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Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program Team: Perspectives from the Principal

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Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program Team: Perspectives from the Principal

By

Sara Shahbazi

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Faculty of **Education and Academic Development**
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of **Master of Education**
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2015

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Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program Team: Perspectives from the Principal

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

The Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten (FDK) Program has expanded the role of the principal and has altered the dynamics of the classroom with the introduction of an early years team (teacher and ECE). I conducted a qualitative study investigating how principals perceive their role and the role of the early years team in FDK. I studied the lived experiences of the principals using semi-structured interviews and analyzed the data through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The themes, Program Awareness, Role as a Leader and Learning Partner, Informal Assessment and Evaluation, Navigating the Roles of Educators and Building a Team Culture emerged from the data. The themes present a general conception of how principals identify their leadership role while providing evidence of their supportive nature within the classroom. Issues in building team relationships and in delineating the roles of the educators in the FDK program continue to be an area of concern.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to the early childhood educators and members of support staff who work in the education sector. Your talent, commitment and continuous work to support students in reaching their full potential does not go unnoticed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Geri Salinitri for her ongoing support, guidance and encouragement. You have been an inspiration to me and have taught me the value of meaningful research and in continuing to question and explore.

Thank you to my family, for your patience, unconditional support and love through this journey.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS

ECE	Early Childhood Educator
EYT	Early Years Team
FDK	Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten
MOE	Ontario Ministry of Education
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A global rise in the value of early childhood education has policy makers seeking ways to provide support for professional development and craft knowledge that requires theoretical and empirical expertise to meet the reforms of the early years programs (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin & Knoche, 2009). The Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) is working to improve the academic and social welfare of young children through new teaching dynamics. The most recent initiative is the implementation of the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten (FDK) Program (MOE, 2010). The FDK program began in September 2010 and reached full implementation in September 2014. One of the newest features of the program is that it includes an early years team (EYT).

The early years team is a major feature of Ontario's Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program. The early years team includes a certified teacher with the Ontario College of Teachers and a registered early childhood educator (ECE) from the College of Early Childhood Educators. The intent of the teacher-ECE relationship is to create an optimal learning experience for students by blending the expertise and academic background of the educators through an equitable, collaborative, knowledgeable and responsive team-teaching approach.

The FDK program emphasizes the partnership between the principal and the teaching team. The principal is recognized as the supervisor and the third member of the FDK team (MOE, 2010). The principal is identified as an "integral" member whose role within the partnership is to guide the teacher and ECE in building a "vision and philosophy to guide pedagogy" (MOE, 2010, p.10). Additionally, principals are expected

to promote a work environment that values and supports the practice of the kindergarten teacher and early childhood educator. While receiving guidance from the principal, the teacher and ECE are responsible for constructing lessons and facilitating and delivering the classroom, activities and instruction (MOE, 2010). The Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program (MOE, 2010), states the teacher and ECE are accountable for the following duties:

Jointly developing and delivering the daily activities in the classroom, including an emphasis on spontaneity to respond to the children's needs and interests; Organizing the indoor and outdoor learning environments; Using a repertoire of pedagogical strategies to challenge and extend children's learning; Monitoring and assessing children's progress using observation and pedagogical documentation; Liaising with families and the broader community; and Assisting children during daily routines (p.11).

Individually, the teacher is accountable for long term planning, program design and classroom management, as well as conducting formative assessment and evaluation (MOE, 2010). The early childhood educator collaborates with the teacher by sharing their knowledge and experience in early childhood development so that they may observe, assess and implement developmentally appropriate lessons together (MOE, 2010).

The Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program (MOE, 2010) highlights the role of the principal and describes them as the "key to maintaining a supportive focus on the creation of high-quality, play-based learning experiences by each teacher and ECE

team” (p.12). The principal’s knowledge and understanding of the program is a fundamental aspect of successful team collaboration and curriculum delivery.

The principal’s perspective on the FDK program is vital because it affects the relationships, perspective and development of the staff and program. Thus, to effectively and efficiently implement and monitor the program and the early years team, principals must have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all members, including their own.

According to Perry and Stewart (2005), the dynamics of a teaching team should induce student learning and educator growth. A successful teaching team is defined as a collaborative and integrated partnership that employs and expands the knowledge, practice and expertise in pedagogy of each member through a reciprocal learning process (Kremenitzer & Myler, 2006). An effective partnership requires trust, an understanding of roles, communication, reflection, feedback and confidence in one another’s abilities (Hestenes et al., 2009).

