

6-2019

Teacher Beliefs On Balanced Literacy And Collective Efficacy In Kindergarten

Dominic DePatsy
University of New England

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dune.une.edu/theses>



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), and the [Elementary Education Commons](#)

© 2019 Dominic DePatsy

Preferred Citation

DePatsy, Dominic, "Teacher Beliefs On Balanced Literacy And Collective Efficacy In Kindergarten" (2019).
All Theses And Dissertations. 219.
<https://dune.une.edu/theses/219>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at DUNE: DigitalUNE. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses And Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DUNE: DigitalUNE. For more information, please contact bkenyon@une.edu.

Teacher Beliefs on Balanced Literacy and Collective Efficacy in Kindergarten

Dominic DePatsy

BA (University of Southern Maine) 1993

MS (University of Southern Maine) 1998

CAS (University of Southern Maine) 2002

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of
the College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the degree of Doctoral of Education

Portland & Biddeford, Maine

June, 2019

Copyright
Dominic DePatsy
2019

Dominic DePatsy
April 2019
Educational Leadership

Teacher Beliefs on Balanced Literacy and Collective Efficacy in Kindergarten

ABSTRACT

The research problem of this study was teacher beliefs about early literacy pedagogy. Research over the past 15 years had made significant strides in studying the complex relationships between teacher beliefs and practices (Fang, 2006). Teacher beliefs play an important role in teachers' work (Biesta, Prestly, and Robinson, 2015). The purpose of the study was to understand how kindergarten teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction influenced how they integrated direct instruction and whole language approaches into their teaching and support of language acquisition in the classroom. The subjects were fourteen kindergarten teachers (participants) who currently teach in three different elementary schools in a one public school district in Maine. The research design was qualitative and grounded in theoretical framework of Fielding, Kerr, and Rosier (2007, 1998). A highly structured interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The transcript was then studied for themes, subthemes, words, and insights. Six themes were identified around kindergarten teacher beliefs on balanced literacy and collective efficacy: developmentally appropriate, high expectations, decision making, guided reading, running records, parental outreach. The findings support the existing literature on teacher beliefs. Teachers have a strong decision-making process and belief in lesson planning, read alouds, guided reading, running records, and parental outreach, however, less decision making around scope and sequence and appropriateness of curriculum. Additionally, the findings suggest further research on teacher beliefs in grades one to three to demonstrate if the feedback aligns or was discrepant in some areas.

University of New England

Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership

This dissertation was presented
by

Dominic DePatsy

It was presented on
9 April, 2019

And approved by:

Michelle Collay, Ph.D., Lead Advisor

University of New England

Kimberly Roberts-Morandi, Ed.D., Secondary Advisor

University of New England

Julie Olsen, Ed.D., Affiliate Member

Director of Instructional Support for MSAD 51

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Michelle Collay, chair of my dissertation committee, for her knowledge, expertise, and support throughout this research process. I truly appreciated Dr. Collay's guidance and helping me develop and condense my topic into something that was useful for me and my work as well as other school districts. As a result of her consultation around the narrowing of my topic, the results and conclusion of this study helped me grow as a leader and educator. I would also like to extend my appreciation to my secondary advisor, Dr. Kimberly Roberts-Morandi and affiliate committee member, Dr. Julie Olsen, for their knowledge, perspective, questions and how they supported me in this process. I am extremely appreciative and indebted to the kindergarten teachers who participated in this study. The participants' time, feedback, beliefs, insights, and expertise proved to be invaluable not only to this study but also to the larger field of education. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Jessica Clark, a colleague and fellow UNE doctoral student, for asking clarifying questions and for her edits. Lastly, I would like to thank my family: my wife and my three sons who understood the time commitment and helped me through the process. They realized I would be the first person in my family to receive a doctorate.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
STATEMENT OF PROBLEM	6
PURPOSE OF STUDY	8
RESEARCH QUESTION	9
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	9
<i>90% Pedagogy</i>	10
<i>Change Theory</i>	11
ASSUMPTIONS, LIMITATIONS, SCOPE.....	12
DEFINITION OF TERMS	13
RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE	14
CONCLUSION	15
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	17
<i>History of Kindergarten</i>	18
<i>Legislation and Impact on Kindergarten Instruction</i>	21
ACHIEVEMENT GAP	22
<i>RTI</i>	25
READING PROCESS	28
<i>Child-Centered Instruction</i>	28
<i>Constructivism: Learner-Centered Instruction</i>	28
<i>Heterogeneous Grouping</i>	31
<i>Homogeneous Grouping</i>	32
<i>Skills-based Instruction</i>	32

<i>Phonics and Phonemic Awareness</i>	34
<i>Whole Language Instruction</i>	35
TEACHER EFFICACY.....	37
<i>Class Size</i>	39
<i>Assessment</i>	40
90% PEDAGOGY.....	40
<i>Parental Involvement</i>	44
CONCLUSION.....	45
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	47
SETTING.....	48
PARTICIPANTS/SAMPLE.....	49
DATA.....	50
ANALYSIS.....	51
DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE.....	52
PARTICIPANT RIGHTS.....	52
POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	53
CONCLUSION.....	53
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	55
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	57
ANALYSIS.....	57
THEMES.....	58
PRESENTATION OF RESULTS.....	60
<i>Theme One: Developmentally Appropriate for Kindergarten Students</i>	63

<i>Theme Two: High Expectations for Kindergarten Students</i>	64
<i>Theme Three: Decision Making</i>	65
<i>Theme Four: Guided Reading</i>	66
<i>Theme Five: Running Records</i>	68
<i>Theme Six: Parental Outreach</i>	69
SUMMARY	71
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	73
INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS	73
TIE TO CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	76
LIMITATIONS AND DISCREPANCIES IN THE FINDINGS	77
IMPLICATIONS	77
<i>Benefits to the Larger Field</i>	78
<i>How These Findings Tie to the Literature</i>	79
<i>Connection to Transformative Learning and Leading</i>	80
<i>Recommendations for Actions</i>	81
<i>Benefits to Stakeholders</i>	83
<i>How will Results be Disseminated</i>	83
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY	83
CONCLUSION	84
REFERENCES	86
APPENDICES	97
<i>Appendix A Interview Questions</i>	97
<i>Appendix B Permission Letter</i>	99

<i>Appendix C Hattie's Effect Size</i>	101
<i>Appendix D Consent for Participation in Research</i>	102

TABLE

Table 1: Number of Years in District and Years Teaching	55
---	----

FIGURE

Figure 1: Analysis of themes guiding teacher reflections.....	71
---	----

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum expectations in the areas of literacy and mathematics had changed kindergarten to be more reflective of first grade expectations in the past several years (Russell 2011; Thelen, 2004; Bassok, Latham and Rorem, 2016). “Most kindergarten teachers now expect students to engage with direct academic instruction at the very beginning of their kindergarten year” (Bassok et. al, 2016, pp. 63). Friedrich Froebel, who conceived the name “kindergarten” in the 1800’s, “stated children at this age need to develop self-confidence before they start schooling” (Brigit, 2012, n.p.). Kindergarten had evolved over the past decades as “primarily a simple curriculum to a more complex curriculum with standards to be met” (Bridgit, 2012).

Kindergarten started to change rapidly from the 1960’s through the 1980’s due to a downward slide in Scholastic Assessment Tests (SAT) scores (Bridgit, 2012). The 1983 report, called “A Nation at Risk”, President Ronald Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education created a wave of local, state, and federal reform efforts. It contributed to a lasting impression that U.S. schools were failing. In 1993 President William Clinton asked for voluntary nationwide standardized testing for fourth and eighth graders in English Language Arts (ELA) and eighth graders for math. President George W. Bush continued Clinton’s legacy by creating the “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) act that mandated testing in grades three through eight with penalties if schools did not meet proficiency targets in these academic areas. Most recently the “Every Child Succeeds Act” (ESSA) replaced NCLB and eliminated the penalties to improve individual and school outcomes. However, the NCLB and ESSA legislation ushered in era of high stakes testing that impacted teachers all over the U.S.

Over the past several years, teacher practitioners across schools in Maine used an instructional pedagogy referred to as the “90% pedagogy” to close the achievement and opportunity gap within grades kindergarten through third grade. According to national literacy consultant Carrie Thurston, “the use of this pedagogy was a direct result from NCLB” (Thurston, 2016, personal communication). The implemented pedagogy was based on the premise of allowing students to access increased time and intensity of direct instruction in reading. Characteristics of reading instruction that align with the 90% pedagogy were: use of skills-based instructional strategies, use of reworking schedules to create more time for instruction, use of ability and flexible groupings, use of formal universal data screeners to inform instruction, use of targeted professional development, and use of a seamless approach to instruction by using an “all hands on deck” approach. The single most important aspect of this reading instructional pedagogy was the time-on-task for early readers.

The pedagogy had gained attention from school boards, district administration, and teachers in Maine due to an ongoing search for ways to close the achievement and opportunity gap. Educators had been focusing on academic core instruction, primarily literacy, by creating clear and high standards with assessments aligned with those standards. Districts created accountability systems on top of the federal and state mandates that demand results for all subgroups of students that include gender, race, special education, economically disadvantaged, and English language students. The 90% pedagogy focused on intensive efforts to assist teachers in improving their practice through various direct instructional techniques, where reported increases in literacy scores had been noticed. However, in the end, teachers had a significant amount of autonomy in the classroom, whether districts had adopted resources and curricula that were aligned vertically and horizontally. The expectation was that teachers enact the curriculum,

instruction, and assessment for students based on the prescribed professional development and mandates from district administration and Department of Education.

There was a discord among early childhood educators about how to provide the best instruction to kindergarten students. These differences in philosophy volleys teacher-directed instruction (skills-based instruction) focused on more measurable standards against instruction that involved students in more open-ended, child-initiated activities (child-centered instruction). According to Chiatovich and Stipeck (2016), during skills-based instruction, the teacher plays a central, directive role, and instruction focused on developing discrete academic skills in a predetermined order, according to the prescribed curriculum. The groupings of students for this type of instruction were homogeneous based on the certain types of assessment data. Conversely, child-centered instruction requires that students play an active role in personal and meaningful learning in classrooms, and the focus of instruction is designed to ensure students understand broad concepts rather than only discrete skills. Child-centered instruction assumes that the child's development determines the starting point for lesson plans and for developing curriculum. Within that philosophy is the concept of whole-child education, which means not just looking at children as vessels to fill up with academic information but taking an approach that encourages children to learn to read by allowing for creativity (Chiatovich and Speck, 2016). For instance, the instructional techniques integrate learning in the classroom with the learner's full life. In this type of instruction, students are typically heterogeneously grouped, and assessment data does not necessarily determine placement.

The goal of this study was to research and document kindergarten teachers' beliefs about how to approach literacy instruction. These findings informed educators about how kindergarten teachers in one school district integrates direct instruction and whole language approaches into

their teaching to close the achievement and opportunity gap. A recent white paper by Calvert (2016) from Learning Forward and the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) reported on work from teachers and administrators who were interviewed to ascertain their reflection on applicable professional development. Calvert (2016) reported, “for many teachers, professional development had long been an empty exercise in compliance, one that falls short of its objectives and rarely improves professional practice” (Calvert, 2016, pp. 2). Often the decision-making and planning around professional development in early literacy in most districts had been left to the administration. This was the case for most of the districts that had embarked on the 90% pedagogy (C. Thurston, 2016, personal communication). Teacher agency was defined as “the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues” (Calvert, 2016, p. 2). Teacher efficacy is an important aspect of enacting the prescribed 90% pedagogy curriculum. Calvert’s (2016) white paper provided conditions that do support teacher agency and impacted the 90% pedagogy and this study. The following conditions support teacher agency: School-wide approach to professional development, intrinsic and internal motivation, use of integral expertise, teacher input and collaboration, use of data that reflects teacher needs, and is goal orientated through professional learning communities (Calvert, 2016).

The literature review describes and analyzes various pedagogical models commonly used in public education systems for kindergarten students. The theoretical framework model presented in this study focuses on teacher decision making about targeted direct instruction in kindergarten. Most instructional models include skills-based instruction, child-based instruction or a combination of both. As early childhood education moved front and center in the public policy debate, more attention is being paid to early literacy. Early childhood professionals had

long recognized the importance of language and literacy in preparing children to succeed in school. Early literacy plays a key role in enabling the kind of early learning experiences. Research by Fielding, Kerr, and Rosier (2007, 1998), DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek (2010), National Early Literacy Panel (2008), and Nation's Report Card (2015) supported how critical the importance of early intervention is in setting a high standard for students. Reading scores in kindergarten include direct assessment of children's skills, teacher observations, or both. They're intended to give teachers a well-rounded picture of the whole child, including academic, social, and physical development as well a baseline of where their students are in their acquisition of literacy.

Some educators believe that providing rigorous direct instruction will close the achievement and opportunity gap. Fielding et al. (2007) provided the backdrop for the study of this pedagogy. The impetus for this particular focus on the 90% pedagogy was the low achievement rates in reading, "which was one of the most significant issues in public education today" (Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012, p. 3). To support this claim, Fielding et al. (2007) stated "of the children who leave third-grade reading below grade level 74% never catch up" (Fielding, Kerr, & Rosiner, 2007, p. 10). Students that are on grade level by the end of third grade are more likely to be college and career ready (Murnane et. al, 2012, p. 3).

Special education teachers often clash with regular education teachers over the phonics vs. whole language debate. In the past, special education teachers advocated for all students to receive more direct instruction in the regular classroom in order to teach explicit skills in phonics and phonemic awareness (Hehir, 2006). Students were often put into special education due to the student not receiving explicit instruction in phonics or phonemic awareness. Special education teachers often took students who were 'curriculum disabled' who just needed direct

instruction general curriculum (Hehir, 2006). This was not the intent of the special education law PL 94-142 or better known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). On the Maine Special Education Specific Learning Disability form there was a question that must be checked “yes” in order for the student to qualify for special education. “If a child is not achieving adequately in all areas, is the underachievement due to the lack of learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child’s age or state approved grade level standards” (Maine Unified Special Education Regulation Birth To Age Twenty, 2017 p. 85). Many special educators characterize this statement as identifying a *curriculum disability*. A curriculum disability occurs when there was an instructional gap preventing students from being assessed on their true ability. While learning disabilities cannot be “fixed”, curriculum disabilities could be explicitly addressed with good teaching, rigor, and Response to Intervention (RTI) services.

The theoretical perspective of this study was grounded in the work of Fielding et al. (2007, 1998). They wrote two books that were the framework for this study, *The 90% Reading Goal* (Fielding et al., 1998) and *Annual Growth For All Students Catch Up Growth For Those Who Are Behind* (Fielding et al, 2007). The authors researched how the Kennewick School district (population of 15,000 students) reestablished a 90% 3rd-grade reading goal, moving from 57% of students at benchmark in 1996 to 89.6% in 2006 and 89.3% in 2007. The Kennewick School system established proportional increases in direct instruction within the areas of reading, writing, and math in grades kindergarten through third grade. They were able to make these gains by focusing on scheduling, diagnostic testing, and having formalized data systems.

Statement of the Problem

The research problem of this study is the lack of documentation on teacher beliefs about early literacy pedagogy. Researchers over the past 15 years made significant strides in studying

the complex relationships between teacher beliefs and practices (Fang, 2006). The research suggested “beliefs play an important role in teachers’ work, an apparent mismatch between teachers’ individual beliefs and values and wider institutional discourses and cultures” (Biesta, Prestly, and Robinson, 2015, para. 3). The literature review found limited research on teacher beliefs around literacy curriculum, instruction, and assessment. When a curriculum or pedagogy was mandated, teachers are the brokers of that pedagogy. What they believed about the value of the approach was not always a consideration when school district leaders implemented an approach or framework for instruction. Teachers’ beliefs about early childhood literacy, with attention to how kindergarten teachers perceived and thought about the elements of classroom-based learning, is extremely important. Teacher efficacy is the collective belief of teachers in their ability to positively affect students (Hattie, 2018). Outside influences such as legislation, administration, parental support, and class size play a role in teacher efficacy and their beliefs about how those factors influenced closing the achievement and opportunity gap.

Kindergarten was offered in nearly every state and is mandatory in 15 states across the country (Bassock, Latham, Rorem, 2016). Kindergarten was intended to be a universal, publicly-funded opportunity that provides children with literacy instruction and language acquisition. The instructional, assessment, and curriculum literacy pedagogy was different from classroom to classroom, and teacher to teacher across the United States. Kindergarten teachers often have different beliefs and philosophies around how and what knowledge kindergarten students should know before first grade (Bassock, Latham, Rorem, 2016). However, research pointed to the importance of ensuring that children enter first grade with the skills and knowledge held by strong readers such as a strong foundation in phonics and phonemic awareness. “In the past two decades, preschool and kindergarten classrooms had rapidly become

more academically oriented and less focused on exploration, social skill development, and play” (Bassick, Latham, Rorem, 2016, p. 2).

Standardized testing, curriculum-based assessments, formative, and summative assessments all indicated many students were not at grade-level as measured by standardized reading assessments in literacy. There had been a push to close the achievement and opportunity gap through legislation by local, state, and especially the federal government, which includes No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and its predecessor Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA). Those federal bills had mandated the federal government's role in education, especially in terms of holding schools accountable for the academic performance of their students. This accountability had a trickle-down effect which impacted each state, district, principal, and eventually each teacher and student.

