but promoting receptive language did not appear to be the motivation for including the activities as much as was getting children to talk. In addition to remaining largely silent on the subject of receptive language, the teachers did not reference syntax, oral comprehension, or vocabulary—components of oral language associated with promoting emergent literacy.

Literacy. Like language development, analysis of interview, observation, and lesson plan data indicate gaps or shortcomings in Piedmont teachers’ knowledge of early literacy concepts. The elements of literacy (called Literacy Knowledge & Skills in the 2010 Framework) relevant to analysis in this section were concepts about print, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and writing. Given that the teachers used the 2010

Framework for planning, outcome indicator examples for each domain element were considered them in relation to collected data. For example, “Recognizes print in everyday life, such as numbers, letters, words, and familiar logos and signs” is an indicator among those listed under the 2010 Framework domain element “Print Concepts & Conventions.” In this case I examined data segments representative of practice promoting recognition of print in everyday life culled from transcripts of teacher comments, notes about practices, and information found on curriculum planning forms to develop an indicator profile—which in turn acted as a new data segment for the purpose of identifying patterns and developing themes.

As was the case with language development, the majority of teachers’ statements related to literacy—such as, the reasons they thought promoting literacy everyday was necessary, the particular aspects of literacy they felt were most important for their children, and the ways they supported growth and learning for a particular domain element—were ambiguous. Ms. March, who in the beginning of our interview struggled a great deal to find the words to express her thoughts, ultimately provided the most cohesive statement about literacy at Piedmont. Her comment, which is reflective of numerous thoughts expressed by the other teachers, is in response to a question asking if there was a progression for literacy concepts taught. “When we start out, we try to get them to recognize their name, and then the first letter in that name—try to associate that there are letters that go with their name. And then we introduce letters and letter sounds. Some of them get it, some of them don’t. That’s okay, we don’t try to [push them]. . . . Maybe with the older ones we try to work a little bit more at it, because we know they’re

going to kindergarten and they've got to know it then. And then just progressively working up, like letters and letter sounds, or recognizing their name, then maybe looking at little words. Like if we're looking at a book, we're reading a book, the word *at*. And going *a-t* and putting the sounds together, the ones who are more developmentally along can go as far as they want to go."

The planning form that the teachers complete each week calls for the identification of a "Head Start Domain to be Explored." For each of the nine lesson plans collected, a domain and a related domain element from the 2010 Framework was identified. (In one case the domain referenced came from the older 2003 Framework.) In some cases a specific indicator was also included. For example, a teacher might fill in this part of the planning form with the following information, "Literacy Knowledge & Skills—Early Writing: Experiments with Writing Tools and Materials." In this instance, "Literacy Skills & Knowledge" is the domain, "Early Writing" is the domain element, and "Experiments with Writing Tools and Materials" is one of the domain indicators. During our interviews, the teachers referred to "the domains" numerous times; however, with the exception of Ms. June's comment about preparing an early writing activity, the teachers did not call any domain element by name, make distinctions between domain elements, or characterize any domain element in terms of what it comprised.

A body of evidence generated from the careful review and cross-referencing of transcript text, field notes, photos, and planning forms suggests that the Piedmont teachers—who frequently made reference to the importance of "introducing" or "exposing" children to letters and letter sounds, and the practices they believe achieved

this—primarily associate early literacy with alphabet knowledge. Ms. April and Ms. May, for instance, frequently mentioned using the Letter People in conjunction with their “Letter of the Week” practice. It should be noted that such an approach has been criticized in the literature on at least two fronts. One school of thought suggests that the practice is artificial and ineffectual because letters are taught out of context, while another suggests that learning a letter a week is insufficient for promoting emergent literacy. Though Ms. March could not point to a particular activity or practice she used to support literacy, she stated several times that introducing children to letters and letter sounds was important for supporting early literacy. Ms. June deviated from the others, suggesting that there were no particular literacy skills that should be emphasized with 4-year-olds. Rather, she suggested that the important thing was just “get them interested in and keep them interested in language and literacy.”

Ms. June also identified reading books and magazines to children as the way she promoted early literacy, saying, “If the children want to read a book, we read a book.” Book reading was also explicitly stated as being a primary method for promoting literacy by Ms. April and Ms. May, and observed in all of the classrooms. Reading books and other texts aloud was also associated with promoting concepts about print. Some concepts were very specific and intentionally addressed, particularly those actions related to book appreciation, such as pointing out characteristics of books, or talking about the way print is read from left to right. Though the teachers provided experiences that potentially promoted other concepts about print—for example, gaining understanding that print carries meaning when the morning message is read and discussed—in some

instances it was unclear, based on the data collected, whether promoting the concept was intentional.

Ms. June, and to a lesser extent Ms. March, raised writing as something that should be included in supporting early literacy, though in both cases, mechanics were emphasized over message, and name writing was the only activity described in detail (by Ms. June). In the two 3-year-old classes, I collected artifacts suggesting that children engaged in activities that involved tracing their names, but the only writing activity I observed was the use of stencils, an activity that promoted fine motor skills needed for writing. Some children in Ms. June and Ms. March's classes spontaneously wrote their names and formed numbers and letters, or approximations of the symbols. I did not, however, observe any of the teachers directing or actively encouraging children to engage in writing other than printing their names.

There is little evidence to suggest that phonological awareness is an intentional and planned part of the curriculum. When the teachers at Piedmont described their literacy practices they talked about letters and letter sounds, but they did not mention phonemic awareness—phonemes, rime, onset, rhyme, or syllables—concepts associated with phonological awareness. Across all interview transcripts, field notes, and planning documents, there was a single reference to phonological awareness, or the skills comprising phonological awareness. There were some instances in the data in which beginning sounds in words were addressed, particularly with names of children; however, the data tips in favor of an interpretation in which the intention of the activity was to promote letter-sound knowledge rather than practice isolating sounds in language.

Theme Three: Preference for Passive or Indirect Teaching Practices

—We introduce it, and we try to get them interested, or try to get them to, not learn it, but catch on to it.

Indirect Promotion of Literacy and Language Development

A third theme that emerged was a disposition toward language and literacy that positioned the domains as important content that needed to be addressed, but not necessarily in an explicit manner, evidenced by a pattern of earnest intentions but vague practices and the use of strategies that were not well defined. When discussing the ways language and literacy were promoted in the classroom, the teachers tended to avoid the words *teaching* and *learning*, preferring instead to talk about “introducing” and “catching on.” When I point out that she seems to be avoiding the word *teach*, Ms. March explains this way: “I know what you’re saying, because we’ve always been told that we’re not necessarily trying to get them to learn it. If they don’t learn it—the younger ones—that’s okay because they are just 3 or just 4. But if they can catch on, we can expand on it and keep going to where they are interested.”

In this section I examine constituent components of the Piedmont teachers’ practice and, in particular, how they contribute to promoting language and literacy and how their dispositions inform practice. I first introduce different categories of teacher activities that comprise their practice: embedded actions, environment preparation, and instructional activities. I also discuss the strategies, activities, and approaches for promoting language and literacy identified by the Piedmont teachers, paying special

attention to the use of books, which emerged as an all-purpose, yet ambiguously used tool for promoting literacy and language in the classroom.

Embedded actions. Embedded actions were the ongoing or opportunistic teaching behaviors that, by design, happen during the course of regularly scheduled activities. Striving to engage children in authentic conversation during meals, center time, and outdoor playtime, for example, was an ongoing, intentionally embedded practice, oriented toward promoting language development that all four teachers identified, and were observed doing to some degree. Piedmont teachers all believed language development was supported across the day and specifically pointed to natural conversations, and the use of open-ended questions during more structured events (e.g., during Circle Time), and as the primary means for promoting children’s growth in language—an assertion that is supported by the observation data.

Opportunistic teaching can be thought of as recognizing and making the most of what is frequently referred to as “teachable moments,” as Ms. June did when she downplayed the idea that children should receive specific instruction in language and literacy. “Specifically instructed? It’s just...I think that language and literacy both, you just kind of fall into it. You try to find your teachable moments. You talk, you have books in the block area. You have books in the art area. You never know where we might be sitting down reading. I try to have stuff around the room that makes them question, ‘what does this say?’ or ‘what does that say?’ We may have a new poster up in the room that they see a printed word on. And they may point to the word and ask ‘what does that say?’ It’s grasping that teachable moment.” For Ms. June, an intuitive teacher, embedded

practices were the primary means she used for promoting children's language and literacy.

Prepared environment. Another teacher practice is the preparation of the classroom environment. The prepared environment includes, for example, the physical centers or activity areas designed by the teacher, the materials that the teacher selects and arranges on shelves in the center, and text, art, labels, and other items the teacher chooses to display on the walls and around the room. All of the teachers expressed that playing in centers promoted children's language development due to conversations that occurred in them. All of the classrooms had comfortable and inviting book areas (though book quality varied) and centers dedicated to writing; however, none of the teachers specifically mentioned either center as a means of promoting literacy. This despite the fact that I observed children in classroom book areas "reading" or being read to almost continuously during center time, particularly in Ms. May's and Ms. April's classrooms. There was also some activity in the writing centers, particularly in Ms. March's and Ms. June's classrooms. In Ms. March's class, each child had a personal "writing box." The containers, however, were packed tightly on a low shelf and hard to access. Generally speaking, the writing centers were not as aesthetically appealing as the book centers, and it was not obvious what the purpose of the materials was or how they differed from the art materials shelved nearby. I did not observe any of the teachers spend time with children in the writing center; however, I did observe the assistant teachers for Ms. March and Ms. June interacting with children there. For example, Ms. June's assistant tried to soothe an upset child by encouraging him to write the letters in his name. In another

instance, Ms. March's assistant filled in a coloring book page while two children worked with stencils. Though she was not facilitating writing per se, she did engage in a lengthy and complex conversation with a child at the table.

Despite the wide array of texts that peppered, if not papered, the classroom walls at Piedmont, the vast majority of the environmental print is not put to use by the children or teachers. Ms. April and Ms. May both used the text to "Humpty Dumpty" hanging on a wall during a Circle Time activity; however, generally speaking, only calendars, posters, and signs in the immediate vicinity of each classroom's meeting area were observed being used. Ms. June was alone in describing the way she and the children interacted with posters and words she had taped to the wall as a general practice.

Instructional practices. Consistent with observation data, the teachers reported that the majority of language and literacy "instruction" took place as a large group activity during Circle Time and involved all of the children. In an effort to better understand language and literacy practices at Piedmont, I cross-referenced lesson plan data, and my field notes with the text from teacher interview transcripts. I did not expect that the teachers would list everything they did to promote language and literacy; however, I did want to get know some of their core strategies. Given that the teachers tended to get more comfortable and respond more easily as the interviews progressed, I posed at least three, and as many as six, questions aimed at identifying the activities and strategies the teachers used or thought would be useful for promoting language and literacy. All of the teachers conveyed that language was developed through conversations during all activities, described previously as an embedded action. Ms. April alone went

beyond this, stating, “I was just really looking back and thinking, ‘What can I do to help promote more language in the classroom?’ Because I do think it’s important.” Specific activities designed to promote language development generally were not part of the Piedmont teachers’ practice.

