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## The Operationalization of the Language Curriculum in Half-day and Full-day Kindergarten

Sean Stethem Lamb

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The Operationalization of the Language Curriculum in Half-day and Full-day  
Kindergarten

(Spine title: Operationalization of Kindergarten Language Curriculum)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Sean S. Lamb

Graduate Program in Education  
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Education

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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# OPERATIONALIZATION OF KINDERGARTEN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

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Sean Stethem Lamb  
Entitled:

The Operationalization of the Language Curriculum in Half-day and Full-day Kindergarten

Is accepted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

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Chair of the Thesis Examination Board  
Dr. Cornelia Hoogland

# OPERATIONALIZATION OF KINDERGARTEN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

## Abstract

This thesis describes a qualitative case study that examined the intended and operationalized kindergarten Language curriculum in one Ontario half-day kindergarten classroom and one full-day kindergarten classroom. The research questions were: What are the components of an operationalized curriculum in a half-day and full-day Ontario kindergarten program? How did each operationalized curriculum differ from the intended curriculum as outlined in the teacher's day plans? How did curricula vary across program types? I also asked teachers to comment on challenges encountered as they operationalized their intended Language curriculum. The analysis drew on *observational field notes, interviews with two kindergarten teachers, and day plans* prepared by the teachers. Data were categorized using the research questions as expected themes and again using Schwab's five curriculum commonplaces. Both classrooms were culturally and linguistically diverse, but the needs of English language learners were not explicitly addressed in the program documents or the curricula. Each teacher felt that she was able to address all the Language expectations in the two-year program, but the teacher in the half-day program felt challenged to provide support to individual children and was able to schedule little time for social interaction and child-initiated play-based learning. The data suggests that the full-day program afforded more time to address the Language expectations in authentic ways, but having an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) as a teaching partner made a more noticeable difference to the curriculum than having more time.

*Keywords:* kindergarten, curriculum, language and literacy, case study

# OPERATIONALIZATION OF KINDERGARTEN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

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Finally, I would like to thank the staff at my current school for allowing me to take the needed time off and supporting me while trying to complete this study, particularly Nathan McMinn and Sharon Stewart.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Rationale

Kindergartens first appeared in Canada during the late 1800s. Kindergarten has never been a compulsory program for children in Canada, but it has long been available to five-year-olds free of charge in most regions. In Ontario advocates for improved early learning services such as McCain and Mustard (2007), McCain, Mustard and Shanker (2007), and Pascal (2009) have called for quality education and care for four-year-olds too. In response to such advice, the Ontario government initiated a full-day kindergarten program to be phased in between 2010 and 2015.

In this thesis I describe a qualitative case study of curriculum in two Ontario classrooms: one half-day kindergarten and one full-day learning classroom. The study was conducted during the first year of the five-year phase-in period. I was interested in learning how the *Kindergarten Program* Language expectations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) would be operationalized in a full-day program and how the operationalized curriculum in full-day and half-day classrooms differed. I believe it is important for educators to reflect on new educational programs to ensure optimal long-term results for children. As a primary teacher and administrator in an Ontario elementary school, I find the topic personally significant, but I also hope my study will be of interest to researchers, other administrators, kindergarten teachers and parents.

### Overview of the Study

My research questions were: What are the components of an operationalized curriculum in a half-day and full-day Ontario kindergarten program? How did each

operationalized curriculum differ from the intended curriculum as outlined in the teacher's day plans? How did curricula vary across program types? To address my questions I drew on three sources of qualitative data: classroom observation, teachers' day plans, and interviews with teachers. I also reviewed recent research literature on the topic of kindergarten and reviewed the official kindergarten program documents published by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 2006 and 2010.

The qualitative data were collected from one half-day classroom and one full-day classroom. These classrooms were administered in the same school board and located in the same large urban centre. The teachers working in the kindergarten classrooms provided two weeks' worth of day plans each and participated in the interviews.

### **Personal Significance**

I entered the world of education because I have always enjoyed working with children. While in high school and university I volunteered as a hockey coach with unwell children and worked at many camps. Following university I worked and volunteered in schools and tutoring services, experiences which confirmed that the teaching profession was the appropriate career path for me. I currently work in a small independent school in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. When I started working at this school I taught junior kindergarten from 2005-2008 in a full-day, co-educational setting. I often wondered if the full-day kindergarten had positive and/or negative effects on the students' social development, academic learning, and long-term overall achievement. Another reason that I chose to study kindergarten curriculum is that I wanted to investigate something that is very current. I have recently become an administrator at this school. Moving forward I intend to utilize my findings as sources of insight into school

policies regarding kindergarten. Finally, I wanted to increase my knowledge for further full-day kindergarten curriculum development since our school's kindergarten curriculum is heavily based on the Ontario curriculum.

### **Kindergarten Program Documents**

The traditional half-day or full-day every other day kindergarten program is outlined in *The Kindergarten Program* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006), which is sometimes referred to in the thesis as the "half-day document." A new program document was developed for the full-day initiative, although it still exists in a draft format. The full-day kindergarten teacher participant utilized a draft version of *The Full-Day Learning – Kindergarten Program* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), which is often referred to as "the draft full-day document or program." The draft full-day document includes the information provided in the half-day document along with new information that describes the conceptual basis of the program. The two programs were well-aligned and the specific learning expectations are exactly the same, except for the expectations related to media texts. There was a small wording change related to teachers. Where the half-day document refers to "the teacher," the draft full-day document refers to the "early-learning kindergarten team (EL-K)".

Differences between the two documents was found in the curriculum expectations sections. The half-day document states an expected outcome such as "explore sounds, rhythms, and language structures with guidance and on their own" (p.36) and follows it with an example of how each expectation could be carried out. For example, exploring sounds is followed by "generate rhymes, including nonsense words; identify syllables through actions, such as clapping; manipulate sounds and words in shared, guided, and

independent activities, such as singing songs or chants or participating in finger plays” (p.36). The draft full-day document states the “specific expectation” as does the half-day document and also has examples of how that expectation might work, but it appends two new sections to each expectation. The first addition is Making Connections: Ways in Which Children Might Demonstrate Their Learning; the second addition is Making Connections: Early Learning-Kindergarten Team’s Intentional Interactions (see p.72). Within the Ways in Which Children Might Demonstrate Their Learning section, each expectation is further divided into subsections called Saying, Doing, and Representing. For the “Exploring sounds” expectation, one of the ways in which the student might show his or her learning is by saying “that rhymes with my name” (p.72). Under Doing and Representing are “[a] small group of children make their names with magnetic letters” and “[a] small group of children chants nonsense words to rhyme their names” (p.73).

A section entitled “The Early Learning-Kindergarten Team’s Intentional Interactions” was divided into three subsections: responding, challenging, and extending. The following excerpt is taken from the “exploring sounds” section:

EL-K team members create a learning centre using a filing cabinet and a table where children can work with magnetic letters. A set of the children’s name cards is placed at the Centre so that the children can make and break apart their names. (p.72)

The draft full-day document outlined a method of challenging the exploring sounds expectation: “A member of the EL–K team observes two children working at a centre. The team member places a class list at the centre so that the children can work with the names of other children in the class” (p.73).

The document goes on to describe how the team might extend children's learning about rhymes and syllables "through actions and in shared, guided, and independent activities such as singing songs or chants or participating in finger plays" (p.73).

When I began working on my proposal for the study the draft full-day document had only recently become available to teachers. I have become more familiar with the document while conducting the study, but my main focus is the Language expectations as listed in the 2006 document.

### **Key Findings**

Many aspects of the Language curriculum in the two classrooms was extremely similar, for example the physical environment of the classroom, the types of instructional activities in which students participated, the professional development that the teachers accessed, and the ways in which each teacher embedded opportunities to address Language expectations into many informal activities throughout the school day.

Students and staff in the full-day kindergarten program appeared to enjoy having time to pursue learning in a leisurely and playful way. It was surprising, however, to note the ways in which students in the full-day classroom spent the extra class time. I had expected that the full-day program teacher might use the time for more large-group instruction, but she used the time to slow the pace of the day and to provide opportunities for one-to-one interactions between the teacher and individual children. Children in the full-day program also had more opportunities for social interaction than did children in the half-day program. This use of time would not have been possible without the support of another teaching professional in the room. The half-day teacher had an Educational



Assistant (EA) in the classroom once every three days, but the full-day program had an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) in the classroom full time.

A third key finding pertains to the Language expectations for English Language Learners (ELLs). Although the program documents mentioned teaching students who do not have English as a first language and the teachers noted that their classrooms were very linguistically diverse, the data contained little evidence of strategies for supporting ELLs such as intentionally providing multimodal meaning-making experiences, or connecting language learning with children's existing linguistic and cultural resources.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis is organized into five chapters. In the first chapter I introduced the study and my interest in the study. The second chapter locates the study in the field of Curriculum Studies. I also describe the study design and methodology including data collection and analysis. The third chapter reviews literature on policies for early childhood education and care (ECEC), the history and theoretical bases of kindergarten, research on half-day versus full-day kindergarten, play in the classroom, a contrast between the intended curriculum and the operational curriculum, and the effect of teacher-to-student ratios. The third chapter also provides an overview of the Language strands described in the Ontario Ministry of Education (2006 & 2010) kindergarten documents and comments on aspects of early childhood literacy that are not represented in these documents. The fourth chapter presents the data. The fifth and final chapter discusses the data and proposes implications for practice and further research.

## Chapter Two: The Study

### Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, the study on which the thesis is based examined the operationalization of the Ontario Language curriculum in a half-day and full-day Ontario kindergarten classroom. I conceptualized the study as a multi-site, qualitative case study of curriculum processes in kindergarten classrooms. I drew on three sources of empirical data: observations, teachers' daybooks, and interviews with teachers. I also drew on policy texts related to early learning in Ontario as background information to contextualize the study. These public domain documents include reports submitted to government officials, such as Charles Pascal's (2009) *With Our Best Future in Mind* which introduced full-day kindergarten to the Ontario public and the Ontario Ministry of Education (2006 & 2010) Kindergarten Program documents which listed the "expectations" that each teacher is required to address throughout the school year.

The study asked the following questions: What were the components of an operationalized Language curriculum in a half-day and full-day Ontario kindergarten program? How did each operationalized Language curriculum differ from the intended curriculum as outlined in the teacher's day plans? How did curricula vary across program types? I also asked teachers to comment on challenges they encountered as they operationalized their intended Language curriculum.

I employed constructs from Curriculum Studies to frame the analysis, in particular Schwab's (1973) curriculum commonplaces. In this chapter I discuss the design of the study and the conceptual framework. I begin by discussing curriculum concepts and the field of early childhood literacy as described in the Education literature.

## What is Curriculum?

The term “curriculum” can take on a number of meanings, for example a document or syllabus, a plan of action, and what is actually learned. As Prideaux (2003) explains:

The curriculum represents the expression of educational ideas in practice.

The word curriculum has its roots in the Latin word for track or race course. From there it came to mean course of study or syllabus. Today the definition is much wider and includes all the planned learning experiences of a school or educational institution (p.268).

The curriculum theorist, Joseph Schwab (1973), identified five commonplaces “found in any attempt to make curriculum” (Null, 2011, p. 27). The commonplaces are subject matter, learners, the milieu, which includes “family, the community, and groupings of religious, class, or ethnic genus” (p. 503), the teachers, and the curriculum making processes. Null updated Schwab’s terminology to call the milieu “context”. He writes that “context refers to the setting in which a curriculum is taught” (p. 31). The commonplaces in my study are the Ontario Kindergarten Language expectations; junior and senior kindergarten students; the classroom, the community and political context, the teachers, and the interactions among them that produce the day-to-day routines and rituals of classroom life. The Kindergarten Language expectations can be conceptualized as an amalgam of commonplaces.

Numerous other representations of curriculum can be found in educational literature. Eisner (1985) uses the term “explicit curriculum” to refer to the fact that schools have “explicit goals” (p. 87). Akker (2003) describes intended, implemented,

and attained curricula. In another book, Akker, Gravemeijer, Mckenney and Nieveen (2006) conflate the notion of intended curriculum with the curriculum as stated in an official curriculum document. For Akker et al. the intended curriculum is contrasted with the implemented curriculum, which “contains both the perceived curriculum and the operational curriculum (as enacted in the classroom)” (p. 69). Akker et al. also define the attained curriculum as “the experiential curriculum (learning experiences from pupil perspective) and the learned curriculum” (p. 69).

My study examined the intended and operationalized curricula. I made inferences about the intended curriculum based on the contents of official program documents and the teachers’ individual day plans. I use the term “operationalized curriculum” to refer to the implemented curriculum. Two other aspects of curriculum discussed in this study are the hidden curriculum, which has been defined as “the indelible message, often nonverbal, that a person takes from an event or an experience” (Anderson, 1992, p. 21) and the null curriculum that Eisner (1985) refers to as curriculum that does not exist. Eisner states that “what schools do not teach may be as important as what they do teach” (p. 97).

### **Literacy in the Ontario Kindergarten Program**

Reading and writing, the activities that comprise everyday definitions of literacy, are described in the Language expectations section of the Kindergarten Program documents. The strands of Language named in the *Kindergarten Program* document are oral communication, reading, writing, and media materials. These categories reflect a view of literacy that is narrower than the description of early childhood literacy presented by Gillen and Hall (2003). Gillen and Hall use the broader term early childhood literacy

to denote a variety of meaning making processes employed by young children.

It is an all-embracing concept for a rich range of authorial and responsive practices using a variety of media and modalities, carried out by people during their early childhood.

It is a concept that allows early childhood to be seen as a state in which people use literacy as it is appropriate, meaningful and useful to them, rather than stage on a path to some future literate state. It is not about emergence or becoming literate, it is about being literate; and it allows the literacy practices and products of early childhood to be acknowledged as valid in their own right, rather than perceived as inadequate manifestations of adult literacy.

It is a concept that allows early literacy to move way beyond the limitations and restrictions of schooling and extend into all domains of the lives of people in early childhood.

It is a concept that has evolved out of contestation, innovation and reconceptualization and one that has become and continues to be susceptible to the scrutiny of a wide range of theoretical and methodological positions. It is not a concept that has finished evolving, nor will it ever do so. As a position it recognizes that it is a social construct and as such will never achieve fixity (p. 9).

Gillen and Hall's broad definition suggests that school is not the sole place in which early childhood literacy is practiced. The defining features of early childhood literacy are ever-changing, but literacy viewed in this way is no longer about levels.

Although the Ontario document with oral communication, reading, writing, and media material expectations is included in Gillen and Hall's definition, early childhood literacy expresses a range of practices that is much broader than the practices promoted in the official Ontario school curriculum. Certainly early childhood literacy includes learning to encode and decode print, but literacy should not be seen "essentially in terms of printed texts" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) and any definition of literacy should acknowledge that children practice multi-modal literacies" (p. 73). A "multimodal approach in teaching acknowledges that language is partial, and that many modes are involved in meaning-making, even though one mode may be chosen to represent meaning (language, visual, spatial, digital, and so on)" (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 11).