The Purpose

The purpose of the study was to understand how kindergarten teachers’ beliefs about early literacy instruction influenced how they integrated direct instruction and whole language approaches into their teaching and support of language acquisition in the classroom. It was important to understand the preferences of kindergarten teachers on utilizing skills-based and whole language-based instruction in kindergarten classrooms. Participants of the study were kindergarten teachers employed in a public school district who had been trained in research-based instructional strategies, scheduling, diagnostic testing, and had formalized data systems by an outside literacy consultant. The consultant, who specialized in response to intervention (RTI) strategies and interventions, supported teachers and administrators by providing these strategies to assist with the “annual” and “catch up” growth for students in kindergarten. The theoretical framework was based on the work of Fielding et al. (2007 & 1998).

Research Question

Guiding this research was the overarching question:

- How did kindergarten teachers' professional beliefs influence the integration of skills-based and whole language based instruction into the classroom setting?
 - Did kindergarten teachers believe they had the agency to enact literacy instruction that will disrupt chronic low achievement?
 - How did kindergarten teachers prioritize their allotted time for literacy instruction?
 - What were kindergarten teachers' beliefs about collaborating with parents?

Conceptual Framework

The research within the studies of Fielding et al. (2007 & 1998) was the premise behind the various districts who were using the 90% pedagogy as an early intervention tool to close the achievement and opportunity gaps. Early intervention was critical in providing equal access for all children to meet their specific learning targets. Educational scientists had been looking at research-based literacy pedagogies to change the status quo or the wait-to-fail model, with a goal of having 90% of kindergarten students reach proficiency before the start of first grade. In 2015, more than one-third of the nation's fourth and eighth graders performed at or above the proficient achievement level in reading (The Nation's Report Card, 2015). In 2017, 47% of the nation's fourth graders were proficient based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (The Nation's Report Card, 2017). The NAEP scores for the United States show how fourth and eighth-grade student achievement had essentially been stagnant for the past two years in their progress (The Nation's Report Card, 2017).

Further research conducted by Wanzek, Roberts, Al Qtaiba, & Kent (2014) focused on the engagement of reading print and found homogeneous grouping did not affect students' perceptions of themselves due to their age. Hong, Pelletier, Hong, & Corter's (2010) research showed a positive effect of homogeneous grouping on students' literacy growth under high reading time and a lack of grouping effect under low reading time. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek (2010), National Early Literacy Panel (2008), and Nation's Report Card (2015) all argued and advocated for research on the use of more time and intensity of direct instruction in reading, flexible groupings, and using current universal data screeners to inform instruction.

The 90% Pedagogy

The 90% pedagogy is a multi-level framework based on addressing the problem of literacy locally in order to form a "Reading Foundation" to work hand-in-glove with the school district to direct a three-prong strategy that:

- Rallied an entire community, including the School Board, behind this basic goal that 90% of all children will read at grade level by the end of third grade.
- Involved parents from birth in language and pre-literacy activities leading to necessary verbal and reading readiness skills. The message can become part of the public consciousness in less than one year.
- Focused on accountability in grades K-3 to ensure that students read on grade level by the end of third grade. The goal and accountability were clear and the training must be focused. Curricular priorities was a set where every able child will not leave third grade without knowing how to read well.
- The theory and practice of teaching these strategies influenced student learning and culture in schools (Fielding et al, 2007).

Change Theory

When applying this pedagogy to the schools in this study, Turbulence Theory developed by Shapiro and Gross (2013), could help explain, predict, and understand relationships, perceptions, and the belief of others. It provided an explanation that could be used to define the data that flowed from the research question. Turbulence Theory rests on two central concepts: first, the idea that not all disruptive conditions are of the same magnitude, and second, that the levels of turbulence are similar to those found in flight (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). Accordingly, Shapiro and Gross (2013) used the four levels of turbulence employed by pilots to gauge turbulence in flight, which was light, moderate, severe, and extreme. As in flight, light turbulence is associated with small disruptions and was hardly be noticed. Examples of light turbulence in this study included opening teacher silos, creating teacher agency, disrupting the status quo with outside expertise, and aligning district goals versus each school being a fiefdom.

In moderate turbulence, the culture and climate of the school were disrupted by this change. Similarly, in school organizations who faced moderate turbulence, people were constantly aware of a disturbance but still worked closely as possible to perform their tasks (Shapiro & Gross, 2013). Several districts were using a particular literacy consultant and the 90% pedagogy K-3 across Southern Maine, including the one in this study. The consultant had caused some moderate turbulence throughout these districts. Moderate turbulence examples with the 90% pedagogy included instructional shifts, where data was used to inform instruction of students, culture and climate discord, principal and teacher exposure of what they didn't know, along with complaints to School Board and Central Office. It was important to note that turbulence levels could result in positive changes and outcomes for students, which included moving from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset, reduction in referrals to RTI and special

education, and improved achievement for all students. Shapiro and Gross (2013) continued to develop Turbulence Theory, which included the underlying concepts of cascading and stability. In examples of severe and extreme turbulence, the pedagogy created such divisiveness between teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators, as well as the School Board who debated the pedagogy at meetings, that the result was teachers that resigned or principals or central office staff members who were not renewed.

The accompanying literature review focuses on the two mindsets of child-centered and skills-based instruction in both public and private education. The 90% pedagogy advocated for a deeper understanding of why the achievement and opportunity gap continues to exist. The conceptual framework of the 90% pedagogy by Fielding et al. (2007 & 1998) examined the instructional practice of how teachers and leaders integrated skills-based and whole language-based techniques to close the achievement and opportunity gap. Skills-based proponents argued there was a lack of rigorous literacy instruction in the nation's kindergarten classrooms and those in place were mediocre at best (Schmoker, 2006; Bassok et al., 2016). These two instructional philosophies have dominated the landscape of public kindergarten education. Turbulence Theory guided the examination of the perceptions and beliefs of kindergarten teachers in regard to kindergarten instruction. Instructional approaches teachers were asked to use in the 90% pedagogy were based on research about early literacy.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope

Considering the purpose of this study, it was assumed that participants engaged in honest, professional, and critically thoughtful dialog regarding the pedagogy being examined. The scope of this study was limited to kindergarten classrooms in three schools using the 90% pedagogy in a small, rural Maine school district. Given this scope, limitations reflect the sample

size. However, while this limitation exists, the ability to generalize the findings of the study to other public schools is feasible. The participant population is reflective of a larger demographic of educators.

Definition of Terms

Achievement--refers to academic progress made over a period of time, as measured from the beginning to the end of the defined period. Achievement growth can be tracked and determined for individual students, schools, states, or countries, and a wide variety of variables and methodologies may be used to determine whether "growth" was being achieved.

DIAL--Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning was an individually administered developmental screening test designed to identify young children who need further testing or who need help with academic skills.

DRA--Diagnostic Reading Assessment- was a standardized reading test used to determine a student's instructional level in reading. Teachers and reading specialists administer the DRA individually to students. Students read a selection (or selections) and then retell what they had read to the examiner.

F&P--Benchmark Reading Assessment- was a benchmark assessment was a series of texts that can be used to identify a student's current reading level and progress along a gradient of text levels over time. The word "benchmark" means a standard against which to measure something.

IDEA--Individuals with Disabilities Education Act- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was a four-part piece of American legislation that ensured students with a disability were provided with Free Appropriate Public Education that was tailored to their individual needs.

Proficiency--refers to systems of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting that were based on students demonstrating that they had learned the knowledge and skills they were expected to possess as they progress through their education.

Pedagogy--the method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept.

PLC--Professional Learning Community- is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students

RTI--Response to Intervention--is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom.

Rationale and Significance

According to Fielding et al. (2007 & 1998), children need to finish their kindergarten year familiar with the structural elements and organization of print. By the end of kindergarten, children should be familiar with the forms and format of books and other print resources and be able to recognize and write most of the alphabet (Chiatovich and Stipeck, 2016). By this point in their academic career, the students at this level need to have some basic phonemic awareness, that was, understanding of the parts of spoken words into smaller units (C. Thurston, personal communication, September 30, 2016). The second proposed goal of kindergarten, according to Chiatovich and Stipeck (2016), was to establish individual perspectives and attitudes when learning about print. Postponing intervention for students who were not proficient in reading was a mistake, according to proponents of RTI. In fact, by waiting until there was a need for intervention, school leaders continued to create cycles of failure. When educators address the

needs of all students universally and systematically, students within all learning types attained a higher degree of success. By providing teachers with a framework to collect, organize, and utilize data routinely, all instructional determinations for students were made according to specific learning needs and designated standards. As teachers increased their ability to identify a student learning profile and then adjusted instruction to include brain-based processes of instruction into the classroom, educators had eliminated the traditional model of identifying why a child cannot learn and instead targeted how they ensured that students do learn. Brain-based processes included activating prior knowledge and utilizing the tool that both dramatically improved outcomes for students and a profound cultural and professional shift among staff.

Conclusion

It is imperative that public education be changed to support 21st-century learning and students' capacity to do jobs that will be developed in the future. School leaders need to close the achievement gap for low performing students, increase ambition and depth for top performers, and move the middle by using technology infused into the curriculum. It is detrimental to students if academic and social support is not provided immediately with appropriate interventions for students who are not proficient in reading and math.

Implementation of the 90% pedagogy with a focus on teacher practice and beliefs, in addition to student learning needs, resulted in school reform in addition to addressing student learning needs. By providing teachers with a framework to collect, organize and utilize data routinely, all instructional determinations for students were made according to specific learning needs and performance profiles. Teachers have learned through professional development on the 90% pedagogy to identify a student learning profile based on data driven protocols with flexible grouping. Kindergarten teachers have adjusted their instruction based on having the ability to

analyze data and identify teaching and learning challenges in their students, which will increase teacher agency. Teacher efficacy through professional development could eliminate the traditional model of identifying deficits or reasons why a child cannot learn and instead target how they do learn.

Exploring the beliefs of how kindergarten teachers integrated both direct instruction and whole language approaches into their teaching resulted in a balanced literacy approach in literacy acquisition that had strong data outcomes for students in the study. Utilizing both direct instruction and whole group instructional strategies of the 90% pedagogy, outcomes for students improved with a profound cultural and mindset shift among staff around utilizing data to inform instruction (C. Thurston, personal communication, September 30, 2016). Teachers provided valuable insights into other aspects of the research such as teacher efficacy, parental participation, and early intervention prior to kindergarten. Systematic changes in kindergarten had occurred over the past two decades. Bassok et al. (2016) found that kindergarten was the new first grade based on teacher beliefs about school readiness, time spent on academic and nonacademic content, use of standardized testing, and pedagogical approach. In the past kindergarten classrooms centered on play, exploration, and social integration. Legislation under NCLB focused on high stakes testing that resulted in kindergarten teachers utilizing more time on teacher-directed instruction in math and literacy. This was outlined in the review of literature in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focused on the research and findings critical to early childhood literacy, community-based learning (family-based), and school-based instruction. In addition, the literature examined how teachers negotiate their own curriculum and assessment at the school site, and policies that influenced the adoption of kindergarten curriculum. This integrated literature review first explored broadly the history of kindergarten and how instruction, assessment, and curriculum moved into various pedagogies that impact the current day kindergarten classroom. Literature supported that there were various literacy pedagogy models of instruction commonly used in kindergarten classrooms. Most instructional models included skills-based instruction, play-based instruction, or a combination of both. The pedagogy model presented in this study focuses on teachers' beliefs about how to balance literacy instruction. The literature review weaved through how legislation based on federal and state mandates have impacted how kindergarten teachers integrate direct instruction and whole language approaches in the classroom. These mandates, as expressed in district initiatives, affect teacher efficacy, class size, and parental involvement in the classroom.

Outside influences such as the 90% pedagogy were based on the framework of using more time and intensity of direct instruction in reading, flexible groupings, as well as using current universal data screeners to inform instruction. The debate in early childhood education pitted teacher-directed instruction, "90% pedagogy", against child-centered instruction. Teacher-directed instruction focused on the direct acquisition of necessary skills while child-centered instruction involved children in more open-ended, child initiated activities. This integrative literature review addressed the following topics:

- History of Kindergarten
- Legislation and Impact on Instruction
 - Achievement Gap
 - RTI
- Reading Process
 - Child-Centered Instruction
 - Homogeneous Grouping
 - Heterogeneous Grouping
 - Skills-Based Instruction
 - Phonics and Phonemic Awareness
 - Whole Language Instruction
- Teacher Efficacy
 - Class Size
 - Time
 - Assessment
- 90% Pedagogy
 - Parent Involvement

History of Kindergarten

Kindergarten means “garden for the children” and was an educational approach traditionally based on playing, singing, practical activities such as drawing, and social interaction as part of the transition from home to school (Passé, 2010; Repko-Erwin, 2017). The idea and implementation of kindergarten were created in the late 18th century. Bavaria and Strasbourg were the first regions in Germany to employ kindergarten as a way to serve children whose

parents both worked out of the home. The term was coined by the German Friedrich Froebel, whose approach globally influenced early childhood education (Fromberg, 2006). Froebel developed a vision for kindergarten based on the ideas of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the later Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (Passe, 2010). Rousseau was considered one of the pivotal figures in the history of education and childhood learning. He was credited with the modern practice of educating in accordance with nature, emotion, and a child's internal motivation, which aligns with child-centered instruction. Pestalozzi's paramount contribution to education was his general philosophy of natural education that stressed the dignity of children and the importance of actively engaging children in using their senses to explore the environment. "Pestalozzianism" was used throughout the United States in the early 1800s (Passe, 2010).

Froebel introduced the concept of kindergarten to give children an educational setting in which to explore the world away from home. Froebel also felt that children needed a sensory experience. Initially, the social and developmental aspects of kindergarten were the teachers' main priority. In 1856, Margwerethe Schurz opened the first Froebian-inspired kindergarten in the United States in Wisconsin (Passe, 2006). This kindergarten included the practice of "circle time", which continues today in the primary grades and is used for a group book read aloud and calendar (Fromberg, 2006). In large cities, immigrant factory workers were provided private kindergartens supported by charities. By 1914, the beginning of World War I, all major American urban school systems had publicly funded kindergartens that were open for five-year-olds. In 1986, Mississippi was the last state to offer public kindergarten (Fromberg, 2006).

Most early education teachers are instructed on developmentally appropriate practices for kindergarten, which was promoting learning through play and socialization. Kindergarten had been allowed to function as a unique learning environment separate from the elementary grades (Cuban, 1992). As the years passed and educational initiatives developed, kindergarten changed to become more academically centered. This led to kindergarten becoming more incorporated into the standard elementary school structure (Passe, 2010). An academic emphasis replaced the social development aspect of kindergarten over recent decades (Bassok et al., 2016). An increased emphasis on direct instruction and skill acquisition and the reduction in play-based activities means that today's kindergarten has many of the same qualities as first grades of the past (Bassok et al., 2016).

Thirteen states and the District of Columbia required full-day kindergarten and the length of a full day of kindergarten was equal to the length of day in a 1st-grade classroom, while a full-day program may be shorter in other states (Education Commission, 2016). Although children are eligible to attend kindergarten at the age of five (Education Commission, 2016), in many states, the compulsory age for starting school ranged between six and eight years old and families could choose if a child was to skip kindergarten and enter school in the first or second grade or enter kindergarten as the first exposure to public schooling.

Many educators and psychologists influenced the philosophy of modern American kindergarten, including John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky (Passe, 2006). These educators utilized their theories and designed best practices in early childhood education to support children by helping teachers to understand more about the ways they grow and learn. Kindergarten started out with the goal to feed, clothe, and keep immigrant children healthy, then evolved over the years due to societal influences, laws, and

reforms. “Kindergarten had traditionally served to bridge these early experiences with the more formal, academically-focused learning environments ubiquitous in first grade classrooms and beyond” (Repko-Erwin, 2017, p. 59). The nature of changes in kindergarten over the years had made kindergarten “the new first grade” (Bassok et al., 2016). These historical events and evolution of kindergarten have impacted the pedagogical differences discussed in this literature review.

Legislation and Impact on Kindergarten Instruction

Kindergarten had evolved from a child’s play instructional center to a skills-based academic setting preparing students for grades beyond kindergarten (Russell, 2011; Thelen 2004; (Repko-Erwin, 2017). Educational reforms such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the newly formed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) impacted all levels of K-12 education. It was necessary for kindergarten to be rigorous in order to help close the achievement and opportunity gap (Stipeck, 2006). The lasting effects of NCLB requirements to make adequate yearly progress toward every student reaching proficiency by 2014, pushed educators to teach academic skills to increasingly younger students (Bassok et al., 2016). Early childhood educators feel pressured to use a rigorous academic curriculum, which is causing teachers to change their play-based, whole-child teaching practices (Campbell, 2015; Rusell, 2011).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and its recent successor Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2016 were designed to raise the learning standards for American public schools. School districts are accountable for improving students’ academic progress as measured by standardized tests (NCLB, 2002; ESSA 2016). The stipulations of the legislation set high expectations for all states. As a result, accountability measures were put into place and assessments were developed to improve how learning was measured. Parents, first-grade

teachers, and members within the political legislation of the NCLB and ESSA and their call for accountability and high-stakes testing resulted in increased academic demands in kindergarten (Goldstein, 2007; Repko-Eriwn, 2017). School district leaders felt the effects of this legislation and, as a result, were changing how they viewed assessment and accountability to improve student achievement even in kindergarten programs (Stipek, 2006). Bassok et al.'s (2016) study provided evidence that kindergarten content and pedagogy had indeed been influenced by NCLB's increased emphasis on standardization and high-stakes accountability.