Getting the teachers to articulate literacy promoting practices—embedded, environmental, instructional, or otherwise—was challenging. Being interviewed can be unnerving, but Ms. March seemed completely stymied when asked what activities she thought promoted the language and literacy of her students, so we agreed to revisit the question. Though she identified things she felt her students needed to know, such as letters, letter sounds, and how to write their names, and stated that she “worked on” these items when students struggled with them, she did not explain how the items were “worked on.” The other teachers were able to supply answers and seemed more confident about what they were saying, but in reality they had said little more than Ms. March. Ms. June, who emphasized teachable moments and responding to children’s interests, described her approach to promoting language and literacy: “Just read if they want to read, talk if they want to talk.” The practices identified by Ms. April and Ms. May were nearly identical. Both teachers described using music and puppets from *The Letter People*, a literacy program based on a 1970s era PBS program of the same name.

The rest of the teachers at Piedmont specifically, and enthusiastically, linked book reading to promoting literacy. Both Ms. April and Ms. May had similar approaches to read-alouds, and similar beliefs about the benefits children received from being read to. The only criterion mentioned for book selection was developmentally appropriate length.

Neither teacher offered any indication that books were ever selected for the express purpose of promoting a particular literacy or language objective, however some benefits to children that they mentioned and the read-aloud practices they described were related to the domains of Literacy Skills & Knowledge and Language Development. For example, when asked what they do when they introduce a book they are reading to the children, both teachers stated that they begin by showing children the front cover, back cover, and spine of the book, constrained book knowledge skills. Both teachers also described asking the children open-ended questions. Ms. April stated that she asks the children questions to “let the children interact with the book,” adding that “it keeps them interested and they won’t be all jittery and want to keep moving around.” Ms. May suggested similar concerns about keeping children’s interest, stating, “If I start reading a book and I lose them, I stop. There’s no sense in reading if I’ve lost them because they’re not benefiting from that.” When I asked what the children got from the read-alouds, Ms. April and Ms. May again expressed similar beliefs. Ms. April offered that the questions gave the children “that better connection with the book,” and both teachers suggested that reading books enabled you to learn things, “about the world, about animals,” as Ms. May put it. Ms. May also noted that children “get the insight of what’s going on in a story,” which, though not explicitly stated, could be linked to comprehension, as could Ms. Mays’s comment about children getting a better connection with the book. Ms. April indicated that the questioning also helped children “learn about how we take turns in conversation.” The interview data regarding book reading practices and approaches are consistent with observation field notes.

Ms. June did not offer specifics about how she conducted book readings or what she thought the children gained from books. Her statement is not quite as basic as it seems. For Ms. June it is not so much “just read,” or “just talk”—a proponent for practice that follows children’s interests—it is the “they want” part that she tends to emphasize. Much of Ms. June’s book sharing I observed was one-on-one and unplanned, something I also noticed with Ms. March.

Another similarity between Ms. March and Ms. June with respect to book reading practices was their use of books on tape during Circle Time. Although I also observed both teachers engaging in enthusiastic read-alouds, there were an equal number of occasions in which Ms. June and Ms. March served as passive page-turners of narrated texts. Although the students were not the primary focus of my observations, it was difficult not to notice the increase in the children’s excitement and engagement when the teachers were doing the reading.

Theme Four: Erroneous beliefs and incomplete knowledge about curriculum

—Essentially, HighScope means learning through play.

HighScope implementation: Obedient Infidelity

Piedmont, like all of the centers operated by Southland, uses HighScope, the curriculum associated with the well-known Perry Preschool study (Schweinhart et al., 2005).

HighScope’s website describes the curriculum as “a comprehensive model that addresses all areas of development through eight content areas and 58 key developmental indicators (KDIs)—the skills and behaviors at each stage of development that pave the way for school and adult success” (HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2018, n.p.)

HighScope is characterized by active learning within the framework of a predictable schedule in which teachers “support and gently extend” children’s understanding (HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2018, n.p.). One of the most notable features of HighScope is Plan-Do-Review, a sequence in which children are encouraged to plan and organize their activity in the classroom, carry out their plans during Work Time (similar to Center Time)—or revise if necessary—and then reflect afterward. In addition to the plan-do-review component, according to HighScope’s website, HighScope classrooms always include small group time, large group time, transitions, and outside time, meals, and rest. (See Appendix H, “HighScope Daily Routine” for further explanation of the schedule elements.) For a more thorough discussion of HighScope curriculum, see Hohmann, Weikhart, & Epstein, 1995; or HighScope.org.)

Evidence from the data collected suggests that the teachers at Piedmont adhere to the structural elements of HighScope—that is to say, the schedule components of High Scope’s Daily Routine. Although the structure of the Daily Routine is present, the practices I observed did not reflect some of the fundamental aspects of HighScope, leading to my initial impression that the HighScope curriculum served as a guide but was not rigidly followed. When I asked whether this was the case, Ms. June acknowledged that in her classroom HighScope provided a framework but was not strictly followed. Though the other teachers asserted that they closely adhered to HighScope, there was little to differentiate the approaches used by Ms. June and the rest of the teachers. In

some respects, particularly the nature of teacher-child relationships, Ms. June's practices seemed more in line with HighScope.

The HighScope Curriculum has been used by Piedmont for more than 20 years; however, the evidence suggests that the Piedmont teachers have little, if any, familiarity with the Key Developmental Indicators central to HighScope. In addition, the teachers did not reference any of High Scope's eight content areas, one of which is titled "Literacy, Language & Communication." Further, although HighScope has a literacy program entitled *Growing Readers*, the only reference to it in any of the data was as a small group activity in Ms. April's class. The nature of the Growing Readers activity is unknown. Growing Readers was not mentioned during any of the interviews and implementation of a Growing Readers activity was not observed.

The teachers at Piedmont also expressed, in remarkably similar terms, a distorted view of a foundational premise of HighScope—namely, that HighScope means learning through play. It is well established that children learn through play (Bruner, Jolly, & Sylva, 1976; Whitebread et al., 2009; Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004), however there is nothing in HighScope's literature to suggest that HighScope should be equated with learning through play. The teachers' interpretation of HighScope as learning through play seems to have generated some reliance on overgeneralized but stable precepts that influence practice, particularly during Work Time (also known as Center Time), the "Do" segment of the Plan-Do-Review sequence. The teachers at Piedmont indicated that under HighScope teachers cannot influence where children go or what children do during Center Time/Work Time because "with HighScope, children are free to follow their

interests.” They also suggested that there is no limit to the number of children who can be in a center at one time, “even when there are nine children in the book center,” and further indicated that teachers are not supposed to work one-on-one with students unless the student chooses the activity, “but sometimes I will pull a child out of HighScope to work on something if they really need it.” The implications of HighScope’s interpretation and implementation are discussed in Chapter 6.

Synopsis of Data Analysis and Synthesis

This case study investigating the Piedmont Head Start Preschool Center located in the Southeastern United States was guided by the following questions: (1) What characterizes Head Start programs’ language and literacy practice?; (2) To what extent do language and literacy practices in Head Start preschools address the essential elements of emergent literacy suggested by the literature?; (3) What informs the decisions that Head Start Teachers make about their literacy and language practices? In Chapter 4, I presented a detailed narrative description of the language and literacy practices at the Piedmont Head Start Preschool Center followed, earlier in this chapter, by a discussion of the themes emerging in this case. In short, the teachers at Piedmont value language and literacy. They are enthusiastic in their efforts to promote language and literacy in their classrooms and are sincere in their belief that most children at Piedmont are on track and making appropriate progress. The teachers at Piedmont, however, unknowingly fall short of implementing comprehensive evidence-based practices to support emergent literacy. Their practice is impacted by incomplete knowledge of the elements comprising the domains of early language and literacy, guidance and directives from multiple sources of

authority that are not fully understood, and in some cases are misunderstood, but are nonetheless accommodated in their practice to varying degrees.

To recap, the teachers feel strongly about language and literacy but emphasized the oral language component more than any aspect of emergent literacy. Language development is almost exclusively promoted as an embedded practice—seen as a natural part of the regular day. It is strongly associated with social skills, if not regarded as one itself, and viewed as important because it enables children to communicate using words instead of their hands or fists. Promoting the development of other aspects of language contributing to emergent literacy, such as vocabulary and comprehension, was not a frequent occurrence and was not expressly mentioned either in interviews or on the lesson plans. Writing and phonological awareness also received scant attention in terms of direct instruction. For the most part, efforts to promote writing were aimed at helping children to write their name. There was little indication that other kinds of writing (e.g., captions, lists, labels) were taught, encouraged, or modeled. Also, there did not appear to be any intentional efforts to connect writing to any other emergent literacy skill other than prompting students to isolate sounds in their name when attempting to write it.

Phonological awareness did not appear to be addressed as an intentional practice and only minimally as an opportunistic practice. Isolation of initial sounds in names was one way phonological awareness was promoted; however, it was sporadically observed and seemed intended to emphasize letter-sound relationships. The children at Piedmont sang songs, guessed rhyming words during read-alouds of predictable text, and learned nursery rhymes, all of which can contribute to the development of phonological

awareness. The impetus for implementing these activities, however, was to please the children or to keep the children engaged and on task more so than it was to promote the children's phonological awareness. Literacy practices at Piedmont emphasized basic book knowledge and concepts about print (parts of a book and treating books with care) and alphabet knowledge (letters and letter sounds). Though elements related to concepts about print were sometimes addressed with children while reading one-on-one, generally speaking, these literacy elements were introduced as large group activities at Circle Time when teachers engaged in read-alouds and conducted "Letter of the Week" activities.

The Head Start centers operated by Southland have used the HighScope curriculum for more than two decades; however, none of the teachers at Piedmont had knowledge of HighScope content areas, HighScope Key Indicators, or other fundamental aspects of the curriculum, including features specific to promoting language and literacy. Further, the teachers have operationalized HighScope simply as "learning through play." The notion of learning through play does not run counter to the HighScope philosophy; however, learning through play is an inadequate description of the curriculum. The teachers' understanding of HighScope, though incomplete and somewhat distorted, was consistent from class to class. This pseudo-knowledge has essentially served as a litmus test for determining what is, or is not, appropriate practice. Other authorities impacting Piedmont—the CLASS assessment tool, NAEYC accreditation standards, Head Start's 2010 Framework, and State Early Learning Standards—also contribute practice; however, based on evidence gathered in this case, the level of influence is not as pronounced or as consistent from class to class compared to that of HighScope.

Summary

I wrap up my case study in Chapter 6 by describing my conclusions. Each of the major findings is reviewed and considered in light of the literature. Implications for classroom practice are described as well as recommendations for policy, professional development, and research. Limitations of the study are addressed before I close with final thoughts.

CHAPTER SIX: SIGNIFICANCE, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Introduction

In this, the final chapter of my dissertation, I begin by revisiting the purpose of my study and provide a synopsis of my project including my research design and the manner in which it was executed. Next I review the themes that emerged during the study, consider their relevance in light of the extant literature, and highlight implications for practice, followed by a discussion of recommendations including specific suggestions for policy and research. Finally, I address limitations of this research before offering a statement of final thoughts.

Project Synopsis

As first stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of the study was to shed light on Head Start teachers' cognition and practices related to language and literacy and to illuminate variables that influence practice decisions. In addition to generating a snapshot of classroom language and literacy practice, it was hoped that understanding the thinking behind what Head Start teachers do and say in the classroom in conjunction with any identified obstacles or facilitators might generate new or existing strands of theory that could contribute to creation of site-specific, or local, professional development. To that end, the research questions guiding this study—which should be construed as specific to the Piedmont Head Start Center—were as follows: (1) What characterizes the language and literacy practices of Head Start teachers?, (2) To what extent do language and literacy practices in Head Start preschools address the essential elements of emergent

literacy suggested by the literature?, (3) What informs Head Start teachers' language and literacy decisions?