Studies have shown that a pressing issue in FDK is the teacher and ECE partnership (Gananathan, 2011; Tozer, 2012). According to Gibson and Pelletier (2012) and Vanderlee, Youmans, Peters and Eastbrook (2012), implications to the FDK teaching relationship are a result of the imposed collaborative learning process, unspecified roles and responsibilities and lack of partner competency. To overcome these challenges, research suggest that principals enhance their understanding of the roles, identity and needs of the team, build partnerships and effectively communicate expectations (Janmohamed & Pelletier, 2010; MOE, 2010; Vanderlee et al., 2012).

To address this concern, I conducted a qualitative study investigating how principals perceive their role and the role of the early years team in FDK. I studied the lived experiences of the principals using semi-structured interviews and analyzed the data through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Using IPA, I examined the meaning of the participants' lived experiences as leaders and uncovered their perception of themselves and the team.

Background

In 2008, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) published *Full-Day Kindergarten: Moving Ontario Forward*. The document was distributed in response to the political platforms of 2007 and a series of studies commissioned by the provincial government, which stressed high quality, child-centered care as the foundation for learning. It emphasized the long-standing importance of providing full-day kindergarten services for young children and the government's aim to move Ontario in line with developed countries that value the education of early years.

Dalton McGuinty's 2007 platform introduced Ontario to the implementation of a full-day kindergarten program. McGuinty appointed Charles Pascal to be the Special Adviser of Early Learning (ETFO, 2008). Pascal developed the Early Learning Report, *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario* (2009). The report built the foundation for the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program. The FDK program was a response to the social and demographic factors of single parent families and dual-working parents. Further, it was intended to assist educators in addressing the existing and developing needs of the students so that they would be cognitively, socially and emotionally prepared when entering the primary grades (MOE, 2010).

The FDK program follows a new kindergarten curriculum and teaching approach. It provides full-day every day kindergarten services and has eliminated Junior and Senior Kindergarten divisions by merging four and five year olds into a single class (MOE, 2010). The document emphasizes an emergent philosophy delivered by the FDK team, which focus is on play-based learning. The emergent curriculum is developed in response to the needs and interests of the students in the class. The educators' lesson plans are adapted to fit the students' needs. Educators build an emergent curriculum through observation, documentation and brainstorming. In doing so, they provide high quality and developmentally appropriate play-based instructional practices that are relevant to the lives and diverse needs of the students (MOE, 2010).

The Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Report

The FDK Program outlines the importance of early learning under a series of principles. Its aim is to build the foundation for early learning in an enriched, safe, play-based environment that will foster children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. Leona Dombrowsky from Ontario's Ministry of Education, has described full day learning as

Part of [the Ministry of Education's] overall plan to help more children get a strong start in school, so they can go on to have successful, rewarding lives. By giving them more opportunities at a young age, we're giving our children a brighter future (p.1).

The FDK Program is based on six fundamental principles. The principles are derived from the *Early Learning Report* (2009) and *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (2006) document (MOE, 2010). The principles include:

1. "Early child development sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour, and

health” (p.2).

The foundation for personal growth and development is rooted in early childhood experiences. The program utilizes the natural developmental process as a tool to nurture social and emotional self-regulation. Self-regulation teaches students self-awareness, attentiveness and to be intuitive and cognizant. Developing these skills will assist students in their problem solving abilities, emotional behaviour and social interactions (MOE, 2010).

2. “Partnerships with families and communities strengthen the ability of early childhood settings to meet the needs of young children” (p.2).

The document recognizes the vital and influential role of parents as primary caregivers. Parents are viewed as essential contributors to the early years team because they provide educators with specific information that is needed to foster the child’s development and growth. Moreover, welcoming parental involvement influences parents to engage in their child’s educational journey (MOE, 2010).

Members of the local school community are also valued. They are important assets to the development and empowerment of early childhood education. Their collaboration with the school and educators promotes ongoing learning and fosters personal connections between students and their environments (MOE, 2010).

3. “Respect for diversity, equity and inclusion are prerequisites for honouring children’s rights, optimal development and learning” (p.2).