### **The Study Design**

Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Razavieh (2009) state that a case study aims "to arrive at a detailed description and understanding of the entity"(p.29). Stake (1995) asserts that a case study can "catch the complexity of a single case" (p. xi). Stake also argues that "we study a case when it itself is of very special interest" (p. xi). As full-day kindergarten is scheduled to be implemented in every Ontario public school by 2015, full-day kindergarten is of very special interest to the education community in Ontario. My goal was two-fold: to capture the complexity of curriculum implementation in a half-day kindergarten and in a full-day setting, and to better understand the curriculum processes.

A case study researcher can play a variety of roles in a study. These "may include teacher, participant observer, interviewer, reader, storyteller, advocate, artist, counselor, evaluator, consultant, and others" (Stake, 1995, p. 91). In this study I assumed the roles

of observer and interviewer. I composed field notes and recorded and transcribed interviews. I also examined participating teachers' written day plans. I adopted an interpretive strategy to analyze these data since an interpretive strategy can "explain how people attribute meaning to their circumstances" (Garrick, 1999, p. 150). Using an interpretive approach also allowed me to keep in mind "the positive concern about the subjective nature of such studies and their inability to make generalizations based on what can be regarded as 'hard' or 'factual' evidence" (p. 151).

### **Recruiting Participants**

My original plan for data collection was to observe three kindergarten classrooms: one full-day every day class, one half-day class, and one full-day alternate days class. However, there was no "alternate days" option available at the board to which I applied. I therefore limited my study to one half-day program and one full-day every day program. The recruitment of the teachers was completed in three steps. The first step was to attain approval from the school board, which was acquired through email. Following that I approached several principals and kindergarten teachers in the board. I promptly had a principal and teacher at two different schools with half-day kindergarten. I waited to decide between these two schools to match the demographics and overall school details to the full-day school once it was attained. Recruiting a full-day teacher and class was more difficult. In many schools either the principal or kindergarten teacher agreed, but not both. Following my initial difficulties finding a full-day program, I sent 48 letters to full-day kindergarten school principals and got many positive responses. After two months of sending letters, making phone calls, and conducting email correspondence, I had a kindergarten teacher and principal at a school with full-day kindergarten that were each

happy to participate.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Empirical data were collected from three sources: two weeks of written day plans from each teacher, classroom observations, and interviews with the same two classroom teachers. The collection of the day plans allowed me to make inferences about how the language curriculum was intended to be operationalized over a two-week period. The classroom observations allowed me to view the day plan for that day and observe how the intended curriculum was being operationalized. These observations also gave me an opportunity to note literacy events that were not detailed on the day plans.

The interviews provided first-hand accounts of teachers' implementing and operationalizing the curriculum in each classroom. Interview questions were intended to help me to ascertain similarities and differences between the full-day and half-day settings. Main areas that were discussed during each interview were how the language curriculum was being implemented, challenges of completing the curriculum, and ability to work one-on-one and in small groups with students. A full list of questions asked in the interviews can be found in Appendix A.

I then conducted three comparative analyses. First the intended curricula across the two day plans were examined and the kinds of planned literacy events were compared. Secondly, I compared the two sets of day plans with my field notes. Finally I reviewed the interview data to compare teachers' comments about how they operationalized the Language expectations, to learn about the challenges they encountered and their impressions of students' engagement and learning, and to infer any hidden curriculum.



**Day plans.** My original intent was to examine one week's worth of day plans from each teacher participant. However, the teachers provided two weeks' worth of plans that I accepted and utilized. Collectively, the plans spanned a three week period. They provided clues about how much time the teacher intended to devote to Language expectations during the two-week period. Each day's plan was examined and the total number of minutes assigned to Language expectations was recorded. The specific expectations were also noted in relation to each planned lesson or activity. Finally, I noted whether an intended lesson or activity was designed to be a whole group, small group, or one-on-one event. I also recorded the time spent with groups of different sizes.

**Observation.** Johnson and Christensen (2007) describe observing in an educational setting for research "as the watching of behavioral patterns of people in certain situations to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest" (p. 211). The phenomenon of interest to me was the Language expectations as they were being operationalized. I observed and documented each teacher's actions for one day. In particular I looked for places where Language expectations were being addressed outside of planned Language instructional time and aimed to identify other learning opportunities related to the Language expectations. My classroom observations were completed over one and a half days; I spent one day in the full-day kindergarten classroom and one complete half day in the half-day kindergarten classroom. The observational notes referred solely to the Language expectations that were covered during the day.

Observational field notes created in each class were utilized to compare the intended curriculum and the operationalized Language curriculum for that particular day. Comparing the intended lessons and activities with the actual events that took place in the

classroom allowed me to complete this comparison. The observation also gave insight into literacy events that were created throughout the day by the students or an educator, but which were not in the day plans. I also made field notes regarding the physical setup of the two classrooms with regards to Language expectations.

As a researcher and guest in each classroom, I did not interact with the kindergarten students. When they came to talk to me or ask questions, I would explain that I was here to watch their teacher teach. Throughout the observations I interacted with many adults, usually school staff.

**Interviews.** Each teacher participated in a semi-structured interview. These interviews were used for “comparative and representative purposes – comparing responses and putting them in the context of common group beliefs and themes” (Bickman & Rog, 2009, p. 554). The interview questions were designed to learn about the teacher’s experiences related to the questions and objectives of this study. The two interviews were held in the teachers’ respective classrooms following the observation.

The goal of the interviews was to “obtain in-depth information about a participant’s thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings” about how they operationalized the Language expectations in their classrooms (Johnson & Christensen, 2007, p. 207). Throughout the interviews I asked clarifying questions, but the interview was primarily focused on the documented questions. Each question was read and responded to by each teacher. When the response was a short one-word or short sentence answer, I would ask a probing question to inquire if they wished to elaborate or not. If they did not have a more detailed response then I moved onto the next question. Each interview was reviewed for consistency in answers. I ensured that their answers

about each topic were consistent throughout the interview when they would speak of a topic in answering more than one question. I transcribed the interviews and sent the transcripts to the respective teachers for confirmation of accuracy and inquire if any changes were needed. The transcripts were reviewed and coded for themes. The themes were based on the research questions. Direct quotes from each teacher were utilized throughout the analysis to provide comparative answers to the questions of the study.

### **Trustworthiness**

It is important that the findings from this study be viewed as trustworthy.

McMillan and Wergin (2002) suggest that trustworthiness is achieved with higher success when detailed field notes are taken and audio recordings are used. Bell (2005) states that to ensure trustworthiness the researcher should ask "whether another researcher using your research instrument and asking factual questions would be likely to get the same or similar responses" (p. 118). I attempted to take detailed and accurate observational notes while not missing anything significant as I was writing. The interview questions were read straight from the list of questions to both teachers.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality are the four criteria to determine trustworthiness. I employed several data sources, employed audio recordings of interviews to ensure accuracy, made careful observations and low-inference approaches to writing field notes. The selection of sites for my study followed a convenience sampling, but the findings are offered to other kindergarten teachers who can then judge the applicability of my comments.

**Ethical Issues**

It was important to use information letters and consent forms that the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee had approved. I provided a formal letter of information to each participating teacher. Upon meeting participants and discussing the process, I aimed to reassure them that they could withdraw from the study at any point. Each school and each participant was given a pseudonym at the beginning of the study and in all written and digital records only that pseudonym was used. The participating teachers did refer to people and schools by name during the interview, but these were promptly changed in the transcript and any written or typed records. No records have named the school board or the schools involved in any way. The daybooks have not identified any participant in the study.

I also tried to adhere to the list of accepted interview questions during the interviews and only add probing questions where necessary. Audio files of the interviews were deleted once they were reviewed and transcribed without any information that identified any participant. Names of participants were only ever accessed or written by me electronically on email. I used two different email accounts for communication with the two participating teachers.

**Limitations**

There are some limitations to the study. I was limited to observing each program for one session only. The statements of observations made throughout this study are therefore not necessarily typical days. The study is also limited to a snapshot of one moment in the school year.

It can be argued that the interviews were limited to the preset questions that were created during the proposal stage. However, upon reflection, there are not many questions I would have added and therefore do not feel significantly limited by the set of interview questions. The scheduling of interviews did not seem to limit what teachers told me. Perhaps some answers would have been better informed at the conclusion of the school year, particularly in the case of Ms. Sallis who was teaching full-day kindergarten for the first time.

There were some limitations on the day plans that were given to me by each of the teachers. The day plans were a snapshot of a particular time and disregarded variations to the schedule. Fire drills, practice lockdowns, teacher absences, and various other occurrences can alter the teacher's plan and yet would not be represented in the day plans I received. Another limitation with the day plans was my difficulty identifying exactly when and how often each teacher intended to implement the language curriculum. It is possible that there were times that teachers addressed Language expectations in the classroom during, for example, intended math times; perhaps one member of the teaching team was supervising math work while another member was reading one-on-one.

Another limitation to this study was the location of the two schools. These two schools were in an urban centre in Ontario, which might give different results than not only other schools in the same urban centre, but also schools in other urban centres and schools in rural settings.

Finally, I did not examine the part played by children in operationalizing the curriculum. This is a decision made to expedite the ethical review process. In hindsight I

believe it limits the scope of the observations. This issue is taken up again in Chapter Five.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I discussed ways in which curriculum is represented in education literature, specifically I discussed terms such as intended, operationalized, null, and hidden curriculum. I defined early childhood literacy and commented on the version of literacy reflected in the Ontario kindergarten documents. I outlined the study design and discussed the basic principles of case study methods. I listed the data sources utilized in the study and described the data collection and analysis. I discussed the merits of the study and ways in which it meets criteria for trustworthiness. Finally I listed ethical issues, and any potential limitations.

By utilizing a case study method to observe a full-day and half-day kindergarten, the study aimed to present a detailed understanding of the operationalization of the language curriculum in each classroom. In the next chapter I present a review of literature relevant to the study.

### **Chapter Three: Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

The full-day kindergarten program is part of an ensemble of early childhood education and care (ECEC) initiatives that includes school-based before - and after - school care for kindergarten students. Before beginning to collect data, I conducted a review of ECEC policy literature, research articles, and professional literature relevant to a study of kindergarten curriculum. Sources of research and professional literature included online databases such as Google Scholar and several Proquest databases accessible via the University of Western Ontario online library site. My searches were designed to access studies about half-day and full-day kindergarten, various aspects of literacy teaching in kindergarten, and the history of kindergarten and early childhood education practices. I aimed to find current information. However, the policy area I was researching is currently changing very quickly in light of changes in the economy. For example, after decades of increased early childhood education in the United States, an economic recession is creating some cuts in publicly funded programs such as full-day kindergarten. Leachman, Williams and Johnson (2011) looked at the 2012 fiscal year budgets for the States in the U.S. and found at least “21 states have proposed identifiable, deep cuts in pre-kindergarten and/or K-12 spending” (p. 2).

In this chapter I summarize findings from research literature. I also provide an overview of the Language expectations laid out in the kindergarten program documents (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006 & 2010).

### **Policies for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)**

Canada's early childhood education and care policies align with international trends. For example, since the 1990s child care targets have been created for countries to achieve, parental leaves have been extended, and governance of ECEC has shifted towards placing more programs for early childhood education and care under the umbrella of education (Kammerman, 2005).

In many countries, changes in family dynamics have created the need for increased care for pre-school aged children. Neuman (2005) discusses a trend towards "expanding early childhood development programs" which began in 1989 with the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" (p. 189). Universal preschools emerged as the dominant model of ECEC in Europe (Kammerman, 2001). In England in 1998 the National Childcare Strategy was initiated which started non-mandatory free nursery education institutions for all four year olds and centres which were to "serve as 'models' for high quality practice integrating early education with childcare" (Sylva & Pugh, 2005, p. 11). In the United States Head Start was initiated in 1965. Head Start was a comprehensive program for low-income families that provided "education, health, nutrition, and mental health services to children and their families" (Melhuish & Petrogiannis, 2006, p. 9).

The Government of Canada established the Canada Assistance Plan in 1966 to arrange funding between the federal government and the provinces (Friendly, Beach & Turiano, 2002). Friendly et al. note that the plan "had an important impact on the way child care has developed since that time" (p. XVII). During the 1970s and 1980s more public and private child care centres were established "as mothers of young children



entered the paid labour force in growing numbers” (p. XVII). Canada’s federal government “plays a significant role in early childhood services ... [they] work closely with provincial and territorial governments to develop strategies and policies” (Dietze, 2006, p. 16), but “[b]y the mid-1980s, most Canadian five year olds (and in Ontario, four year olds) were enrolled in public, mostly half-day, kindergarten programs” (Friendly et al., 2002, p. XVII) and by the mid-1990s, the provinces had taken over much of the responsibility for ECEC. However, a national childcare system is still not in place. Kindergarten is the only early childhood education and care (ECEC) program that is offered entirely free of charge.

At the start of the 2000s, twenty countries including Canada joined together to share information about early childhood education policy (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2001). The OECD’s report proposed eight characteristics of successful ECEC systems:

1. a systemic and integrated approach for children 0-8
2. equal partnership with education systems to support learning from birth
3. accessibility to all
4. substantial public investment
5. quality improvement by staff, parents, and children
6. appropriate training and work conditions for staff
7. systematic attention to analyzing and collecting data
8. long-term research and evaluation plan (p. 126).

The OECD report allowed international educators and researchers to work together and echoed an Ontario report by McCain and Mustard (1999) calling for consistency and universal access to programs. These and several other reports (McCain & Mustard, 2007; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007; Pascal, 2009) calling for quality education and care for kindergarten aged children in Ontario led to the Ontario government starting full-day kindergarten programs for all appropriately aged children in the province. This new initiative would be phased in over five years starting in 2010.

In Ontario, early childhood education and care programs and services for children under the age of six are not normally funded and administered by the Ministry of Education. Kindergarten is the exception to this rule (McCain & Mustard, 1999). In their *Early Years Study*, McCain and Mustard noted that there were 330,000 kindergarten students in the province, but they were mainly in half-day programs. They recommended that Ontario implement new, school-based early childhood programs for children under six.

McCain, Mustard and Shanker (2007) followed up the *Early Years Study* with *Early Years Study 2: Putting Science into Action* eight years later. This report states that Canada should develop a “national framework of early childhood programs” (p. 135). This report continued a push towards universal full time care and programs for all socio-economic groups for children between birth and eight years.

In a recent report to the Ontario Premier, Dalton McGuinty, Charles Pascal (2009) made a list of twenty recommendations about early childhood education and care. These recommendations for Ontario were wide ranging. Specifically, he recommended programs that are accessible, have continuity, and are staffed by professionally trained

and certified practitioners. A key recommendation was to mandate school boards to offer “a two year, full-day Early Learning Program ... with parents having the option of a half, full (school hours), or a fee-based extended day of programming” (p. 55). Since Pascal’s 2009 report, full-day learning in Ontario has been gathering momentum and attracting publicity, although transitioning from a half-day kindergarten to a full day program will be costly. Pascal (2009) estimated that the implementation would cost an additional \$130 million dollars in capital for building and renovating space in schools and between \$790-\$990 million in annual increases to the budget for operational and staffing upon full implementation of full day kindergarten across Ontario (p. 43). In December 2009, it was estimated that “the costs of full-day kindergarten in Ontario (would be) between \$1.5 billion and \$1.8 billion annually, with costs rising to over \$6 billion” for full implementation (Mrozek, 2009, para. 3).