Achievement Gap

The most significant concern in American public education was low achievement rates in reading (Fielding et al., 2007; Sparks, 2017). Fielding et al. (2017) stated, "Of the children who leave third-grade reading below grade level, 74% never catch up" (p. 10). When students are on grade level by the end of third grade, they will be college and career ready and have a higher probability to graduate from college (p. 10). Reading is not a content area like math, science, literature, or social studies. Reading is a skill allowing children to continually receive information from books, computers or iPads and blackboards. In 2015, more than two-thirds of nation's fourth- and eighth-graders performed below the proficient achievement level in reading (The Nation's Report Card, 2015) where the average reading score for fourth-grade students in 2017 was not significantly different compared to 2015. In the previous assessment year, however, the 2017 average score was higher in comparison to the first reading assessment in 1992.

Sparks (2017) stated that "basic literacy was at an all-time high worldwide and a majority of countries had seen rising reading achievement in the last decade. The bad news was that students in the United States were bucking the trend" (Sparks, 2017, para. 4). The general

English Language Assessment for Maine, called EmpowerME, was taken by most students in grades 3 through 8. Only 50% of students in grades 3 through 8 were at grade level according to this assessment (Maine DOE Newsroom, 2017). The Maine Department of Education released data on 11th-grade state testing using the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). The data showed 50% of students were at proficiency based on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (Maine DOE Newsroom, 2017). Up until the end of third grade, most children are learning to read. Beginning in fourth grade, however, students are reading to learn, using their skills to gain more information in subjects such as math and science, to solve problems, to think critically about what they were learning, and to act upon and share that knowledge in the world around them (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010).

According to a long-term study by the Annie W. Casey Foundation, students who were not proficient in reading by the end of third grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school. The Children's Reading Foundation stated that up to half of the printed fourth-grade curriculum was incomprehensible to students who read below that grade level. Three-quarters of students who were poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school (Children's Reading Foundation, n.d.). What was clear is that many of these students, once entering school, continue to lack access to strong foundational literacy instruction. Children's Reading Foundation had presented findings that students with relatively low literacy achievement tend to have more behavioral and social problems. Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2018) argue that, without a strong foundation in reading, children were left behind during a critical development stage in the beginning of their education. They lag in every class, year after year, because more than 85% of the subsequent curriculum was taught through reading materials (Castles et al, 2018). By the end of third grade, 74% of struggling readers won't ever

catch up. In fact, one of the most important predictors for graduating from high school was reading proficiently by the end of third grade (Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010); Baer and Sabatini, 2015; Center for Public Education (2015); and Children's Reading Foundation, n.d).

According to Brown (2016), academic achievement gaps grew in the 1970's to 1990's. However, academic gaps between low-income and high-income kindergarteners increased from 10% to 16% in the last ten years. Based partly on research from Stanford University, investments in early childhood education provided resources to low-income families so that they could consistently read to their children, a strategy shown to reduce the achievement gap (Wasserman, 2016). The gap still exists, but there was evidence that public campaigns specific to literacy were helping low-income students (Brown, 2016). However, Hursh (2013) argued that the socioeconomic status, cultural identity, and the educational levels of parents were linked to the achievement gap between students of different races and ethnicities. Children from low-income families have lower achievement than students from middle-class and wealthy families (Hursh, 2013).

Illiteracy rates in the United States grew at an alarming rate regardless of the multitude of literacy programs being initiated in public schools. According to a study conducted by the US Department of Education and the National Institute of Literacy in April 2015, 32 million adults in the United States cannot read above a fifth-grade level, and 19% of high school graduates were illiterate. According to the Department of Justice, "the link between academic failure and delinquency, violence, and crime was leading to reading failure" (Literacy Inc., n.d.). Statistics back up this claim: 85% of all juveniles who interfaced with the juvenile court system were functionally illiterate, and over 70% of inmates in American prisons cannot read beyond a fourth-grade level (Literacy Inc., n.d.). Increasing literacy among children and adults is an

educational necessity. Due to the consistent achievement and opportunity gaps, there has been a heightened focus on literacy and more advanced skills. Kindergarten teachers agree that children should learn to read in kindergarten (Bassok et al, 2016; Clough, 2018). Time spent on literacy has gone up in American classrooms, but time spent on arts, music, and child-selected activities (like stations) that involved play and natural learning has decreased (Walker, 2015).

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Nearly 45 years ago, as part of the nation's evolving commitment to accommodate the needs of all children in public schools, the U.S. Congress passed the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. After the passage of this historic legislation, policymakers became concerned about two trends. First, the number of students identified with learning disabilities grew rapidly and reached a higher threshold than anticipated. Second, the percentages of Black and other racial minority students who were found eligible for special education services were much higher than the ratio of racial minorities in the U.S. population. Because of these concerns, many educators and policymakers recommended that educators use alternative methods to determine students' eligibility for special education services.

The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) allowed states and school districts to use a portion of federal special education funds to provide coordinated early intervention services to students at risk of reading failure or other academic or behavioral problems. One of the primary approaches that had emerged was called “Response to Intervention” (RTI). RTI incorporated a range of assessment, instruction, and intervention principles, including offering multiple tiers of support for students, depending on the level of reading difficulty they may be experiencing. RTI also allocated staff to provide that tiered

support to students, and system leaders strived to collect and use data to make instructional and intervention decisions for students throughout the school year.

Recognition of response to the growing achievement gap led to an increase in Special Education and RTI referrals (Brendle 2015; C. Thurston, personal communication, September 20, 2016). The history of special education leading to RTI is a story of prevention-focused instructional practices. Special Education and RTI are grounded in skills-based or direct instruction pedagogy. Most schools do not emphasize prevention and early intervention, in part because they treat general and special education as separate entities both instructionally and financially (DuFour et al., 2010). After the passage of IDEA in 2004, schools needed time to develop team practices with limited resources and staff. Brendle (2015) surveyed general and special education teachers examined perceptions on team membership and interventions. Findings indicated that special education teachers reported a higher rate of student referrals to the team for intervention and a higher degree of knowledge intervention practices than general and special education teachers. In a major court decision in the 9th district (*M.M. v. Lafayette School District*, 2014) it was found that utilizing response to interventions in the general curriculum blurred the line between special and general education around eligibility.

The use of the RTI initiative was a result of a change in approach related to special education policy and the process for identifying children with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). This was the disability category that was most often associated with reading difficulties. The previous eligibility standard required educators to document an “educationally significant discrepancy” between the achievement of specific skills, for example, reading performance and general ability. The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA forbid states from requiring districts to identify SLD students using a discrepancy approach and permitted districts to use an SLD

identification process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based interventions. Schools were allowed to use evidence of a student's failure to respond to instructional interventions as part of the data documenting the presence of a specific learning disability.

The law also allowed districts to use up to 15% of their IDEA Part B special education funds to develop and implement coordinated early intervention services for students not yet identified as needing special education and related services but who need additional academic or behavioral support to be successful in the general education classroom. This funding change allowed federal dollars to be used specifically for RTI services (IDEA, 2004).

Many studies have shown that students benefited when prevention practices were used in schools (Bailey, 2017). In November 2015, the U.S. Department of Education published a study that showed students who received RTI for reading performed lower than those who did not participate. Evidence from the report suggested that RTI, when implemented in schools without enough evidence to indicate it, would be a successful program and it was not scientifically proven (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). RTI, like special education, had become another way to label students, and many parents and teachers resent RTI because of the lack of resources for teachers and parents; the fear was that this process keeps their students from getting special education services (Bailey, 2017).

Dufour et al. (2010) stressed the importance of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in schools and how they would help struggling students achieve proficiency. They described how diverse elementary schools had closed the achievement gap for struggling students by creating comprehensive systems of interventions and enriching students. Hord (1997) developed the concept of PLC's and later DuFour (2010) nationalized the PLC model that supported teachers in closing the achievement gap (Dufour et al., 2010; Hord, 1997). Thomas

Hehir (2016) found that the “ableist assumptions were harming disabled and nondisabled students and were contributing to unequal outcomes in our schools” (p. 14). Labeling children could be harmful, and the ingrained prejudice may exacerbate academic deficits against performing activities in different ways that might be more efficient such as learning to read (Hehir, 2006).

Reading Process

Child-Centered Instruction

Child-centered instruction is defined as using the child as the starting point for lesson plans and also for developing curriculum. Within that concept was the notion of whole-child education, which means not just viewing children as a receptacle for academic information. Play was an important part of development and should not be overlooked in the early stages of schooling. Kindergarten standards were not written with the development needs of young children in mind (Repko-Erwin, 2017). The National Association for Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC, 2009) position paper stated that play was an important vehicle for developing self-regulation, language, cognition, and social competence. Hadsinger, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff (2017) promoted play as a major stress reliever that fosters creativity, which was what major business corporations were saying was needed to improve the U.S. economy to bring lower SES individuals into the mainstream economy. Guided play was a form of child-centered practices, and was important for developing interventions to assist children from vulnerable populations, such as those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, children with disabilities, or children experiencing stress or trauma (Hadsinger-Das et al., 2017).

Constructivism: Learner-Centered Instruction

In the literature, constructivist learning is sometimes associated with play-based instruction. Under this model, learners constructed their understanding rather than having it delivered or transmitted to them. Learners use their own experience to construct understandings that make sense to them. Any new learning depended on prior understanding and is interpreted in the context of understanding, not first as isolated information that was later related to existing knowledge. Lucks (1999) discussed how learning is enhanced by social interaction in constructivist-directed lessons encouraging students to verbalize their thinking and refine their understandings by comparing them with those of others. An important part of constructivist instruction is the use of authentic learning tasks. Authentic learning tasks are classroom learning activities that require understanding similar to thinking encountered outside the classroom. Constructivist learning activity lessons focused on explanations and answers to problems or questions. The explanations and answers came from the learners, not the teacher, and derived from content representations and social interaction (Lucks, 1999). In a study by Fasoli (2014), learning through play was more common among Euro-American families but that the view of play varied among Latino families.

Constructivist lessons provide students with a question that serves as a focus for the lesson. This was very similar to the philosophical approach of Montessori education. Montessori is an innovative, child-centered approach to education developed a century ago by Dr. Maria Montessori. She was struck by how avidly the children retained knowledge from their surroundings, although they were not explicitly taught the information. Given developmentally appropriate materials and the freedom to follow their interests, they joyfully taught themselves. The goal of Montessori education was to foster a child's natural inclination to learn

(Whitescarver, 2010). Montessori teachers guide rather than instruct, linking each student with activities that meet their interests, needs, and developmental level. The classroom was designed to allow movement and collaboration and to promote concentration and a sense of order. “The surge in Montessori was due to several factors. First, as evidenced by bulging waiting lists in urban magnet schools, many parents had become disenchanted with public schooling and were looking for a humane, yet challenging alternative” (Whitescarver, 2010, p. 21). The Montessori philosophy is play-based and an example of constructivist-theory learning.

In Finland, students spend a sizable chunk of their day playing (Walker, 2015). Finland’s early intervention model is primarily play-based, and the scores on international tests like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed that students in Finland perform well on these assessments. Because of their success with high test scores on PISA, Finland received a great deal of coverage about their educational system (Walker, 2015). Even though there was more time directed toward academics in the United States, Strauss (2012) stated that the reforms to close the gap ignore the outside influences that affect how well a student does in class. Outside influences on Finland’s educational system included providing universal childcare, health care, and generous maternity leave (Bastos, 2017).

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquired and effectively applied the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, n.d.). Social-emotional learning is another form of child-centered instruction. This approach is being infused into classroom routines instead of requiring more time to be scheduled in an already busy school day. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) found that 93%

of employers wanted more focus on social and emotional learning in schools. Employers are seeking the very skills that programs of social and emotional learning foster: teamwork, problem-solving, character, and grit (CASEL, n.d.).

Many public schools are moving to more of a personalized educational system that recognizes the unique nature of each learner. Domenech, Sherman, & Brown (2016) declared that, based on research associated with improving the performance of diverse student populations, the focus needs to be “seeing the learner as a complete learner” (p. 60). A personalized educational system recognizes the unique nature of each learner and also acknowledges that the whole learner has a combination of physical needs, emotional developmental needs, and changing intellectual needs. Domenech et al. (2016) stated that addressing the whole child required that a curriculum system takes into account the complexities of what it means to be human. This is very similar to the Montessori educational approach where collaboration was the key to the learning process. “The capacity for small-group problem solving and decision making was a non-negotiable 21st-century workplace competency cited recurrently by many employers and corporate head. Project-based and Montessori education was grounded in the play based instruction pedagogy” (Domenech et al., 2016, p. 60).

Heterogeneous Grouping

Heterogeneous grouping is a type of distribution of students among the various classrooms of a particular grade within a school. In this method, children of approximately the same age were placed in different classes to create a relatively even distribution of students of varying abilities as well as different educational and emotional needs. Gifted, special education and response to intervention identified children were scattered throughout the various grade level classrooms, rather than all together in one class. For students with disabilities, heterogeneous

classrooms can prove highly challenging, as they might not be able to participate in general education programs.

Heterogeneous classrooms, which are primarily based on the constructivist theory, led to an increase in special education costs and identification and referrals to RTI (C. Thurston, personal communication, September 20, 2016). Students with disabilities such as autism, attention deficit disorder (ADD), emotional disturbances, severe intellectual disabilities, or other medical conditions, may benefit from a self-contained classroom with homogeneous grouping. This arrangement allows them to learn at their own pace, which may differ significantly from their peers (Hehir, 2006).

Homogeneous Grouping

Homogeneous grouping is the placement of students of similar abilities into one classroom. Although there may be a range of skills in one classroom, it was more limited than the range found in the heterogeneous classroom. Researchers Wanzek, Roberts, Al Qtaiba, and Kent (2014) discussed the results of providing additional time for kindergarten students who were at risk for reading. The researchers advocated for more time and rigor for kindergarten students, and supported instruction by ability group, whether the target was reading print or engaging in any of the five main components of reading instruction. Wanzek et al. (2014) focused on the endeavor of reading print, and that homogeneous grouping did not affect students' perceptions of themselves due to the age of the study's population. Hong, Pelletier, and Carl (2010) found that their "results coincide with the empirical evidence from an earlier study show a positive effect of homogeneous grouping on students' literacy growth under high reading time and a lack of grouping effect under low reading time" (p. 1). Researchers in both

studies came to the conclusion that more explicit instruction with more time was needed regardless of the pedagogy.

Skills-Based Instruction

The literature on skills-based instruction in kindergarten is limited, but does primarily focus on reading. Fielding et al. (2007) and the Children's Reading Foundation (n.d.) noted that a national goal was to have all students read independently by the end of third grade. They promoted preventing or minimizing reading deficits by having kindergarten classrooms use reading programs and strategies with explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and word identification skills. Campbell (2015) found that educators of young children in New Zealand and Australia felt pressured by parents to include formal phonics lessons. A study by Shaywitz, Stuebing, and Fletcher et al. (1996) suggested that the developmental course of reading skills in children with a reading disability was best characterized by the deficit, not developmental lag. Educators, including teachers and administrators, used skills-based or play-based in the form of kindergarten programming. At times teachers combined the two approaches.

The debate between whole language and phonemic instruction in regular education has raged on for years. These two pedagogical methods had been referenced using various names. Skills-based instruction, or direct instruction, assigned a central role to the teacher in explaining, modeling, and providing opportunities for practice with feedback (Lucks, 1999). Characteristics of direct instruction included the teacher's classroom management style being especially effective and the rate of poor student behaviors was low (Lucks, 1999). The teacher maintained a strong academic focus and used available instructional time intensively to initiate and facilitate student learning activities "to ensure that as many students as possible

achieve good learning progress by carefully choosing appropriate tasks, clearly presenting subject-matter information and solution strategies” (Lucks, 1999, p. 3). Diagnosing each student’s learning progress and difficulties allowed teachers to provide effective help through remedial instruction.

The current consensus was for some balance between the two approaches. The instruction was too complex to be captured by defining it primarily as either skills-based or child-centered. Most teachers used more than one approach to varying degrees (Stipeck, 2016). Supporters of developmentally appropriate practices claimed that this policy shift negatively impacts students, while promoters of skills-based instruction advocated that time was of the essence to close the achievement gap. Fielding et al. (2007 & 1998), DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek (2010), the National Early Literacy Panel (2008), and Nation’s Report Card (2015) supported the importance of early intervention in raising the bar and providing rigorous direct instruction to close the achievement and opportunity gap.

Phonics and Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is important because it was critical to reading and spelling success. Children who cannot distinguish and manipulate the sounds within spoken words have difficulty recognizing and learning the necessary print and sound relationship that was critical to proficient reading and spelling success. It is also a critical skill for learning to read alphabetically and in written language. Phonemic awareness is a prerequisite for learning to read. Skills-based instruction proponents understand the importance of phonemic awareness, why it could be difficult to acquire, and what happens to the would-be reader who failed to acquire it.

Most children who enter school at kindergarten have limited phonemic awareness and phonics skills, and when there is no explicit instruction in this skill, many will fail to acquire the

ability to read (C. Thurston personal communication, 2016). Further, for a small percentage of young people, even explicit training is insufficient to guarantee the development of phonemic awareness (Fielding et al., 1998). Phonics is being explicitly taught in preschool while literacy-play relationships were disappearing due to the emphasis on phonics (Campbell, 2018). Children who become poor readers enter first grade with little phonemic awareness (Juel, 1988).