My motivation for undertaking this particular study stems from personal, professional, and practical goals. As a former master teacher in a laboratory preschool, I have a deep interest in preschool quality and the variables informing teacher cognition, and in turn, teacher practice across preschool settings. My interest in examining the language and literacy practices of a local Head Start program resulted from my work on an earlier study conducted at more than 20 Head Start centers in the region. My curiosity was piqued when I became aware of the challenges these Head Start teachers face (e.g., very low pay, lack of resources, time-consuming administrative tasks), as they strive to ready children from low SES homes for school. Practically speaking, I hoped to gather data useful for informing site-specific professional development. From an intellectual standpoint, I had three goals in mind. I wanted to describe the current language and literacy practice in a local South Carolina Head Start program and situate it within the evidence-based framework for promoting emergent literacy. Second, I aimed to identify factors that play in the decisions that lead to practice, or an absence of practice. Third, I hoped to get a sense of which factors were most influential on practice decisions.

Seeking to present “meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2009, p. 4), I use a case study design—or more specifically, a single case study with multiple embedded units of analysis. The bounded case is the language and literacy practice at the Piedmont Head Start Preschool Center between November 2014 and January 2015, and the embedded units of analysis, or mini cases, is the language and literacy practice in

each of the four classrooms during the same time period. Piedmont was chosen through “typical sampling,” a strategy considered to be a type of purposeful sampling in which “a site is specifically selected because it is not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual” (Patton, 2015, p. 284).

The data collected for this study includes observation field notes and anecdotal memos from more than 36 hours spent at the school across a dozen school visits, over 100 pages of teacher interview transcripts, CLASS scores (program quality assessment) from the month prior to the start of my data collection, lesson planning forms for nine weeks, photographs of the classrooms, and 18 artifacts ranging from children’s artwork to notes to parents. At the commencement of the formal data analysis period all data were sorted by type—and by classroom in the case of observation field notes. Memos resulting from informal data analysis, something that occurred throughout the study, were recorded on Contact Summary Forms or index cards and treated as separate data type for formal analysis purposes.

With teacher cognition theory as a frame for my analysis, I used an inductive process to develop codes, patterns, and ultimately themes for the data. Sifting through each type of data individually, I looked for meaningful chunks of text, which I recorded on note cards and then physically arranged and rearranged until categories started to emerge. I repeated this process with each batch of data—keeping a running list of categories—before combining note cards from all of the separate observations together. Categories were collapsed, expanded, or discarded until all data chunks were accounted for (or in a few instances, removed from the theme-building process) within a theme, and

the themes could be logically linked to one another as well as back to the questions guiding the study. Analysis of the data generated four major themes describing the teacher cognitions and practices related to language and literacy at Piedmont. The data indicate that Piedmont teachers have a cloudy understanding of Head Start's mission; gaps in content and pedagogical knowledge; a preference for indirect instruction; and erroneous beliefs and incomplete knowledge about HighScope curriculum. In the next section I will provide an overview of the findings—describing each of the four themes, its significance to research, and its implications for practice.

Overview of Findings

In this section I recap the four major themes discussed in Chapter 5. For each theme I describe its significance in relation to existing research, highlight implications for practice, and suggest recommendations for future research.

Theme One: Cloudy Understanding of Head Start's Mission

In the 1998 legislation reauthorizing Head Start funding, Congress revised Head Start's purpose from promoting social competence to promoting school readiness. Subsequent legislation has reinforced the mandate to promote school readiness, including the most recent reauthorization of the program (2007) stating that Head Start's purpose was to “promote the school readiness of low-income children by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. . .” Congress stipulated that this should be done in a learning environment that “supports children's growth in language, literacy, mathematics, science, social and emotional functioning, creative arts, physical skills, and approaches to learning,” and provide low-income families with “. . . health, educational,

nutritional, social, and other services. . .” deemed necessary (Public Law 110-134, Sec. 2). Further, the 2007 legislation required Head Start grantees to create school readiness goals that reflect expectations for children, across domains of learning and development that will improve their readiness for kindergarten. The OHS describes Head Start’s approach to school readiness as meaning “children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning and schools are ready for children” (OHS-ECLKC, n.d.). This very broad description leaves the construct open to wide interpretation.

All of the Piedmont teachers stated or agreed that preparing children for school was part of their role as teachers, and that attending to certain literacy and language skills was part of that preparation. They also believed an important part of their job was to support all aspects of children’s growth and development, particularly in terms of children’s health and nutrition, and to help parents grow and learn as well. The teachers, however, did not necessarily regard promoting school readiness as Head Start’s main purpose. When explicitly asked about Head Start’s primary purpose, the two 3-year-old teachers identified school readiness, whereas the 4-year-old and mixed-age classroom teachers expressed purposes that were related to supporting the well-being of children and their families.

The teachers who identified school readiness as the purpose of Head Start used more structured approaches for promoting development in cognitive domains; however, their practice in this regard was almost exclusively related to language and literacy, particularly constrained literacy skills. Those who viewed child and family well-being as

the priority regarded promoting academic components as appropriate to an extent, but not as a driver of practice. Although all Head Start grantees are required to create school readiness goals, only one teacher seemed to know that school readiness goals existed. Social and emotional factors were important to all of the teachers and at times meeting social and emotional goals took precedence over promoting cognitive development.

Significance in light of the literature. Conceptual ambiguity regarding school has been a persistent theme in the research (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Brown & Lan, 2015; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Snow, 2006). It is also well documented that traditionally, early childhood educators have tended to look to social skills more than preacademic skills as indicators of school readiness (Heaviside & Farris, 1993). The literature, in fact, suggests that many of those affiliated with Head Start initially failed to grasp a change in Head Start's purpose because they equated social competence and school readiness (Zigler et al., 2004). The findings in the present case, while similar, do not fit squarely within any one of these strands of research.

The actions of the two teachers who reported school readiness as Head Start's primary objective suggest that, at a minimum, they understand that children need more than social competence to be ready for school. The fact that two of the teachers, both with more than 15 years experience as educators at Head Start, were unaware of Head Start's purpose though unfortunate, was not necessarily surprising. It was however, hard to situate in the research. In a review of the literature to date, I have been unable to locate any study from the past 15 years that speaks to Head Start teachers' lack of knowledge of Head Start's purpose or mission.

Implications for practice. Ideally, Head Start teachers know that the purpose of Head Start is to promote school readiness in a learning environment that supports development across domains, including language and literacy. Further, they are cognizant of school readiness goals for their particular center. Such knowledge does not guarantee model practice or optimal outcomes, but when fundamental aims of the program are unknown, or partially understood, as seems to be the case at Piedmont, there is a risk that some domain elements, if not entire domains, may not be adequately addressed. Skills comprising the domains of language, and even more so, literacy are particularly vulnerable to exclusion from teacher practice. Regarded as academic in nature, instruction in the domains of language and literacy were traditionally considered inappropriate for early childhood settings, and are not firmly established as preschool content. In Head Start settings the risk of excluding academic-oriented domain elements is increased because preschool education is not the sole function of Head Start programs, and instruction may compete with the delivery of other Head Start services.

All of the teachers at Piedmont stated with conviction that they value language and literacy but gingerly discussed the way they promote these domains, avoiding the word *teach* as they described their practices. The two teachers who were aware of the school readiness mission used direct instruction to promote language and literacy, but the range of learning objectives addressed was narrow—perhaps due, at least in part, to a lack of familiarity with Piedmont’s school readiness goals. Their colleagues who viewed Head Start’s mission as advocating for children or supporting families, on the other hand, promoted literacy and language almost exclusively through indirect means.

Theme Two: Gaps in Literacy and Language Content Knowledge

A review of the research, presented in Chapter 2 herein, suggested five key elements teachers of young children should address to promote emergent literacy—alphabet knowledge, concepts about print, phonological awareness, writing, and oral language. These elements are also identified in Head Start’s 2010 Framework within the domains of “Literacy Knowledge & Skills” and “Language Development.” Although the 2010 Framework was intended to be a source of guidance for the Head Start workforce, the Piedmont teachers never refer to it, and mention the domains very generally, if at all. When asked to describe the ways in which language and literacy were promoted in their classrooms, the Piedmont teachers, school-wide, mentioned regular conversations occurring across the day and book reading. Interviews and observations of practice suggest that the teachers focused primarily on constrained skills that are on the early end of the emergent literacy continuum. The elements receiving the most attention were book appreciation (which appears in the 2010 framework but not among the essential elements identified in my review of the literature), some concepts about print (directionality, for example), and alphabet knowledge. The teachers believed these elements to be important and were very comfortable talking about them. Language development, which was regularly promoted, primarily through embedded practices, was highly valued for its impact on social and emotional domains and not fully understood in terms of its service to emergent literacy.

On the whole, neither writing nor phonological awareness figured significantly in conversations with teachers or in observations of their practice. The only writing

mentioned by all of the teachers was name writing. Only Ms. June described writing specifically as an element of literacy. The small amount of writing that I observed at Piedmont was almost exclusively focused on the mechanics of forming letters, and not experimenting with writing as a form of communication.

Significance in light of the literature. The overall theme and the individual segments of data that comprised it are very much consistent with the existing research in the field. Moats (2014) points out that studies indicating that there are gaps in early childhood educators' language and literacy knowledge are well established in the literature (Bos et al., 2001; Mather et al., 2001; Moats, 1994; Moats, 2014; Moats & Lyon, 1996; Troyer & Yopp, 1990). The findings informing this theme mirrored many of the findings from Hawken and her colleagues' (2005) national survey of Head Start teachers' views and practices related to emergent literacy. Similarities to the present study include the prevalence of early, more basic skills, such as book appreciation and print awareness, and a lack of attention to phonological awareness. Results from the study suggested that the teachers surveyed engaged in writing activities more frequently using a wider variety of strategies than did the Piedmont teachers.

Implications for practice. The teachers are enthusiastic promoters of language and literacy on a variety of fronts—book appreciation, print awareness, and alphabet knowledge to name a few. Although they assert that the outcomes for their students are positive, the teachers' gaps in knowledge, particularly with respect to promoting phonemic awareness—a critical emergent literacy skill associated with long-term literacy and school success—is a cause for concern. Similarly, the lack of attention given to

promoting aspects of language development that support emergent literacy (as opposed to supporting social competence) may negatively impact comprehension skills and development of more complex understanding of vocabulary.

Theme Three: Indirect Approaches to Teach Literacy and Language Development

Structural elements, such as the components of the daily routine and the physical organization of space, create some initial parameters within which practice decisions are made at Piedmont. All of Piedmont's classrooms are outfitted with a variety of themed activity centers (book area, dramatic play, science center, for example) aimed at promoting children's learning and growth in a variety of content areas and developmental domains through independent exploration. Furniture is strategically arranged to carve out open rug space large enough to accommodate an entire class for Circle Time and other whole-group gatherings, and tables of different sizes are strategically situated for small group activities.

Generally speaking, the teachers saw their role in this environment—particularly with respect to Center Time—as that of a facilitator, in that they prepared the environment for learning, participated in the children's play, and they extended children's thinking—if they could do it without pushing too hard. In structured group settings, teachers assumed leadership roles in which they guided the proceedings, more so than instructed the children.