Teachers must recognize the individual needs and learning styles of the students, so that differentiated instructional strategies can be developed to ensure an optimal learning experience. Further, all members of the school and community, regardless of race,

sexuality, gender, culture, religion, gender, socio-economic status and physical or intellectual ability, must be respected (MOE, 2010).

4. “A planned curriculum supports early learning” (p.2).

The education and learning that children receive during the early years of development is critical. The program states the importance of kindergarten students having “a balance of exploration or investigation, guided instruction and explicit instruction” (p.12). These learning experiences build on students’ existing awareness and foster the growth of knowledge and understanding (MOE, 2010).

5. “Play is a means to early learning and capitalizes on children’s natural curiosity and exuberance” (p.2).

Play fosters embedded learning opportunities that occur naturally and purposefully. Educators are responsible for offering activities, lessons and choices that are representative of the student’s developmental stage (MOE, 2010).

Moreover, the document emphasizes that play is linked to inquiry. The FDK program exposes children to experiences and an environment that promotes questioning, curiosity and wonder. Questioning motivates students to gather a better understanding of themselves, their environment and those around them. Inquiry based learning is a natural process that follows a series of stages; initial engagement, exploration, investigation, and communication. This motivates students to observe, question, reflect and share their findings (MOE, 2010).

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

The teacher and ECE are the educators of the kindergarten program. The quality of learning that the children receive is dependent on the team’s cooperation, passion, and

understanding of the students' needs. High-quality educators reflect, observe, plan and facilitate. Moreover, they value the balance of teacher initiated and child initiated learning experiences (MOE, 2010).

The stated principles recognize that children are at the center of learning and that the teacher, ECE and principal influence student success. Together they work in partnership with other educators, family and the community. It is the teams' role to support one another and ensure that the students engage in developmentally appropriate practices that are relevant to their personal needs and the program's pedagogy (MOE, 2010).

Importance of Study

As vital members of the early years team and school environment, the principals' perspectives have significant impact. Attaining such information will provide preliminary insight regarding the areas of success and contention within the FDK program.

Currently, there are concerns regarding Ontario principals' understanding of the role of the early childhood educator (Tozer, 2012). In February of 2014, the president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Sam Hammond, issued a letter to the assistant deputy minister of the early years division, Jim Grieve. Hammond raised multiple concerns regarding the need to educate principals about the roles and responsibilities of the team members and the program. Specifically, Hammond reported that some principals assumed that the ECE was a replacement for the educational assistant in the kindergarten classroom. Hammond explained that "this staffing decision undermines the role of the [early childhood educator] and the ability of the teacher and [ECE] to function as an educator team" (2014, February, p.10). By developing an understanding of the

perspectives of the principals studied, further steps can be taken to assist administration in mediating team issues and recognizing their professional responsibility as principals and team members.

Moreover, it is the principal's responsibility to uphold the essential duties listed in the Educational Leadership Policy Standards (2008):

Standard 1: An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders (p.3).

Standard 2: An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth (p.3).

The principal must be aware of their own responsibility and the roles of the teacher and ECE in order to promote and maintain an effective program that nurtures a cooperative team that practices high-quality care.

As a result, I hope that this study encourages principals to become conscious leaders who reflect on their perspectives, understanding and actions as program leaders and team members, in order to foster successful implementation and positive staff relations.

Statement of Purpose

The aim of the research is to present and interpret the principals' perspectives so that policymakers, administrators and researchers develop a deeper understanding of the patterns, structure and dynamics of the program and team so that the FDK program can

continue to develop to meet the needs of twenty first century early years practitioners and learners.

Research Question

How do principals in a southwestern Ontario school board perceive their role and the role of the early years team in the Fully Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Developing an understanding of principals' perceptions of the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program gives insight into the successes and areas of contention in navigating the team relationships within program. As principals' accountability increases with the program's requirements, it becomes important to identify the impact of their role. Principals are leaders of change and the advocates for new implementation (Gooden, 2000). The success of a program's implementation is dependent on the principal's leadership, awareness, motivation and understanding of the organizational change (Rogus, 1983; Walter, 1981). The principal's style of management effects teacher motivation and commitment and in doing so, it indirectly impacts program and student achievement (Eyal & Roth, 2011). The relationship between principal leadership and teacher motivation is intrinsically linked (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Thus, the principal's leadership, commitment and understanding of the curriculum influences the staff's commitment to implementation and willingness to change (Nicholson & Tracy, 1982). The following literature review will expand on the historical context of kindergarten, the principal's role in leadership, the importance of gathering principal perceptions and the principal's implementation of the program and in forging teams.