Juel (1988) also asserted that, by the end of fourth grade, poor readers who had not achieved strong decoding skills that good readers had achieved at the beginning of second grade will tend to become poor writers.

Richard Allington, a leading researcher on reading difficulties, argued that “children from high poverty and limited literacy homes should be able to provide all letter names by Halloween” (Allington, 2006, p. 523). Allington argued that there were only 26 letters, and by Halloween, children will have spent roughly nine weeks in kindergarten focused on only nine letters. Allington (2006) indicated that his favorite design had both the classroom teacher and reading interventionists sharing a common curriculum and moving students through that curriculum at twice the traditional pace.

Whole Language Instruction

The whole language method of teaching reading and writing emphasizes learning whole words and phrases by encountering them in meaningful contexts rather than by phonics exercises. The whole language approach originated in the 1970’s from the work of Ken Goodman, who focused on teaching initial reading skills from contextual clues provided in a symbol-rich environment of literature, poetry, and stories. “Its primary focus was on the meta-context of meaning in which reading occurs” (Fielding et al., 1998, p. 185). The mechanics of phonics, when taught in a whole language lesson, were embedded and not explicitly taught. This

sparked the whole language and phonics debate which now continues on into the current skills-based versus child-based debate. In response to these debates, most districts have a balanced literacy approach, which was the read aloud, guided reading, shared reading, interactive writing, shared writing, reading and writing workshop, and word study work.

The U.S. Department of Education, the National Research Council, and the National Reading Panel conducted research and released reports that support a balanced literacy approach. The National Reading Panel's (2000) reported that several reading skills were critical to becoming good readers: phonics for word identification, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Some whole language proponents favor Reading Recovery, which was a first-grade intervention focused heavily on fluency and comprehension compared to phonics and phonemic awareness. However, many special educators and phonics-based proponents felt programs like Orton Gillingham were expensive, with limited long-term results (C. Thurston personal communication, 2017).

Prevention-based methods such as Reading Recovery and Orton Gillingham have been used for many years. Reading Recovery is a short-term tutoring intervention that provides one to one tutoring to first grade students who were struggling in reading and writing. Cook, Rodes, and Lipsitz (2017) found very limited evidence of Reading Recovery's success unless schools incorporated all components of evidence-based reading instruction. Sirindes, Gray, and May (2018) did a four-year study on Reading Recovery sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, which led to findings stating it had an immediate impact on student literacy. These findings contribute to the "reading wars" that have been around for decades pitting phonics-approaches against whole language instructional strategies. There is research to support each side

of the debate. On the What Works Clearinghouse, Reading Recovery was found to have positive effects on general education students' reading achievement.

Orton Gillingham was a broad, multisensory approach to teaching reading and spelling and can be modified for individual or group instruction at all reading levels. Ring, Avrit, & Black (2017) reported data from hospital-based learning disabilities clinic that found the program effective but needed more comprehension instruction. Another recent study on Orton Gillingham was on its use with incarcerated adults (Robinson, 2018) with dyslexia and it showed effectiveness in its approach. However, the What Works Clearinghouse stated: "the lack of studies meeting WWC evidence standards means that, at this time, the WWC was unable to draw any conclusions based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of unbranded "Orton-Gillingham" based strategies" (What Works Clearing House, n.d.).

Teacher Efficacy

The relationship between the student and teacher has a high correlation to student achievement according to John Hattie's (2012) research on what works in today's classrooms. Hattie acknowledged that the most reliable characteristics of instruction were the qualities of the teacher (Hattie, 2012). Hattie noted effect sizes were the best way of answering the question, "What has the greatest influence on student learning?" (Hattie, 2012). An effect size of 1.0 was typically associated with advancing learners' achievement. An effect size of 1.0 was very high based on his research. Direct instruction was elevated in Hattie's research, which was a .82 and was higher than many other interventions listed including any play-based instruction or constructivist models. Hattie's table of effect sizes is included in Appendix C (Hattie, 2012). If parents and teachers work together to provide strong literacy instruction at home and school, they can influence the variable of increased time for reading.

Teacher efficacy is when teachers believe in their own ability to guide their students' success (DeWitt, 2016). Collective efficacy is when a staff of teachers believes that together they could inspire growth and change in their students (DeWitt, 2016). Researchers explored the link between teacher self-efficacy and student achievement. Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017) found when teachers engage in PLC work, higher levels of teacher collective efficacy occurs, and in turn, contributes to improved student achievement. Dewitt (2016) suggested that teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy tend to be better planners, more resilient through failure, and more open-minded and supportive with students. According to *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning* (2012) by John Hattie, collective teacher efficacy had the greatest impact on student achievement, even higher than factors like teacher-student relationships, home environment, or parental involvement.

There seems to be an ongoing tension between educational policymakers asking teachers to exert judgment over their own work and those who want to reduce those opportunities. In the past several decades, agency has been taken away from teachers and replaced with prescriptive curriculum and standardized testing. There now seems to be a return to teacher agency, which gives permission to teachers to exert higher degrees of a professional judgement as professionals (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). Research by Biesta et al. on the Role of Teacher Beliefs in Agency (2015) suggested that beliefs play an important role in teachers' work. Biesta et al. (2015) found that teacher beliefs were strongly oriented towards the here and now and were strongly influenced by current and recent policy rather than by more of a wider purpose and meaning of schooling. This orientation limits teachers from exercising authority and achieving agency. One example is when teachers' unions deal with procedural minutia in contracts versus members having a seat at the table to develop strategic planning for student programming.

Class Size

Class size is another factor in influencing teacher efficacy and beliefs. In today's public schools, class size varies throughout the country, based on decisions driven by budgets, district administration, and school boards. Proponents of small class sizes believe student achievement and learning will increase. Glass and Smith (1979) produced one of the earliest influential studies on class size, and found once class size fell below 15, students' learning increased. In a recent study, Jackson, Johnson, and Perscico (2015) found that gains in achievement were due to low student-teacher ratios. Typically, every district has a class size policy or protocol that they use to determine the class size for teachers. For many teachers, "having large class sizes often means that they cannot do project-based learning or take risks to include more innovation in their classrooms. Large class sizes can lead to stress and high anxiety" (Dewitt, 2016, n.p.).

Hattie's (2009) *Visible Learning* was a synthesis of more than 800 meta-studies covering more than 80 million students. *Visible Learning* was the result of 15 years of research about what works best for learning in schools and he gives class size an effect of 0.21. Hattie states,

Certainly, reducing class size had a small increase on achievement -- but the problem that had been found was that when class size was reduced teachers rarely change their practice so it was thus not surprising that there were small differences. Imagine if teachers were retrained to optimize all the (obvious) advantages -- but without major retraining, the effects were likely to remain as they had when reducing class size. Reducing class sizes had (not the past tense) had a small but positive effect on achievement. Relative to other influences, it was a very low effect and the only question was why was this effect so low (but

positive) given the major claims often argued for the amazing influence of reducing class size. (Hattie, 2009, n.p.)

Assessment

Making decisions about student assessment on a regular basis in the arena of early childhood assessment can be difficult. Assessment in the earliest elementary school grades prekindergarten through 3rd grade is a complex topic, wrapped up in discourse about what's appropriate and what's best for the youngest learners (Jiban, 2013). The debate revolved around using assessment for students who are progressing in their learning is critical in helping them succeed. But if teachers and administrators used inappropriate methods of assessment from the outset, they risk potentially doing more harm than good. "Children were continuously and rapidly developing, both academically and across a wide range of other domains. The context that informed assessment decisions for early learners was qualitatively different from the context for older students" (Jiban, 2013, p. 1)

90% Pedagogy

Reading is a complicated cognitive process of decoding symbols to construct or derive meaning or reading comprehension (Fielding et al., 1998). Learning to read is the most essential educational outcome of primary education (Fielding et al., 1998). Fielding et al. (1998) state:

Reading is a complex process that builds on oral language facility and encompasses both specific skill development of phonemic and decoding strategies and the use of comprehension strategies. The precise ways in which these processes combine need to be understood if teachers were to identify their students' needs and teach them most effectively. Reading comprehension means language acquisition, communication, and sharing information and ideas. (p. 9)

A kindergartener's opportunity to develop reading skills is likely constrained by the amount of time that is specifically allocated to reading instruction. Most schools had a 60-minute reading block, but the teacher rotates from high-skill to medium- to low-skill groups where each student receives roughly 20 minutes of instruction (C. Thurston personal communication, 2016). The Kennewick model increased the time spent on direct reading instruction and developed school schedules that were conducive to more instructional reading time that increased reading growth. "Proportionally increased time was enhanced with skilled instruction and a curriculum aligned to student's current need" (Fielding et al., 2007, 52). Fielding et al.'s (2007) research was based on evaluation of skills-based instruction. The authors argued that the quantity of instructional time could be doubled and tripled for students based on sound data systems. They also stated that school systems need quality instructional time with an excellent curriculum, rigorous training, and diagnostic assessments. Puccinoni (2015), Wanzek, Roberts, Al Otaiba, and Kent (2014) also found the amount of time students were engaged with reading instruction was associated with student achievement.

Fielding et al. (1998) promoted recommendations that the reading process requires continuous practice, development, and refinement. Because reading is such a complex process, it cannot be controlled or restricted to one or two interpretations of teaching reading. Reading research over the last 20 years identified the critical skills that students must acquire very early in reading development to ensure that they can read at grade level by third grade (Florida Center for Reading Research, 2006); The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010; The Center for Public Education, n.d.). These skills were in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency in reading text, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. The development of these skills was critical to getting students off to a good start in reading, and educators can begin to assess them

as early as kindergarten. Florida Center for Reading Research stated students who lag behind in the development of these skills in early elementary school were in danger of not being able to read at grade level by third grade.

At the federal, state, and local levels, both educators and lawmakers alike have pushed to close the achievement and opportunity gap. However, such legislation focused on rigorous phonics-based curriculum and instruction into kindergarten, reawakening the debate between child-centered and skills-directed instructional methods. A typical kindergarten day has changed over the past several decades. “Think about what you did in first grade, and that's what five-year-old students were expected to do” (C. Thurston, personal communication, September 20, 2016). Private literacy consultant Thurston posed the question, “If over 80% of our kindergarten students were demonstrating proficiency at the recommended end of year Developmental Reading Assessment 2nd Edition (DRA2) Level 3, why were we only attaining a less than 60% literacy rate for our upper grades?” (C. Thurston, personal communication, September 30, 2016). The question further posed an inquiry into the point at which literacy skills shifted from proficient in the early elementary grades to partially or less than proficient in the upper elementary grades. The determination was made by certain district leaders in Southern and Central Maine to consider the impact of establishing a higher end-of-year kindergarten benchmark standard by using a DRA2 Level 4 to see if that would result in students maintaining proficient literacy skills as they progressed from the early elementary grades to the upper elementary grades. Based on the research of Fielding et al. (2007) in the 2013-14 school year, these schools embarked on a goal of 90% of kindergarten students demonstrating the end of year proficiency as measured by a DRA2, Level 4.

In 2015, private literacy consultant Thurston completed a comprehensive data analysis in schools utilizing the same pedagogy where similar outcomes from the Kennewick study were found. When students attained a DRA2 Level 3, or the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (F&P) equivalent text level comparison, 36% of these students demonstrated the appropriate proficiency at the end of 1st grade, and 38% demonstrated proficiency at the end of 2nd grade. Conversely, of the students who attained an end-of-year benchmark of DRA2 Level 4, 88% demonstrated proficiency at the end of both first and second grade. Within this measurement period, proficiency standards were measured as a DRA Level 18 and Level 28 respectively (C. Thurston, personal communication, September 30, 2016). The DRA2 and Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System were widely recognized nationally as the gold standard in measuring early literacy skills for kindergarten through second-grade students. Benchmarks were based on normed national grade level expectations and correlated to Lexile levels (C. Thurston, personal communication, September 30, 2016).

Districts in Southern Maine and Massachusetts, with the help of a national literacy consultant, began collecting data from entering kindergarten students from the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL) assessing reading skills like the concepts of print, letter names, letter sounds, and onset sounds for a three-year period from 2015-2018. Based on the data from the literacy consultant 50% to 60% of students in these districts were performing below the national norm in reading skills before they entered kindergarten (C. Thurston, personal communication, August 1st, 2016). As the curriculum became more rigorous, students struggled with reading fluency and were left with little time to attend to and process the ideas they were presented with during instruction. While others who were fluent in their reading focused on key concepts within a text, those struggling were still trying to decode

text. This disparity aligns with the widening gap. In the districts where poverty was prevalent and skills unattained, teachers, with the best intentions, lower their expectations and set a lower bar, leading to “the way things were done here” or the “status quo”. For students to be at grade level they need to exceed growth expectations according to Fielding et al. (2007 & 1998). It is not enough for them to demonstrate adequate growth because they enter with a deficit. If they are not addressed, opportunities to participate in rigorous learning environments are forgone. The longer they attend school without automaticity in early literacy skills, the wider the gap and the lesser the chance for catch up growth.

Fielding et. al (2007) recommended rallying the entire community, and most importantly the school board, around a targeted goal that 90% of students will be on grade level by the end of third grade. There had been little research on the effects of school board members on student achievement, however, Korelich and Maxwell (2015) and Lee and Eadens (2014) found that more professional development for school board members, in general, could lead to increased student achievement.

Parental Involvement

Research and educational policy point to the importance of parent involvement in children’s academic success for over five decades where family literacy studies had demonstrated the importance of parents’ involvement in promoting the acquisition of literacy (Saracho, 2017). Research from the Center of Innovation and Improvement (2008) indicated that there were positive academic outcomes resulting from parent involvement starting in early childhood. Involvement plays an important role in social and emotional learning, preventing risky behavior into adolescence. Sustained parent involvement in children’s education is essential. The challenge is how to encourage successful parent involvement for all children,

regardless of parents' economic status. The 2008 article by the Center on Innovation & Improvement highlights research evidence pointing to the major role parent involvement and school-family partnerships play in children's learning and behavior. Parent involvement remains a strong predictor of academic achievement even for high school students.

Fielding et al. state, "It appears that we can increase academic performance in children without changing their low socio-economic status if we can increase their pre-literacy experiences. Parents who read twenty minutes a day with their children from birth had a kindergartner who had received 608 hours of literacy experience prior to kindergarten" (Fielding et al, 1998). It is essential, through the relationship parents had with the school, that parents are aware of their powerful influence.

Conclusion

Children need to leave kindergarten with a familiarity and understanding of the structural elements and organization of print. By the end of kindergarten, children should be familiar with the forms and format of books and other print resources and be able to recognize and write most of the alphabet (Allington, 2006). They should possess some basic phonemic awareness, which allowed the listener to understand the parts of spoken words digested into smaller units. Implementation of RTI focused on providing effective strategies to teachers to help close the achievement and opportunity gap. Fielding et al. (2007) provided a framework to collect, organize, and utilize data routinely, all instructional determinations for students were made according to specific learning needs. The traditional model of identifying why a child cannot learn or "wait to fail" approaches will be analyzed through kindergarten teacher philosophy. It was important for this researcher to learn from teachers how child-centered and skills-based instruction impact the 90% pedagogy initiative. There is a current gap in the literature on teacher

beliefs around direct instruction and whole language approaches in kindergarten, along with class size, parent involvement, and assessments. This study utilized the current review of literature on teacher beliefs and perceptions in order to develop methods for this qualitative case study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to understand how kindergarten teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction influenced how they integrated direct instruction and whole language approaches into their teaching and language acquisition in the classroom. Though there was a considerable amount of literature available on this topic as described in the literature review, such as the many influences on early childhood literacy, there was less research on teachers' beliefs about their own efficacy in planning instruction. Guiding this research was the overarching question:

1. How did kindergarten teachers' beliefs influence the integration of skills-based and whole language based instruction into the classroom setting? Sub-questions are:

- Do kindergarten teachers believe they had the agency to enact literacy instruction that will disrupt chronic low achievement?
- How did kindergarten teachers prioritize their allotted time for literacy instruction?
- What were kindergarten teachers' beliefs about collaborating with parents?

This qualitative study discovered how kindergarten teachers in a small, rural district in Maine characterized and described their decision-making and individual and collective efficacy in the context of enacting the prescribed curriculum.

The researcher was passionate about the topic, setting, and participants, which is indicative of action research (Gallos, 2006). Qualitative data was collected in the form of a structured interview in each of the three schools in one school district involving 14 teachers. The theoretical framework for this study was grounded in the work of Fielding et al. (2007, 1998).

This researcher gathered data by interviewing teachers about their individual and collective efficacy and then drew conclusions from those findings. Using the theoretical framework of the “90% pedagogy” by Fielding et al. (2007, 1998) allowed the researcher to document and analyze how kindergarten teachers were enacting the art of teaching in the classroom to close the achievement and opportunity gap. The researcher assumed they were integrating different types of instruction in a purposeful way.