### **History of Kindergarten**

Friedrich Froebel introduced kindergarten in 1837 at a school in Blakenburg, Germany. Froebel gave the name kindergarten, which means “children’s garden” to provide a learning and nurturing environment for students. Froebel developed a set of ten (and later twenty) exercises, called *gifts* that created the first curriculum for kindergarten (Bryant & Clifford, 1992). Brosterman (1997) states “[h]armony, unity, and the reconciliation of opposites are the concepts that formed the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the kindergarten” (p. 16). In 1840 Froebel opened the Universal German Kindergarten. Over the following years Froebel and Wilhelm Middendorf travelled across Germany to create awareness and interest in kindergarten. By 1847 Germany had seven kindergartens, but over the coming decade and a half a Prussian court

had forbidden kindergarten from being taught (Brosterman, 1997). However, Froebel's hard work and dedication paid off and by 1860 "kindergarten was well on its way to becoming a common institution throughout the world" (Brosterman, 1997, p. 29). In their article, 150 Years of Kindergarten, Bryant and Clifford (1992) state that by 1860 "the kindergarten movement had spread to England, France, Holland, Italy, and America" (p.149).

A typical Froebel kindergarten day would be approximately three hours and would consist of play-based activities: singing, dancing, active games, art creations, and sharing of gifts. Brosterman (1997) states "[t]he intended result of this all-encompassing instruction was the creation of a sensitive, inquisitive child with an uninhibited curiosity and genuine respect for nature, family, and society" (p. 39). Froebel initially created ten gifts, but later extended his list to twenty gifts. Brosterman (1997) catalogues the twenty gifts:

1. balls,
2. sphere, cylinder, and cube,
3. blocks: a cube that divides into eight smaller cubes,
4. blocks: tiles (like dominoes),
5. blocks: a cube divided into twenty-seven blocks,
6. blocks: a cube divided into thirty-six blocks,
7. parquetry: similar to modern tangrams,
8. sticks,
9. rings,
10. drawing,

11. pricking: pricking through paper with pins,
12. sewing,
13. cutting paper,
14. paper weaving,
15. slats,
16. jointed slats,
17. interlacing paper strips,
18. folding paper,
19. peas work: a box containing peas, sticks and models,
20. modeling clay,

Manning (2005) described the purposes of each of the first ten gifts, in order. The balls represented a circle; each solid shape was for their understanding of forms. The third through sixth gifts of blocks provided the purpose of “promoting building skills” (p. 374). The parquetry and sticks introduces the children to realm of abstract and straight line and length concepts respectively. The rings emphasize curves and the tenth gift developed motor skills. These were the ten gifts that the main Froebel system was based upon.

In 1851 Johannes and Bertha Ronge opened England’s first kindergarten in London at Hampstead. Ronge then produced a manual titled *A Practical Guide to the English Kindergarten* in 1855 (Wollons, 2000). In the United States, Froebel’s kindergarten first started to be known when the first American publication of Froebel's ideas was a pamphlet issued in 1856 by the *American Journal of Education* (Bryant & Clifford, p. 149). Wood (2004) summarizes the shift in kindergarten in the United States

with reference to a speech made by the executive director of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Mark Ginsberg who stated that "America is finally coming to understand the tremendous importance of building an earlier foundation for later learning" (p. 1). The United States National Center for Education Statistics reported that in 1970 less than twenty percent of kindergartens in the United States had a full-day program, but by 1999 the number had grown to 56% (Walston & West, 2004).

Following the introduction of nursery schools and private facilities, the first public school opening a kindergarten in Canada was at Louisa Public School in Toronto in 1883 (Prochner & Howe, 2000). In 1892 two charitable associations, Winnipeg Free Kindergarten Association and Methodist All People's Mission, created kindergartens for children to attend in Manitoba. The Winnipeg Free Kindergarten Association's mission was linked closely to Froebel's ideology (Prochner, 2009). By 1895, 40 Canadian public schools had kindergarten programs. Regina was the location of the first public kindergarten in 1891 where it started as a full day program until high enrollment made a switch to half-day programs necessary. Following the two World Wars kindergartens started to increase in prominence all across Canada (Prochner & Howe, 2000).

Kindergarten is unique among public education programs in Canada because it introduces children to formal educational settings, creates a foundation for school learning, utilizes play-based learning, and has a focus on personal and social development. Although students might have gone to nursery school or other places with social and/or educational experiences, kindergarten does expose children to school for the first time. When students walk into the kindergarten classroom for the first time in September it is their "first day of school". Kindergarten is where children learn to learn

in school-determined ways, socialize, contribute to groups, and follow school rules and routines.

Macdonald (2010) researched the state of kindergarten in provinces across Canada. Macdonald found that in Alberta ninety-five percent of children attend non-mandatory kindergarten. Alberta's Commission on Learning came up with ten recommendations for the future of kindergarten in Alberta, which included full-day options being part of the education system. British Columbia announced in 2009 that their province would offer full-day kindergarten to all five-year olds following a two year phase in. Saskatchewan has some full-day and some half-day kindergarten programs since the Education Act signed in 1995 gave the right to school boards to deem the length of kindergarten program. Manitoba is similar to Saskatchewan as the province allows the boards to decide the length and as a result have some full-day and half-day programs. Quebec, Prince Edward Island (since 2010) New Brunswick (since 1991), and Nova Scotia offer full-day kindergarten. Newfoundland and Labrador has half-day kindergarten and "has no plans to move to full-day kindergarten right now" (p. 6).

### **Half-day Versus Full-day Learning**

Several studies have compared the use of instructional time between full-day and half-day kindergartens. Some studies observed the amount of time spent in instructional times. Anderson (1983) compared language arts instructional time in half-day kindergarten and full-day kindergarten. Anderson found that full-day kindergartens spent 250% more time on language instruction. Elicker and Mathur (1997) reported much more learning time in all curriculum areas for full-day kindergarten students compared to their half-day counter parts. Olsen and Zigler (1989) state "full-day curriculum tends to

resemble the half-day curriculum, simply extending the same activities and instruction over longer periods of time” (p. 174).

Studies have compared the student’s literacy development between half-day and full-day kindergarten. Elicker and Mathur’s (1997) research compared report cards and concluded that full-day students’ literacy “progress was significantly greater” (p. 476). Many studies in the United States (Gullo, 2000; Zvoch, Reynolds & Parker, 2008; Wang & Johnstone, 1999; Ray & Smith, 2010) and Canada (da Costa & Bell, 2001; da Costa, 2005; Zakaluk & Straw, 2002) have found that kindergarten students who attend full-day classes are better prepared in their reading, writing, and oral language for grade school. Zvoch, Reynolds and Parker (2008) studied literacy growth in half-day and full-day kindergarten students. Their findings showed that in class sizes smaller than twenty, “full-day kindergarteners rate of literacy acquisition was twice that of their half-day peers” (p. 104). When the class size was increased the literacy growth amongst full-day students was still higher than half-day students, but the disparity was much smaller. Baskett et al. (2005) performed a similar study and found that there was no significance or minor significance in some literacy areas, but there was significantly higher scores by full-day students in areas such as “‘reading level’, ‘literacy skills’, ‘letter sounds’ and ‘story sequence’” (p. 425).

A few studies (Hildebrand, 2001; Cannon, Jacknowitz & Painter, 2006; DeCicca, 2007) indicate no outcomes or favourable academic outcomes in the short-term for half-day kindergarten literacy development when compared with full-day schooling for four and five year olds. The studies have found no significant long-term difference in literacy development between full-day and half-day programs. Hildebrand (2001) found that



although full-day students performed better in reading, there was no significant difference between half-day and full-day students in writing ability. Cannon, Jackowitz and Painter (2006) performed a study and found that after an initial increase in reading development amongst full-day kindergarten students these “small effects largely disappear by first grade and are eliminated by third grade” (p. 318). DeCicca (2007) found that full-day students showed further development in some areas including reading, but this impact of reading growth in “kindergarten has depreciated considerably by the end of first grade” (p. 81).

Some researchers have argued that the type and quality of a program is more important to the literacy development than the length of day that kindergarten students are in school. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1987) concluded "quality is not determined by the length of the program day" (p. 47). Karweit (1992) stated that research and that curriculum need to be less spent on length of a kindergarten school day and the real challenge facing kindergarten “is to provide developmentally and individually appropriate learning environment” (p. 84).

It appears that there is some disagreement about the merits of a full-day kindergarten for literacy development. There are many widely agreed upon positives such as early childhood care and improved socialization, but the literacy progress remains a point of dispute when looking at the length of day. As noted above, the quality of program often outweighs the length of the school day when it comes to kindergarten and further research will need to investigate the literacy development in Ontario after this switch to full-day kindergarten.

### **Student-to-Teacher Ratios**

Ehrenberg et al. (2001) studied class sizes and the student-to-teacher ratios in the early learning years. A lower student-to-teacher ratio can improve literacy learning because “the teacher is able to focus on individual students and their specific needs” (p. 1). Other reasons that Ehrenberg et al. state for better learning with lower ratios include students having higher attention spans in small groups and teachers having “more frequent assessments, more writing, more discussion, more help for individual students, etc...” (p. 20). These findings corroborate the study performed by Zvoch, Reynolds and Parker (2008) who found that students are able to have better literacy learning experiences with lower teacher to student ratios.

### **The Ontario Kindergarten Program**

In Ontario, the Kindergarten program is looked on as a foundation for future learning. *The Revised Kindergarten Program* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) states that “[c]hildren’s early learning experiences have a profound effect on their development” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 1). “[I]t is essential that Kindergarten programs provide a variety of learning opportunities and experiences that are based on assessment information and the strengths, needs, and interests of the children” (p. 1).

In 2010 the Ontario Ministry of Education published the draft of a new curriculum program for kindergarten, *The Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program*. This document is a draft and was utilized by full-day kindergarten teachers during the 2010-2011 academic year.

The learning expectations in the 2006 Kindergarten Program “represent the first steps in a continuum of programming from kindergarten to grade 8” (p. 5). In Ontario, *The Revised Kindergarten Program* touches on personal and social development, where the Ministry states that this area “lays the social and cognitive groundwork that fosters a love for school, engages the children in the process of learning, and supports future success in school and in life” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 30). Developing these areas is designed to assist students in their transition into grade school. Kindergarten in Ontario takes all of these areas of learning and development to prepare the students for learning in grade school and beyond.

A stated goal of the draft full-day program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) is “to establish a strong foundation for learning in the early years, and to do so in a safe and caring play-based environment that promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of all children” (p. 1). The program is based on six fundamental principles:

1. Early child development sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour, and health.
2. Partnerships with families and communities strengthen the ability of early childhood settings to meet the needs of young children.
3. Respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion are prerequisites for honouring children’s rights, optimal development, and learning.
4. A planned curriculum supports early learning.
5. Play is a means to early learning that capitalizes on children’s natural curiosity and exuberance.

6. Knowledgeable, responsive educators are essential (p. 2).

Currently half-day kindergarten teachers are implementing the 2006 Ontario Ministry of Education's *The Kindergarten Program*. The full-day educational team is implementing the new draft full-day program document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). The specific language expectations are very similar to the first thirty expectations in the 2006 Kindergarten Program. The 2006 document for half-day programs has one additional expectation related to media texts. It is important to note that although the expectations are similar, the 2010 program document is longer with much more detail throughout. The 2006 edition spans over 68 pages while the updated 2010 version encompasses 156 pages. The increase in pages is a result of detailing how teachers can make the connections for each expectation. Another component that makes the 2010 document longer is the addition of parts in the explanation of the document part such as, the role of play in the full-day early learning–kindergarten program, areas of learning, developmental domains, big ideas, and interactions.

The other changes to the Language expectations are largely wording modifications to accommodate the addition of one person to the early-learning kindergarten professional teaching team, which includes the kindergarten teacher and an ECE. For example, the 2006 document lists an expectation as follows: “Use illustrations to support comprehension of texts that are read by and with the teacher” (p. 37). The 2010 draft full-day program document has the same expectation worded as “[u]se illustrations to support comprehension of texts that are read by and with the EL–K team” (p.84). The new program document also includes more detail and examples for teachers to utilize, but expectations are not changed.

Both program documents (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006 & 2010) divide Language expectations into four strands: oral communication, reading, writing, and media texts. Oral communication is divided into the same eleven expectations in both documents, but expectations are listed in a different order. The 2006 document has eleven reading expectations in one overall group and the 2010 document has the same eleven expectations in different order and divided into two overall reading expectations. The final reading expectation in each document is, “begin to use reading strategies to make sense of unfamiliar texts in print” (2010, p. 87). This is the expectation that is separated into its own overall expectation in the full-day document. The writing expectations are broken into the same six expectations and are listed in the same order in each document. The first two expectations under media texts are appear in the same order and the wording is identical in each document. The 2006 program document has one extra expectation under media texts, “view and listen to a variety of media materials” (p. 39).

### **The Kindergarten Language Curriculum**

One stated goal of the kindergarten program is to prepare children for primary education. The program was informed by an earlier framework entitled *Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT)* (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2006) that stated the following:

Children who thrive in primary school and whose pathways are set for later academic success are those who enter Grade 1 with strong oral communication skills are confident, able to make friends, are persistent and creative in completing tasks and solving problems and excited to learn

(p. 15).

Rog (2001) suggests that the beginning of a student's academic life is important and the "first day, first month, and the first year are all crucial" (p. 3). This beginning in kindergarten "lays the groundwork for continuing social, emotional and cognitive development throughout the school years" (p. 3). Rog supports some of the theories of Jean Piaget, for example the idea that children learn by exploring how the world operates. Rog states "interactions around print with adults and other significant people in their lives have a great impact on children's literacy development" (p. 6).

The study presented in this thesis conceptualizes the intended curriculum as the teacher participants' interpretations of Language expectations laid out in the 2006 *Kindergarten Program* document. By the end of the year in kindergarten "children are supposed to be able to communicate with others using appropriate listening and speaking skills, to comprehend written materials that are read to them, to use simple writing strategies, and to understand and use many media materials" (Heydon & Wang, 2006, p. 37).

As noted above, the kindergarten program documents (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006 & 2010) break all the expectations down into four strands: oral communication, reading, writing, and media texts. Heydon and Wang (2006) state that the Ontario kindergarten program "falls on the extreme prescriptive/efficiency end of the curricular paradigm continuum" (p. 40). This paradigm "takes a static and mechanical view of curriculum" in which "designers perceive theory as preceding practice and thus able to direct practice" (p. 33). The introduction to the Language expectation section of the new draft document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 68) discusses using

prior knowledge in the students learning, literacy in play-based learning, and building a community of literacy learners. However, the actual expectations all fall under the strands mentioned before, which provides a perspective on curriculum that is about results and centred on kindergarten students beginning to read and write.