Kindergarten: From Past to Present

The early years kindergarten educational philosophy, which links child's play and learning, initiated in Germany during the mid-nineteenth century (Hatch & Freeman, 1988). Its progressive concept correlated with Ontario's growing child's right movement, which led to an expansion of full-day public kindergarten programs in the 1940s (Heydon & Wang, 2006).

By the late 1970s almost 100 percent of Ontario's five year olds were enrolled in Kindergarten and 39 percent of four year olds attended Junior Kindergarten (ETFO, 2001). Lee, Burkam, Ready, Honigman and Meisels (2006) investigated several demographic and sociocultural factors in the mid 1970s that led to a resurgence of full day kindergarten in the United States. The first factor was related to the increasing number of working mothers. More than 60 percent of women who had children under the age of six were now in the labour market. As more women worked, the number of children in child-care programs increased. This exposed children to being in a classroom setting for an entire workday.

Similar to the 1970s, present-day sociocultural and demographic factors continue to influence the current education system. The standardization of full-day kindergarten is a result of the escalating number of single-parent households and dual-income families of the twenty-first century (Clark, 2001). As a result, the FDK program was implemented to ensure that all children, including those of low socioeconomic background, received high-quality care and optimal learning supports (Heydon & Wang, 2006).

From Half Day to Full Day: Benefits

Demographics are not the only reason schools have adopted a full-day practice. Research has shown that full-day kindergarten programs lead to student academic improvements (Weiss & Offenber, 2003). Full-day kindergarten has a longstanding presence in the United States and significant effect on children. Research shows that when students are in a full-day setting there is a decrease in the number of teacher-directed activities and an increase in the presence of child-initiated activities, active child engagement and positive child affect (Elicker & Mathur, 1997; Gullo, 2000). Children in the full day program spend more time working individually with the teacher and less in

teacher-directed large groups (Carnes & Albrecht, 2007). Moreover, students who attend full day have shown significant improvements in the cognitive domains of literacy and mathematics (Gullo, 2000). These differences have suggested that students who attend full-day classes are more prepared to enter grade one, when compared to their half-day counterparts (Elicker & Mathur, 1997).

Further, Pelletier (2012) investigated key findings from Year One of FDK in Peel District School Board, Ontario. The researchers found that senior kindergarten (SK) children had greater vocabulary and reading skills, while junior kindergarten (JK) students showed stronger early reading and phonological skills. However, as a whole, the FDK students developed number knowledge at an earlier rate and initiated more complex and meaningful drawings (Pelletier, 2012)

Change in Curriculum

The FDK Program uses an emergent, child centered, inquiry-based pedagogical approach for the purpose of meeting the social, emotional and academic needs of the child. Emergent curriculum reflects the students' interests, core competencies and abilities (Cassidy, Mims, Rucker & Boone, 2003). Teachers develop the classroom program based on their observations of the children (Cassidy, Hestenes & Smith, 2004). Using these observations, educators create inquiry-based activities to promote meaningful engagement and complex understanding (Clandenin & Connelly, 1998). Inquiry-based learning encourages student observation, inference making, communicating, and drawing conclusions for the purpose of developing a conceptual understanding of the content (Samarapungavan, Patrick & Mantzicopoulos, 2011). Moreover, the program is designed to help children develop emotional awareness, self-control, and problem solving skills through self-regulation. Self-regulation is a skill that children can learn from the time

they are in preschool (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). However, research indicates that the self-regulated learning of kindergarten students improves significantly when educators facilitate the process effectively (Perels, Merget-Kullman, Wende, Schmitz & Buchbinder, 2009).

ECEs in Kindergarten Classrooms

Early childhood educators have a significant role in determining how and what students learn (Copelan, Wichmann, Lagace-Seguin, Rachilis & McVey, 1999). Their expertise and understanding of early childhood development guides them in developing a child-centered environment with meaningful and developmentally appropriate content (Sheridan et al., 2009). Until recent initiatives, the early childhood educator has been recognized as a support in the kindergarten classroom (ETFO, 2008). The change in their professional recognition is related to the growing concern to enhance children's social and emotional learning from an early age (Kremenitzer, 2005).