Setting

This study took place in a moderate-sized Maine public school system of over 4,000 students. The Free and Reduced Lunch Rate (FRLR) in the district was 43% and the Special Education percentage was 19%. The district was located in Southern Maine and had a full-day kindergarten program in three schools across the district with fifteen kindergarten teachers. The kindergarten programs in the district were located in different grade span buildings that consist of two K-3 schools and one K-5 school. There were 226 kindergarten students enrolled in the three elementary schools. The students were predominantly Caucasian and from low, middle to upper-class citizens that populate the district. The average Maine Educational Assessment (MEA) score for third grade was 53.21%, which was above the State of Maine average. In 2017 the district spent the average of \$12,585.00 per pupil. This was the third lowest per-pupil expenditure in Southern Maine districts, which includes York and Cumberland counties. The district has a comprehensive literacy program with the following elements:

- Literacy coaches and literacy interventionists
- Implementation and professional development of the 90% pedagogy.

- Kindergarten Jump, which was from the Kennewick Model where the district had implemented a pre-kindergarten teacher-directed summer program with incoming kindergarten students for five weeks.
- A mainstream curriculum (Tier 1) that specializes in reading and writing workshop from Teachers College Columbia New York.
- Special education programs, as well as other methodologies or instructional techniques that were available to them.

The researcher knew the Superintendent in the district and also the outside literacy consultant that was hired to implement the 90% pedagogy. The researcher gained written permission from the Superintendent to conduct the study. Permission was granted in writing from each kindergarten teacher for a voluntary interview and follow up, by personal communication.

Participants/Sample

Fourteen kindergarten teachers were participants in the study. Each of the educators was a full-time employee in the district. The participants did not include educational technicians who worked in kindergarten classrooms at each school. Given that each participant was a contracted employee in the district, working a minimum of 181 days, they were in their school, working with students, engaging in regular professional development, and working with the outside consultant in their building on applying early literacy acquisition skills. The outside literacy consultant was hired by the district to provide professional development in the area of early literacy skills for teachers. The researcher sought to better understand how kindergarten teachers integrated both direct instruction and whole language skills into their teaching and how it impacted student achievement in kindergarten classrooms in a Maine school district.

Data

Data for this case study was gathered through individual interviews. The intent of the interview was to provide an opportunity for teachers to discuss their experiences using skills-based and whole language-based instruction for language acquisition in their teaching. The researcher conducted interviews during teacher professional development days in February. Interview questions were created and were piloted with one veteran kindergarten teacher in another district to explore the process with respect to the questions and their ability to elicit needed information prior to the interview. The researcher personally gathered all the data. All interviews took place in a private room on one campus of the district. Having one consistent person gather the data strengthened the use of common terminology and facilitated recognizing patterns in the data. The researcher analyzed all the interview results. Participants who were interviewed were asked to review the documentation and findings for accuracy. Each person had a chance to modify or add to their input at any time. Participants had the right to withdraw or discontinue participation in the research study at any time. If a participant decided to withdraw from all components of a research study, the researcher discontinued all of the following research activities involving participant in that study. 14 of 15 teachers completed interviews.

The results of this study were drafted to be confidential, with participant information de-identified so no one can link the data provided by the participant. All interviews took place in a private room on the participant's campus. The researcher maintained confidentiality to the extent permitted by law. The information obtained in this study could be published in educational journals or presented at educational conferences, but the data contained no identifying information. The researcher, Institutional Review Board, and researcher's advisor

and committee had access to the data for the duration of the study and the researcher will retain transcripts for three years after the study is complete. Once this time period has passed, all data will be shredded. The UNE Institutional Review Board approved the research methods.

Participants signed consent forms that will be maintained by the principal investigator, along with the transcript data, in the same location for at least 3 years after the project was completed. The consent forms and data were stored in a secure location.

All data was housed on a password-protected computer or in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the principal investigator. No individually identifiable information was reported and only the researcher had access to the data for the duration of the study and will for three years after the study is complete. Once this time period had passed, all data will be shredded. Audio recordings were taken from the 1:1 interviews for the purpose of transcribing, coding and analyzing the data to develop trends and categories across participants. These audio recording will be saved for three years and then deleted from all electronic devices. There was no intent to use the data for future research purposes upon the conclusion of this study. All research findings were available to the participants upon completion of the dissertation. Staff has access to a copy of the dissertation.

Analysis

The interview transcript was studied and coded for emergent themes, categories, words, and insights. Open coding was conducted using a two-column note format. The themes that emerged from the transcript was categorized and analyzed by using a diagram to organize themes, as well as words and ideas. Sub-themes were sorted under the larger themes and these provided additional information to support the purpose of the study. Sub-themes were labeled in order to condense the data into manageable categories and units. All positive and negative

adjectives were highlighted. The creation of interview questions for the kindergarten teachers was based on the study's purpose to document the opinions, experiences, beliefs, and behaviors of the teaching staff. The researcher was careful not to create ambiguous or biased questions and sought to create a quality protocol that involved both writing good questions and organizing them to form the questionnaire.

Data Collection Timeline

Once the researcher obtained committee and Institutional Review Board approval, interview meetings were scheduled. A semi-structured interview was performed with the 14 kindergarten teachers and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each interview was scheduled for one hour. The interviews were scheduled through Google calendar invite with specific outreach email. Each of the participants was given a consent form, outreach letter, and email correspondence with the Google calendar invitation so they had time to read about and understand all components of the study. Interview questions were given individually to each teacher. The researcher offered to respond if participants had questions about the study. All meeting dates were confirmed.

Participant Rights

All participant information and data was maintained in a secure, password-protected network. If at any time a participant chose, they could withdraw from the study. Interview data maintained respondent confidentiality while presenting rich, detailed accounts of the integration of direct instruction and whole language skills presents unique challenges and strengths. Other data on parental involvement, class size, and teacher collective and individual efficacy was analyzed. One possible unintended outcome of participation in the study was that the district

would be identified. Another unintended outcome could be negative comments about individuals such as the principals, central office staff, and the outside consultant.

Potential Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this research and study included its small sample size of one district in a rural state. This small number limits the ability to generalize the findings of this study to all other public schools. While this limitation exists, the participant population of kindergarten students was reflective of a larger demographic of students. Therefore the outcomes and findings of the study may be applicable beyond the school being researched. A second limitation was that the researcher was a Superintendent in a neighboring district. Monitoring any possible bias of the research outcomes was critical to the success of the study. Ethical data collection and analysis with constant data checking with participants was important throughout. Participants needed to feel comfortable that they were entering a conversation in which they could be open, honest, and comprehensive with their answers.

Conclusion

This chapter offered an explanation for a qualitative case study that was applied to gather and analyze data to better understand the philosophy and beliefs of kindergarten teachers on language acquisition in kindergarten classrooms in a New England public school district in Maine. This chapter outlined the rationale for the case study as well as the data collection methods that were implemented for this research. Subsequently, considerations concerning human subjects were outlined. Details regarding proposed participant selection were discussed in addition to developing research questions for the interviews for the participants. The following chapter describes the data, analysis, and findings that arose from this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The qualitative study focused on understanding how kindergarten teacher's beliefs about early literacy instruction influenced their integration of direct instruction and whole language approaches into their teaching and support of language acquisition in their classroom experiences. Data was collected through individual interviews with 14 kindergarten teachers (participants) who teach in three different elementary schools in one public school district in southern Maine. Common themes emerged from each interview, and a description of how this data was organized, analyzed, and coded is presented. Findings begin with their years of teaching experience, degree level and the number of years in the district. Information from participants' responses is organized around themes. Descriptions of each theme that emerged were aligned with supporting quotations from participants. The presentation includes how findings were linked to research questions, literature review, and the conceptual framework.

Fourteen participants took part in this study, and one participant was not interviewed due to time constraints. The participants do not work in the same district as the researcher. The participants' years of teaching experience in this study ranged from one to twenty-nine years, and their number of years in district ranged from one to thirty-two years. Only female teachers participated in this study. The participants represented all three elementary schools in the district. The average kindergarten class size was 16.

Table 1. Number of Years in District and Years Teaching

How many years have you taught kindergarten?	How many years in this district?
1	1
2	1
2	2
4	2.5
4	3
8	4
9	4
10	8
10	8
10	10
10	11
11	13
15	15
29	32

During the course of each day and each week, the participants worked at least one hour on average when providing direct reading instruction in the form of guided reading, which was the major reading instructional methodology for the district. During guided reading, teachers performed informal assessments that include running records, observations, letter identification, letter sounds, and sight words. In addition to teaching responsibilities and being responsible for the scope and sequence outlined by the district curriculum, teachers were required to provide direct instruction techniques and strategies outlined by the outside consultant reflecting the 90% pedagogy. Teachers also gathered specific student data on progressions in literacy development and collaborated with their literacy coaches, interventionists, and with parents. The data was stored in a data wall that informs the participants' instruction, monitors progress for the student

and the teacher, and informs the PLC when they meet as a team. Other assessments on the data wall include spring and fall benchmarks, FAST data, and a phonemic awareness assessment.

Research Questions

1. How do kindergarten teachers' beliefs influence the integration of skills-based and whole language based instruction into the classroom setting? Sub-questions include:

- Do kindergarten teachers believe they have the agency to enact literacy instruction that will disrupt chronic low achievement?
- How do kindergarten teachers prioritize their allotted time for literacy instruction?
- What are kindergarten teachers' beliefs about collaborating with parents?

Analysis

Data collection was launched with the researcher interviewing the participants on a professional development day provided by the district. Fourteen out of 15 participants volunteered for the interview. During the interviews, the researcher used the researcher's personal iPhone to record each conversation as well as a Google voice-to-text document. Voice typed notes, handwritten notes, and an audio recording were created throughout the conversation. After each meeting, the Google voice-to-text documents and the iPhone audio recordings were transcribed. The transcriptions and voice-to-text were merged to provide a detailed and complete record of the conversations.

Participants reviewed the transcripts to check for accuracy and validated the Word documents that contained the transcripts. Once all transcriptions were completed and validated, data was transferred into Excel spreadsheets by question to look for themes, subthemes, words, and phrases, as well as documenting teacher beliefs, opinions, differences, and similarities on a separate document. Coding was used to condense the data, which allowed themes, subthemes,

and patterns to emerge from the transcriptions of the interviews. The researcher further delved into the transcripts and highlighted terms which included relevant words about the individual participant's approaches and belief in literacy instruction. Themes surfaced from an analysis of the findings, which allowed categories to be formed. Review of transcripts revealed clear similarities and differences among the responses from each participant. As themes emerged, code categories were developed and excerpts from the transcripts were put into the Excel spreadsheet to assist with the coding process. The researcher engaged in several rounds of reorganizing of the data and themes. After much reflection and review, the researcher processed the findings to report the data in a qualitative narrative. Teacher beliefs and opinions regarding how they were able to integrate literacy instruction into their teaching were presented. During the coding process, six major themes emerged from the reorganization of the data:

Developmentally Appropriate, High Expectations, Teacher Decision Making, Guided Reading, Running Records, and Parental Outreach.

Themes

The themes and subthemes that emerged from conversations during the one-to-one interviews outlined many common beliefs, but also some contrasting comments among the kindergarten teachers, regardless of their years of experience and years in the district. Kindergarten teachers reported that their philosophy either “mostly”, “fairly”, “somewhat”, and/or “fully” aligned with the current curriculum and scope and sequence. Additionally, participants expressed that they had no decision-making ability in the planning of the kindergarten scope and sequence of curriculum. However, they all have flexibility and make decisions about the development of unit themes and lesson design. Participants' answers varied, but the tone and frankness in their responses grew based on their years of experience and years in

the district. Guided reading and running records were imperative to daily reading instruction time and mentioned by all participants in the study. Participants' responses to the questions about teacher decision-making were strikingly similar. Participants in this study felt they did not have a voice or input into most aspects of the district curriculum. The interviewees also expressed other areas of limited decision-making ability which included class size, flexible grouping, professional development, and the large volume of assessments to be performed throughout the year.

Another major theme that emerged was in the area of parental outreach. Participants had both similar and different ways of supporting and encouraging parents to read at home with their child. Kindergarten teachers used low- and high-tech ways to communicate, educate, inform and allow parents access to their child's kindergarten experience. Ultimately, a common underlining comment from the participants was their overall need to what was best for their students. The data pointed to all individual and collective decisions from the participants were made through the lens of the student. Basically, students come first. Subthemes were time and flexibility, and they were commonly described in several of the themes below. The major themes will be presented and results will be analyzed.

Themes from the Interview Data

Themes
Developmentally Appropriate
High Expectations
Decision Making
Guided Reading
Running Records
Parental Outreach

Presentation of Results

Once all the data was analyzed, themes emerged, codes were assigned, viewpoints were assigned to each code, and participants' quotes were excerpted. Each quote had a corresponding participant and number after it representing a designation for the different participants who completed interviews. The record shows that all participants were represented multiple times.

The conceptual framework of the 90% pedagogy by Fielding et al (2007) rallied an entire community (including the School Board) behind this basic goal that 90% of all school-aged children will read at grade level by the end of third grade. The participants of this study had the same goal outlined by their school board and district administration; however, the participants of the study believed the high expectation end of the year benchmark Level D F&P is not developmentally inappropriate. "I feel the district has gone too far by going beyond the F&P benchmark expectation of independent D in kindergarten" (Participant 1).

Participant 13 mentioned, and it has become clearly evident in the data, that there are some discrepancies between the Fountas & Pinnell recommended benchmark levels and the district expectations. The current expectation is that students will read a text level D, *independently*, by the end of kindergarten. However, the teachers were assessing them with a tool that was written with the intention that students will read the level D, *instructionally*, by the end of the year. In short, the teachers believed the expectations do not match their assessments. When children read at an independent level, they were able to read and comprehend a text with little or no instruction. At an instructional level, students read and comprehend a text with few errors and an overall understanding of what they've read, but they still may require guidance and instruction in order to become independent at this level. This was a debate that needs to be resolved between the teachers and the administration.

The 90% pedagogy also focused on accountability in grades K-3 to ensure that students read on grade level by the end of third grade. The 90% pedagogy uses assessments used for accountability and calls for focused professional development on direct instruction strategies. Participants in the study discussed this goal throughout the interviews and the training that they received on a monthly basis. Curricular priorities were set and it was determined that every able child will not leave third grade unless they were proficient in reading. However, according to participants, teacher voice in the decision making of curricular priorities was determined by administration. "Whenever the Superintendent walks into my room he always says, 'you know these kids need to get to a level D/E by the end of kindergarten in order to be on grade level and be successful in high school'" (Participant 2). Setting a rigorous benchmark sparked a debate with the participants and administration around developmentally appropriate curriculum,

instruction, and assessments. “We have teachers and students who are stressed out with the hustle of the curriculum and the day-to-day grind of what we are allowed to do and not supposed to do” (Participant 7).

The theory and practice of the 90% pedagogical strategies that influenced student learning and culture in schools (Fielding et al, 2007) were evident in the participants’ interviews both positively and negatively. “It is engaging and touches upon the critical tools that students need to be successful readers and writers,” noted Participant 6. Consistent with the comments around curricular and assessment expectations from the administration, the professional development was also characterized as “top down”. “I appreciate [consultant’s name] but the roll out was thrown at us too fast. We need to know why first, and a chance to process and learn more before we are thrown into the lion’s den” (Participant 3).

Skills-based and child-based instruction was represented by the comments and discussion throughout the interviews. Conversations around proportional increases in direct instruction within the areas of reading and writing were frequently mentioned. A focus on scheduling, diagnostic testing, and obtaining and managing formalized data systems also came through by the participants as being developed by the outside consultant. All of the participants mentioned the need for more social-emotional learning in the classroom to make the curriculum more developmentally appropriate. “I also believe that social skills and emotional regulation are of high performance in the kindergarten curriculum” (Participant 12). These two instructional philosophies dominated the landscape the kindergarten classrooms of this district.

The 90% pedagogy involved parents, where teachers and the staff encourage and engage families to be part of their child’s literacy program. The participants all had various ways of pulling their parents into the school and communicating with them at home around literacy

strategies. Participants used newsletters, Seesaw (Seesaw is a student-driven digital portfolio that empowers students to independently document what they are learning at school), parent nights, cold calling, emailing, texting, offering paper and electronic versions of books sent home, and an incentive-driven schoolwide program involving parents reading at home with their children. “I have a weekly newsletter that has some suggestions at the bottom of it that give them some things to focus on (like sight words etc.) and encouraging them to read with their kids” (Participant 12).

The Turbulence Theory guided the examination of the perceptions and beliefs of kindergarten teachers during the interviews. The instructional approaches teachers were asked to use in the 90% pedagogy along with the lack of teacher decision-making created light to moderate turbulence with the participants. In moderate to light turbulence, the culture and climate of the schools were disrupted by this change or lack of input in what was best for the participants’ students for literacy development. Participants were constantly aware of this disturbance but still worked closely as possible to perform their tasks (Gross, 2013). Based on the participants’ responses, educational leaders in the district were unaware of the light to moderate turbulence that is pulsating with the kindergarten team in this district. “It seems we have a program picked by the administration and then one year of a pilot. I feel the pilot is never very thorough and then we just adopt the program with no global conversation or professional development with the new program” (Participant 3). Administrators need to know about these perceptions so they could work through these difficult dilemmas in order to sustain change processes over time.