The Ontario Kindergarten program document does not depict a program in line with Heydon and Wang's (2006) description of the emergent paradigm. In the emergent paradigm, "the curriculum is more a culture than a model or approach" and the "children are viewed as an important source of the curriculum" (p. 35). There is one aspect that appears in the previous Kindergarten document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) and the new draft document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) that allows the students to inform the curriculum. In the introduction 2010 document's introduction to Language, the authors state that "on the basis of information gathered from ongoing assessment, (the teaching team) should make decisions about the kinds of support, instruction, and materials they need to provide" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 69). However, beyond the short section in the introduction entitled "Using Assessment in Planning Instruction" (p. 69), there does not appear to be any other component that aligns with an emergent perspective.

The Kindergarten Program documents (2006 & 2010) organize the Language expectations into four areas, but also state that the expectations are "aspects of an integrated learning process, and are applicable in all areas of learning" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 69). This integrated process can be taught and learned through direct instruction or learned through experimenting and discovery. The four Language strands are aligned with components of emergent literacy studied by numerous

researchers who espouse a cognitive developmental perspective on reading and writing development.

**Oral communication.** Roskos, Christie and Richgels (2003) state that kindergarten “children need writing to help them learn about reading, they need reading to help them learn about writing; and they need oral language to help them learn about both” (p. 54). Kindergarten students learn oral language “through conversations with adults and peers” (Roskos, Tabors & Lenhart, 2009, p. 47). Roskos, Tabors, and Lenhart (2009) continues that in addition to this learning through dialogue, children must be taught certain aspects of oral language such as “how words rhyme, to manipulate morphemes (e.g. plurals), and to listen for main ideas” (p. 47).

Byrnes and Wasik (2009) identify four main components to developing oral language, which are phonological, semantic, and grammatical knowledge, conversational skills, goals and reasons to communicate, and comprehension and using communicative devices. Roth, Speece and Cooper (2002) studied kindergarten student’s oral communication skills as a predictor of reading success in grades one and two. The results showed that phonemic awareness was a large predictor of reading words, but “oral language contributes to early reading skill in ways other than through the influence of phonological awareness” (p. 268). The study found that oral definitions and word retrieval was a large predictor for many reading capabilities, particularly comprehension.

An expanded vocabulary allows beginning readers to identify words and their meaning. Jalongo and Sobolak (2011) performed a case study to identify the effects the level of vocabulary has on the reading development of young readers and writers. The study results displayed that children were able to identify words in context and



understand the meaning of the words better. Jalongo and Sabolak concluded that when “vocabulary is systematically built it enhances young children’s oral and written communication skills, supports growth in reading, and ultimately increases the educational opportunities available to them throughout life” (p. 427).

Building oral communication in kindergarten increases the development in other literacy areas in kindergarten and in future grades. By developing their vocabulary and oral communication students are able to utilize these abilities to further expand their other literacy skills.

**Reading.** The authors of *Early Reading Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003) argue that it is important for children’s future reading success that they begin to read while in early primary grades. There is a critical window of opportunity from the ages of four to seven for learning to read. Children who successfully learn to read in the early primary years of school are well prepared to read for learning and for pleasure in the years to come (p. 7).

There are various ways that kindergarten students are able to learn to read. According to the previously mentioned report of the Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario, there are three goals of instruction in reading. These are fluency, comprehension, and motivation. There are nine prerequisites for reading fluency: “oral language, prior knowledge and experience, concepts about print, phonemic awareness, letter-sound relationships, vocabulary for reading, semantics and syntax, metacognition and comprehension strategies, and higher-order thinking skills” (p. 12). In kindergarten, two areas of reading are especially important to instruct: connecting phonics to print and further developing vocabulary (Cummins et al., 2010). In a study conducted by Morris,

Bloodgood and Perney (2003), it was found that “alphabet recognition and spelling successfully predicted (85% hit rate) whether children could or could not read at grade level at the end of first grade” (p. 104). The above research highlights phonics as a crucial prerequisite for reading development. Likewise, Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, and Willows (2001) found that the “impact of phonics instruction on reading was significantly greater in the early grades” (p. 427).

**Writing.** Edwards (2003) stated “research on writing instruction in kindergarten remains an emerging area of research” (p. 145). However, researchers have discussed the various aspects of writing that kindergarten students should cover. The first objective for writing in kindergarten “is to encourage children to put down their ideas on paper” (Rog, 2001, p. 75). This writing can be from a wide spectrum of activities including drawing pictures, scribbles, or actual written letters.

Vukelich and Christie (2009) state: “Early language and literacy education should focus on core content – the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are predictive of later success in learning to read and write” (p. 12). This core content includes, “oral language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print awareness” (p. 12). Roskos, Christie and Richgels (2003) concur with many of the core strategies as these authors surmise that for children to become writers they are required to:

learn phonological awareness, alphabet letter knowledge, the functions of written language, a sense of meaning making from texts, vocabulary, rudimentary print knowledge (e.g. developmental spelling), and the sheer persistence to investigate print as a meaning making tool (p. 55).

Emergent literacy researchers argue that once students attain a certain level in the

core content areas, they also need to learn how to form the letters and perform handwriting. It must be noted “poor handwriting may be more a result of weak letter knowledge than a result of motor difficulties” (Edwards, 2003, p. 145). Edwards suggests that kindergarten students should start with letter formation and phonics, followed by writing three letter words in consonant, vowel, and consonant formation. Once students reach this level writing short sentences should be the next goal.

**Understanding of media texts.** In the two Ontario Ministry of Education (2006 & 2010) Kindergarten Program documents there are two curriculum expectations that fall under the overall expectation that students “demonstrate a beginning understanding and critical awareness of media texts” (p. 91). The two specific expectations are “begin to respond critically to animated works” and “communicate verbally and non-verbally about a variety of media materials” (p. 91).

Lieberman, Bates and So (2009) discuss how media and technology are able to help students including kindergarten in their literacy development. There are interactive media that allow kindergarten children to learn literacy concepts such as “the alphabet, phonics, word recognition, [and] word building” (p. 274). Watching videos, playing computer games, and other interactive media allow kindergarten students to further develop their literacy.

### **Challenges to the Emergent Literacy Perspective**

In their review essay on the topic of early childhood literacy, Gillen and Hall propose that early childhood literacy “will never achieve fixity” (2003, p. 10). Gillen and Hall point out that although emergent literacy research marked a revolutionary shift in thinking about young children’s interactions with print, the research findings are not

universally applicable. Much of the research was conducted with groups of Anglophone children from middle-class family backgrounds. Moreover, the view that literacy consists of reading and writing printed texts has also been challenged and joined by a range of theoretical perspectives that expand understandings of what it means to be literate beyond print. Social semiotic theory, for example, “is concerned with ways in which meaning is made in social contexts” (p. 8). Noticeably absent from the Ontario Language expectations are any expectations related to multimodal meaning making, multilingual learning, or methods of extending language learning outside of the classroom.

**Multimodal learning.** One area that was lacking in the language expectations is multimodal learning. The concept of multimodal language learning “puts images, gestures, music, movement, animation, and other representational modes on equal footing with language” (Siegel, 2006, p. 65). Although multimodal learning is an aspect to early childhood literacy, multimodal learning is not confined to just learning literacy.

Wohlwend (2008) writes, “language comprises only one piece in the literacy puzzle that is completed by other modes” (p. 127). She states that play facilitates multimodal language learning to occur as “the multimodal quality of play offers children multiple ways to expand their meanings of the messages they produce” (p. 128). These various modes of expression and communication further young children’s language learning.

When students engage in play in areas of the classroom such as the area where they play with blocks, they are utilizing multiple modes of expression. “Block play is multimodal and can allow children to experiment with materials to represent the world in many forms of literacy” (Cohen & Uhry, 2011, p. 80). Children utilize and learn through many modes of communicating in early childhood education. Although multimodal learning is a

significant part of kindergarten, it is important to note that it is not listed in the Language expectations.

**Multilingual Learning.** In Ontario the draft full-day program document has a section entitled “Program Considerations for English Language Learners” (p. 37). Unfortunately the Language expectations pay no attention to the needs of these learners. On the website Inspire, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) stated that in 2005-2006 approximately 20% of elementary school students in Ontario had a language other than English as their first language and were classified as English Language Learners. It is of note that although a fifth of the students are English Language Learners, they are not discussed in the specific language expectations. Cummins (2010) concluded in his study on teaching in a multilingual classroom that the education community should:

promote examination of the basic tenets of language learning and teaching in light of new insights in cognitive psychology and applied linguistics, together with the possibilities for enhancing communicative interaction and literacy development opened up by technological advances (p. 238).

It is clear that the operationalization of the Ontario kindergarten program expectations have not integrated Cummins’ multilingual perspective. For the program to implement this perspective, at least one expectation would be required to draw upon “bilingual instructional strategies” to utilize the first language of students and English to better perform components of literacy (p. 238).

**Literacy learning outside the classroom.** Gillen and Hall (2003) state that early childhood literacy should “move way beyond the limitations and restrictions of schooling and extend into all domains of the lives of people in early childhood” (p. 10). The new

draft full-day document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) contains a section that discusses building a community of learners, which includes the role of parents. This section dictated the importance of parents supporting their child's learning and working in partnership with the school.

### **Play**

An area important to conversations about kindergarten is the role of play in literacy learning. *The Revised Kindergarten Program* stated “[p]lay is a vehicle for learning. It provides opportunities for learning in a context in which children are at their most receptive” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 14). In this full-day kindergarten curriculum the Ontario Ministry of Education suggests that there are three forms of play: pretending, socio-dramatic, and constructive. During pretend play events, students “use language to create a shared pretend scenario” (p. 70). When kindergarten students participate in socio-dramatic play they determine tasks and roles, conduct storytelling, and create environmental print. The 2006 document states that during socio-dramatic play students use “literacy acquisition, narrative recall, and use of complex language” (p. 14). Constructive play includes drawing, painting, planning, and building. This form of play involves language and “development of fine motor control” (p. 14).

Many authors (Roskos, Christie & Richgels, 2003; Pascal, 2009; Roskos, 1988) have described the positive impact that play can have on literacy in a kindergarten classroom. Play allows for kindergarten students to learn in various areas through exploration and enjoyment. The use of play in kindergarten allows students to experiment with and utilize their language skills. In kindergarten “a literacy-enriched play environment exposes children to valuable print experiences and lets them practice

narrative skills” (Roskos, Christie & Richgels, 2003, p. 57). Pascal (2009) states, “a deliberate and effective play-based approach supports young children’s cognitive development” (p. 25). Roskos (1998) observed kindergarten aged children engage in play and determined that the two main areas that they engage in literacy are through creating stories and actually writing or reading as part of the play.

Saracho (2001) observed five kindergarten classrooms and examined how literacy was evident during play. The results showed that important aspects to the kindergarten students developing literacy through play included the physical classroom environment, literacy-enriched Centres, literacy Centres, and spontaneous play Centres. Saracho (2001) asserts that a classroom that engages literacy learning through play “involves numerous opportunities for children to practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening from symbolic play activities to communicating in an endless variety of forms and media” (p. 111).

Pickett (2002) followed literacy connections during play in kindergarten and found that the “play included many of the activities and conditions that are deemed necessary for literacy learning as they practiced skills and applied literacy concepts that were learned during formal literacy lessons” (p. 12). The same study found that the students would read and write various materials while they interacted with their peers and played in Centres and around the classroom.

### **How Does the Operational Curriculum Differ from the Intentional Curriculum in Kindergarten**

Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2005) state the “operational curriculum is the observed curriculum of what actually goes on hour after hour in the classroom” (p. 6) in

contrast to the intentional curriculum which is the set of written expectation that the “school system consciously intends” (p. 8). I found few research articles addressing ways in which the intentional curriculum differs from the operational curriculum. For example, Pickett (2002) found that during play students “demonstrated knowledge of alphabetic principle, conventions and functions of print, acquisition of basic sight words, and an appreciation of text as a means of communication” (p. 19). In my study, however, setting up a Centre is viewed as one way that a teacher can operationalize the curriculum. The operational curriculum allows “literacy routines [to] find their way into the play of children” (Roskos, 1988, p. 564).

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the history of kindergarten and sketched out an overview of Ontario’s early childhood education and care policies. I also discussed research that informs the Language strands of the Ontario government’s current Kindergarten documents and some background information about the importance of play in early learning. During the next step, I noted aspects of early childhood literacy that are not covered in the documents. In the next chapter I describe the data collected through interviews and observations in the two kindergarten classrooms. Chapter Five provides discussion of these data.



## **Chapter Four: Presentation of the Data**

### **Introduction**

As discussed in the previous three chapters, my study aimed to explore the operationalized curriculum in two Ontario kindergarten classrooms, one a half-day and one a full-day program. The data were collected through various methods, such as interviewing and observing in the classrooms. The data provide insight into ways in which the operationalized curriculum differed from the intentional curriculum in each classroom. They also reveal challenges that each teacher faced when teaching the Language curriculum. In this chapter I present the data in thematic categories such as staffing in the classrooms, amount of time dedicated to literacy, covering the language curriculum, and ability to work in various sizes of small groups including one-on-one instruction.

### **Research Sites and Participants**

Two teachers allowed me to observe their programs, shared their day plans, and participated in individual interviews. The half-day kindergarten teacher, Ms. Phillips (a pseudonym), was in her fifth year teaching kindergarten at that school. The full-day kindergarten teacher, Ms. Sallis (also a pseudonym) was in her ninth year teaching kindergarten at her current school. The first eight years were teaching half-day kindergarten and this was her first year teaching full-day kindergarten.

Both classrooms were located in a large Ontario city. The two schools were located less than ten kilometers apart. Ms. Phillips taught half-day kindergarten and her school will be referred to as the half-day school. 92 percent of the student population in the half-day school spoke a primary language other than English. 48 percent of the

students in the full-day school spoke a primary language other than English. According to the standardized test scores (EQAO, 2011), the overall academic successes of the schools were fairly similar. In the half-day school, 46 percent of the grade three students achieved the provincial standard; in the full-day school 40 percent of the grade three students achieved the standard.

Ms. Phillip's half-day class was in a co-educational setting that consisted of 22 students with 16 present on the day I observed. The full-day class was in a co-educational setting that consisted of 26 students and 22 of them were present the day I observed.