The data in this case study suggested that, although limited in scope, the teachers used direct teaching methods to address some elements of literacy. Language development, however, was almost exclusively promoted through embedded actions,

which I earlier conceptualized as both the routine behaviors and scripts teachers adopt to promote learning across activities throughout the day, and the teachers' engaged responses to spontaneous teachable moments. In contrast to embedded actions, which are dependent on live teacher involvement, prepared environments are dependent on the conditions teachers create. The prepared environment speaks to factors within the classroom that encourage and support independent exploration and learning, including choice and arrangement of furnishings, organization of the classroom, provision of learning centers, and access to materials.

It was unclear whether or not the teachers viewed the environment they prepared as a teaching approach. When the teachers were asked about strategies that they used to promote language and literacy, they offered examples reflecting both embedded practice and direct instruction; however, the centers and other aspects of the environment were not mentioned.

Significance in light of the literature. These findings are consistent with the extant literature addressing Head Start teachers' instructional strategies, particularly those related to language and literacy. The teachers at Piedmont believed promoting the language and literacy of young children on a daily basis was important, if not critical, for their future success. This is similar to findings from a study of Head Start teachers by Powell, Diamond, Bojczyk, and Gerde, 2008, in which they found "Head Start teachers generally recognize the importance of addressing early literacy goals" (p. 448). Like the teachers in Powell et al.'s study, Piedmont's teachers had differing opinions regarding how best to support emergent literacy. For example, Ms. June was of the mind that

talking to the children and seizing on teachable moments in the natural course of the day was the best way to support children's emergent literacy. The other teachers also valued this approach but were open to and tended to engage in more direct teaching practices. This was particularly true of the 3-year-old classroom teachers, Ms. April and Ms. May, both of whom enjoyed trying new ways of engaging their children.

The findings in the present study appeared to differ from findings in previous research in terms of reliance on the prepared environment. In a national survey investigating Head Start teachers' views and practices related to emergent literacy Hawken et al., (2005), found the majority of Head Start teachers in the study relied on the prepared environment. Rather than engage in activities that called for direct instruction or teacher-child interaction (e.g., embedded practices), these teachers expressed a preference for "creating opportunities to encourage children to interact with literacy-related materials" (p. 9). Similarly, Piedmont teachers created conditions in their environment that invited engagement with literacy-related material—the most obvious examples being book areas and writing center. With the exception of Ms. June, however, who openly discussed the children's use of text and other materials she had placed in the centers to promote emergent literacy, none of the teachers pointed to centers or any other aspect of the environment as a way in which emergent literacy was promoted. This does not mean language and literacy were not promoted in this way; however, it does signal that the teachers are less aware of the potential the prepared environment has as a teaching strategy.

Some researchers have found that Head Start teachers give preference to promoting social and emotional outcomes over language and literacy or have expressed beliefs suggesting that children must have certain social and emotional skills before teachers make any effort to promote language and literacy. Findings suggest Piedmont teachers value both, and though there were occasions in which the teachers suggested that social and emotional development had been an obstacle to some children's learning, they did not suggest that teachers needed to tackle one domain before the other.

Implications for practice. The belief that children learn best through play was a recurring sentiment expressed by the teachers at Piedmont and one that curbed their use of direct teaching methods. Piedmont teachers made limited use of the direct instructional approach—restricting it primarily to promoting concepts about print, book appreciation, and alphabet knowledge. The teachers felt, however, that their hands were tied with respect to increasing the amount of direct instruction used because direct instruction conflicted with the notion that children learn through play, a precept the teachers incorrectly interpreted as a guiding principle of the curriculum used at Piedmont.

Although the teachers expressed broad support for promoting language and literacy, at some level the teachers' actions may be influenced by previous wisdom in the field that branded academic content, including elements of early language and literacy, as inappropriate in early childhood settings. The teachers point to a conflict between direct instruction and learning through play as the reason for not explicitly teaching literacy and language, however this rationale is inconsistent with their practice. Although the teachers at Piedmont were reluctant to promote literacy and language through direct instruction,

they frequently used direct approaches—including lecture—to teach “nonacademic” content. Topics including shapes, colors, days of the week, months, classroom rules, manners, and social expectations were taught on a daily basis. The subjects covered are canon in preschool and perhaps afforded more leeway than academic domains, which are relatively new to early childhood settings.

Theme Four: Erroneous Beliefs and Incomplete Knowledge About Curriculum

The teachers at Piedmont have almost identical limited, and in some ways distorted, understandings of the HighScope curriculum, a phenomenon that can be fairly attributed to the fact that the teachers, by and large, learned HighScope “on the job.” None of the teachers appears to have received comprehensive HighScope training. Two of the teachers report receiving some curriculum training when they started their jobs, but at least one received no training at all, reporting that she “picked it up” as she went along. The Piedmont teachers’ understanding of the curriculum is limited in that apparently they have no knowledge of the HighScope content areas, one of which addresses literacy, language, and communication, nor are they familiar with a fundamental component of the HighScope curriculum, the 58 “Key Developmental Indicators.” Their understanding is distorted in that they have essentially reduced HighScope’s philosophy to a tagline, “learning through play,” which they have interpreted to mean children’s activity choices must be unfettered at almost any cost, and teachers should interact with children during their play without steering them in any way, particularly during their Work Time.

This is significant because the teachers regularly use this interpretation of HighScope as justification for practice decisions, and likely, as a filter for determining

whether a new practice would be permissible in the classroom. Although Head Start's mandated purpose to promote school readiness is not fully incorporated into the school culture, all of the teachers at Piedmont understand that more will be asked of their children when they eventually enter kindergarten in terms of their language and literacy, and therefore more needs to be done in preschool to prepare them. In the teachers' minds, promoting language development seems to be neatly accommodated under their interpretation of HighScope, however promoting early literacy is not as easy a fit. Although the literature suggests that under the HighScope curriculum small group time is used to address content areas, at Piedmont the time is typically used for non-academic content, such as art projects, sensory experiences, and fine motor activities. The teachers at Piedmont point to books as their primary, though non-specific means of promoting literacy, however they are cognizant of the fact that reading alone is insufficient.

In some cases, as Ms. May puts it, a child might be "pulled out of HighScope" to work with a teacher one-on-one during the Work Time, something primarily done with children who have not "caught on" to a particular concept. In general, specific literacy skills or concepts, such as letter sounds, for example, are introduced during Circle Time. It is during Circle Time that what might be considered traditional preschool activities are enacted, many on a daily or near daily basis—reviewing the calendar and days of the week; "counting" to 20; taking roll; describing the weather; reviewing class rules; singing the ABC song; reviewing colors, shapes, and patterns; singing songs; and reading books, for example. Many of these activities, it seems, are not chosen with a specific purpose in mind, but rather included as a matter of habit. In many ways, Circle Time is the de facto

“non-HighScope time” during which teachers feel free to make most decisions and do the majority of the talking, making it an acceptable part of the day to try to incorporate any kind of instruction. The teachers who identified social priorities as Head Start’s purpose scaled back Circle Time activities when accommodating instruction, whereas the teachers who described school readiness as the goal seemed to add instructional-oriented activities to the preschool content lineup.

Significance in light of the research. From the start of this study I was interested in describing the language and literacy practices of a group of Head Start teachers. I was not attempting to provide explanations or establish causal relations and therefore was not particularly focused on whether or not the teachers’ practice reflected fidelity to the curriculum. I was, however, interested in uncovering factors that *potentially* impact what happens in the class. The lack of familiarity with a curriculum that they ardently adhered to fits this description. A review of the literature revealed numerous studies set in preschool settings focused on related topics, such as fidelity of implementation or teacher knowledge of curricular interventions. The literature was silent, however, with respect to investigations of early childhood teachers’ depth of knowledge related to their existing curriculum.

Implications for practice. This theme is of great significance because the teachers have institutionalized a faulty perception of their curriculum that is pervasive, in that the teachers’ cognitions about HighScope dictate which actions and practices are deemed permissible and which practices are not. In my estimation, the phenomenon that has emerged with respect to HighScope has a strong impact on teacher cognition and

practices related to language and literacy, and Piedmont teachers' practice in general. It appears to be limiting the pedagogical choices they make and inhibiting them from innovating in a way that meaningfully expands the footprint of their practice. Though a deeper investigation of the teachers' understanding is needed, correcting this issue, if done with sensitivity, could address a number of other challenges to practice. The particular way in which the Piedmont teachers understand their curriculum may be an anomaly; however, it warrants wider investigation to determine if the phenomenon extends to teachers at other Southland schools, and perhaps beyond.

Recommendations

One of the benefits of conducting a case study in a localized educational setting is that it gives administrators and other stakeholders close to setting the opportunity to see the environment through a different lens. This new perspective may lead them to confirm their impressions or perhaps question their existing perceptions. The case study report highlights strengths in personnel and resources, and illuminates issues that warrant attention and can benefit development and implementation of center policy. Tapping into the report's well of data when creating or selecting professional development for teachers may increase the likelihood that professional development experiences are relevant and more meaningful, and have a positive impact on teachers' cognition and practice that may lead to improved student outcomes. Suggestions for policy and recommendations pertaining to professional development specific to Piedmont, and perhaps useful to stakeholders in comparable settings as well, are described below. In some instances, findings from studies of local phenomena suggest questions to investigate or theories

worth test testing more broadly. I propose that is the case in the present study and accordingly offer recommendations for future research.

Piedmont Head Start Center teachers are enthusiastic, experienced, and compassionate. They have earned NAEYC accreditation for their center and are knowledgeable about their children and the families they serve. They are dedicated, resourceful, and loyal to Head Start. They are confident their students are on track and are learning what they need to know. They are creative and collaborative, sharing ideas that work and tips about how to make things work better. Despite the credentials and positive attributes of the Piedmont teachers, there is a continuous beat in the research literature, and in popular culture as well, pounding the message that Head Start is not closing the achievement gap and that children who attend Head Start preschools are not showing lasting gains in math, language, or literacy. Putting aside for a moment that research may bear this out, it does not negate the teachers' accomplishments. The teachers at Piedmont see and take pride in their children's growth and development. They observe the tremendous impact they have on parents—many of whom have barely reached adulthood—as they counsel and guide them, helping them develop into more capable mothers and fathers and grow as families. Teachers at Piedmont are asked to integrate into their practice a dizzying array of guidelines, standards, and mandates, specified by a host of organizations and sources of authority including: the Head Start framework; their state's early learning standards; their center's school readiness goals; the Classroom Assessment and Scoring System indicators; HighScope curriculum; NAEYC accreditation requirements; and ongoing professional development. They

manage this on top of addressing local and state health and safety regulations, while monitoring the other non-education services their students receive—all with the expectation that they will close an entrenched achievement gap that has existed for at least half a century. It is an extraordinary demand of teachers who work in a state where the average salary of Head Start teachers holding bachelor's degrees was less than \$23,000 per year—almost \$1,000 below the federal poverty threshold for a family of four (NHSA, 2014; HHS-ASPE, 2014). Nonetheless, the issue of insufficient and fading gains in language and literacy needs to be investigated. As I stated when I introduced my study, teacher practice, a quality marker related to positive child outcomes, is an appropriate focus of investigation. In the case of Piedmont's teachers, there is a fairly straightforward theme running through the findings. Simply put, the teachers don't know what they don't know.