As a result of the FDK Program ECEs are now instructional partners in the classroom. They are expected to work with their team member to facilitate a responsive and optimal learning environment (MOE, 2010). Conversely, even as an influential member of the FDK team, there remains implications regarding the role and identity of ECEs (Gananathan, 2011).

Partnerships are built on the identification of roles, responsibilities and team collaboration (Perry & Stewart, 2005). Tozer (2012) found that the division of roles in the FDK partnership was approached with much uncertainty. Both teachers and ECEs were unclear of their partner's expectations and ability to contribute. These issues were evident in the teachers' hesitancy towards the ECEs' capabilities and understanding of child development. Moreover, Tozer (2012) identified five specific factors that contributed to

this separatism: planning time; pay differential; ultimate responsibilities; hiring practices; and literacy instruction skills. These factors, as well as the undefined roles, created disconnect between the expectations and requirements of early childhood educators in FDK (Tozer, 2012). Principals who take the initiative to understand and clarify the role of the ECE diminish the identity discrepancy in the partnership (Gananathan, 2011).

Importance of Principal Perspective

Principal perspectives determine the degree to which school leaders impact organizational change and the progress of staff and student achievement (Urlick & Bowers, 2014). Investigating principal perceptions of a program implementation explains the process through which principals manage leadership style and navigate through the program (Hord & Hall, 1986). Principals are responsible for conceptualizing the curriculum content, methodology and redefining the staff's roles within a new program (Walter, 1981). Thus, assessing the perspectives of principals during implementation gives insight into the basic needs and effectiveness of the program.

Perspectives sometimes develop through reflective practices. Reflection is a method of learning that requires personal contemplation (Guthrie & Jones, 2012). It leads to self-awareness, a greater understanding of experiences, values and beliefs and it encourages positive leadership development (Park & Millora, 2012). Identifying principal perspectives stresses the significance of school context factors and gives insight into the variables that impact the program (Urlick & Bower, 2014; Zimmerman, 2011). Further, reflection promotes high quality learning and encourages educators to be conscious of their role within a partnership, as well as their responsibility as an individual and team member (Perry & Stewart, 2005).

In the FDK Program (2010), the principal is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the program. Monitoring requires the principal to observe the staff and program and to reflect on what is discovered (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006). Principals can evaluate the organization using formal or informal methods. Formal assessment is utilized in the course of decision-making, as it uses evaluative criteria to improve the validity and reliability of the observed action (Foster, 1981). Informal assessment is spontaneous and offers principals insight to instructional practices on a day-to-day basis (Ing, 2010). However, for either assessment method to prove effective, principals must synthesize between what is observed and what is expected (Ing, 2009).

In 2011, the British Columbia Principal's and Vice Principal' Association investigated the first implementation year of full-day kindergarten (Mort, 2011). Principals in the first wave of the program were interviewed. Principals suggested the need for an in-service plan for FDK teachers and administrators, paid release days, formulating a designated FDK committee and creating pilot classes for teachers and administrators to observe. The data collected from the interviews served to assist current and upcoming administrators in understanding the program and its implementation by identifying the resources needed to address the challenges and to assist in the transition to full-day kindergarten. As a result, the principals' perspectives gave insight on ways to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and success of British Columbia's new kindergarten program (Mort, 2011).

Principal Leadership

The principal is an influential and motivational figure in the school who shapes staff relationships, the cultural climate and program delivery (Gorton & Alston, 2012;

Gulcan, 2012). Further, the principal has a significant role in affecting teacher motivation and instructional practices. As a catalyst to the effectiveness of staff's professional practice, principals have the ability to influence the success of program output and student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Instructional and Transformational Leadership

In the context of global reforms, two models of educational leadership have emerged: instructional and transformational. Hallinger (2003) differentiates the models by the tiered approaches that are used to undertake student improvement and school change. While instructional leaders adopt a top-down, first-order approach, transformational leaders apply a bottom-up, second-order method of leadership. The choice of leadership style is dependent on the principal's perspective. This is a result of principals being change agents, whose leadership reflects the functional and organizational needs of the school (Hauserman & Stick, 2014). However, many scholars have highlighted the overall success related to transformational leaders (Beugre, Acar & Braun, 2006; Ibrahim, Ghavifekr, Ling, Siraj, Azeez; 2014).