### **The Classrooms**

The two classrooms were set up and decorated in similar ways. Both classrooms had a door to the outside used as a main entrance and exit. In each case the door was shared with another kindergarten class. Adjacent to the communal door, there were hooks and storage compartments for each student to place belongings such as jackets, boots, school bag, and anything else they brought from home. On the other side of the storage area was the classroom. In both classrooms there was a word wall, a large display board on which the teacher had printed words that were frequently read and written in the classroom. The words were listed in alphabetical order. Both classrooms had designated socio-dramatic play areas where children were invited to pretend they were at home playing with imaginary stoves, ovens, sinks, dollhouses, and other household items. There were separate sections of the classrooms that were designated for various activities such as building objects out of wooden blocks, table for math work, a table for writing in small groups, tables for the whole class to be working at a table or

having snack, a bin full of sand, a bin full of water, and a carpet beside a dry erase board on the wall and an easel. On the walls of both classrooms, there were many decorative posters, letters, numbers, and similar points of reference for the students in various subjects. For example, classrooms had alphabet posters where each letter was illustrated with a picture of something that “starts with that letter.” Other items on the walls in both classrooms included labels of things in the classrooms such as chair, door, lights, and chalkboard.

Both classrooms had bookshelves and bookstands on which were displayed books such as *Curious George* (Rey, 1941), *Berenstain Bears* (Berenstain, Berenstain & Berenstain, 2005), *Dr. Suess* (Suess, 1957). A majority of the books contained coloured pictures, but there was variety in the amount of printed text relative to the pictures. In both classrooms there were also phonetic readers, books based on sound – symbol patterns that encourage beginning readers to use their growing ability to use graphophonics.

There were very few differences between the two physical spaces. Ms. Sallis’s full-day classroom was a little bigger than the half-day classroom. When I viewed these two classrooms, the full-day classroom did not contain any specific areas that the half-day classroom did not, but many areas such as the pretend house area and building blocks area seemed to be larger than in the half-day setting.

### **Centre Activities**

In each classroom an educator set up learning Centres at which children would engage in independent activities. Centres time was a regular feature of the daily schedule in each classroom. During Centre activities, students worked and played in

groups of various sizes with materials laid out by the teacher. Centres provided open-ended learning experiences and tasks designed by the teacher. Centres that were common to the two classrooms were the computer centre, sand table, and writing centre.

In the half-day classroom, the teacher set up Centres before the students arrived at school. In the full-day classroom, the ECE set up the classroom while Ms. Sallis was teaching on the carpet to the whole class. Once it was time for Centre activities, the teachers in both classrooms had discussions about where each student should go. In the half-day classroom, Ms. Phillips told the children which Centres or activities would be available and asked the students to put up their hands to indicate where they would like to participate. When describing each Centre, Ms. Phillips also stated the number of students who could attend a Centre at one time. As students raised their hands to indicate their wishes, Ms. Phillips would allow that number of students to go until the Centre was "full." Ms. Phillips had calculated the number of students there that day and decided that each Centre would have a predetermined number of students. This allowed Ms. Phillips to ensure that there were no more than five students at the writing centre with her.

On the day that I observed the full-day classroom, Ms. Sallis asked which students had not done an anti-bullying poster. Those students were to go to an area with the ECE to make one. Ms. Sallis also invited one student to read with her one-on-one. All the other students were allowed to choose any activity available in the classroom, which included two computers, toys, a sand table, a pretend-play house area, an area to build with blocks and Lego™, a classroom library where students could take books to read on the carpet. As the Centre time continued, Ms. Sallis called students in turn to

read one-on-one with her. During the Centre activities the students were free to change from activity to activity amongst the available activities in the classroom as long as they were not required to work directly with the ECE or full-day teacher.

### **Staffing in the Classroom**

All the educators in the kindergarten classrooms contributed to the implementation of the curriculum, regardless of the types of curriculum being implemented. However, the staffing in each classroom made a difference in how teachers operationalized the Language expectations. The half-day teacher had a volunteer in once a week and an EA once every three days. The volunteer usually read one-on-one with students. The EA helped the teacher prepare for activities in the classroom by performing tasks such as cutting out paper for use, setting up an area for the student activities, and cleaning up from a previous activity. Another aspect to the role of the EA was to supervise the larger group when the teacher was working with one student or working with multiple students in smaller groups. The full-day teacher had an ECE in the classroom full time, all day every day. This freed up the full-day teacher to work with one student or a small group of students on a consistent basis. I observed that with the ECE being in the full-day class all day, the ECE was able to supervise the students while the teacher worked with other students. The ECE also led some language events throughout the day during the daily ECE-lead activity and Centre activities. One ECE led activity involved having the full class sit in a group in a carpeted area to discuss the weather. The ECE asked what the weather was like at recess and they engaged in some shared writing by writing the word "sunny" on the board. While the students were at Centres, the ECE worked with five students in a guided writing exercise that involved

the students asking the ECE how to spell words and she would guide them towards the appropriate spelling. For example, the ECE teacher might ask, "What letter does 'sunny' start with?" Then she would lead the class in a sing-song where they sang, "s-u-n-n-y, and sunny was the weather" to the tune of the children's song "Old MacDonald" in place of "B-I-N-G-O, and Bingo was his name-o". During the interview, each teacher discussed her ability to work closer with students when other members of the teaching team were in the classroom.

The half-day teacher indicated that she was able to implement many more one-on-one and small group language instruction when she had her EA in the classroom.

When asked about this Ms. Phillips responded:

Another challenge is the lack of support – staffing. I am by myself a fair bit. I have an Ed Assistant every third day so in a week my Ed Assistant might be in my class 1 or 2 days a week, which means when you look at doing something like one-on-one reading or guided reading group you are so limited because you have 20 children you are supposed to be supervising. So when you really want to do something that requires one-on-one or small group attention I try to only do that when there is another adult in the room – another paid educational adult.

The full-day teacher made substantial use of time afforded by additional staff to create language learning opportunities in the classroom. During the interview Ms. Sallis discussed the teaching team:

You know, I am really, really fortunate in that I have a really good partnership. The ECE and I work really well together and we pick up

where the other one drops off. It is seamless a lot of the time. As you saw today, I was in and out of the class and she was able to pick up and carry the program forward.

I observed that the ECE took over the teaching of the whole group when the teacher was working one-on-one with a student, or when the teacher left the classroom for a moment. When this occurred the students knew that Ms. Sallis was unavailable to assist them so they would immediately go to the ECE, who was able to help them with literacy questions, social interaction situations, and general questions. In my field notes from the full-day classroom visit, I wrote that "it is interesting to see the ECE field so many questions while Ms. Sallis is reading with students individually".

It appeared through observations, interviews and reviews of the day plans that having another adult as a member of the teaching team opened up many opportunities to implement language experiences. These two educators seemed to work extremely well together and I inferred that this harmony enhanced the learning environment and overall program. During the interview, the full-day teacher stated that she was "fortunate in that I have a really good partnership. The ECE and I work really well together and we pick up where the other one drops off. It is seamless a lot of the time". As discussed in the next chapter, although this partnership worked well, there may be classrooms in Ontario where the full-day teacher and the ECE do not have such a professional and positive working relationship.

In the full-day classroom, the teacher assumed most of the lead roles, such as leading the whole group instruction. The ECE led one activity after recess when the teacher was not in the classroom, prepared the classroom for activities and snack, and

took students from classroom to classroom during transitions. The ECE only led Language activities to the whole group when the full-day teacher was out of the classroom and in small groups when the teacher was working with another student or other students.

The two classrooms I observed had a separate reading area for an adult to read with a student one-on-one. In the half-day classroom the volunteer read in this area with some of the students. In the full-day classroom this was the teacher's area that Ms. Sallis utilized to instruct one-on-one. I did not observe or hear about any differences in the classroom setup for the purpose of staffing in the classroom. The only difference was the in the one-on-one reading areas in each classroom, the adult reading with students was unable to view the whole classroom. Therefore, an adult could read with a student in this area only when there was another teaching adult in the classroom.

I inferred that the teacher was the lead staff member and planned the day. Throughout the day I observed the ECE ask for direction many times, such as asking if she should prepare snack at a certain time and which students she should write with during Centre time. I inferred that the teacher planned the day and which students performed which tasks when and what the teacher and the ECE would perform throughout the day. The one time that the ECE seemed to plan her own was during the post-recess ECE-led time where they played outside and then discussed the weather being "sunny" in the shared writing experience mentioned earlier. The ECE did perform many of the organizational tasks such as putting the chairs off the tables at the start of the day, put the chairs on top of the tables at the end of the day for the cleaners, prepared snack, cleaned the floor, and wiped the tables clean. The ECE did perform language



teaching in shared and guided writing capacity while I was there. I observed the ECE do “the weather is sunny” activity and discuss making anti-bullying posters with a group of students. Outside of leading those activities mentioned earlier, the ECE was there in a supporting role. She supervised the students that allowed the teacher to work one-on-one with students. During this time I observed the ECE discipline a student that was misbehaving and guided students back onto task that were not staying on task.

### **Time Dedicated to Language Curriculum**

When asked which days during a week teachers dedicated to teaching the language curriculum, both the full-day and the half-day teachers responded: “Every day!” Both teachers explained that language is embedded in everything that they do in the kindergarten program. Throughout their respective interviews the two teachers referred many times to the manner in which they were able to integrate language into almost all aspects of kindergarten school life. The half-day teacher, Ms. Phillips, stated that language learning “is just embedded in everything that we do”. The full-day teacher, Ms. Sallis said, “The literacy component is incorporated throughout the entire day.”

The teachers’ comments were consistent with my observations of each classroom. Language was built into the half-day students’ routines when they entered the class, the carpet time, and the Centre activities. In the half-day classroom the students were invited to participate in language activities and games when going about everyday activities. For example, when the students had a part of their snack they required the teacher to open, they played a guessing game by hiding their food behind their back and telling the teacher the first letter of that food for her to guess. It was apparent that both teachers in this study were able to embed language into the daily routines and activities for the

students. Students participated in language experiences throughout the day and these were integrated into their daily routines, activities, and when working in small groups with a member of the early-learning team.

The day plans were consistent with my observations. Each classroom had dedicated time to either a language experience or an activity that involved one each day. There was carpet time each day, which allowed each teacher to review Language instruction or introduce new concepts. Centres were also worked into the daily schedule of each classroom, which based on the interviews and observations the Centres usually, if not always, involved at least some students performing language work.

The next area I examined was the amount of time each week that Language expectations were operationalized in each classroom. When asked if she felt that she had more time to teach Language in a full-day setting compared to her nine years teaching half-day kindergarten, the full-day teacher responded: "They have a lot more time to make those social connections, but the teaching time is probably about the same." It was not possible to decipher the exact amount of instructional time spent on Language in each classroom as literacy was "embedded" into many activities throughout the day in both classrooms and language development occurs outside of instructional time.

(Instructional time in this study is time in which the teacher directly teaches a language strategy or lesson to the whole class or a small group). When comparing the daybooks to observe the time allocated to teaching time, the full-day class had significantly more time. The intended instructional time is calculated as the time the kindergarten teacher has intended to provide whole group, small group, or one-on-one Language instruction.

It is important to note, of course, that language is learned in an ongoing way, not only during instructional times.

*Figure 1*  
*Percentage of Day Spent in Each Activity*

	Half Day	Full Day
On carpet	18.7	21.1
At Centres	27.7	13.2
Music	10.3	10.5
Arts	0.0	3.9
Physical Education	13.5	2.6
Library / Lab	0.0	2.6
Snack	12.9	5.3
Arrival / Dismissal Routines	13.5	10.5
Whole class ECE Led Activities	0.0	2.6
Transitions (from class - class, etc...)	1.9	0.0
With a guest speaker	1.3	0.0
Show & Tell	0.0	3.9
Lunch / Recess	0.0	23.7

For this study the instructional time for Language expectations included carpet instruction time and time for Centres. Although the Centres were not always focused on Language expectations, it was an opportunity that both teachers utilized to provide language instruction to at least one student. The carpet time generally involves the whole class on the carpet listening and learning from one educator. The educators implemented daily routines such as discussing the calendar and reading a daily message written to them from their teacher, introducing new concepts to the whole class, and involved teachers modeling certain reading and writing strategies to the students. The instructional time in this study discounted times such as music, art, physical education, library/lab, snack, arrival and dismissal routines, whole-class, ECE-led activities, transitions between classes, guest speakers, show and tell, and lunch/recess. "Show and Tell" is certainly a Language experience, but it was disregarded from the equation that

identified instructional time because it was an opportunity for the student to speak about something specific and usually did not involve the teacher in planned instruction. After reviewing each teacher's daybook, I noted that the full-day class had almost twice the amount of planned instructional time. Figure 2 displays the difference between full-day and half-day classes with regards to carpet instruction and centre-based learning time as 650 minutes and 360 minutes respectively. The difference as can be seen in Figure 2 is 180% more in the full-day setting.

*Figure 2*  
*Number of Minutes Spent in Various Activities in a Week*

	Half Day	Full Day	% More in FD
At school	775	1900	245.2%
At carpet area	145	400	275.9%
At Centres	215	250	116.3%
Music	80	200	250.0%
Arts	0	75	N/A
Physical Education	105	50	HD more
Library / Lab	0	50	N/A
Snack	100	100	100.0%
Arrival / Dismissal routines	105	200	190.5%
Whole class activities (ECE leading)	0	50	N/A
Transitions (from class - class, etc...)	15	0	HD more
With guest speaker	10	0	HD more
Show & Tell	0	75	N/A
Lunch / Recess	0	450	N/A

*Notes: N/A indicates this was not planned to occur; HD more indicates half-day had more time in the given activity.*

The full-day schedule afforded a variety of in-school learning opportunities not afforded by a half-day schedule. Language expectations could be either directly or indirectly taught during many routine moments in the school day such as music, arrival and dismissal routines, show and tell, library time, and ECE lead activities. The half-day program did have music and the two programs had similar percentages of their programs

dedicated to music. However, the full-day class had two and a half times more music during the week than the half-day class. Both classrooms had language present during the arrival and dismissal routines. Independent reading, independent writing, and oral communication were prevalent during these times in both classrooms. The majority of these activities was done independently and did not involve the teacher or ECE. In both classrooms the teacher helped the students stay on task by saying things such as "remember to sign your name on the sign-in sheet" and "remember you should be reading quietly to yourself right now". Due to more time in the day, the full-day classroom was able to schedule almost double the amount of time (190.5%) the half-day program could. During the week the half-day class had no time dedicated to show and tell, library time, or ECE lead activities and the full-day class had 75 minutes, 50 minutes, and 50 minutes in the week respectively.

During my observations in each class, it appeared that the full-day kindergarten class was more relaxed during instructional time. I noted in my field notes during the half-day visit that "transitions were short and the class moves from activity to activity quickly." Conversely, during the full-day visit I made a field note commenting "for the second time today the students had a long transition between activities." This referred to transitions between classes, such as between music and carpet time that lasted between two and five minutes. It appeared that the half-day kindergarten teacher was required to be more efficient with time with regards to dedicated teaching time. There was a little more structure to the Centres in the half-day setting, while the students in the full-day class freely switched between activities and had more activities to choose from. The main difference was that during the Centre activities the full-day teacher was able to

work one-on-one with a student through all of their Centre time while the half-day teacher could only do so once in awhile.

Previous studies have compared the use of instructional time between full-day and half-day kindergartens and found similar results. These findings are consistent with findings by Anderson (1983) and Elicker and Mathur (1997) that students in full-day classes were exposed to more literacy instruction than their half-day counterparts. Plucker et al. (2004) also examined kindergarten schedules, but on a larger scale, and found that the instructional time in full-day kindergarten was 284.1 minutes as opposed to 141.47 minutes in the half-day kindergarten.