Some of the missing knowledge is foundational to the program. For instance, although two teachers knew the purpose of Head Start is to promote school readiness, none of the teachers mentioned specifics about school readiness goals. Equally, if not more concerning, is a significant void in the teachers' knowledge about their program's curriculum. All of the teachers identified the curriculum at Piedmont as HighScope, and each followed a HighScope-like schedule. Three of the four teachers said they strictly adhered to the curriculum. None of the teachers, however, made reference to, implemented, or discussed core components of HighScope, such as HighScope's eight content categories or the 58 Key Indicators that serve as the program's goals.

Specific to language and literacy, the teachers appeared to lack comprehensive understanding of language and literacy domain elements and how they contributed to emergent literacy. Passive instruction of language and literacy was an intentional choice for one teacher, who viewed it as more developmentally appropriate than explicit instructional approaches. The other teachers tended to rely on passive instruction because they believed they were prohibited from doing otherwise within curriculum guidelines, or in some instances, because they had independently judged an activity to be outside of the scope of developmentally appropriate practice for a specific child. Increased pedagogical knowledge may have allowed the teachers to reconcile more direct forms of language and literacy instruction with their existing cognitions, instead of relying solely on passive or indirect means.

As an early childhood language and literacy researcher, it would be tempting to address concerns about teacher's cognitions related to early language and literacy by introducing a promising intervention; as a grantee agency's curriculum coordinator, "fixing" the problem with a new model for professional development targeting language and literacy might have appeal; as a Head Start administrator, it may seem appropriate to implement regular language and literacy quality assessments. Although well-intended, layer upon layer of "help" may be exacerbating the problem rather than effectively addressing it; first, by increasing the burden on teachers who are attempting to comply with the dictates of multiple authorities, and second, by obfuscating a more fundamental issue. Findings from this small study suggest that less may be more. With that in mind, I offer a metaphor to illustrate a "less-oriented" approach for solving perplexing problems

before offering recommendations for Piedmont stakeholders and early childhood language and literacy researchers in the sections below:

The Missing Snake Allegory

When I was a preschool teacher, I discovered one morning that a snake on loan to our class had gone missing. Though the snake was harmless, I was concerned about the consequences of having a loose snake freely exploring the room when the children arrived. I also was wondering how I would explain the snake's absence to its owner. Learning of my dilemma, a friend and colleague shouted from her office down the hall, "Google—find escaped ball python." Though I thought she was joking, I went along with the pretense and mockingly typed my query into the search bar. I was surprised, and felt a surge of hope when numerous entries popped up on my screen. I clicked the first one and read instructions from a man who lost a ball python for three months. The snake was located when the seasons changed and the man needed his winter coat. It was nestled amongst the hooks of a coatrack just a foot from the snake's terrarium enclosure. The man's advice was to start at the habitat and begin searching in concentric circles around it, increasing the radius by a foot at a time after each search. Although I was certain it was folly, I nonetheless took a yardstick to the terrarium, measured out the first circle, and feeling foolish opened a box containing clay stored on the shelf precisely one foot below the snake's home. I screamed (startled, but also amazed that the simple technique had worked) and felt relieved that I would not have to call animal control, set up live mice bait stations, or any of the other solutions I had pondered. It turns out ball pythons are homebodies. The most likely scenario, unbeknownst to me, was that the snake would

have found a resting spot not far from its habitat. Lesson learned. The story of the lost ball python is offered to illustrate the point that sometimes, as researchers, we need to take a closer look at our assumptions before testing new interventions. The mouse bait station may have been innovative, and may even have worked, but there would likely have been unpleasant and unintended consequences. Starting a search at ground zero was a quick, and effective solution—and even replicable. I do not mean in any way to suggest that addressing issues in a Head Start preschool classroom, or any classroom for that matter, is as simple as opening a cardboard box. I am suggesting, however, that we consider simplifying before complicating—examine what is fundamental and move out from there.

Site-Specific Recommendations

Although there are gaps in teachers' knowledge that should be addressed and it is tempting to immediately remedy the situation with targeted professional development, more lasting impact may be achieved if foundational issues are first addressed—starting from ground zero—Head Start's mission. To that end, it is recommended that Piedmont administrators, involving teachers as much as is feasible, build a site-specific framework for teaching and learning that emphasizes intentionality rather than compliance and begins with Head Start's purpose of promoting school readiness.

- Establish all teachers as partners in the process. Create a culture where teachers can respectfully express concerns and acknowledge gaps in knowledge, and offer suggestions without fear of judgment or feelings of vulnerability. Be prepared to

say this is what we did, these are things we did right, these are the things we did wrong, and this is what we want to do now.

- Consider stripping away any non-mandated authorities. For instance, are teachers required to use state learning standards in their planning? Would another authority source suffice? Is NAEYC accreditation essential to program funding? If not, does the benefit justify the cost in terms of time and resources? Start with what is absolutely necessary and make informed and intentional program choices that are aligned with program goals.
- Assess teachers' knowledge of Head Start's purpose; ensure that teachers understand Congress's intent for amending purpose. Plan professional development in which a program-wide definition for school readiness (informed by language from 2007 reauthorization addressing school readiness) is created. Expect and make room for intellectual conflicts teachers may have due to long held beliefs or understandings.
- Assess understanding of Head Start's current learning framework. Identify and acknowledge areas where knowledge is strong, determine areas where gaps exist, and create PD to address them. Tap, and validate, teachers' strengths by asking them to serve as expert of a domain. If HighScope continues to serve as Piedmont's curriculum, ensure that teachers see how they are aligned. Develop specific, measureable goals for school readiness incorporating the two sources. Revisit goals bi-annually to ensure they continue to make sense in light of experience and the research available.

- All Head Start programs are mandated to use a research-based curriculum. If Piedmont intends to continue using HighScope, they should fully commit to the curriculum, strive to implement it with fidelity, and make use of its resources—particularly the publications aligning Head Start’s framework with HighScope’s indicators. A more thorough assessment of the teachers’ knowledge of HighScope should be conducted to better understand their cognitions regarding the curriculum and determine what is required in terms of personnel and resources in order to develop PD that effectively maps new and/or different information onto teachers’ existing frame for HighScope. The creation of professional development for existing staff offering ongoing reinforcement of HighScope and a protocol for training new staff members when they are hired is essential to sustainability of curriculum fidelity. Establish a point person for HighScope curriculum questions.
- Continue communicating Head Start directives to teachers and direct teachers to source documents. Ensure teachers understand the impact of new Head Start legislation.
- Continue to foster collaboration among teachers and the sharing of ideas for language and literacy and other cognitive domains. Engage consultant with classroom experience for periodic meetings to help extend thinking.
- In terms of language and literacy, I do not recommend specific professional development until teachers are comfortable with the foundational conceptualizations—or it is asked for. However a useful approach that would have benefit for the children and teachers without adding to their load would be

establishing a guest teacher program with a local university. Frequently, the speech teacher gave the teachers at Piedmont activities and exercises to do with the children in their classrooms who were in speech therapy. The teachers were all extremely receptive to her requests, so much so that they reported doing the activities with the whole group—ostensibly to avoid singling out children receiving therapy—however, it was clear the teachers liked doing the activities and believed that all of the children benefited. Creating a program in which graduate students come once a week to do work with small groups of children that supports development of their phonological awareness (and eventually writing, comprehension, vocabulary, etc.) in the presence of the teacher, provides the teacher with a description of the activity along with a rationale and necessary materials. Similar to the relationship with the speech teacher, learning from someone who is helping the children, although indirect, appears to be much more palatable than having an expert, who may or may not have classroom experience, come to help the teachers. Further, the teachers have the opportunity to see an activity in practice with their own children, rather than hearing about it or playing the role of child themselves, increasing the chances that they engage in the activity themselves and add to their knowledge.

Questions and Topics Warranting Additional Research

There are several questions suggested by this study that are relevant to a broader population and that have not been adequately addressed in existing research. Topics of investigation include:

- Why does infrequency of practices promoting phonological awareness among Head Start teachers, early childhood educators in general, persist?
- How well are existing curricula in Head Start preschools understood by classroom teachers? How does existing curricula address language and literacy?
- Do Head Start teachers know and understand Head Start’s purpose? Does their depth of understanding impact the nature and/or quality of their practice?

In particular I would like to note that design-based research (also known as formative design) focused on the process of altering and augmenting the distorted and incomplete information teachers have about the HighScope curriculum in a way that ultimately leads to high implementation fidelity would be of tremendous value, both as a service to Piedmont and as a significant contribution to the literature in the field.

Limitations of the Study

Throughout the course of this project, I repeatedly found myself making mental notes about things I would do differently the “next time.” Although this is the first and last dissertation I will write, my habit of reflecting on the ways I could improve upon my study and strengthen the final product was not a purely theoretical exercise. Recognizing the potential limitations of this study and understanding how to address similar issues in my future research endeavors will help make me a better scholar. More immediately, reporting on the salient limitations of this study offers insight helpful in determining where to locate this research in the literature in light of qualifications.

The issues potentially impacting findings in this study are as follow:

1. Less data collected for Ms. June’s class than for the others.

2. Single researcher conducting observations.
3. Numerous observations concentrated around December holidays.
4. Research plan did not include a member check of narrative.

Descriptions of Limitations

I conducted three observations in the classrooms of Ms. March, Ms. April, and Ms. May and two observations in Ms. June's class. Though a third observation had been scheduled, an outbreak of flu hit the school and I was asked not to come in on my observation day—for my own protection. I made several attempts to reschedule however, illness persisted in Ms. June's class resulting in two more cancellations. Unfortunately, I was unable to arrange a time to return before moving out of state. In addition, though I received copies of weekly plans from Ms. March, Ms. April, and Ms. May, I was unable to obtain lesson plans for Ms. June's class. Although she had agreed to provide them, after several follow-up requests to which I received no response I decided to let it go. I did not want to burden any of the teachers unnecessarily and was therefore reluctant to press her because she had been stressed during the time the flu hit her classroom. Further, I had requested lesson plans from during the general time that I was collecting data and I started to get the sense that she may not have completed lesson plans for that time period. I considered eliminating her data from analysis because it was not equivalent in terms of volume. In the end, however, I decided to include it because it was a rich source of data and not including it would take much more away than an additional observation and lesson plans would add.

I was the sole researcher conducting classroom observations. Although I am an experienced early childhood educator and familiar with the context, preschool classrooms are often busy places with multiple zones of activity. As I was beginning my formal data analysis, I began to wonder what if I had missed anything and also whether or not I had interpreted the situations I observed correctly. A second pair of eyes in the classroom would add to my data, and give me a means of checking my understanding. I enlisted the help of a second reader to get their opinion on some of my field notes, however, that was done in a limited way. Having someone in these roles throughout would strengthen my study.

Timing was such that a significant portion of my data was collected between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. As a former preschool teacher I understand that these are not necessarily "normal" days. My preference would have been to collect data at another time or to spread it more but the dates around the holidays worked better for the staff at the school. I do not believe that this impacted my data collection significantly; however, I am raising the issue here because it is something that might be of concern to some readers, and I want to give assurances that I was mindful of the fact that the children (or teachers) could have more "off" days around this time. I added special notes when I observed something that was related to the stress/excitement of the holidays, which was helpful when I engaged in my formal analysis.

Although I had made arrangements for the teachers at Piedmont to review the transcripts from their interviews, I did not plan for a review of the narratives that I created. This was largely due to the fact that I originally planned to weave all the data

into narratives arranged by themes; however, I ultimately told each teacher's story individually. The fact that the teachers reviewed transcripts adds to the validity of the study. I would have liked to have done the same for the observation data; however, I believe that I captured the essence of each teacher and feel comfortable with the way they are represented.