The instructional leadership method emerged in the 1980s and continued to be a common method of school of leadership until 2000 (Hallinger, 2003). Research has recognized instructional leaders as programmatic leaders who are well versed in curriculum content and knowledge (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982; Urick & Bowers, 2014). Instructional leaders are aware and responsive to educational changes and school realities (Mitchell & Castle, 2005). The instructional leader's objective is to establish the school's mission and to manage the instructional program for the purpose of facilitating student academic achievement (Hallinger, 2003). An indirect success of

instructional leadership is the creation of a positive climate (Gulcan, 2012). This a result of the professional development and instruction facilitated by the school leader, which is created in response to the demanding needs within the school context (Hallinger, 2003). However, studies have challenged the effectiveness of instructional leadership by recognizing the intense working demands it places on principals and the absence of teacher initiative and instructional autonomy (Marsh, 2000; Mitchell & Castle, 2005).

As the 1990s emerged, the preferred model of principal leadership styles transformed from a managerial position to a shared and distributed design (Hallinger, 2003; Urick & Bowers, 2014). Mazurkiewicz (2012) argued that a shared method avoids stagnation in the education system by using a systematic reaction identified as modern leadership to address social, individual and organizational realities. Modern leadership is based on

... Cooperation and permanent communication with people, efficiently using complex diversity of actions, attitudes, behaviors and values... leadership has to be a process of taking actions, creating situations, determining organizational initiatives, entitling others to take actions, modeling relations between people (p.43)

As a result, principals are implementing a shared approach and are departing from the classic leadership style of single handedly formulating and delegating program and curriculum content by employing a transformational approach (Mazurkiewicz, 2012; Hallinger, 2003).

In contrast to instructional leaders, transformational leaders emphasize organization renewal by improving teacher self-efficacy and commitment (Marks &

Printy, 2003). The principal is recognized as an inspirational and supportive leader who provides staff with personalized attention and intellectual stimulation (Devos & Bouckenooghe, 2009; Griffith, 2004). The principal's efforts are positively associated with empowering teachers' autonomous motivation (Eyal & Roth, 2011). A transformational leader strengthens teachers' independence by promoting teacher involvement, innovation and by immersing teachers into the school's climate (Urick & Bowers, 2014). Teachers' self-determination is linked to improvement in their quality of learning, teaching, performance and wellbeing (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Moreover, teachers learn to construct meaning in their practice and develop a greater appreciation for their role within the program (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam & Brown, 2014).

The choice of whether to adopt a transformational or instructional approach is dependent on the principal's perceptions of his or her leadership behaviour and the organizational environment (Urick & Bowers, 2014). It is important for principals to identify the concerns of their school and program in order to practice effective management (Valentine & Prater, 2011). Adopting a management style that reflects the needs of the school and staff can result in a school wide improved pedagogy and an increase in student achievement (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006).

Principal and Program Implementation

Virgilio and Virgilio (2001) investigated the role of the principal in program implementation. They argue that program implementation occurs through a series of stages handled by the principal. The stages for curriculum implementation include change, communication and staff development.

Change and Implementation

Implementing a new program requires changing the existing circumstance.

Change is a technical process that requires time, meaningful commitment, awareness and active engagement (Virgilio & Virgilio, 2001; Walter, 1981). The quality of change is dependent on the principal's advocacy and understanding of the program (Nicholson & Tracy, 1982). The principal is responsible for informing and instructing the staff on new initiatives (Mojkowski, 2000). Creating change requires principals to reflect on and assess their position and to be aware of their responsibility as program leaders (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012). Nicholson and Tracy (1982) argue that "the principal needs sufficient time and information regarding the change to pass through a personal adoption process and thus be ready to effectively transmit the change to teachers" (p. 72). Once principals have acquired the knowledge and skills essential for implementation, they can effectively diffuse the information among staff so that new curriculum practices can be successfully applied (Peters & Pearce, 2012).

Communication and Implementation

Turk, Wolff, Waterbury and Zumalt (2002) argue that effective communication is essential for successful program implementation. It is the principal's responsibility to inform faculty about the rationale for the new curriculum (Virgilio & Virgilio, 2001). To do so, principals need to view themselves as a vital resource and transmitter of knowledge (Turk et al., 2002). Through open communication, principals can educate their staff about the program's rationale and expectations. Initiating dialogue fosters team collaboration and builds trust between the principal and teaching staff (Moye, Henkin & Egley, 2005).