#### **Language Expectations Addressed**

The two teachers each expressed a strong belief that they were generally able to complete the kindergarten program and all the expectations it contains within the two years of kindergarten. Ms. Phillips responded in the interview that in her half-day class, "I would say we are covering if not everything – almost everything." When asked if she would cover all expectations in her full-day kindergarten, Ms. Sallis answered, "Yes, in the two years." Throughout the two years each teacher believed that they were able to teach to each expectation either explicitly or through it being embedded into their overall program.

After hearing from each teacher that they were able to cover each curriculum expectation, I asked each of them about the amount of time and quality of time they were able to spend on the language curriculum. Ms. Phillips in her half-day class said, "I would definitely touch on every expectation, but I wouldn't be able to teach them as thoroughly as I'd like to".

**Oral language.** The oral language expectations focus on kindergarten students becoming effective communicators (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 72). According to the Ministry document, the teacher or teaching team “can guide oral language development by listening attentively to and observing children’s responses and interactions, by providing models of richer responses to guide children’s thinking, and by introducing new vocabulary” (p. 68). Due to approximately half of the students or more in each school having a language other than English as their home language, oral language was a large component of the intended and operationalized curricula in each of the classrooms. The half-day teacher, Ms. Phillips stated: “Yes, we spend a fair amount of time on oral language.” She said that the oral language experiences that her students could experience included group discussions, discussing weekends each Monday, through music, through socialization at Centres, and modeling appropriate and expanded vocabulary.

Ms. Sallis stated that inside her full-day class, “we have the opportunity to share their news at the start of the day. Everybody has that opportunity. Typically between four and six [students] depending on the time. Then again, oral language is woven throughout the day.”

Based on the interviews and observations in the classrooms, I inferred that both classes utilized general discussions as a main context for oral language development. These discussions included adult to student on the carpet during full class lessons and little discussions throughout the day. These little discussions happened when students arrived and departed for the day with commonplace interactions such as “hello, good-bye, how was your weekend?” Another method of teaching and practicing oral language

was implemented as student-to-student discussions, which occurred while the students socialized when performing tasks at Centres, during playtime, and during other times in the day the students socialized. Centres involved students participating in various activities throughout the room at preset areas such as playing with sand, water, at a computer, building with blocks, writing something specific, performing math, and other teacher planned opportunities.

**Reading.** A key expectation for reading stressed in the kindergarten program is to “demonstrate understanding and critical awareness of a variety of written materials that are read by and with the” educators (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 80). This focused on developing reading skills by being read to and reading to their teachers in a variety of contexts. Another key aspect to the program document was to “use reading strategies that are appropriate for beginning readers in order to make sense of a variety of written materials” (p. 87). This expectation focuses on beginning reader strategies such as using the pictures as meaning clues and for guessing the words, memorizing words that appear frequently in texts and developing phonemic awareness.

Ms. Phillips stated that in her half-day class the students read a lot on the carpet, play a daily mixing game, read a morning message daily, perform a reading train, independent reading with books at their level that would have been attained by the teacher through a formal reading assessment, utilize big books for shared and guided reading, and read words at the Centres and all around the classroom. Ms. Sallis spoke to the reading opportunities in her class:

They have free choice activity reading in the morning when they get in here. They have one-on-one – I try to hit everyone, but not always – one-



on-one reading at home and at school. So we have a home-school journal they work on and again, we have... There is a group of girls that sit and do a lot of independent reading and we have access to dictionaries and environmental print that they can pull and use. Again, part of it teacher led, a lot of it is student led and some of it is just spontaneous.

It is clear that each teacher tried to include a lot of reading in their program and ensure that words were visible all over their classrooms. This environmental print included word walls, classroom signs, alphabets, posters with words, and student names. Students utilized this environmental print to aid in their reading and writing by referring to the print on the walls and copying them where necessary. There appears to be guided, shared, modeled, one-on-one, and independent reading opportunities in each classroom.

**Writing.** In Ontario kindergartens, students “communicate in writing, using strategies that are appropriate for beginners” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 88). These strategies include writing simple messages using symbols, letters, and pictures to become aware that writing can express and meaning to the reader. The students are also expected to begin writing about their own experiences or about materials they know about such as books they have read or been read to.

During my observations in each classroom, there appeared to be a lot of writing opportunities. In the half-day classroom students participated in writing their name to sign in, there was a writing centre, and the students had writing opportunities in the math centre. During the interview with Ms. Phillips she stated:

I make sure there are writing utensils at almost every Centre. So with this math / art activity it also had a place to write what shape they used. At the

block centre there are clipboards and pencils there because the kids have been really interested in doing plans before they build lately. Even if you aren't writing specific letters you are writing something and communicating that on a piece of paper and make it look realistic. We have an easel set up at the sand table so they can write on it. Sometimes I will write a specific question for them to answer and sometimes they can just write what they did there to represent what they have been working on. The writing centre has a lot of writing. I make books and they have sticky notes and I put different materials there so the children can write there. There are shared writing together at the carpet – today it was shapes. Sometimes if we are going to journals then I will do an example and they will help me spell everything and they know to look for words on the word cart to know how to spell it if it is on the word cart. They write their name when they sign in every day. We write a lot.

Ms. Sallis described in her full-day class there is a special helper each day that “gets to sit with me and we work on sentence structure, word decoding, or whatever it is that they need”. It appeared that Ms. Sallis was consciously bringing multiple forms of writing into her classroom as she went on to describe other writing experiences in her classroom:

Sometimes we will do journal writing and sometimes we will do word lists or themes lists. So if someone comes in and says oh I saw robin, we will make a list of all the words that can help describe robin. Today they were

at the sand table and looking at the different properties of sand - wet versus dry. Tomorrow we will pull it back and write a list together.

**Media texts.** The main concept in the media texts section of the Ministry document was to “demonstrate a beginning understanding and critical awareness of media texts” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 91). The students were to accomplish this by “begin[ning] to respond critically to animated works [and to] communicate their ideas verbally and non-verbally about a variety of media materials” (p. 91).

In the half-day class the students were exposed to various media texts such as grocery fliers and magazines. Newspapers were laid out to protect tables during art, but not for reading purposes. Ms. Phillips utilized a lot of music in the classroom, but not the radio. The students used computers daily during Centres and during the interview Ms. Phillips described another media text she used a lot:

We actually use a lot of Youtube. I prescreen it obviously. They are on the computers during activity time if they so choose on a couple programs there. We actually use youtube a lot – the kids were very interested in bees and so we did a huge bee and sunflower unit and I couldn't find a lot of real examples so I went to youtube.

Ms. Sallis also noted that she only used newspapers for non-reading purposes and she used the same magazines Ms. Phillips as they both utilize the children's magazines, *Chickadee* and *Chirp*. In the full-day class students had access to the computers daily. Ms. Sallis said that her class went to the “computer lab two times a week – at least 2 times a week”. When the full-day

teacher thought about more media texts she responded: “We have been working a lot on non-fiction. We will pull out photos or non-fiction texts and labels and that sort of thing and menus.”

### **Professional Development**

Both Ms. Phillips and Ms. Sallis told me that they felt fortunate to receive the amount of professional development they have received over the last year or so. They both commented during their interviews that they had learned a lot about running records and how to use them in the kindergarten classroom. Ms. Sallis could not recall the name of her PD, but when she described it, it sounded very similar in content and purpose as the PD Ms. Phillips called “comprehensive literacy”. Ms. Phillips described this PD as follows:

Right now we are doing a fairly intense PD – it is 6 sessions on comprehensive literacy ... It is basically teaching us how to do running records and introducing us to what Reading Recovery really looks like in grade one so we can better prepare children for grade one.

Ms. Sallis also noted the importance of this professional development for her preparation of students for grade one. She stated that the goal of this professional development was “to get these kids ready for grade one and to target their needs.” It appeared that key components of this professional development were strategies and concepts that would prepare the students for grade one. This focus marks a change of direction for kindergarten. As Russell (2011) explains, “once a distinctive educational model focused on the child’s social, emotional, and moral development, media images increasingly cast kindergarten’s purpose as the beginning of serious academic

instruction" (p. 237). It appears that kindergarten is focusing more on formal instruction of reading and writing than in the past.

The two teachers had different responses when asked about what strategies they would like to utilize more in their classroom. Ms. Phillips stated that she would like to use running records more efficiently and "knee-to-knee discussion groups", which allow the students to work on their sharing and overall oral language. "Knee-to-knee discussion" groups have pairs or small groups discuss something back and forth about a specific topic. Ms. Sallis response was centred on interactive writing, which she describes as "to get the kids to experiment with the writing in front of the whole class". These two teachers shared the same experiences with regards to professional development, but different perspectives on strategies that they would like to utilize more.

#### **Working One-on-One with Students on Language**

The two teaching participants in this study each worked one-on-one with students in their classes. Although both teachers attempted to work one-on-one with students there was a significant variation in the amount of time each teacher was able to spend with students individually. The full day teacher stated that she worked one-on-one with students every day. This individual work was usually reading, but at times included writing and math. When asked a clarifying question about how often in a given week she works with an individual child, the full-day teacher responded that she "would probably sit one-on-one with them probably three times a week for each student." The half-day teacher is able to find little moments each day to work one-on-one with students. When students asked questions about language work or during Centre time the half-day teacher was able to make it an individual teaching moment. However,

dedicated and planned time to working so closely with students happened only once a week. Ms. Phillips stated:

Formally where I can actually spend a bigger chunk of time with a child one-on-one would only be when my Ed Assistant is in the room and that would probably be once a week. Once a week I really try to take the time – either in a guided reading group with 3 or 4 kids or do one-on-one reading with a kid.

My observation of the full-day teacher's ability to dedicate more time working one-on-one with students corroborates comments made by teachers during the one day visit. The full-day teacher read individually with eight students and the half-day teacher was unable to plan time to work individually with any student. The half-day teacher was able to create literacy events lasting a few seconds working one-on-one akin to what she mentioned in her interview. The half-day class also had four students that were able to read one-on-one with a classroom volunteer that comes in weekly. Having the ECE in the full-day classroom allowed the teacher to read one-on-one with the students and not worry about the supervision of the other students.

### **Small Group Instruction**

Each teacher participant utilized small group instruction. They both saw the value in teaching language to small groups when possible. The day I observed the full-day class, there was a few times during which I observed the ECE implementing the language curriculum with a small group. The ECE had five students in a guided writing exercise as she wrote on a wipe board while students copied and made an anti-bullying sign. On another occasion the teacher did a shared writing exercise with eight students

while they wrote a card for another student together. When interviewing the full-day teacher Ms. Sallis said:

Other times I'll target the seniors or pull out the students that are struggling with letter-sound correlation so it will depend on what I am working. We always have assessment going on and I am aware of where we can pull the students.

I found it interesting that she chose the word "we" as I believe she was referring to her partnership with the ECE, who, on the day I observed also led writing experiences, one a shared writing experience and the other a guided writing experience. This partnership allowed the teaching team to provide varied language instruction regardless of whether the teacher was working one-on-one with a student or performing other tasks in the classroom.

The half-day teacher responded that she did utilize small-group language instruction and found it very important. During the interview she indicated that she has really enjoyed using guided reading groups and that has been very helpful. The obstacle for the half-day teacher was that she often got interrupted while trying to complete small group instruction when the EA was not in the classroom, which was the majority of the time. While observing the half-day teacher's class I watched some guided writing with seven students while they wrote about a kite they were making during Centres time. By having all students busy at various Centres, the teacher was able to sit at the writing centre and work with the students there. However, she complained in the interview of getting interrupted as children were arguing over who got what toy or about the computer "breaking".

## Challenges

The data revealed challenges experienced by the teachers in their attempts to address the Language expectations. Ms. Sallis stated:

I find that, again, since the literacy component is incorporated throughout the entire day, I find that sometimes the expectations are very specific so to pull it back to a very specific expectation is hard and to interweave it into everything we do. And then a lot of times what we do is go back and say we have hit these three expectations while trying to do math or hit that expectation while trying to do science. It really bounces back and forth and I find it hard to be specific time so we try to weave it through everything.

When asked about the challenges she encountered, Ms. Phillips responded:

A lot. Some things that you can control and some things that you can't control. Something you can't control is that the students here – very few would have English as their first language. For a lot of them they come into junior kindergarten having no interaction experience whatsoever, they come from a family where English isn't spoken at home, they don't have the means to speak English at home or in the community. You can go to the shopping mall and buy clothes and groceries or pharmacy and still speak your first language. That is great for maintaining the first language, but is a struggle for when they start school. For the juniors that is what they spend most of their first year doing, learning what English letters look like and what English sounds like, and how to talk. That is certainly a challenge but it is amazing how quickly most of them pick it up – this age



group is amazing. Another challenge is the lack of support – staffing. I am by myself a fair bit. I have an Ed Assistant every third day so in a week my Ed Assistant might be in my class 1 or 2 days a week, which means when you look at doing something like one-on-one reading or guided reading group you are so limited because you have 20 children you are supposed to be supervising. So when you really want to do something that requires one-on-one or small group attention I try to only do that when there is another adult in the room – another paid educational adult. I do have a volunteer that comes in once a week and does part of the reading program which is great, but as a teacher I would like to be the one delivering that myself and using it as an assessment tool, but you work with what you can. Probably staffing is a big challenge.

It is worth noting that Ms. Sallis focused on operationalizing the mandated expectations and did not mention anything to do with staffing. By contrast, Ms. Phillips did not feel that she could accomplish as much as she could if she had another teaching adult in the room on a more regular basis.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I described the two classrooms I observed for my study with reference to the physical layout, the composition of the class, and makeup of the educational team. I have outlined the Centre activities and discussed how they were utilized in each classroom. I discussed the amounts of time dedicated to Language expectations and noted how the full-day and half-day classes differed along these dimensions of curriculum. I also discussed how the Language expectations were

addressed, specifically expectations related to oral language, reading, writing, and media texts. Teachers' thoughts about professional development are also covered in this chapter.

A variety of data were collected from day plans, observations, and interviews. These data sources provided information about staffing in the classrooms, amount of time teachers dedicated to the Language expectations, and the affordances of the half-day and full-day settings for working with groups of various sizes, including one-on-one instruction.

The Language expectations for the two classes did not differ; the physical settings too were similar, and teachers used many of the same teaching strategies. The data revealed, however, that the different amounts of time available to spend on language activities and the different staffing formula in the full-day and half-day programs did have consequences for the operationalized curriculum. The full-day program allowed for a more relaxed pace, more variety in grouping and more time for the teacher to spend with each child as an individual. In the next chapter I discuss these findings further and identify some implications of the findings for practice and for research.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

### Introduction

In this chapter I discuss and raise questions about the data presented in Chapter Four. I first discuss the data in relation to Schwab's five curriculum commonplaces: subjects, teachers, students, the milieu or context, and curricular processes. Finally I identify some implications of my findings for research and practice.