Theme One: Developmentally Appropriate for Kindergarten Students

A common theme across the one-to-one interviews was that kindergarten students were capable to be challenged with more rigor; however, many of the participants believed the curriculum was less than developmentally appropriate for kindergarten students. “I also believe that some of the methods we are expected to use are not developmentally appropriate. I prefer to utilize a play-based approach with hands on activities, interactive lessons, and activities that integrate literacy with other subject areas” (Participant 12). Participant 13 shared that the district “has gone too far by going beyond the F&P benchmark expectation and creating our own benchmark expectation of an independent D in kindergarten.” Similarly, “the curriculum is beyond developmentally appropriate” (Participant 7). Participant 4 felt the literacy instruction was too intense so close to the start of school. Each of these kindergarten teachers shared a similar belief around how the developmental inappropriateness of the curriculum expectations with kindergarten-aged students.

Social skills exposure and emotional regulation strategies were a high priority for the kindergarten teachers in the interviews. Participant 1 believed that social and development skills have taken a back seat to literacy. Participants expressed the importance of the play-based approaches and other hands on activities. Participant 12 struggled with making lessons fun for four- and five-year olds who may come into public education without the proper academic, social and motor skills, and lack the stamina to last the entire day. Participants had difficulty fitting the entire expected scope and sequence of the kindergarten curriculum in the school day. The push for rigorous curriculum impacted kindergarten teachers’ overall philosophy around the developmental growth of their students. Time was common subtheme throughout the interviews. There was not enough time to teach all mandated areas and the participants

frequently shared how often they felt stressed in trying to complete daily reading, math, science, and social studies tasks.

Theme Two: High Expectations of Kindergarten Students

A second theme that emerged was having high expectations for kindergarten students. The teachers also stated that kindergarten was not developmentally appropriate, the two beliefs were intertwined and contraindicated their statements. “I think that kindergarten students are ready for some academic rigor and higher expectations and have seen amazing growth” (Participant 1). Participant 2 mentioned that kindergarteners in the district “are knowing more by midyear at this point due to KJS (Kindergarten Jump Start) and other school support”. Participant 2 talked about how kindergarten teachers need a new phonics curriculum because they finish the required phonics lessons in March, where they then need to borrow phonics materials from their first grade colleagues. Kindergarten Jump Start (KJS) was the cornerstone in the 90% pedagogy that emphasized early direct instruction prior to kindergarten and all of the participants believed in the value of the program, which was created by the outside consultant. Participant 6 commented that the KJS curriculum “engages and touches upon the critical tools to be successful readers and writers”.

Once students started kindergarten, a veteran kindergarten teacher believed “with such high expectations, we are making it difficult for many children to be successful in school before they’ve hardly begun” (Participant 12). Participant 1 described the high expectations as going too far in the district and felt “we need to meet in the middle where kids are challenged with independence and rigor. I would like more flexibility to teach important social-emotional skills”. The participants all believed in high expectations for their kindergarteners, but it was juxtaposed against the developmental needs of the students in the classroom.

Theme Three: Decision Making

The majority of the kindergarten teachers believed that they had no real voice regarding the scope and sequence of the curriculum in the district. The only way to offer input into the curriculum design was to be on the vertical district curriculum team that provided input to the administration about recommended changes. Participants assumed administration might not accept the recommendations around the curriculum not being appropriate. “Administration picks certain people to always be on these committees and not all voices are heard” (Participant 3). Participant 4 explained, “Many decisions are made from the administrative team, literacy coaches, and literacy consultants”. Common statements by participants about not having input on big picture decisions like scope and sequence in the district made them feel unvalued and not heard. “I feel like many times, decisions are being made at an administrative level without input of the teachers who do this work every day and actually know what kindergarten students are like” (Participant 5). The data implied a low level of frustration around decision making in the district. One participant stated, “I think if administrators listen more to teachers who are in the trenches working with the students in their classes, the outcomes would be better” (Participant 7). Comments regarding the chain of command were prevalent throughout the data where participants stated, “we are told what we need to do and expected to do that” (Participant 11). Several participants mentioned they don’t want to lose their jobs.

Participants all stated they develop their own lessons that were linked to the scope and sequence of the curriculum. “We do have flexibility in lesson/unit themes though!” (Participant 13). Current kindergarten teachers in the district were able “to design lessons and activities that they want to use in order to get students to meet the standard and learning targets that are set

forth in the curriculum (Participant 12). The participants enjoyed developing the units of study and also the lessons for whole group and individual student instruction.

Theme Four: Guided Reading

Guided reading unanimously came through by each participant as the most important aspect of literacy instruction in the classroom. Guided reading was an instructional approach that involved a teacher working with a small group of students who demonstrated similar reading behaviors and could all read similar levels of texts. Formal training in the district was provided through the Fountas and Pinnell reading program, as well as Teachers College. “I love how guided reading creates a natural differentiation process for each reader and the small group design is ideal for kindergarten” (Participant 1). A guided reading teacher plays the role of an expert reader who guides the lesson for readers. Therefore, a guided reading teacher plans lessons and focuses instruction on the areas where students need support. By focusing instruction on these areas, a guided reading lesson prepares students to be able to read the next level of text complexity. Participant 5 stated why guided reading was important to her. “Doing the daily 5 and guided reading in small ability-based groups as well as the relationships that I have built with my students over the course of the year is in important to me because learning to read and write is a very vulnerable process.”

Guided reading groups on average utilized 10-12 minutes of teacher instruction time with each group daily based on the interviews. Some participants mentioned that, in some schools, education technicians teach the word work (common sight words) portion for support. The word work specific portion of the reading program was given to the educational technicians by the literacy supervisors. “It is frustrating, as I feel there is never enough time to bond and respond

with my students, and often the word work doesn't line up with what I am teaching each group" (Participant 7).

The importance of class size was another common belief throughout the interviews. All the participants agreed that 16 students were the "magic number" for a class size in kindergarten. Participant 14 said, "I feel the smaller class size allows me to be even more thorough with the curriculum and meeting all the students' needs." Participants discussed how it was optimal to have four students at a time during a guided reading group, which makes perfect ability groups of four with a class size of sixteen. "It also allows you to be flexible in the moment and adjust instruction and the lesson based on what you are observing or noticing from students" (Participant 8). The district does not have a class size policy, but in the past few years, the class sizes have been around 16 for kindergarten.

Another important aspect of guided reading was what the other three small groups do when the teacher was providing guided reading. Participant 10 exclaimed that daily guided reading was the most important aspect of literacy instruction "along with three other literacy centers that are dictated by our administration with little flexibility for creativity". Creating activities in the other three literacy centers were often problematic for the participants. It took lots of planning and organization to make sure their students were engaged in literacy activities that could be from coloring to iPad reading apps such as RAZ kids. Participants also discussed the need for support during these centers where Participant 11 shared, "In my classroom, the most important aspect of literacy instruction is the support of another adult in the room with me." Educational technicians were often mentioned in the interviews to help provide and support, as well as differentiate the skill drill session for the teacher. Furthermore, writing can be a struggle for many students in kindergarten. "The kids need so much help to form their letters, stretch out

their words, and make sentences that make sense. “It is almost impossible for me to offer support for everyone” (Participant 11). Overall guided reading “is critical in the growth and development of budding readers” (Participant 13). Another similarity within the data was the participants use of read alouds. Read alouds gave students the opportunity to experience the language of others, and it helped students to make connections to their lives and to inform their view of themselves and others. Thinking and reading aloud helps children learn how to use comprehension strategies that are important when reading independently.

Enthusiastic read alouds are also so important during my literacy block and throughout the entire day in my classroom. Rich read alouds can contribute so much to a child’s language and understanding of vocabulary, sentence structure, book features, comprehension, imagination and so much more. Passionate read alouds also help to inspire a love of reading in these young kiddos, so incorporating multiple read alouds into my day is a must. (Participant 1)

Theme Five: Running Records

A running record was a method used to assess reading and as able to be done quickly and frequently. It was an individually conducted formative assessment, which was ongoing, and curriculum-based through guided reading. The running record provided a graphic representation of a student's oral reading and helped to identify patterns of effective and ineffective strategies that were being employed. Most of the participants mentioned the use of running records as the “go to” for an assessment so they could determine know their students current reading level. “I use benchmarks and running records to direct what my next day’s lesson will be. What kind of book I will need or word work I will do” (Participant 3). Participant 9 also mentioned that running records inform their daily instruction. The beginning and end of year benchmark

assessments as well as the running records were often linked together and highly supported among participants. “Running records/benchmark assessments are the important because they tell you so much information about what a child is doing or not doing when faced with a novel text (Participant 5). Participant 1 explained the most important assessment for district was the benchmark assessment along with running records because it directly influenced her teaching and planning for guided reading and literacy centers. There were many important assessments given in kindergarten however they all do require time to perform them with fidelity. Again time came through as a subtheme around doing all the assessments that were required. “There is just never enough time to get everything done and be as interactive as I would like with my students” (Participant 7).

Theme Six: Parental Outreach

Schools and parents share responsibilities for improving academic achievement. In the past, parent involvement was characterized by volunteers, mostly mothers, assisting in the classroom, chaperoning students, and fundraising. Today, it has been replaced with a much more inclusive approach using school-family-community partnerships which now include mothers and fathers, stepparents, grandparents, foster parents, other relatives and caregivers, business leaders and community groups all participating in goal-oriented activities, at all grade levels, linked to student achievement and school success. Parent participation in the 90% pedagogy was a major cornerstone in that theoretical framework. Participants in the study work diligently to encourage parents to read to their child and support them in engaging in their child’s literacy program. Kindergarten teachers try to bring parents into their classrooms in a variety of ways in order to extend teachable moments at home. “Giving parents information on how to help their child with words that match what we say in class” (Participant 7). Participant 13 stated, “I engage parents

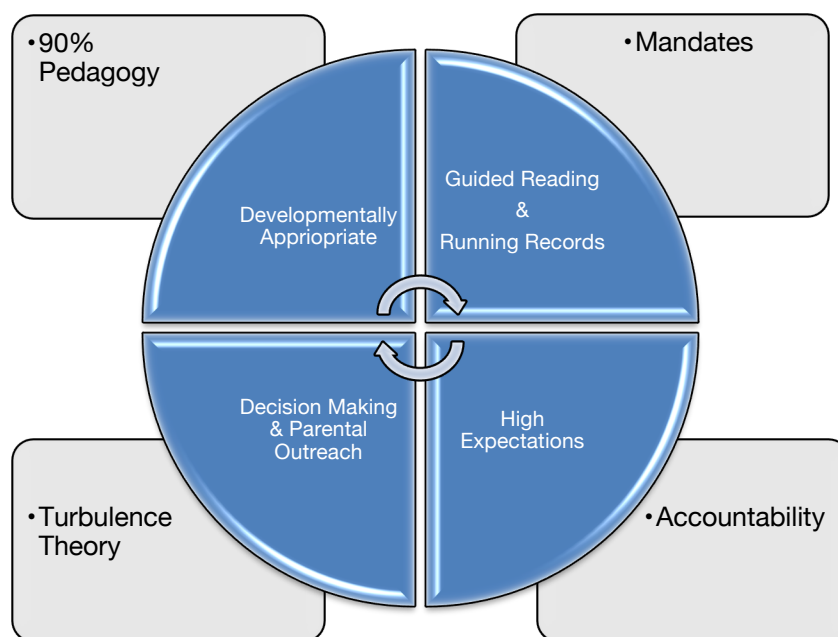
in my literacy practices by sending home a weekly newsletter outlining what we do each week in reading and writing”. Most of the participants mentioned using a technology app like Seesaw to encourage parents to read at home with their child. “I have family nights where parents come in with their child and read a book, then a complete an activity for the book afterward” (Participant 14).

Other subthemes that emerged in the parent outreach data were personal conversations, emails, and texts. One participant developed a program over the summer for her students to help with summer slide, which they defined as a lapse in skills due to not reading over summer break. “I do a backpack program with some of kids where I fill backpack with books and then every Wednesday, I drive around to the kids houses and switch them up so they have a different backpack every week” (Participant 5). All of the participants send home leveled books that were connected to the student’s guided reading individual program. The participants believe strongly in this approach. “One way I encourage parents to read with their children is by sending home books for them to read together. The children take home a guided reading book each night to practice at home” (Participant 12). Participant 9 sent home family literacy bags as well videos and links to books to read aloud. In one of the elementary schools, there was a school wide reading incentive program. “Our school sends books home daily with students to encourage reading at home. Additionally, we have an online reading program called RAZ Kids readers each week, so kids are excited about reading at home” (Participant 8).

The figure below visually represents the six codes as discussed above and how they represent the beliefs of the kindergarten teachers in a southern Maine school district. The six themes influenced how they integrate of skills-based and whole language based instruction into their classroom. Teacher beliefs were also influenced by outside variables that included

mandates from outside and inside the district, accountability goals (90% reading goal), and pedagogical interventions provided by the outside consultant. During the analysis, common themes emerged from the data related to teacher beliefs. There were themes and subthemes that influenced the participants' understanding around what was best for students in today's kindergarten classroom.

Figure 1: *Analysis of themes guiding teacher reflections.*



Summary

The purpose of the study was to understand how kindergarten teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction influenced how they integrated direct instruction and whole language approaches into their teaching and support of language acquisition in the classroom. This study addressed the overarching research question: How do kindergarten teachers' beliefs influence the integration of skills-based and whole-language based instruction into the classroom setting? Additionally, the study focused on related research questions of: Do kindergarten teachers believe they have the agency to enact literacy instruction that will disrupt chronic, low

achievement? and, how do kindergarten teachers prioritize their allotted time for literacy instruction? What are kindergarten teachers' beliefs about collaborating with parents? Results demonstrated that kindergarten teachers used a balance of skills-based instruction and child-based instruction in their instructional reading block. Guided reading and read alouds were strongly recommended by the participants in order to close the achievement and opportunity gaps.

Results also indicate that teachers have a strong decision-making process with the development of unit and lesson planning and less with the larger scope and sequence of the curriculum at the district level. Formative assessments like running records were very important to the participants in understanding a student's current reading level. This study found the importance of parental outreach and early intervention, along with more support in the classroom, were very strong beliefs held by the participants. Incoming CDS (Child Developmental Services) students impact their reading groups but the participants work with their special education colleagues to include them in their reading groups. The lack of developmentally appropriate and social-emotional activities in the classroom was extremely concerning to participants and want flexibility in their day to provide social-emotional activities. Participants believe there were too many demands on 4 and 5 year olds and as educators, are concerned there were not providing the skills necessary to make them good citizens.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative study examined the beliefs of kindergarten teachers on early literacy instruction and how they integrated direct instruction and whole language approaches into their teaching. Literature and research support that there were various literacy pedagogy models of instruction that were commonly used in kindergarten classrooms. Teacher beliefs about early literacy pedagogy were reviewed in the study. Individual interviews including a follow-up conversation were held to gather data and hear the stories and experiences of these kindergarten teachers. The research was framed using the theoretical framework of Fielding et al. (2007 & 1998) and Gross' Turbulence Theory. Specific questions were designed to delve into the participants beliefs regarding their professional knowledge that influence the integration of skills-based and whole language based instruction in the classroom setting. In addition, other questions were created to assess how kindergarten teachers prioritize their allotted time for literacy instruction, teacher agency in closing the achievement gap, and their beliefs around parental outreach.

Interpretation of Findings

The interpretation of findings were presented and linked to the research questions. The overarching research question was: How do kindergarten teachers' beliefs influence the integration of skills-based and whole language based instruction into the classroom setting? Findings indicate that kindergarten teachers strongly believe in guided reading as a practice, read alouds, running records for assessments, teacher decision making in lesson planning, high expectations and developmentally appropriate instruction for kindergarten students. The participants provide direct instruction in the form of guided reading where they differentiate and

homogeneously group the students into reading groups with leveled texts. Participants often use read alouds when they provide whole class instruction, which were heterogeneously grouped and they embed phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency (Daily 5) strategies in their art of teaching. They also weave instructional strategies around the Daily 5 (Phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension) into guided reading. The participants feel they would like the ability to add more whole group instruction in the form of social-emotional learning to the curriculum and school day for kindergarten students. The scope and sequence of the district curriculum is rigorous and takes away from child-centered activities that the participants believe would benefit their students.

The conclusion of the findings indicated participants had very limited input on the scope and sequence of the kindergarten curriculum, however, they had full control over creating and teaching their lessons. Participants often integrated what they feel is developmentally appropriate into their lesson planning and this included a balanced literacy approach based on the needs of each individual student.

Additionally, the study focused on related research questions of: Do kindergarten teachers believe they have the agency to enact literacy instruction that will disrupt chronic low achievement? Participants all held high expectations for their students despite the belief that the curriculum was not developmentally appropriate at times for this age. Decision making in lesson development and parental outreach provide opportunities to close the achievement and opportunity gap. The participants don't believe that students should be at an F&P independent D reading level but rather expected to meet the independent C level as that was the previous benchmark. Participants believed they have the collective efficacy to enable their students to perform where they need to be based on their students' individual needs using their own

individual and professional pedagogy. The participants perceived that the administration often provided top down mandates without understanding what was going on in classrooms.

The researcher also asked, how do kindergarten teachers prioritize their allotted time for literacy instruction? Results show that the participants prioritize their literacy instruction in guided reading groups and read alouds. Participants report they don't have enough time with their students to provide direct instruction with leveled texts. Additionally, some participants don't believe in flexible grouping but others felt it was a great differentiation instructional technique that opened up classrooms so teachers could work collectively and collaboratively based on current data. Participants utilized running records as major tool for formative assessments and also used them to gauge where their students were at all times, regardless of time restraints. Assessments take a great deal of time and overwhelmingly the participants stated they need more support in the classroom to do these assessments as well as the instruction required in the scope and sequence of the curriculum. They feel they are asked to do more and more in an already busy school day. Participants also explained how they often work most weekends on lesson planning, grading, scoring assessments, and reaching out to parents.