Communication affects the construction and maintenance of teaching teams. Principals must share their knowledge to facilitate the curriculum output and expected roles of each member. When teachers' roles are defined, members are conscious of their expectations and responsibilities, as well as those of their partners (Turk et al., 2002).

Staff Development and Implementation

The implementation of a novel curriculum requires re-educating and re-socializing the staff (Virgilo & Virgilo, 2001). It involves refining roles so that teachers can adapt to changes in their practice, program delivery and curriculum knowledge (Gooden, 2000). In providing professional development, principals assist their staff in gaining the expertise required for effective implementation (Sackney & Walker, 2006). Professional learning enhances teachers' knowledge of the program, which assists them in implementing the modified curriculum so that they can assess their students' needs more critically. Mojkowski (2000) suggests that staff development increases teacher responsibility and commitment to the program and gives teachers the opportunity to enhance their practice. Moreover, the principal's knowledge and awareness provides the necessary background to facilitate and assist the process (Virgilo & Virgilo, 1984).

Expanding teachers' professional practice is a process. Principals must engage and collaborate with their staff, so that roles are addressed and the program is effectively put in place (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Gooden (2000) recommends that principals provide teachers with ongoing training, regular meetings, classroom assistance and the opportunity to observe other classrooms. Related research suggests that staff development works best when it is personalized to the newly defined role (Walter, 1981; Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Principals who initiate one-on-one interaction to address the

teachers' individual concerns are able to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the program on a deeper level (Hord & Huling-Austin, 1986).

Team Building

A successful team appreciates, values and takes advantage of one another's experience and expertise (Chen, Chen & Tsao, 2009). A successful team increases member's commitment and cooperation to the organization and has a significant effect on job satisfaction (Park, Henkin & Egley, 2005). Principals establish teams through their leadership, building of trusted relationships and definition of roles.

Studies have shown that a principal's communication and awareness about a program's curriculum and the staff's responsibility increases the principal's role as a team member and their ability to foster a collaborative work environment (Moye, Henkin & Egley, 2005; Tozer, 2012; Wood 2005;). As a vital resource to the staff, principals educate and model leadership qualities to assist teachers in building and maintaining effective teams (McCoy, 1981). Turk et al., (2002) found that principals who considered the following steps were able to foster effective and successful staff teams:

...Principal should (a) provide dedicated time for teams to meet; (b) allow teams to define their purpose within the guidelines of the school's mission, norms, policies and other procedures; (c) provide time, materials and other resources for team-building activities and training; (d) actively support and model the team concept; (e) develop and support cross- functional teams to address school leadership issues (22).

Price (2012) further argues that staff attitudes improve when the principal-teacher relationships include positive, fundamental feedback. Principals who have a developed understanding of the team's role are able to adjust their leadership style to staff needs

(Gooden, 2000). By initiating and maintaining an environment that includes communication and trust, principals empower the teachers to build a close professional culture with high professional standards (Jurasaitė-Harbinson & Rex, 2010; Peters & Pearce, 2012).

By fostering team relationships, principals build a school culture. A positive school culture is established by ingraining a set of core values that promote collaboration, collegiality and trust (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006). The values create a vision that is based on the needs of the team, program and school community. Moreover, establishing a positive school culture with beginning educators increases their level of resilience and confidence and helps the staff manage ambiguity (Lambert, 1988). This is because a positive school culture encourages staff appreciation and participation by principals offering personalized support and providing staff development (Peters & Pearce, 2012).

Trust and Team Building

As leaders of the school, principals have the responsibility of modeling and promoting trust among staff members. Trust provides the groundwork for establishing staff relationships and is a fundamental component in promoting optimal working conditions and learning experiences (Kutsyruba, Walker & Noonan, 2010). More importantly, the style of leadership cultivated and led by the principal influences the faculty's trust in the principal (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015)

The morality and authenticity of the principal are essential elements in establishing trust. Klein (2012) argues that trust is a result of increased transparency between the principal and staff. Transparency encourages a safe and secure work environment that recognizes and respects the needs of staff members through a reciprocal relationship (Nicholson & Tracy, 1982). Principals who are open with their staff and

provide clear expectations are able to nurture positive growth (Bird, Wang, Watson & Murray, 2012). Thus, trust propagates effective and productive interaction, a positive working environment and healthy collegial relations (Moye, Henkin & Egley, 2005).