### Curricular Commonplaces: Subjects

My study took as its focus the Language expectations for Ontario Kindergarten programs. Both participating teachers expressed confidence that they could cover the majority of expectations in the two years allotted. I inferred from their use of the word "cover" that they could address each expectation with the students. Neither teacher indicated the level at which the students would master the expectation, but that they could address each one.

The two teachers intentionally addressed Language expectations on a daily basis and tried to embed Language learning opportunities in activities throughout the day. As noted in the previous chapter, however, they organized and paced their instruction in ways that reflected the differing amounts of time available in a half-day and full-day program.

Oral language expectations featured prominently in each teacher's intended curriculum. While numerous studies stress the importance of developing oral language in kindergarten (Dragan, 2005; Cummins, 2010; Roskos, Christie & Richgels, 2003; Roskos, 2009; Byrnes & Wasik, 2009), the teachers referred to the English language learning needs of many of their students. Ms. Phillips, for example, talked of first

language maintenance as an obstacle to learning English at school. She stated that the large majority of her students would not have English as their first language. The majority of students at both schools spoke English as an additional language, a fact that had implications for all aspects of language and literacy learning, but particularly for oral language development. Cummins (2000) states that English Language Learners typically take five years to “catch up academically to their native-speaking peers” (p. 24). In the same article, Cummins explains that mastery of their native tongue can assist in the learning of a new language, in this case English.

The two teachers allotted similar proportions of class time to oral language. However, half-day students enjoyed fewer opportunities at school to engage in social and playful uses of language. Cummins (1980) discusses two concepts, basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). CALP are “those aspects of language proficiency which are closely related to the development of literacy skills in” their first language and their second language (p. 177). He writes that a student’s BICS, that is their “accent, oral fluency, and sociolinguistic competence may be independent of CALP for a variety of reasons and it is not being suggested that these latter skills represent a unitary dimension” (p. 177).

Most full-day students had lunch and recess at school, which afforded them more time for socializing and practicing the BICS of English. They also had more scheduled time for Centres and other informal activities and more opportunities to interact with adults. Many of the oral language expectations could be addressed while the students socialized with each other. For example, each week the full-day students had 450 minutes of lunch and recess (ninety minutes a day). One activity that was regularly

scheduled in the full-day program, but not in the half-day setting was “Show and Tell” where a student would bring an object to school and tell the class about it. It is possible that the half-day program teacher would schedule this activity at some point during the year, but it was not mentioned in the day plans that I received. Many oral language expectations can be addressed in the context of “Show and Tell”. Opportunities exist for students “to talk about their thinking, to reflect, and to solve problems” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p.76). They “describe personal experiences, using vocabulary and details appropriate to the situation” (p.78). Moreover, the students who watch and listen to Show and Tell can ask questions about the object being described; they “listen and respond to others for a variety of purposes” (p.73). Show and Tell also provides opportunities for children to talk about what matters to them and to share “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1994, para. 2) from home. Moll refers to “Funds of knowledge” as the strategies and “bodies of knowledge that are essential for to a household’s functioning and well-being” (para. 2).

Finally, the activity provides the teacher with valuable informal assessment data and an opportunity to support the child’s language learning through active listening, recasting students’ comments and questions, and so on. The new draft full-day program document stated English Language Learners “may use body language rather than speech or they may use their first language until they have gained enough proficiency in English to feel confident of their interpretations and responses” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 38).

As noted earlier in the thesis, the reading and writing strands of the Language expectations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, 2010) focus primarily on printed

texts. Students are expected to show an interest in reading, tell about the kinds of books and other texts that they enjoy, respond to, make predictions and connections, and understand basic knowledge of how printed texts work. Students display their knowledge of printed works by (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) holding the book right side up, following along from left to right, and “begin to recognize the difference between letters and words” (p. 81). These expectations were addressed in each class as students were exposed to a variety of print texts, listened to the teachers read, and participated in shared and guided reading lessons. Both teachers referenced reading aloud to the class and my observations confirm that reading aloud was a frequent activity in both programs.

A substantial body of research informed by emergent literacy theory (e.g. Roskos, Christie & Richgels, 2003; Vukelich & Christie, 2009) indicates that letter recognition and phonemic awareness are centrally important to print literacy development in kindergarten. During the interviews, both teachers talked of stressing letter recognition and beginning phonics. Ms. Sallis said: “In the JK year we focus on letter recognition, phonic recognition, and sound correspondence. Then in senior kindergarten we focus more on spelling for grade one and developing the reading skills.” Ms. Phillips stated that with her junior kindergarten students she focuses on “learning what English letters look like and what English sounds like.”

The teaching of reading strategies followed a similar pattern in the two classes. Strategy teaching was aligned with the current notions of “best practices” found in the literature (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Morris, Bloodgood and Perney, 2003). However, much of research that comprises “best practices” literature reflects a monolingual approach to the teaching of reading and

writing (Edwards, 2009; King & Hornberger, 2005) common in English speaking countries. Supporters of multilingual perspectives (Edwards, 2009; Cummins, 2010) have stated that a monolingual perspective disregards the student's first language and any connections between them that adversely affect the ability to learn the new language.

A noticeable difference in reading practices between the half-day and full-day class was the amount of time each teacher spent reading one-on-one with children. According to Taberski (2000), "Individualized instruction is invaluable when learning a new skill"(p.125). This includes all areas of literacy, but reading and writing skills in particular. Individual instruction allows the teacher to ensure students are receiving instruction specific to their unique needs. Taberski believes various group sizes can be utilized to teach reading, but "they take on a different quality when it's just the child, the book, and the teacher" (p.125). Dahl and Freppon (1995) also state that when teaching new skills, individual help enables children who are experiencing difficulty to "focus on the lesson and increase their learning efforts" (p. 64).

The teachers' comments and my observations indicated that much of the teachers' one-on-one time with individual children focused on reading with the child. Not surprisingly, Ms. Sallis was able to spend significantly more time working one-on-one than Ms. Phillips. Ms. Phillips stated that she could generally only read one-on-one with a child when her educational assistant was in the room, noting that "once a week I really try to take the time -- either in a guided reading group with three or four kids or do one-on-one reading with a kid." Volunteers also listened to children read and during my observation sessions, four students read closely with a volunteer. The students in the full-day class received one-on-one reading instruction from the teacher a lot more frequently.

Ms. Sallis said: "Every day the special helper (i.e., a designated student) gets to sit with me and we work on sentence structure, word decoding, or whatever it is that they need."

In Ms. Sallis' class a new special helper was chosen each day. Special helpers worked on specific guided writing tasks in front of the class while the rest of the class supported the process by observing and offering ideas and suggestions. Ms. Phillips also noted that each day she chose a student to write a sentence in front of the class.

There is no way to accurately quantify the amount of time each class dedicated to writing expectations. Both teachers included shared or guided writing experiences daily and each day engaged in guided writing with an individual student in front of the class. In addition to drawing on vocabulary knowledge and oral language skills, letter recognition and phonemic awareness, writing in kindergarten requires students to experiment with and practice letter formation. The teachers augmented opportunities afforded by pretend play situations with scheduled opportunities for children to experiment with writing guided by an adult at the writing centre. In the full-day classroom, I noticed that the writing activity, an anti-bullying poster, provided an opportunity to combine drawing and writing. Likewise, in the half-day classroom, students drew and wrote about shapes they had drawn.

When reviewing the teachers' day plans the only significant difference between the full-day and half-day plans for utilizing media texts was that the full-day class utilized the computer lab for 50 minutes during the week. The half-day class did not have computer lab time built into their weekly schedule. Likewise, my interview questions about the use of media texts elicited almost identical answers from the two teachers. They made magazines such as *Chirp*, *Chickadee*, and *Owl* available and employed menus



and grocery flyers in planned literacy activities. Ms. Phillips mentioned the use of curriculum-related videos, both on DVD/cassette and on the Internet. Ms. Sallis mentioned that photographs in non-fiction materials were a resource in her classroom too. Both classes utilized two computers during Centre activity time. Neither of the teachers spoke specifically about the nature of the computer games that the students played. I observed students playing educational games that addressed math and language expectations, thereby corroborating Liberman, Bates and So's (2009) finding that "many digital media products and interactive toys for young children ... teach language and reading readiness skills, such as the alphabet, phonics, word recognition, (and) word building" (p.274). It seemed, however, that the students were playing more math games than language games on the days I observed.

#### **Curriculum Commonplaces: Teachers**

As noted above, Ms. Sallis was able to work one-on-one with students frequently whereas Ms. Phillips was rarely able to do so. The reason for the difference, in my view, was not only time available, but also the child-to-staff ratio. The full-day class was staffed by Ms. Sallis and an ECE who worked with small groups and supervised the whole class while Ms. Sallis worked individually with students. Ms. Phillips described her frustration at being the only professional assigned to her classroom and noted that many questions from students and behaviour issues prevented her from working one-on-one with children. However, Ms. Phillips said that there were one-on-one moments, but they were not usually long moments: "Just a little direction here and there." Ms. Phillips noted too that she was able to work one-on-one with a student when her Educational Assistant was present. It appeared to me that the addition of a qualified ECE provided

the most noticeable advantage to the full-day program as the teacher in a full-day class has more opportunities to work one-on-one, do assessments, and provide individual instruction and support. In Ms. Sallis's day plans the ECE was not mentioned in many places. An "ECE activity" was mentioned, but the day plans focused on what the students would be doing and listed the students she planned to work with individually. I inferred in my observations that the ECE knew the activity or students to which she should direct her attention. However, I did not witness any planning conversations between the teacher and ECE.

Ms. Sallis and Ms. Phillips appeared to fulfill similar professional roles in the classroom. They explained routines and which students should go where at certain times. They instructed new material and review concepts to the whole class. Each teacher fulfilled the role of a nurturer by caring for the students. During my observations I watched Ms. Phillips and Ms. Sallis each gently take care of a child that was crying. However, Ms. Sallis was able to be instruct one-on-one a lot more and Ms. Phillips was required to be a nurturer more often as the students in the full-day class could be cared for by Ms. Sallis or the ECE.

The professional development opportunities described by the teachers were extremely similar and their descriptions actually made it sound as if they were currently participating in the exact same program. It appears that as the province moves to full-day kindergarten, the professional development opportunities have been planned centrally.

#### **Curricular Commonplaces: Students**

I did not focus my observations on the students. I could have identified the student's involvement in addressing Language expectations and made inferences about

my observations. I might also have been able to learn what the half-day students did when they were not in school. It would have been interesting to note if and how the Language expectations were being addressed outside of the kindergarten classroom.

I did make inferences about the representation of kindergarten students in the Ministry of Education program documents, the teachers' plans, and the teachers' comments about students and what students needed. For example, when the teachers shared their views on play-based learning and when they discussed professional development activities, they also articulated an assumption that the purpose of kindergarten is to "ready" children for grade one. The purpose of kindergarten in this view was to get ready for something rather than a set of educational experiences of worth to children themselves. I inferred that kindergarten was being aligned with grade school and the move to full-day kindergarten appears to further this alignment.

The full-day class had many more transitions between subjects and activities in the classroom, and more transitions from the classroom into other areas of the school. A transition occurs when the class is required to change from one activity to another. Both classes needed to leave the class and walk to classes for physical education and music. In addition, the full-day class walked to another area in the school for art, library/lab, and lunch/recess. There were also transitions within the class where students were required to clean up activities, all join on the carpet, get dressed to go home, and prepare for snack. Transitions can teach children how to share and clean up, walk "properly" in halls, and various activities that are required to be a "good member of the class". However, more transitions can create anxieties for children and take away time for learning and socializing.

It is important to note that there were no special needs children in either classroom. Perhaps if there had been a special needs child in one of the classrooms that required a full-time EA, it would have changed the staffing dynamics and the operationalization of the curriculum. With no representation in either classroom, the ways in which the curriculum was operationalized to include special needs children were beyond the scope of this study.

### **Curriculum Commonplace: The Milieu**

The term milieu refers to the physical, social and political context in which a curriculum is operationalized. The physical setup of the classroom is a component of the intended curriculum and the milieu. Each of the two teachers in this study intended for their classrooms to have printed texts on the walls, easels, chalkboard, and all around the room. I noted in my field notes that the classrooms were each "rich with literature and words all over the classroom." Overall, the ability for the physical classroom to be a large part of the intended language curriculum is based more on the teacher's knowledge about environments for learning, classroom size, and class budget than the length of the school day.

The physical space required for before- and after-school programming does mean, however, that only certain schools can currently accommodate full-day learning classrooms. Also, full-day learning for kindergarten creates a need for twice as many classrooms and much investment in furniture and equipment. The extra space required and cost of furniture and equipment means that full-day learning may not be implemented first in schools where students stand to gain the most. For example, Ms. Phillips' school did not have the physical space for a full-day kindergarten. The staff told me that the

school was to be breaking ground soon in the schoolyard to accommodate the additional room that the full-day program kindergarten will require. When looking at the current academic needs of the school, however, it seemed to me that the school should be one of the first to receive full-day kindergarten. In the 2010-2011 Ontario Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO, 2011) results, the school had nine percent fewer students than the school board average achieving level three or above on writing and reading. The scores in the school that housed the full-day kindergarten, on the other hand, had at least three percent more students than the school board average achieving level three or above on writing and reading.

Schwab's notion of milieu also refers to the local community. The half-day kindergarten school was located in a residential area that had many high-rise apartment buildings. I inferred that a large majority of the students at the school lived in the apartment buildings within walking distance. Through observation and conversations with staff at the school it appeared that the local community had many new Canadians. There were several stores and a small mall nearby where food and goods from other countries were available. The full-day school was located in a residential area that had houses and low-rise apartment buildings. The local community seemed to be very culturally diverse. I did not collect data on the community or specific languages covered or not covered at home or overall ethnic backgrounds, but relied on teachers' accounts and descriptions.

Finally, milieu can refer to the political context. The political vision of Ontario for early years education "is to make Ontario an international leader in achieving the social, intellectual, economic, physical and emotional potential of all its children" (Best

Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2006, p. 4). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) website lists three main reasons for children to attend full-day kindergarten: “a stronger start in school”, “more time with classmates”, and “a seamless and integrated day”. The message that the Ontario Ministry of Education appears to be communicating is that full-day kindergarten will support children’s social and academic development and readiness for school. Perhaps Ontario could adopt values similar to British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick. In her discussion of the new provincial curriculum frameworks, Langford (2010) states that curriculum frameworks in those provinces “highlight the importance of an early childhood educator examining his/her image of the child as well as children’s rights” to reach their full potential (p. 11).

#### **Curricular Commonplaces: Processes**

The final curricular commonplace is curriculum processes. Smith (1996) gives an example of this:

Another way of looking at curriculum theory and practice is via process.

In this sense curriculum is not a physical thing, but rather the interaction of teachers, students and knowledge. In other words, curriculum is what actually happens in the classroom and what people do to prepare and evaluate. What we have in this model is a number of elements in constant interaction (para. 19).