The researcher investigated, what are kindergarten teachers' beliefs about collaborating with parents? The data clearly indicated that the participants believed strongly in collaborating with parents. The participants used similar ways to engage and encourage parents to be a partner in their child's literacy program. All participants used newsletters, Seesaw, book bags, or send books home in various ways to engage and encourage parents to read with their child. One particular school had a school-wide incentive program to pull parents into reading with their child. The students received trophies and capes for reading at home with parents for a certain number of hours. Different options were offered from the schools to support the in-home carry-

over of learning including flashcards, summer book bags, and RAZ Kids in order to have parents involved with the literacy program.

Tie to Conceptual Framework

The area of data collection focused on teacher beliefs about early childhood literacy, with attention to how kindergarten teachers think about elements of classroom-based learning and spoke to how this research ties to the conceptual framework. Data regarding how participants' beliefs influenced the integration of skills-based and whole language based instruction into the classroom setting was gathered. Fielding et al. (2007 & 1998) theorized a multi-level framework that utilized more time and increased the intensity of direct instruction in reading, flexible groupings, as well as using current universal data screeners to inform instruction. The 90% pedagogy attacks the problem of low achievement in a three-strategy: rally an entire community, including the School Board around a 90% reading goal, involved parents from birth and pre-literacy activities, focused on accountability, developed curricular priorities, and utilized the direct instructional strategies provided by the outside consultant for the district.

This theory was helpful in examining how kindergarten teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction influence how they integrate direct instruction and whole language approaches into their teaching. Complementing the 90% pedagogy theory, Shapiro & Gross' (2013) Turbulence Theory was used to help explain, predict, and understand relationships, perceptions, and the beliefs of others. Data in this study found that kindergarten teachers believed in high expectations for their students, but conversely, feel that the scope and sequence of the curriculum was not developmentally appropriate for a five-year-old and would like more decision making ability in curriculum design process. They strongly believed in guided reading, read alouds, using running records, and embracing parents into the literacy curriculum. The

results of this study support Fielding et al.'s (2007, 1998) theoretical framework with the 90% pedagogy in a New England public school district. However, there is a light to moderate turbulence within the kindergarten team around the ability to make decisions around instruction, assessment, and curriculum on a larger scale in the district.

Limitations in the Findings

The data gathered in this study was limited to a small rural New England school district and to kindergarten teachers. There were 14 kindergarten teachers who participated in this study, which was an appropriate sample for a study of this nature, but also provided some limitations regarding the generalizability of the study. Additionally, a limitation in this study was that the researcher is a close colleague with the Superintendent in the district. This potential for bias was well recognized and supports were put in place to minimize this limitation. While there are potential limitations in this study, the consistency in responses across the 14 participants was strong, which strengthens the interpretation of the findings. The development of clear categories and themes seamlessly emerged from the data. If data were inconsistent across respondents, a larger sample size might have been required to gather more data in order to generalize the study to a wider audience.

Implications

The results from this study were meaningful and beneficial to the participants and school district of the study, the larger community, and other public school districts at the state and national level. The findings of this study support the beliefs and perceptions of kindergarten teachers. Enabling kindergarten teachers to express their beliefs on direct instruction, whole language, and balanced literacy approaches help to benefit staff, students, administration, parents and overall the most important stakeholder the student. The study group of kindergarten

teachers' collective efficacy on literacy is important for any district, school, or teaching team in order to analyze how to close the achievement and opportunity gap. The participants' strong beliefs on guided reading read alouds, running records, and parental outreach are important to the teaching pedagogy of kindergarten classrooms. The results presented that teacher decision-making was very important to the interviewed kindergarten teachers, however, they often feel they do not have a voice on larger decisions in the district.

Decisions about instruction for students were made according to specific learning needs and designated standards based on the data. However, the interviewed kindergarten teachers believed the benchmark for proficiency was too high for kindergarten students, and students require more play-based and social-emotional activities infused into the classroom.

Kindergarten teachers adjusted their instruction to include phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension strategies during literacy instruction into the classroom. The findings suggested that the participants used a balanced literacy approach in the classroom. Kindergarten teachers believed they need more support during guided reading, which could be in the form of educational technician support, technology, or coaching. The findings support the vision of the district as well as the strategic plan of the district. There may also be implications for district administrators, as the findings clearly suggest that teachers would like more input around the scope and sequence in the curriculum.

Benefits to the Larger Educational Field

While there were limitations to the study, the findings can be used to help educators at both the state and district level. Understanding teacher beliefs is one of the most important and critical grade levels in a public school setting. The kindergarten teachers who participated in this study range in years of experience, area of literacy expertise, and years employed in the

district. Given how consistent the responses were from participants, it is definitively clear that guided reading and read alouds were critically important stabilizers in the kindergarten curriculum. Various assessments were needed or required by the district data wall, however, running records were extremely important to kindergarten teachers. Findings indicate teacher discretion is a critical component for the future of public education, not only for student achievement, but for the culture of the building and district.

How These Findings Tie to the Literature

Participants in this study supported the work of Fielding et al. (2007 & 1998) or the 90% pedagogy with the basic tenets of Kindergarten Jump Start, using data to inform instruction, parental outreach, and curricular priorities in the form the guided reading. Additionally, the literature outlined the various types of instruction used by kindergarten teachers. Most teachers used more than one approach to varying degrees (Stipeck, 2016). Fielding et al. (2007 & 1998), DuFour, Dufour, Eaker & Karhanek (2010), National Early Literacy Panel (2008), and Nation's Report Card (2015) support providing rigorous direct instruction to close the achievement and opportunity gap. Dewitt (2016) suggested that teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy tend to be better planners, more resilient through failure, and more open-minded and supportive with students. These statements align with the findings in the study that teachers wanted more decision-making in the implementation and revisions of the district's scope and sequence and curriculum. Repko-Erwin (2017) stated that the early stages of development and kindergarten standards were not written with the development needs of young children in mind. Play-based instruction and social-emotional learning was an important piece of the developmentally appropriate theme found in the study and participants believed it should not be overlooked and be utilized more in the school day.

Connection to Transformative Learning and Leading

Burns (2010) reported that transformational leadership was defined as a leadership approach that caused change in individuals and social systems. In its ideal form, it created valuable and positive change in the followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders. The goal of transformational leadership is to make effective organizational change in complex systems, allowing them to function more smoothly and efficiently (Burns, 2010). Understanding the beliefs and preferences of kindergarten teachers was a prime example of the application of this leadership model. Using this theory, one is transforming the collective efficacy of an entire grade level by looking at the shared patterns of a group of participants around their beliefs of literacy instruction. Over the past decades, teachers and administrators debated skills-based instruction vs. child-based instruction in form of phonics vs. whole language. The only “winner” from this debate was the large publishing companies that sold boxed curriculums and assessments. The current consensus from participants in the study was that a balance is needed between the two approaches. Instruction is too complex to be captured by defining it primarily as either skills-based or child-centered. Most teachers used more than one approach to varying degrees (Stipeck, 2016).

School administrators are responsible for listening to the beliefs and preferences of their staff and to support the individual and collective efficacy of teachers. Having teachers feel that they have a voice is important for the overall culture of a school community and system. Additionally, the administration needs to have the ability to have a clear vision of support that aligns with what their teachers believe and realize what is best for students. This vision of closing the achievement and opportunity gap can be evaluated over time by checking in with teachers and discussing current beliefs in the classroom. The transformative leader needs to

embark on this change process by soliciting teacher voice and including them in decision making. Teacher preferences about the way direct instruction, whole language and balanced literacy are integrated will only strengthen their capacity to close the achievement and opportunity gap and meet district goals. Research, literature, and this study support that a transformational leader can create a vision which includes the use of teacher beliefs in a public school setting to support kindergarten teachers who use balanced literacy approaches.

Recommendations for Action

The results of this study are supported by previous literature of Fielding et al. (2007 & 1998) as well as Stipeck (2016). Data from this study suggest that participants have high expectations for their students. This is a large mind shift as participants in the study have recognized that kindergarten students can read and write prior to 1st grade. The participants acknowledge this fact based on their MEA (Maine Educational Assessment) and benchmark assessment data has improved greatly. The work of the outside consultant is important to continue around best practices and strategies for providing direct instruction. The 90% pedagogy should continue to be used in order to monitor student growth. Administrators should allow the participants to voice what they require for professional development. These steps could assist in developing relational trust between administration and coaches with the participants of the study. Social-emotional and or play-based activities should be infused into the day. A professional development day that focuses on these themes by experts in the field could provide relief for the participants in the trenches of the classroom and show support from the administration.

It is also recommended that teachers continue to receive support through Teachers College through reading and writing workshops. Guided reading and running record clinics or

PLC time would give participants time to collaborate on best practices for students. The PLC time could also be a way to discuss play-based and social-emotional activities that are not another add-on to the day. The administration should work with the participants to provide more time for literacy in the classroom. An anonymous survey to elementary teachers could ask questions to provide teachers a voice and contribute to decision-making around what is effective during the school day. For example, participants provided examples of how they would use whole group literacy instruction to infuse in social-emotional learning.

Lastly, when considering recommendations based on this study, parental outreach should continue to be supported by both teacher and administration. This could be in the form of professional development, technology, and time compensation to enact this important theme found throughout the study. After reviewing the district's teacher professional growth and evaluation rubric, parent outreach has a specific domain that focuses on the family and community outreach. Participants, in this case the teachers, should come with ideas on how they can show each parent in-depth knowledge of their child's literacy skills and how they meet proficiency standards. The participants should continue to find ways to communicate with parents as this is a constant shift as technology changes and evolves. The teachers should utilize student-led conferences so the students see the strong connection between home and school. Both the literature and the results of this study indicate a strong need for to develop play-based and social-emotional activities based on the number of adverse childhood experiences reported by participants. At a recent conference a national speaker said, "You can't apply rigor of academics until your students heal from their trauma(s)" (Scott, 2019).

Benefits to Stakeholders

Kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the importance of a balanced approach to literacy instruction are supported by this study. Kindergarten teachers will benefit from the findings showing collective efficacy on their beliefs in literacy instruction, assessment, and curriculum. Paramount to the application of this study, administrators should take note of the frustration in the lack of teacher voice and decision-making. Lastly, this study affirms the need for the district and community to support and provide developmentally appropriate instruction that is balanced, with high expectations to close the achievement and opportunity gap. Parent outreach, at this level, is very strong and utilizing technology to draw parents into the classroom is optimal.

How will Results Will Be Disseminated

The results of this study will be shared with the 14 kindergarten teachers who participated in the study. Individually, the results will also be shared with the district superintendent and curriculum director to assist in kindergarten programming in their PLC or vertical curriculum design teams. Lastly, the results will be presented in the researcher's district to help elementary teams with collective efficacy.

Recommendations for Further Study

While this study provides clear and consistent data regarding the beliefs of kindergarten teachers on integration of direct instruction, whole language, and balanced literacy approaches in a New England public school, it does not provide data focusing on grades one to three or data in a variety of schools. Both of these areas are recommendations for further and expanded study. It would be valuable to research whether elementary teachers in grades one through three provide feedback that aligns with the kindergarten teachers or whether it is discrepant in some areas. It

would also be powerful to expand the study to include a variety of kindergarten through third grade public schools in various states with different demographic profiles. In addition, it is recommended that data be gathered around teacher beliefs around social-emotional learning and decision making ability in the entire scope and sequence of the curriculum.

Lastly, it would be interesting to take longitudinal data on kindergarten teachers' beliefs on providing changes to the scope and sequence of the district curriculum so they can provide developmentally appropriate instructional activities. Additional data in these areas would strengthen the body of research and literature in the field. This data is persuasive and can provide meaningful information to school districts across the nation.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to understand how kindergarten teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction influenced how they integrated direct instruction and whole language approaches into their teaching and support of language acquisition in the classroom. Results demonstrate that kindergarten teachers use a balance of skills-based instruction and child-based instruction in their instructional reading block. Guided reading and read alouds are strongly recommended by the participants in closing the achievement and opportunity gaps. Results also indicate that teachers have a strong decision-making process on a smaller scale with the development of unit and lesson planning and less with the larger scope and sequence of the curriculum at the district level. Formative assessments like running records are very important to the participants in understanding where their students reading level standing.

This study found parental outreach and early intervention, along with more support in the classroom, as very strong beliefs by the participants. Recommendations for further studies in the area of grade span, demographics, direct instruction techniques, and teacher decision making are

recommended to understand teacher beliefs and efficacy. The cultural values of kindergarten teachers in the past were based on individualized preferences where doors were shut and teachers were isolated from their colleagues. Based on the findings of this study, there is a collectivism that has emerged among the participants to create a collective efficacy and a strong belief system of what is best for their students. The collective group (PLC) can make developmentally appropriate decisions that include balanced based literacy practices, social-emotional instructional lessons, and to analyze methods that are functional and successful for the students. The results of the study have changed the beliefs of the researcher as the focus of instruction requires more concerted effort and time in order to hear and understand the beliefs of teachers by administrators, coaches, and School Board members.

References

- 50 State Review. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Full-Day-Kindergarten-A-look-across-the-states.pdf>
- Allington, R. L. (2006). Fluency: Still waiting after all these years. In S. J. Samuels & A. E. Farstrup (Eds.), *What research has to say about fluency instruction* (pp. 94-105). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Baer, J., Kutner, M., and Sabatini, J. (2009). Basic Reading Skills and the Literacy of America's Least Literate Adults: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) Supplemental Studies (NCES 2009-481). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.
- Bailey, N. (2017, September 18). Why were schools still using response to intervention? *Nancy Bailey's Education Website*. Retrieved from <http://nancyebailey.com/2017/09/18/why-were-schools-still-using-response-to-intervention/>.
- Bassok, D., Latham, S., & Rorem, A. (2016). Was kindergarten the new first grade? *AERA Open*, *January-March Vol. 1(4)*, 1-31. doi.org/10.1177/2332858415616358
- Biesta, G., Priestley, M., & Robinson, S. (2015, June 15). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 624-640. doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325
- Brigit (2012). Kindergarten: The changes from play to work. Retrieved from <https://commons.trincoll.edu/edreform/author/brioual/>
- Brindle, Janna. (2015). A Survey of Response to Intervention Team Members' Effective Practices in Rural Elementary Schools. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, *34(2)*, 3-8. doi.org/10.1177/875687051503400202

- Brown, E. (2016). Low-income kindergartners were closing the achievement gap, reversing a decades-old trend. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/education/wp/2016/08/26/low-income-kindergartners-were-closing-the-achievement-gap-reversing-a-decades-old-trend/?utm_term=.1b523fcf06f4
- Cahn, S. (2013). *Exploring ethics: An introductory anthology* (3rd ed ed.). Retrieved from New York, New York: Oxford University Press
- Calvert, L. (2016). *Moving from compliance to agency: What teachers need to make professional learning work*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward and NCTAF.
- Carrie Thurston, personal communication, June 12, 2016
- Carrie Thurston, personal communication, September 20, 2017
- CASEL. (n.d.). What is sel? Retrieved from <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>
- Castles, A., Rastle, K., & Nation, K. (2018, June 11). Ending the reading wars: Reading acquisition from novice to expert. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 19, 5-51. doi.org/10.1177/1529100618772271
- Center for Public Education. (n.d.). Class size and student achievement. Retrieved from <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/research/class-size-and-student-achievement>
- Chiatovich, T., & Stipek, D. (2016, August 2). Instructional approaches in kindergarten: What works for whom? *The Elementary School Journal*, 117(1), 1-29.
- Clough, L. (2018). *The impact of rigorous curriculum in transitional kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms*. Dominican Scholar. Retrieved from <https://scholar.dominican.edu/masters-theses/319>

- Cook, P., Rodes, D. R., & Lipsitz, K. L. (2017). The reading wars and reading recovery: What educators, families, and taxpayers should know. *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 22(2), 12-23. doi.org/10.18666/LDMJ-2017-V22-I2-839112
- Copper, H., Allen, A. B., Patall, E. A., & Dent, A. L. (2010). Effects of full-day kindergarten on academic achievement and social development. *Review of Educational Research*, 80(1), 34-70. doi.org/10.3102/0034654309359185
- Cuban, L. (1992). Why some reforms last: The case of kindergarten. *American Journal of Education*, 100(2), 166-194.
- Denzin, N. K. (1970). *The Research Act in Sociology*. Retrieved from Chicago: Aldine.
- DeWitt, P. (2016). Does self-efficacy really matter? Retrieved from https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/finding_common_ground/2016/11/does_self-efficacy_really_matter.html
- Domenech, D., Sherman, M., & Brown, J. L. (2016). *Personalizing 21st century education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2010). *Raising the bar and closing the gap: Whatever it takes*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Early literacy Matters. (n.d.). Retrieved September 30, 2017, from <http://lincnyc.org/expanding-the-model/#>
- Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. (December 10). Public Law 114-95. *Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2017*.
- Repko-Erwin, Melia E. (2017). Was kindergarten left behind? Examining US kindergarten as the new first grade in the wake of No Child Left Behind. *Global Education Review*, 4(2), 58-74.