Addressing Similar Matters in Future Research

There are several takeaways from my experience that would inform and perhaps improve similar studies going forward. Two of the issues I address involved the action or cooperation of the subjects in my study. As such, addressing them in the future is not completely in my control. For instance, in the case of the timing of the data collection, I had different dates in mind; however, the dates were not compatible with the schedules of the teachers. Conducting the observations around the holidays was a very minor issue for me. If timing of any component involving study subjects is determined to be a factor, planning far in advance is important so that the needs of all parties can be accommodated. In the case of data collection related to Ms. June, it would have been hard to foresee a flu epidemic that lasted in one class for so long. To address issues that are out of my control in the future, it would be wise to plan to collect more data than likely is needed to ensure it is sufficient for the case. With respect to unfulfilled requests (as in the case of the missing paperwork), judgment should be exercised. I did not want to harass or embarrass Ms. June and therefore I had to make a decision regarding the value of the data to the case versus the potential cost in terms of good will, getting cooperation in other aspects of the research, and being willing to potentially participate in future projects.

The other issues I mentioned are related to increasing reliability. Again, like several of the previous issues, planning ahead is key. Building in extra time allows for accommodating changes made based on new information. Also, securing the subjects permission to contact them after general data collection ends should the need arise would be prudent. These measures allow for flexibility that could potentially strengthen the project. Enlisting the help of individuals who can participate in observations and confirm interpretations is very helpful, not only for the corroboration value but also for the benefit to insight generated through discussion of the case. Doctoral students usually do not have a team of individuals to turn to; however, recruiting colleagues to help may be a viable option particularly if there is reciprocation involved.

A Note About Case Study

Finally, recognizing that frames of reference for research will vary from reader to reader, I wanted to highlight the fact that this research was designed and conducted as a case study. It would therefore be inappropriate to attempt to generalize findings from this study to a larger population. Generalizability is not a characteristic of case study and as such, a lack of generalizability is not a flaw, nor is it a limitation of the study. Findings from this study were intended to inform understanding of a single Head Start program in the local area and may have transferability to schools with similar contexts, particularly the Southland Head Start centers proximate to Piedmont. As I have suggested in the discussion presented in the present chapter, some findings, though not generalizable by design, may suggest phenomena of interest warranting broader investigation.

Final Thoughts

Shortly before writing this section, I did a cursory review of the literature in a blithe attempt to convince myself that my dissertation reflected the breadth of the extant research. One article screamed out at me, stoking the sense of urgency I had grown accustomed to when I first started researching “the gap,” and was shocked to learn that this gap was present in children as young as 2. More digging quickly dropped the age to 18 months before, soon after, I was informed by the literature that, inconceivably, gaps in development attributed to socio-economic status were observed in babies just 9 months old. These many months later, it was jaw-dropping to come upon research solemnly reporting the gap was said to be present in 7-month-old infants. Intellectually, I recognize that the downward trend in the age that the GAP is being identified is not indicative of the GAP shifting into younger and younger children; rather, researchers have just developed more sensitive instruments for measurement. I am sharing this anecdote for two reasons: first, to highlight the fact that the ultimate utility of this study will be determined by its ability to move the research forward in service to changing the lives of children; and second, to draw attention to the fact that the heartfelt pleas of child advocates, the concern and frustration expressed by policy makers, and the stream of jolting research from early childhood education and other fields with an interest in the well-being of children have conveyed a sense of urgency in addressing this lingering problem.

It was curious to me that the teachers at Piedmont do not seem to feel this sense of urgency at all. The teachers noted that some children had deficiencies in language, which they largely attributed to cultural factors and social development, but indicated that the

vast majority made great strides with ~~their~~ language. The teachers did not mention SES-related gaps in development and aside from language delays, which they seemed to regard as routine, made no mention of children coming to school behind. Piedmont teachers recognized that the parents of the children they served lacked resources to provide children with materials such as books and that the parents did not necessarily know how to promote literacy and language at home. They took pride in the way parents benefited from the programs and supports that helped them “grow as a family,” as one teacher put it.

Piedmont teachers believed that language and literacy are important and should be promoted daily. There is evidence to suggest language development is in fact promoted as an embedded practice present across activities in the daily routine. Language development was highly associated with social and emotional domains. The teachers focused almost exclusively on pragmatics associated with language indicating that it was important because of its impact on the communication skills children needed to successfully engage with their peers and participate in classroom activities. On the other hand, the data suggests that although literacy skills were presented using direct teaching methods, they were not necessarily promoted daily, particularly in the case of phonological awareness, which received sporadic attention at best. Frequently the teachers at Piedmont simply stated “books” when asked how they promoted literacy. Book reading happened on a daily basis and the book areas were typically filled with children during the Work Time segment of the day. Despite the fact that there were several instances in which two of the teachers simply held a book and turned pages while

a recording of the book played, all of the teachers at Piedmont are enthusiastic and engaging during read-aloud activities and the children were quite responsive. The teachers did little beyond promoting book appreciation skills and concepts of print when they read aloud to the children. Tapping into the power of books would likely be a particularly useful strategy given how much both students and teachers enjoy the activity.

Researchers examining early childhood educators' cognitions and practice have frequently found that there is incongruence between teachers' beliefs and teachers' practice. One might be led to conclude that is the case in the present study. The Piedmont teachers however, believe that they are in fact promoting both language and literacy, that their center as a whole is performing above average relative to other centers in the area, and further, that their students, with few exceptions, are "where they should be" in terms of their language and literacy. They express no concern about their students' development other than to say it is feasible that any who aren't "on track" when they leave Piedmont could fall behind when they get to public school.

Much of the literature regarding teacher beliefs, knowledge, and practice has attempted to dissect beliefs and knowledge to such a degree that the field has trouble comparing findings across studies or moving research forward. If anything, I learned that in some cases beliefs serve as knowledge—particularly when beliefs are institutional and reinforced—and that sometimes it is unnecessary to fragment cognition for the purpose of sorting and sifting through knowledge and beliefs to find understanding. It seems as though before going straight to the nitty-gritty, we researchers should make sure there are no boulders around first.

This study contributes to a small but growing body of research examining Head Start teachers' cognition and practice. Approaching this inquiry as a case study has provided a nuanced picture of the literacy and language development practices at a Southeastern Head Start center that has been missing from large-scale studies and may have transferability to other centers in the region as well as similar centers in other locations. The case study may be particularly useful in terms of adding to the research base informing professional development efforts geared toward improving Head Start teacher practice and Head Start program quality in general.

As I present these final thoughts and picture the teachers at Piedmont, I see four women who wholeheartedly embrace their job. They are enthusiastic, experienced, committed educators doing their best to accommodate many layers of authority into their practice—including, rules, regulations, suggestions, guidelines, and performance indicators. Some of it is mandated, some of it is monitored, and some of it is tied to their funding. Due to the volume, most of the material the teachers are responsible for is filtered through Ms. Bright or the Southland office. It is not surprising that there is confusion about the mission of Head Start or distortion and knowledge gaps related to their own HighScope curriculum; however, it is an untenable situation—particularly in the case of promoting development in domains that traditionally fell outside of the purview of preschool classrooms such as language and literacy.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Head Start Child Outcomes Framework (2000 Framework)

Domain	Domain Element	Indicators <input type="checkbox"/> = <i>Domain or indicator mandated by Congress</i>
Language Development	Listening & Understanding	Demonstrates increasing ability to attend to and understand conversations, stories, songs, and poems.
		Shows progress in understanding and following simple and multiple-step directions.
		<input type="checkbox"/> Understands an increasingly complex and varied vocabulary.
		<input type="checkbox"/> For non-English-speaking children, progresses in listening to and understanding English.
	Speaking & Communicating	<input type="checkbox"/> Develops increasing abilities to understand and use language to communicate, information, experiences, ideas, feelings, opinions, needs, questions; and for other varied purposes.
		<input type="checkbox"/> Progresses in abilities to initiate and respond appropriately in conversation and discussions with peers and adults.
		Uses an increasingly complex and varied spoken vocabulary.
	Progresses in clarity of pronunciation and toward speaking in sentences of increasing length and grammatical complexity.	
	<input type="checkbox"/> For non-English-speaking children, progresses in speaking English	
Literacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Phonological Awareness	Shows increasing ability to discriminate and identify sounds in spoken language.
		Shows growing awareness of beginning and ending sounds of words.
		Progresses in recognizing matching sounds and rhymes in familiar words, games, songs, stories, and poems.
		Shows growing ability to hear and discriminate separate syllables in words.
		<input type="checkbox"/> Associates sounds with written words, such as awareness that different words begin with the same sound.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Book Knowledge & Appreciation	Shows growing interest and involvement in listening to and discussing a variety of fiction and non-fiction books and poetry.
		Shows growing interest in reading-related activities, such as asking to have a favorite book read; choosing to look at books; drawing pictures based on stories; asking to take books home; going to the library; and engaging in pretend-reading with other children.
		Demonstrates progress in abilities to retell and dictate stories from books and experiences; to act out stories in dramatic play; and to predict what will happen next in a story.
		Progresses in learning how to handle and care for books; knowing to view one page at a time in sequence from front to back; and understanding that a book has a title, author, and illustrator.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Print Awareness & Concepts	Shows increasing awareness of print in classroom, home, and community settings.
		Develops growing understanding of the different functions of forms of print such as signs, letters, newspapers, lists, messages, and menus.
		Demonstrates increasing awareness of concepts of print, such as that reading in English moves from top to bottom and from left to right, that speech can be written down, and that print conveys a message.
		Shows progress in recognizing the association between spoken and written words by following print as it is read aloud.
		<input type="checkbox"/> Recognizes a word as a unit of print, or awareness that letters are grouped to form words, and that words are separated by spaces.
	Early Writing	Develops understanding that writing is a way of communicating for a variety of purposes.
		Begins to represent stories and experiences through pictures, dictation, and in play.
		Experiments with a growing variety of writing tools and materials, such as pencils, crayons, and computers.
		Progresses from using scribbles, shapes, or pictures to represent ideas, to using letter-like symbols, to copying or writing familiar words such as their own name.
	Alphabet Knowledge	Shows progress in associating the names of letters with their shapes and sounds.
		Increases in ability to notice the beginning letters in familiar words.
<input type="checkbox"/> Identifies at least 10 letters of the alphabet, especially those in their own name.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Knows that letters of the alphabet are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named.		