The topic of curriculum making processes includes how the curriculum is operationalized. In kindergarten classrooms, instruction is augmented by active exploration of materials and the environment. The 2010 draft full-day program document advocates play-based learning. Kindergarten teachers are expected to create

opportunities for playful exploration of ideas and materials. However, a commitment to play-based learning in the Ontario kindergarten classroom intersects with official learning expectations and this creates a tension that is difficult to resolve in the curriculum processes.

Play refers to a variety of activities carried out with different purposes in mind. A large body of literature (e.g. Roskos, Christie & Richgels, 2003; Pascal, 2009; Wohlwend, 2008) advocates play-based learning in kindergarten. In particular, Charles Pascal's (2009) report endorses a play-based approach to early learning and a large section in the draft full-day learning program document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) is devoted to play-based learning. This literature states that play allows children to develop their literacy and learn through experimenting and having fun and that play exposes students to print and to valuable experiences reading and writing print. The draft full-day document therefore suggests that play-based learning be part of the intentional curriculum. It contains a section on how play is to be taught in the teaching/learning approaches section and in the language section under "literacy in play-based learning" (p. 70). However, in the intended language curriculum expectations there is no reference to the utilization of play. One area mentioned play in the new draft full-day program is in the language expectation, "identify personal preferences in reading materials" under "Make the Connection" it is listed "in the dramatic play centre, a group of children role-play characters from a book they have just heard in a read-aloud" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 80).

Both participating teachers mentioned play and play-based learning a number of times. Ms. Sallis told me "a lot of the kindergarten program is now play based and

student led." I myself observed a lot of play during Centre time in the full-day class. During Centres, the students had the choice to be at a writing centre and write in a guided format with the ECE. They could rotate one-by-one to read with Ms. Sallis, build with blocks, play with sand, play and build with Lego™, play learning-based games on the computers, read independently on the carpet, or play with other toys that were around the room. There was also a house centre where students could imitate cooking and other domestic activities. When I observed this classroom, it appeared that there were no limits placed on student choices as long as there was space at a Centre. Some students needed to be working with one of the two adults in the classroom at certain times, but when they were without that restriction it appeared they could utilize any activity or toy in the classroom. In both classrooms teachers appeared to have left the students to their own unless they needed to be redirected due to behavioural or social reasons. Ms. Phillips generally watched the students to ensure they were on track and behaving and in the full-day class it was usually the ECE performing this duty so that Ms. Sallis could work with an individual student.

Play was less in evidence in Ms. Phillips classroom. The students were given a specific list of activities that they could go to during Centres. The day I observed the half-day teacher gave the following options: work with Ms. Phillips writing about shapes in a kite, play learning-based computer games, building with blocks, using an over-head projector to project a kite onto large paper on the wall to colour in the kite, or play with sand at a specific sand table. It was clear that Ms. Phillips designated specific areas that the students could use to ensure variety in their day-to-day activities.



The teachers told me in the interviews and in their day plans that they believed in play-based learning and utilized Centre time to attain this. Although in Ms. Phillips half-day classroom there was not as much time available in total, Centre time was allotted a similar amount of time in both classrooms. In both classrooms there were certain activities to perform during Centres time that were not play-based, but throughout play was allowed and encouraged during Centres time.

Another part of the day that afforded opportunities for play was recess. Recess provides the students an opportunity for unstructured play and overall socialization. The half-day class did not participate in recess. Children in the full-day class did have a daily lunch recess if they do not go home for lunch. On the days that I observed, the half-day students did not go outside for any reason and the full-day class was outside for an hour.

As outlined previously, the intended curriculum in this study is defined as the schedule of lessons and activities laid out in the teacher's day plans with an understanding that the plans themselves were informed by expectations listed in the Ministry of Education's (2006) half-day program document. I inferred from observations and interviews that the two teachers in this study both "taught to" the program documents. That is, they had knowledge of curriculum expectations and created opportunities to address expectations. Although their day plans did not identify expectations, Ms. Sallis and Ms. Phillips discussed ways in which expectations informed their planning processes during the interviews.

Ms. Sallis said she felt "obligated to teach every part" of the Language curriculum and that she covered all of it in the two-year program. Ms. Sallis also discussed how the junior kindergartens focus on certain aspects of the curriculum and the senior

kindergartens focus on other aspects. Ms. Phillips said that she covered most of the required expectations each year, but emphasized that she “covers” each expectation, but not as thoroughly as she would like. The teacher in the full-day program was able to plan for more time working on the expectations and had the opportunity to include recess, “Show and Tell”, library/lab time, and an arts class. Other activities included in the plans of both teachers were lessons on the carpet, music, and time for arrival and dismissal routines. The half-day class did have significantly more time in physical education than the full-day class, but the full-day students had recess time in place physical education.

In Chapter Two the operationalized curriculum was defined as the curriculum that was enacted in the classroom. For example, in both classrooms Language expectations were being addressed outside of planned instructional time. Ms. Sallis spoke in her interview about how language pops into all areas of school and Ms. Phillips discussed how there were curricular expectations met during music, drama, and math. The Language curriculum was also operationalized during specific times set up for Language instruction and throughout the day.

There were two main differences between the half-day and full-day classrooms in the Language curricula. The first one was the staffing that allowed full-day students to work more closely, utilizing one-on-one and small group instruction. The other main difference was the amount of time the students and teachers had to operationalize the intended curriculum. As the students were in school longer, they were exposed to more time in all areas of literacy learning, particularly oral language. However, time may not be the only factor. The National Association for the Education of Young Children

(NAEYC) (1987) and Karweit (1992) point out that the opportunities afforded by a quality program outweigh the opportunities afforded by the length of the day.

### **The Unintended Curriculum**

I use the term “unintended curriculum” to refer to aspects of the operationalized curriculum that did not appear to be part of the intended curriculum. For example, children engaged in large quantities of multimodal meaning making during play events, yet the draft full-day program document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) does not make reference to multimodal learning. Although the teachers might have intended for these experiences, it is not written in the program documents. It appeared in this study that there were more opportunities to utilize multimodal meaning in the classroom in the full-day class because of the extra time spent on subjects such as music, art, and recess. Multimodal learning should be written into the formal program document for full-day kindergarten in Ontario. With the additional time in school and additional time spent in typically multimodal meaning activities, kindergarten could utilize multimodal learning to further enrich the children’s learning in all areas. Stooke (2010) summarized recent research and theoretical writing on the topic. She noted a consensus among writers in the field (Heath, 1983; Rowsell, 2006) that “gesture, movement, music, sound effects and gaze are all important ways in which children make meaning. Given the opportunity, children choose the modes that best suit their communicative intentions” (p. 53). It is noted here that the kindergarten program should include an expectation that addresses students communicating in multimodal ways.

An area not adequately addressed in the teachers’ intended curricula is the literacy learning of English Language Learners (ELLs). The Ontario Ministry of Education

(2010) stated in the draft full-day program that “the first language of approximately 20 percent of the children in Ontario’s English-language schools is a language other than English” (p.37). The draft full-day program document has a section entitled “Program Considerations for English Language Learners” (p. 37) which lists recommendations to teachers for working with ELLs, but no specific guidance is available in relation to the Language expectations. In the coming months the Ontario Ministry of Education will modify the draft version document. It would be beneficial to address the needs of ELLs in the program document rather than in separate resources such as guides so that the support for the teachers are distinctly related to the written program. One such area that could be added to the kindergarten program is to have all students, but early English Language Learners in particular engage in playful activities that would help them to “learn features of (English) such as syntax, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and norms of social usage” (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 13). The only Language expectation that touch on any of these areas in the current new draft program is “use specialized vocabulary for a variety of purposes” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 76). Identifying more basic vocabulary and the other features of English identified above would assist all kindergarten students, especially the Early Language Learners.

Throughout this study I have referenced the positive aspects of play-based learning in kindergarten. Play-based learning was observed in both classrooms and built into the schedule of each classroom, mainly during Centres. As there is more time at school for students in the full-day program, I recommend that a significant portion of this additional class time should go towards play-based learning. Play should not be left to chance, but included in the intentional curriculum.

I would suggest two areas of play be included in the intentional curriculum. First, a play-based learning aspect that allows the teacher to set up what is being played to ensure language curriculum expectations are addressed in the process. However, I suggest there should also be a second level of play where students have free-play. King (1979) states "when the teacher uses play as part of the curriculum, the children redefine such activities at work" (p. 86). It is important to have a playful approach to learning even if the student understand it is "part of the curriculum" as this learning will allow students to learn a specific expectation in a fun way. The free-play would then allow them to not feel it was "part of the curriculum" and have them create meaning and learn together on their own.

### **Implications for Practice and Research**

An examination of the data using Schwab's commonplaces illuminates interdependence among the commonplaces and the uniqueness of each operationalized curriculum. The data show, for example, that while the physical settings of the classrooms in the study were similar, the curricula varied on all other dimensions of curriculum.

Most noticeable were the increased time and extra staff assigned to the full day program. The time in the full-day program allowed for more instructional time, more opportunities for children to socialize with peers and adults, and more time for multimodal meaning making. The extra time also afforded a more leisurely pace. The half-day program was a faster pace with more transitions. It was as if each moment needed to count. It is worth noting, however, that this study did not seek children's perspectives or examine the children's out-of-school activities. It would be unfair to

assume that students in the half-day classroom would not have opportunities for multimodal meaning making and socialization during the rest of the day. A study that examined the children's perspectives and actions could enhance educators' understandings of the place that half-day and full-day kindergarten assume in children's lives.

My findings also corroborate research evidence (e.g. Ehrenberg et al., 2001; Zvoch, Reynolds & Parker, 2008) that underlines the importance of a low child-to-teacher ratio for the creation of literacy learning opportunities. Students in the full-day program were able to receive more individualized instruction because the teacher was not obliged to supervise a large number of students at the same time. Having the ECE in the classroom reduced preparation time for the teacher and allowed the teacher to work one-on-one and in small groups with students. It also allowed the ECE to further the students' language learning through added support and instruction. The ECE appeared to have a slightly different relationship with the students than Ms. Sallis did. The ECE had full control of the class and would discipline, but I inferred she nurtured the students a little more and was a little less focused on the learning and more focused on their well being. It would have been interesting to observe the EA in Ms. Phillips half-day classroom to compare the differences in the roles of an EA and ECE in kindergarten. Based on the interviews, it appeared that the ECE operationalized the language curriculum more than the EA did, but both supervised the students when in the classroom similarly to allow the teacher to work in small groups or with an individual student.

Thinking about the actions of the children and the role of the ECE raises questions about who operationalizes a curriculum. Again, a focus on students' perspectives and

experiences might illuminate the unique skills and approaches that ECE professionals can bring to an early childhood educational setting.

Several implications for practice relate specifically to decision-making at the Ministry of Education and School Board levels. Decisions about which schools received full-day learning programs in the first phase of the implementation have social justice implications since students who stand to benefit most from full-day learning may not have access until new facilities are built. In the absence of physical facilities, however, School Boards could be funded to appoint ECEs in half-day programs. If ECEs are assigned to half-day programs, schools that do not currently have the space requirement to offer full-day kindergarten could support individualized and extended language learning.

It was interesting to hear that the teachers shared similar stories of current professional development. Moving forward I would recommend kindergarten teachers attend professional development on some critical areas:

1. Play-based learning
2. Including literacy into Centres
3. Creating the optimal Early Learning-Kindergarten Team partnership with an ECE

These three areas would allow kindergarten teachers to learn how to successfully create an optimal learning environment for kindergarten students.

Finally, I recommend that the implementation of full-day kindergarten be documented and researched in a variety of ways, including but not only through traditional program evaluations. The following questions could be the basis of future studies: In what ways does the working relationship between the full-day kindergarten

teacher and ECE affect kindergarten students' learning? How can full-day early learning programs be organized to maintain the unique qualities of early learning programs?

Should the Ontario kindergarten program be altered to add multimodal learning? How should the intentional kindergarten program be amended to best serve Early Language Learners?

### **Concluding Remarks**

I have learned a lot throughout this study. When I started the process I thought that most of the results and implications would be centred on the amount of time in the classroom participating in language experiences. Although time was a factor in the results, it became quite clear that the biggest difference between the programs was the staffing. The ability for the teacher to work in an educational team with another educator full-time allowed for many more opportunities. The students got to know the ECE very well, become comfortable with them, be supervised by them, and learn from them.

As a new administrator and as someone who continues to learn about the education world, I found it extremely interesting that the biggest resource to the children was staffing more so than time. As educators, we need to identify how we can create optimal learning environments for the children we teach. Due to funding and physical space for classrooms in schools, it is unrealistic to propose class sizes reduced to half the current levels, or to have teaching teams of more than two in every class. However, my observations suggest that the Ministry of Education is on the right track in creating teaching teams for the new full-day kindergartens. This study did not ask if the teaching team should have two qualified teachers, or one EA, or one ECE. However, what it has



touched upon and brought to light is that a having teaching team of two educators has the potential to create a more relaxed and richer language learning environment for children.

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**Appendix A – Interview Questions**

- I. On which days during a week do you dedicate time to teaching the Language curriculum?
- II. What aspects of the Language curriculum do you expect to cover this year?
- III. What challenges do you experience in teaching the Language expectations?
- IV. Are there any activities you'd like to organize or strategies that you would like to use, but do not currently use? What would help you to organize the activity or use the strategy?
- V. What professional learning opportunities would you like to access to teach language arts?
- VI. How often are you able to work one-on-one with a student?
- VII. Do you utilize small group instruction when teaching language? If so, how do you organize for that?
- VIII. Do you teach language expectations outside of language instructional time? If so, when do you do it? How do you do that?
- IX. What reading opportunities do students have in your classroom?
- X. What writing opportunities do students have in your classroom?
- XI. What oral communication experiences do the students in your class engage in?
- XII. What media texts are accessed by students in your class during class sessions?

## Appendix B – Ethics Approval



**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE**

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Review Number: 1010-3  
 Principal Investigator: Rosamund Stooke  
 Student Name: Sean Lamb  
 Title: *The Operational Language Curriculum in Kindergartens*  
 Expiry Date: May 31, 2011  
 Type: M. Ed. Thesis  
 Ethics Approval Date: November 8, 2010.  
 Revision #:  
 Documents Reviewed &  
 Approved: UWO Protocol, Letters of Information & Consent

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This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or information/consent documents may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB, except for minor administrative aspects. Participants must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information/consent documentation and/or recruitment advertisement, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

  
 Dr. Alan Edmunds (Chair)

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**2010-2011 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board**

**Dr. Alan Edmunds** Faculty (Chair)  
**Dr. John Barnett** Faculty  
**Dr. Jacqueline Specht** Faculty  
**Dr. Farahnaz Faez** Faculty  
**Dr. Wayne Martino** Faculty  
**Dr. George Gadanidis** Faculty  
**Dr Immaculate Namukasa** Faculty  
**Dr. Robert Macmillan** Assoc Dean, Graduate Programs & Research (*ex officio*)  
**Dr. Susan Rodger** UWO Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (*ex officio*)

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