- Fang, Z. (2006, July, 9). A review of research on teacher beliefs and practices. *Educational Research*, 38(1), 47-65. doi.org/10.1080/0013188960380104
- Fielding, L., Kerr, N., & Rosier, P. (1998). *The 90% Reading Goal*. Kennewick, WA: The New Foundation Press.
- Fielding, L., Kerr, N., & Rosier, P. (2007). *Annual growth for all students catch up growth for those who were behind*. Kennewick WA: The New Foundation Press.
- Fiester, L., (2010). *Early warning! why reading by the end of third grade matters*. Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.ccf.ny.gov/files/9013/8262/2751/AECFReporReadingGrade3.pdf>
- Francis, D. J., Shaywitz, S. E., Stuebing, K. K., & Fletcher, J. M. (1996). Developmental lag versus deficit models of reading disability: A longitudinal, individual growth curves analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88(1), 3-17. doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.88.1.3
- Fromberg, D. P. (2006). Kindergarten education and early childhood teacher education in the United States: Status at the start of the 21st century. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 27(1), 65-85.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gallos, J. (2006). *Organizational development*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Glass, G. V., & Smith, M. (1979). Meta-analysis of research on class size and achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 1, 2-16. doi.org/10.2307/1164099

- Goldstein, L. (2007). Embracing pedagogical multiplicity: Examining tow teachers' instructional response to the changing expectations for kindergarten in U.S. public schools. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 21(4), 378-398.
- Gross, S. J., Shapiro, J. P., & (2013). *Ethical educational leadership in turbulent times: Resolving moral dilemmas*. Retrieved from New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Gordon, J. (2007). *The Energy Bus*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Hadsinger-Das, B., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2017). The case of brain science and guided play: A developing story. *NAEYC*, 72(2), 131-136. Retrieved from <http://www.naeyc.org/yc/article/case-brain-science-guided-play>
- Hattie, John. (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximum Impact on Learning*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Hehir, T. (2006). *New directions in special education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Hong, G., Pelletier, J., & Carl, C. (2010). Class Management and Homogeneous grouping in Kindergarten Literacy Instruction. *University of Michigan, School of Education*. Retrieved from 10.3102/0162373711424206
- Hord, S. M. (1997). *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*. Retrieved from <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/change34/plc-cha34.pdf>
- Hursh D. (2013). Raising the stakes: high-stakes testing and the attack on public education in New York, *Journal of Education Policy*, 28(5), 574-588, doi: 10.1080/02680939.2012.758829

- Jackson, C., Rucker, C., Johnson, P. (2016). "The effects of school spending on educational and economic outcomes: Evidence from school finance reforms. " *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 131(1), 157-218.
- Jiban, C. (2013). Early childhood assessment: Implementing effective practice: A research-based guide to inform assessment planning in the early grades. Retrieved from <http://info.nwea.org/rs/nwea/images/EarlyChildhoodAssessment-ImplementingEffectivePractice.pdf>
- Juel, C. (1988). Learning to read and write: A longitudinal study of 54 children from first to fourth grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80(4), 437-447. Retrieved from <http://people.uncw.edu/kozloffm/learningtreadandwrite.pdf>
- Korelich, K., & Maxwell, G. (2015). The board of trustees' professional development and effects on student achievement. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 27(Jan), 1-15. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1056179.pdf>
- Lee, D. E., & Eadens, D. W. (2014). The problem: Low-achieving districts and low-performing boards. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 9(3), 1-13. Retrieved from www.ijepl.org.
- Lencioni, P. (2002). *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-bass.
- Lucks, R. (12/16/99). Constructivist teaching vs. direct instruction. *University of Delawwere*. Retrieved from http://ematusov.soe.udel.edu/final.paper.pub/_pwfsfp/0000017b.htm
- Maine Department of Education. (2013). Maine Students Show Improved Proficiency in Math, Reading. Retrieved from <http://www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=DOENews&id=606365&v=article>

- Maine Department of Education. (2017). *State Assessment Results for 2015-2016*. Retrieved from <https://mainedoews.net/category/interests/teaching-learning/assessment/>
- Maine Unified Special Education Regulations Birth to Age Twenty, 05-071 Chapter 101, (August 25, 2017).
- Murname, R., Sawhill, I. & Catherine S. (2012). Literacy challenges for the twenty-first century. *The Future of Children*, 22(2), 3-15. Retrieved from https://futureofchildren.princeton.edu/sites/futureofchildren/files/media/literacy_challenges_for_the_twenty-first_century_22_02_fulljournal.pdf
- National Early Literacy Panel. (2008). *Developing early literacy: Report of the national early literacy panel*. Retrieved from <http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NELPReport09.pdf>
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Public law 107-110 (8 January, 2002). *Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002*.
- Noddings, N. (2007). *Philosophy of education* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: Westview Press.
- North use, P. G. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (7th ed.). MI: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Otaiba, S. A. (2015, August 1). "Waiting to Fail" Redux: Understanding Inadequate Response to Intervention. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 37(3), 129-133. doi.org/10.1177/0731948714525622
- Parham, K. (2016). Closing the gap: What effective teaching can do in the early years. *New America*. Retrieved from https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/closing_the_gap/
- Passe, A. S. (2010). *Kindergarten in the twenty-first century*. Redleaf Press. Retrieved from http://www.redleafpress.org/assets/clientdocs/social_media/IsEverybodyReadyForKindergarten.pdf

- Patrikakou, E. N. (2008). The power of parent involvement: evidence, ideas, and tools for student success. Retrieved from <http://www.centerii.org/techadsist/solutionfinding/resources/powerparinvolve.pdf>
- Puccioni, J. (2015). Predictors of reading achievement: Time on reading instruction and approaches to learning. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 64(1), 249-266. doi.org/10.1177/2381336915617598
- Ravitch, S. M., & Riggan, M. (2017). *Reason & rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Ring, Jeremiah J.; Avrit, Karen J.; Black, Jeffrey L. (2017). Take flight: The evolution of an orton gillingham-based curriculum. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 67, 383-400.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11881-017-0151-9
- Russell, J. (2011). From child's garden to academic press: The role of shifting institutional logics in redefining kindergarten education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(2), 236-267. doi.org/10.1086/505440
- Saracho, O. N. (2017). Literacy in the twenty-first century: Children, families and policy. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(3-4), 630-643.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1261513>
- Schmoker, M. (2006). *Results now*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Shapiro, J. P., & Gross, S. J. (2013). *Ethical educational leadership in turbulent times: Resolving moral dilemmas*. Retrieved from New York, NY: Rutledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Smith, D. G., & Reed, K. (2010). Appalachian Women Leaders: Products of Culture and Life Events. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 17(1), 87-99.

- Sirinides, P., Gray A., May, H., (2018). The impacts of reading recovery at scale: Results from the 4-year i3 external evaluation. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 40(3), 316-335. doi.org/10.3102/0162373718764828
- Sparks, S. (2017, December 5). Global reading scores were rising, but not for U.S. students. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/12/05/global-reading-scores-were-rising-but-not.html>
- Spillane, J. P. (2002). Local theories of teacher change: The pedagogy of district policies and programs. *Teachers College Record*, 104(3), 377-420.
- Stages of Literacy Development. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.theliteracybug.com/stages-of-literacy>
- State Assessment Results for 2015-2016. (2016). Retrieved from <https://mainedoews.net/category/interests/teaching-learning/assessment/>
- Stipeck, D. (2006). No child left behind comes to preschool. *Elementary School Journal*, 106(5), 455-465. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/505440>
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2010). The 2010 Kids Count Data Book. Retrieved from <https://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-2010KIDSCOUNTDataBook-2010.pdf>
- The Children's Reading Foundation. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.readingfoundation.org/third-grade-reading-matters>
- The Florida Center For Reading Research. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.fcrr.org/news/index.html>
- The Nation's Report Card. (2015). *Mathematics and reading assessments*. Retrieved from https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2015/#reading?grade=4

- Thelen, A. P. (2004). Kindergarten teacher perceptions regarding the development of young children's emerging literacy skills (Doctoral dissertation). *Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database, UMI no. 3159014*. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/openview/0b377b34c64b76a61c3f7cab7acfb92/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
- Third grade reading success matters. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.readingfoundation.org/third-grade-reading-matters>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *Evaluation of Response to Intervention Practices for Elementary School Reading*. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20164000/pdf/20164000.pdf>
- United States. National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: the imperative for educational reform: a report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education*. Washington, D.C.: The Commission.
- Voelkel, R., Chrispeels, j. (2017). Understanding the link between professional learning communities and teacher collective efficacy, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 28*(4), 505-526, doi: 10.1080/09243453.2017.1299015
- Walker, T. D. (2015). The joyful, illiterate kindergartners of finland. *The Atlantic*, 1-12. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/10/the-joyful-illiterate-kindergartners-of-finland/408325/>
- Wanzek, J., Roberts, G., Al Otaiba, S., & Kent, S. C. (2014). The relationship of print reading in tier 1 instruction and reading achievement for kindergarten students at-risk for reading difficulties. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 37*(3), 148-160. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4209904/>

Wasserman, M. (2016). Ready for kindergarten? gap between rich and poor narrows. Retrieved from <https://news.stanford.edu/2016/08/26/kindergarten-ready-gap-rich-poor-narrows/>

Waters, T., Maranon, R. J., & McNulty, B. (2003). Balanced Leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement. *Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning*. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED481972.pdf>

What was SEL? (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://casel.org/what-was-sel/>

Whitescarver, K. (2010). Montessori in America: the current revival. *Montessori International*, *October-December*, 20-21.

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

This study focuses on teacher beliefs about early childhood literacy, with attention to how kindergarten teachers think about elements of classroom-based learning.

Questions	Elements in Literature Review that informed Questions
How many years had you taught kindergarten?	Demographic to look at average number of years of the 15 kindergarten teachers and warm up questions focused on experience
How many years in this district?	Demographic to look at average number of years in the district and warm up question. Also teacher efficacy in district.
How does the current curriculum align with your philosophy?	Reading Process where the question was focused around child-centered or skills-based instruction along with teacher efficacy in the classroom
What was the forum for decision-making about implementation of the kindergarten curriculum design?	Teacher efficacy along with Turbulence Theory/Change Theory, 90% Pedagogy
Do you believe you had the ability to enact the instruction that will disrupt chronic low achievement?	Turbulence Theory/Change Theory, 90% Pedagogy, Reading process along with research around how teachers deal with National, State, and district mandates and assessments. This includes RTI and Achievement Gap research
What was the most important aspect of the literacy instruction in your classroom?	Reading Process- child-centered and skills based instruction along with homogeneous and heterogeneous groups. Teacher efficacy on phonics and whole language approach.
How had class size influenced how you plan and interact with the curriculum?	Class Size and Reading Process
How do you use assessment to inform instruction?	Assessment, Legislation and impact on kindergarten instruction

How do you respond to mandates that were top down from either administration or at State or Federal level?	Teacher efficacy, Legislation and impact on kindergarten instruction
What was the most important literacy assessment you administer and why?	Assessment, teacher efficacy
How does the reading assessment data influence your instructional decisions?	Teacher perceptions and beliefs around assessments, teacher efficacy, views on mandates on district or Federal or State mandated assessments.
What were your beliefs on parent engagement in literacy for kindergarten students	Teacher beliefs in regards to parent involvement around 90% Pedagogy.

APPENDIX B

12/16/18

Research Proposal

University of New England Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

This proposal serves as the request to conduct research in MSAD 60 School District.

Name of Researcher

My name was Dominic DePatsy and I am a graduate student in the doctorate program at The University of New England. I am conducting a research study designed to investigate teacher beliefs about early childhood literacy, with attention to how kindergarten teachers think about elements of classroom-based learning.

Method of Study

The method of study I will use includes conducting interviews with fifteen kindergarten teachers to understand how kindergarten teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction influence how they integrate direct instruction and whole language approaches into their teaching and language acquisition in the classroom. There will be no student involvement in this research project.

Benefits to the school or district

There was a direct benefit to you and MSAD 60 School District for participating in this research, as it was my hope that the findings of my study will provide insight around teacher efficacy and kindergarten literacy in your district.

Proposed Project Period

The research proposed research period was from January 1, 2019 through June 30, 2019.

Participation

All participants will be asked to sign an informed consent to participate. All participants will be informed of the purpose of the research and I will be responsible to obtain consent from each participant. Participants will be informed that their participation was completely voluntary. Participants can choose to answer only the questions with which they feel comfortable and can discontinue participation at any time. Some of the data may be used for future research purposes consistent with the original purpose stated in the consent document. The final data will be stored for a period of not longer than two years after which it will be destroyed.

There was a risk of loss of privacy. However, no names or any other identifying information will appear in any published reports of the research. The research material will be kept in a secure location, and only I will had access to the data. At the conclusion

of the study, all audiotapes of interviews will be deleted and any other identifying information from the transcripts will be removed.

Sincerely,

Dominic DePatsy

APPENDIX C

Influence	Effect Size	Source of Influence
Feedback	1.13	Teacher
Student's prior cognitive ability	1.04	Student
Instructional quality	1.00	Teacher
Direct instruction	.82	Teacher
Acceleration	.72	Student
Remediation/feedback	.65	Teacher
Student's disposition to learn	.61	Student
Class environment	.56	Teacher
Challenge of Goals	.52	Teacher
Peer tutoring	.50	Teacher
Mastery learning	.50	Teacher
Homework	.43	Teacher
Teacher Style	.42	Teacher
Questioning	.41	Teacher
Peer effects	.38	Peers

APPENDIX D

Version

**UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH**

Project Title: Teacher Beliefs on Direct Instruction, Whole Language, and Balanced Literacy Approaches in Kindergarten.

Principal Investigator(s):

The principal investigator for this project was Dominic DePatsy, University of New England, 207-317-0637 or ddepatsy@une.edu. Faculty advisor for this research was Michelle Collay at 207-602-2010 or mcollay@une.edu

Introduction:

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form was read to you. The purpose of this form was to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.
- You were encouraged to ask any questions that you may had about this study, now, during or after the project was complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation was voluntary.
- This letter was to certify that information obtained from the research will not include names of interviewees, schools, districts, student names or personal information.

Why was this research study being done?

As a student in the Doctoral Program for Transformational Leadership at the University of New England. The purpose of the study was to understand how kindergarten teachers' beliefs about early literacy instruction influence how they integrate direct instruction and whole language approaches into their teaching and support of language acquisition in the classroom.

Who will be in this study?

Fifteen kindergarten teachers in MSAD 60 will participate in the study.

What will I be asked to do?

All 15 kindergarten teachers will be asked to participate in a one-hour interview

- There will be no experimental or unusual procedures or interventions used.
- Interview questions will be used and shared with participants prior to each meeting.

What were the possible risks of taking part in this study?

Participation in this study was strictly voluntary.

- All participants may choose not to participate or may withdraw from the study at any time.
- There were no known risks associated with this research.
- The information obtained in this study will had no bearing on supervision, evaluation, or other responsibilities of participants.
- This was a confidential process and any information, which could identify a participant and that was obtained during this study.

What were the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

There were no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. The outcomes of this research may be of interest to other kindergarten teachers, the superintendent, and/or school board members.

What will it cost me?

There were no anticipated costs for you to participate in the research. There was no travel included in this research as the interviews will take place on the MSAD 60 campus.

How will my privacy be protected?

All interviews will take place in a private room on the campus of MSAD 60.

- This was a confidential process and any information which could identify a participant and that was obtained during this study.
- The information obtained in this study may be published in educational journals or presented at educational conferences, but the data will contain no identifying information.

How will my data be kept confidential?

The results of this study were designed to be confidential, this means that no one, can link the data you provide to you or identify you as a participant.

- All data will be housed on a password-protected computer or in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the principal investigator.
- Data will be coded and no individually identifiable information will be collected.
- The researcher, Institutional Review Board, and researcher's advisor and the committee had access to the data for the duration of the study and for three years after the study was complete.
- A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least 3 years after the project was complete before it was destroyed. The consent forms and data will be stored in a secure location.
- Audio recordings will be taken of all 1:1 interviews for the purpose of transcribing, coding and analyzing the data to develop trends and categories across participants. These audio recording will be saved for three years and then deleted from all electronic devices.
- There was no intent to use the data for future research purposes upon the conclusion of this study.
- All research findings will be available to the participants upon completion of the dissertation. Staff will had access to a copy of the dissertation.

What were my rights as a research participant?

- All research findings will be available to the participants upon completion of the dissertation. Staff will had access to a copy of the dissertation.
- Your participation was voluntary. Your decision to participate will had no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with MSAD 60.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there was no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you were otherwise entitled to receive.
- You were free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
- If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you were otherwise entitled to receive.

- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

What other options do I had?

- You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

The researcher conducting this study was Dominic DePatsy. For questions or more information concerning this research, you may contact him at 207-284-4505 or ddepatsy@sacoschoos.org. The faculty advisor for this research was Michelle Collay and you can contact her at 207-602-2010 or mcollay@une.edu

- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Dominic DePatsy or 207-284-4505 or ddepatsy@sacoschoos.org The advisor is Michelle Collay and you can contact her at [207-602-2010](tel:207-602-2010)/mcollay@une.edu. If you had any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Certification

- This letter was to certify that information obtained from research will not include names of interviewees, schools, districts, student names or personal information

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

Participant's signature or
Legally authorized representative

Date

Printed name

Researcher's Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Researcher's signature

Date