Mathematics	Number & Operations	Demonstrates increasing interest and awareness of numbers and counting as a means for solving problems and determining quantity.
		Begins to associate number concepts, vocabulary, quantities, and written numerals in meaningful ways.
		Develops increasing ability to count in sequence to 10 and beyond.
		Begins to make use of one-to-one correspondence in counting objects and matching groups of objects.
		Begins to use language to compare numbers of objects with terms such as <i>more, less, greater than, fewer, equal to</i> .
		Develops increased abilities to combine, separate and name “how many” concrete objects.
	Geometry & Spatial Sense	Begins to recognize, describe, compare, and name common shapes, their parts and attributes.
		Progresses in ability to put together and take apart shapes.
		Begins to be able to determine whether or not two shapes are the same size and shape.
		Shows growth in matching, sorting, putting in a series, and regrouping objects according to one or two attributes such as color, shape, or size.
	Patterns & Measurement	Builds an increasing understanding of directionality, order, and positions of objects, and words such as <i>up, down, over, under, top, bottom, inside, outside, in front, and behind</i> .
		Enhances abilities to recognize, duplicate, and extend simple patterns using a variety of materials.
Shows increasing abilities to match, sort, put in a series, and regroup objects according to one or two attributes, such as shape or size.		
Begins to make comparisons between several objects based on a single attribute.		
Science	Science Skills & Methods	Shows progress in using standard and nonstandard measures for length and area of objects.
		Begins to use senses and a variety of tools and simple measuring devices to gather information, investigate materials, and observe processes and relationships.
		Develops increased ability to observe and discuss common properties, differences, and comparisons among objects and materials.
		Begins to participate in simple investigations to test observations, discuss and draw conclusions, and form generalizations.
		Develops growing abilities to collect, describe, and record information through a variety of means, including discussion, drawings, maps, and charts.
	Scientific Knowledge	Begins to describe and discuss predictions, explanations, and generalizations based on past experiences.
		Expands knowledge of and abilities to observe, describe, and discuss the natural world, materials, living things, and natural processes.
		Expands knowledge of and respect for their bodies and the environment.
		Develops growing awareness of ideas and language related to attributes of time and temperature.
		Shows increased awareness and beginning understanding of changes in materials and cause-effect relationships.
Creative Arts	Music	Participates with increasing interest and enjoyment in a variety of music activities, including listening, singing, finger plays, games, and performances.
		Experiments with a variety of musical instruments.
	Art	Gains ability in using different art media and materials in a variety of ways for creative expression and representation.
		Progresses in abilities to create drawings, paintings, models, and other art creations that are more detailed, creative, or realistic.
		Develops growing abilities to plan, work independently, and demonstrate care and persistence in a variety of art projects.
		Begins to understand and share opinions about artistic products and experiences.
	Movement	Expresses through movement and dancing what is felt and heard in various musical tempos and styles.
		Shows growth in moving in time to different patterns of beat and rhythm in music.
Dramatic Play	Participates in a variety of dramatic play activities that become more extended and complex.	
	Shows growing creativity and imagination in using materials and in assuming different roles in dramatic play situations.	
Social & Emotional	Self Concept	Participates in a variety of dramatic play activities that become more extended and complex.
		Shows growing creativity and imagination in using materials and in assuming different roles in dramatic play situations.
		Shows progress in expressing feelings, needs, and opinions in difficult situations and conflicts without harming themselves, others, or property.
		Develops growing understanding of how their actions affect others and begins to accept the consequences of their actions.

		Demonstrates increasing capacity to follow rules and routines and use materials purposefully, safely, and respectfully.
	Self Control	Increases abilities to sustain interactions with peers by helping, sharing, and discussion.
		Shows increasing abilities to use compromise and discussion in working, playing, and resolving conflicts with peers.
		Develops increasing abilities to give and take in interactions; to take turns in games or using materials; and to interact without being overly submissive or directive.
	Cooperation	Demonstrates increasing comfort in talking with and accepting guidance and directions from a range of familiar adults.
		Shows progress in developing friendships with peers.
		Progresses in responding sympathetically to peers who are in need, upset, hurt, or angry; and in expressing empathy or caring for others.
	Social Relationships	Develops ability to identify personal characteristics including gender and family composition.
		Progresses in understanding similarities and respecting differences among people, such as gender, race, special needs, culture, language, and family structures.
		Develops growing awareness of jobs and what is required to perform them.
		Begins to express and understand concepts and language of geography in the contexts of their classroom, home, and community.
	Approaches to Learning	Initiative & Curiosity
Develops increased ability to make independent choices.		
Approaches tasks and activities with increased flexibility, imagination, and inventiveness.		
Grows in eagerness to learn about and discuss a growing range of topics, ideas, and tasks.		
Engagement & Persistence		Grows in abilities to persist in and complete a variety of tasks, activities, projects, and experiences.
		Demonstrates increasing ability to set goals and develop and follow through on plans.
		Shows growing capacity to maintain concentration over time on a task, question, set of directions or interactions, despite distractions and interruptions.
Reasoning & Problem Solving		Develops increasing ability to find more than one solution to a question, task, or problem.
		Grows in recognizing and solving problems through active exploration, including trial and error, and interactions and discussions with peers and adults.
	Develops increasing abilities to classify, compare and contrast objects, events, and experiences.	
Physical Health & Development	Gross Motor Skills	Shows increasing levels of proficiency, control, and balance in walking, climbing, running, jumping, hopping, skipping, marching, and galloping.
		Demonstrates increasing abilities to coordinate movements in throwing, catching, kicking, bouncing balls, and using the slide and swing.
	Fine Motor Skills	Develops growing strength, dexterity, and control needed to use tools such as scissors, paper punch, stapler, and hammer.
		Grows in hand-eye coordination in building with blocks, putting together puzzles, reproducing shapes and patterns, stringing beads, and using scissors.
		Progresses in abilities to use writing, drawing, and art tools including pencils, markers, chalk, paintbrushes, and various types of technology.
	Health Status & Practices	Progresses in physical growth, strength, stamina, and flexibility.
		Participates actively in games, outdoor play, and other forms of exercise that enhance physical fitness.
		Shows growing independence in hygiene, nutrition, and personal care when eating, dressing, washing hands, brushing teeth, and toileting.
		Builds awareness and ability to follow basic health and safety rules such as fire safety, traffic and pedestrian safety, and responding appropriately to potentially harmful objects, substances, and activities.

The text for this chart was taken from *The Head Start Path to Positive Child Outcomes: The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework* (OHS, 2003).

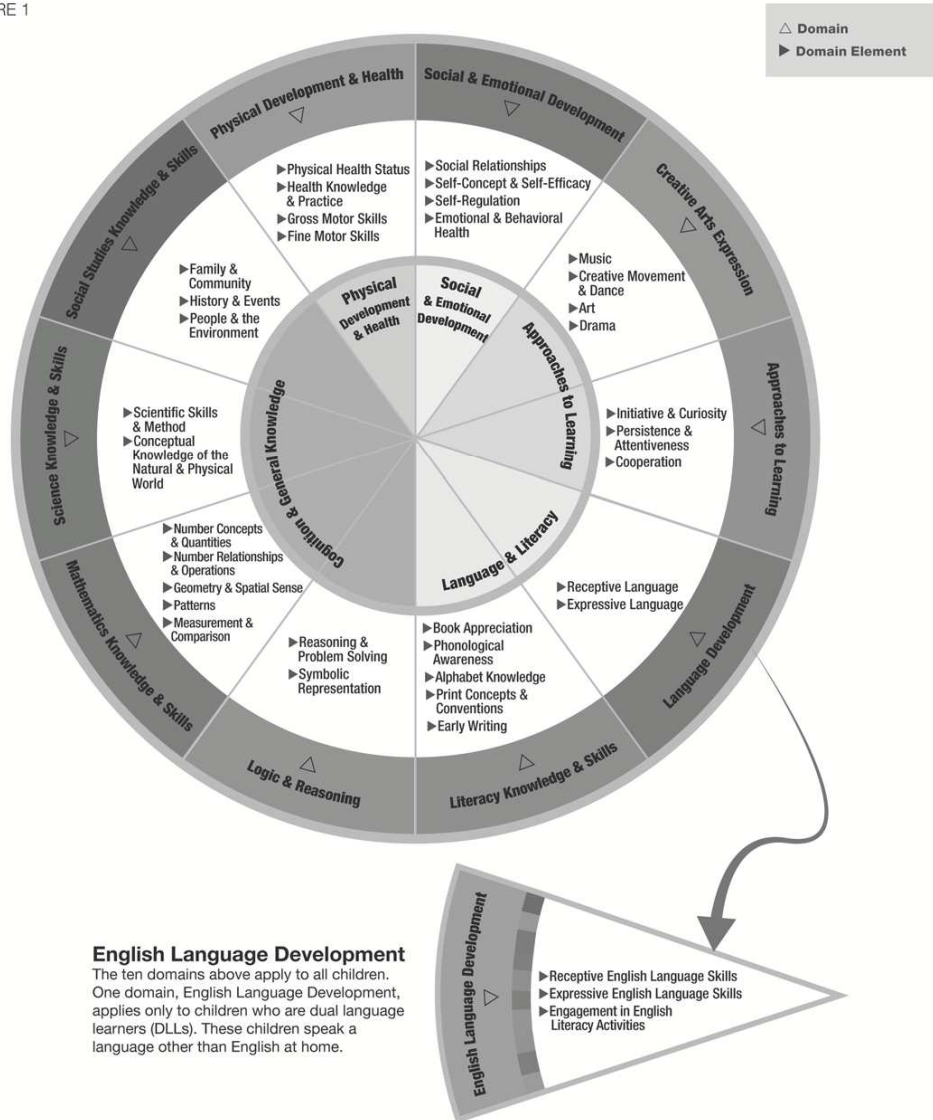
Appendix B

Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework

The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework Promoting Positive Outcomes in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children 3-5 Years Old

The *Framework* represents the foundation of the Head Start Approach to School Readiness. It aligns with and builds from the five essential domains of school readiness identified by the National Education Goals Panel (see inner circle) and lays out essential areas of learning and development. The *Framework* can be used to guide curriculum, implementation, and assessment to plan teaching and learning experiences that align to school readiness goals and track children's progress across developmental domains. The domains \triangle and domain elements \blacktriangleright apply to all 3 to 5 year olds in Head Start and other early childhood programs, including dual language learners and children with disabilities.

FIGURE 1



Graphic from *The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework: Promoting Positive Outcomes in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children 3-5 Years Old* (OHS, 2010).

Appendix C

Recommendations for a Head Start Program by a Panel of Experts

The objectives of a comprehensive program should include:

- A. Improving the child's physical health and physical abilities.
- B. Helping the emotional and social development of the child by encouraging self-confidence, spontaneity, curiosity, and self-discipline.
- C. Improving the child's mental processes and skills with particular attention to conceptual and verbal skills.
- D. Establishing patterns and expectations of success for the child, which will create a climate of confidence for his future learning efforts.
- E. Increasing the child's capacity to relate positively to family members and others while at the same time strengthening the family's ability to relate positively to the child and his problems.
- F. Developing in the child and his family a responsible attitude toward society, and fostering constructive opportunities for society to work together with the poor in solving their problems.
- G. Increasing the sense of dignity and self-worth within the child and his family.

Note. The text above comprises the objectives set forth by Head Start's initial planners (Schrag, Styfco, & Zigler, 2004, pp. 1-2).

Appendix D

2010 Framework Literacy and Language Guidance

The text below, taken from Head Start's second framework *The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework* (OHS, 2010), describes the domains and "Language Development" and "Literacy Knowledge & Skills."

Language Development

Language Development refers to emerging abilities in receptive and expressive language. This domain includes understanding and using one or more languages. Language development is among the most important tasks of the first five years of a child's life. Language is the key to learning across all domains. Specific language skills in early childhood are predictive of later success in learning to read and write. Also, children who are skilled communicators are more likely to demonstrate social competence. In the domain of Language Development, programs need to ensure that children who are dual language learners can demonstrate their abilities, skills, and knowledge in any language, including their home language.

The domain elements for language development for 3 to 5 year olds are:

Receptive language: The ability to comprehend or understand language.

- Attends to language during conversations, songs, stories, or other learning experiences.
- Comprehends increasingly complex and varied vocabulary.
- Comprehends different forms of language, such as questions or exclamations.
- Comprehends different grammatical structures or rules for using language.

Expressive language: The ability to use language.

- Engages in communication and conversation with others.
- Uses language to express ideas and needs. □
- Uses increasingly complex and varied vocabulary.
- Uses different forms of language.
- Uses different grammatical structures for a variety of purposes.
- Engages in storytelling. □
- Engages in conversations with peers and adults.

Literacy Knowledge & Skills

Literacy Knowledge & Skills refers to the knowledge and skills that lay the foundation for reading and writing, such as understanding basic concepts about books or other printed materials, the alphabet, and letter-sound relationships. Early literacy is the foundation for reading and writing in all academic endeavors in school. It is considered one of the most important areas for young children's development and learning. Early literacy learning provides children with an opportunity to explore the world through books, storytelling, and other reading and writing activities. It is a mechanism for learning about topics they enjoy and acquiring content knowledge and concepts that support progress in other domains. It is critical for supporting a range of positive outcomes, including success in school and other environments. In the domain of Literacy Knowledge & Skills, programs need to ensure that children who are dual language learners can demonstrate their abilities, skills, and knowledge in any language, including their home language.

The domain elements for literacy knowledge & skills for 3 to 5 year olds are:

Book appreciation and knowledge: The interest in books and their characteristics, and the ability to understand and get meaning from stories and information from books and other texts.

- Shows interest in shared reading experiences and looking at books independently.
- Recognizes how books are read, such as front-to-back and one page at a time, recognizes basic characteristics, such as title, author, and illustrator. □
- Asks and answers questions and makes comments about print materials. □
- Demonstrates interest in different kinds of literature, such as fiction and nonfiction books and poetry, on a range of topics.
- Retells stories or information from books through conversation, artistic works, creative movement, or drama.

□

Phonological awareness: An awareness that language can be broken into words, syllables, and smaller pieces of sound.

- Identifies and discriminates between words in language. □
- Identifies and discriminates between separate syllables in words. □

- Identifies and discriminates between sounds and phonemes in language, such as attention □ to beginning and ending sounds of words and recognition that different words begin or end with the same sound.

Alphabet knowledge: The names and sounds associated with letters.

- Recognizes that the letters of the alphabet are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named. □
- Recognizes that letters of the alphabet have distinct sound(s) associated with them. □
- Attends to the beginning letters and sounds in familiar words. □
- Identifies letters and associates correct sounds with letters. □

Print concepts and conventions: □ The concepts about print and early decoding (identifying letter-sound relationships).

- Recognizes print in everyday life, such as numbers, letters, one's name, words, and familiar logos and signs.
- Understands that print conveys meaning. □
- Understands conventions, such as print moves from left to right and top to bottom of a page. □
- Recognizes words as a unit of print and understands that letters group to form words.
- Recognizes the association between spoken or signed and written words. □

Early writing: The familiarity with writing implements, conventions, and emerging skills to communicate through written representations, symbols, and letters.

- Experiments with writing tools and materials. □
- Recognizes that writing is a way of communicating for a variety of purposes, such as giving information, sharing stories, or giving an opinion. □
- Uses scribbles, shapes, pictures, and letters to represent objects, stories, experiences, or ideas. □
- Copies, traces, or independently writes letters or words. □

Appendix E

Data Collected at Piedmont Head Start Center

Data Collected	Purpose for Selecting Data for Collection
Descriptive field notes, including detailed description of physical characteristics of setting, materials, and participants	Painted a picture of setting; useful for case-to-case generalization.
Observational field notes capturing general class activities	See above. They also provided insight into intangibles and potential intervention insertion points.
Piedmont's October 2014 scores from Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)	The CLASS instrument is used by Head Start to measure program quality; used for data triangulation.
Semistructured interviews of all lead teachers	Contributed to intangible aspects of context; ascertain motivators, attitudes toward literacy, and perceptions of activities.
Photographs of setting	Source of triangulation; complements descriptive field notes.
Lesson plans	Contributed to triangulation of data; provided insight into motivation and intentions.
Artifacts and documents offered by teachers	Contributed to triangulation of data.

Appendix F

Language and Literacy in Head Start Preschool Classrooms Semistructured Interview Instrument

Name and/or Classroom #:

Title:

Date:

1. How long have you been teaching preschool children?
 - a. In a Head Start Preschool?
 - b. At this center?

2. What certifications or degrees do you have?
 - a. Major or emphasis?

(PROMPTS)

- b. Child development associate certificate or credential (cda)
 - c. Elementary teaching certificate/license
 - d. Early childhood teaching certificate/license (includes kindergarten and first grade)
 - e. Early childhood special education teaching certificate/license (includes preschool)
 - f. Other special education teaching certificate/license
 - g. English as a second language teaching certificate/license
 - h. Other teaching
3. Do you currently teach children with disabilities? DIAGNOSED or SUSPECTED?

(PROMPTS)

- a. VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS, cannot be fully corrected (includes blind)
- b. HEARING IMPAIRMENTS, cannot be fully corrected (includes deaf)
- c. DEAF/BLIND (children who have both visual and hearing impairments)
- d. SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, or BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS, child receives special education services
- e. SPEECH OR COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS, child receives special education or speech therapy services
- f. INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES, child receives special education services
- g. AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS, child receives special education services
- h. GENERAL DELAYS IN DEVELOPMENT, child receives special education services
- i. PHYSICAL DISABILITIES, child has received physical therapy services and may use adaptive equipment (e.g., wheelchair, walker)

- j. HEALTH PROBLEMS, problems that affect the child's activities on a daily basis and require ongoing support and follow-up from health professionals (e.g., child is on oxygen, has seizures that are not controlled by medication)

3a. What accommodations does this (do these) child(ren) receive?

4. How many children are enrolled in your class?

- a. Without disabilities?
- b. With disabilities?
- c. Children whose primary language is not English?
- d. With disability and ESL?

5. What languages are used for instruction in your classroom on a daily basis?

6. Should language development be promoted every day?

- a. Why or Why not?

7. Should literacy development be promoted every day?

- a. Why or Why not?

8. Who decides what kind of language or literacy development practices occur in your classroom?

9. What do you think are the most appropriate activities to promote language and literacy development?

10. In what ways are language and literacy development promoted in your classroom?

Books (selection, preparation, read aloud questions?)

HEAD START

11. What are the objectives of Head Start in general?

12. What do you think is their most important goal?

How do you know that?

13. How do you feel about that?

14. Does the Office of Head Start in Washington, D.C., provide guidance regarding meeting their objectives?

YES– How are their objectives conveyed to you?

NO– (then 14b)

14b. Who is responsible for providing the teachers guidance regarding goals and objectives for the children in your classroom?

15. How does the Office of Head Start (or, if applicable, the individual/organization identified in 14b) provide information about practices they would like to see in the classroom?

a. What kind of activities do they suggest?

b. Is that something you include?

Why/why not?

16. Is the Office of Head Start “in-touch” with what is happening in Head Start classrooms?

a. Why do you say that?

17. How do you think your classroom is doing in terms of meeting National Level Head Start goals?

Your center?

Other centers in the upstate (beyond?)

18. What comes to mind when you hear “developmentally appropriate practice?”

a. Is being developmentally appropriate important?

19. What kinds of activities are developmentally appropriate?/are not developmentally appropriate?

20. How do you feel about the language and literacy development of your students?

a. Have your views about language and literacy development changed during the time you have been teaching?

21. Is there anything you would like to change about language and literacy development activities or practices in your class?

a. Obstacles?

22. What are the centers in your classroom?

a. Do the materials “belong” to the class?

b. How are materials selected for centers? Rotated?

23. I noticed that there are homework folders. How are these used?

24. What are your responsibilities in the classroom, aside from teaching?

Appendix G

Types of Information Provided by Teachers in Weekly Curriculum Plans under “Head Start Domain to be Explored/State Early Learning Standards”*

Type of Information Provided	Specific Example from Weekly Curriculum Plans
Head Start Domain—Domain Element: Domain Element example	Mathematics—Identifies shapes: Shows understanding of some positional words.
Head Start Domain—Domain Element: Domain Element example // Parallel State Early Learning Standard	Language Development—Receptive Language: Attends to language during conversation, songs, stories, or other learning experiences // ELA-3K-3.6 Begin joining in familiar nursery rhymes and songs.
Head Start Domain—Domain Element: Domain Element example // State Early Learning Standard from same developmental area	Language Development—Expressive and Receptive Language: Attends to and engages in conversations with others // ELA-3K-1.3 Anticipate spoken lines in songs and finger plays.
Head Start Domain with Domain Element and Domain Element example // Early Learning Standard from different developmental area	Mathematics—Identifies shapes; shows understanding of some positional words // ELA-3K-4.3 Creates a picture and labels it orally.
Head Start Domain—Domain Element // Parallel State Early Learning Standard	Social and Emotional Development—Social Relationships // SE-4K-2.5 Demonstrate with adult guidance simple techniques to solve social problems.
Head Start Domain: Domain Element example only	Creative Arts Expression: Participates in group music experience; participates in dramatic play events.

*In all cases, a substandard was identified rather than a broader standard.

Appendix H

HighScope “Daily Routine”

Schedule Segment	Description
Plan-Do-Review	This three-part sequence is unique to the HighScope approach. It includes a 10 to 15-minute small-group time during which children plan what they want to do during work time (the area to visit, materials to use, and friends to play with); a 45 to 60-minute work time for carrying out their plans; and another 10 to 15-minute small-group time for reviewing and recalling with an adult and other children what they’ve done and learned. In between “do” and “review,” children clean up by putting away their materials or storing unfinished projects.
Small-Group Time	During this time a small group of ideally 6–8 children meet with an adult to experiment with materials and solve problems. Although adults choose a small-group activity to emphasize one or more particular content areas, children are free to use the materials in any way they want during this time. The length of small group varies with the age, interests, and attention span of the children. At the end of the period, children help with cleanup.
Large-Group Time	Large-group time builds a sense of community. Up to 20 children and 2 adults come together for movement and music activities, storytelling, and other shared experiences. Children have many opportunities to make choices and play the role of leader. Daily large-group times include an opening activity in which children and teachers gather around a message board to “read” messages in words and pictures about the events of the day
Outside Time	Children and adults spend at least 30 minutes outside every day, enjoying vigorous and often noisy play in the fresh air. Without the constraints of four walls, they feel freer to make large movements and experiment with the full range of their voices. Children run, climb, swing, roll, jump, yell, and sing with energy. They experience the wonders of nature, including collecting, gardening, and examining wildlife. During extreme weather or other unsafe conditions, teachers find an alternative indoor location for large-motor activity.
Transitions	Transitions are the minutes between other blocks of the day, as well as arrival and departure times. Our goal is to make transitions pass smoothly since they set the stage for the next segment in the day’s schedule. They also provide meaningful learning opportunities themselves. Whenever possible, we give children choices about how to make the transition. For example, they may choose how to move across the floor on their way to small-group time.
Meals and Rest	Meals and snacks allow children to enjoy eating healthy food in a supportive social setting. Rest is for quiet, solitary activities. Since both activities happen at home as well as school, we try to respect family customs at these times as much as possible. Our main goal is to create a shared and secure sense of community within the program.

Note. Adapted from text describing HighScope’s daily routine taken from <https://highscope.org/faq>.

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