The significance of a trusted relationship is reinforced in the event of a challenge or new initiative. Key events have a considerable impact on the working relationships between principals and teachers (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). Overcoming these moments requires joint collaboration and principals' support, direction and confidence of staff members (McCoy, 1981). In the case of program implementation, teachers who trust their school leader remain confident and optimistic during times of uncertainty (Hord & Huling-Austin, 1986). This is a result of a trusted working relationship that incorporates consultation, initiative, support and shared knowledge (Hall & Hord, 1987).

Collegial trust continues to grow when knowledge is openly shared and communicated with members of the organization. A supportive principal promotes a transparent relationship and encourages team collaboration by extending knowledge beyond oneself (Gooden, 2000; Turk et al., 2002). Jurasaitė-Harbinson and Rex (2010) investigated administrator influence on professional relationships and found that trusted relationships emerged when principals exercised knowledge creation. Knowledge creation is the “tinkering, transfer, research of practice and facilitation...” (p.269). Administrators who employed effective knowledge creation and who shared information, resources and announcements with staff created a trusted, open and valued relationship among them.

Defining Roles and Team Building

Clearly defining the objectives of each member is a necessary step in effective partnership and program planning (Anderson, 2013). The principal's understanding of the

team members' competencies affects the teaching team and the staff's capacity to contribute to the program's implementation (Tozer, 2012). Having a thorough understanding and effectively communicating the roles and responsibilities of team members positively impacts the behaviour, commitment and practice of the staff (Rogus, 1983).

A shared pedagogical philosophy and an understanding of individual and team roles help to develop partnerships (Perry & Stewart, 2005). Studies have shown that the initial formation of teams is often based on a set of assumptions and expectations (Perry & Stewart, 2005; Tozer, 2012). Predisposed ideas that lack clarification lead to role confusion. Such misunderstandings occur when colleagues from different disciplines are required to build an effective partnership with little guidance and support from the principal (Gooden, 2000).

Tozer (2012) found that kindergarten teachers in the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program assumed that the ECE would adopt roles similar to an Educational Assistant (EA) or co-op student. Tozer (2012) concluded that the uncertainty regarding the ECE's roles and responsibilities and the teacher's lack of knowledge about the ECE's capabilities was a result of the undefined expectations within the partnership. To build a collaborative team that values, recognizes and respects the abilities and skills of each member, there needs to be time dedicated to formulating an understanding of the expectations (Perry & Stewart, 2005; Tozer, 2012). As a result, being the leaders of change, principals are responsible for informing and discussing the roles and expectations of the team members (Virgilio & Virgilio, 2001).

Summary of Literature Review

The literature review is a synopsis of the peer-reviewed studies related to the topic of principal leadership, curriculum implementation and relationship building. The brief overview of the impact and influence of principal perspectives and leadership provides insight to the growing literature. However, although studies continue to be conducted, there remain significant gaps regarding program effectiveness as assessed through the reflection and perception of the principal.

As a result, my aim in the current study was to explore the perspectives of principals in this study so that reflection and improvements can be made to enhance the success and effectiveness of Ontario's Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten program. I hoped to find common themes that extend the existing research conducted within the Ontario context. In doing so, I hope that policymakers and administrators cultivate a deeper understanding of the patterns, structure and function of the program and relations.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Framework

The purpose of this study is to investigate elementary school principal perspectives on their role and the role of the early years team in the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program. I used an exploratory qualitative approach to investigate the lived experiences of the participants. Qualitative methodologies use an inductive and descriptive approach to understand the events and people studied (Maxwell, 2012). These methodologies focus on inquiry and expand upon the researcher's interest in understanding how the participants interpret their lived experiences (Merriam, 2014). Exploring the perceptions of the principals will give me greater insight in uncovering their experiences and positionality.

More specifically, I employed Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) method of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is based on three theoretical models: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. IPA is a qualitative method that is concerned with uncovering the meaning of an individual's lived experience. It seeks to understand how major events and occurrences affect the participant's position within a specific context. This creates an approach that is inductive in nature, as the researcher draws conclusions from the lived experiences of the participants, rather than creating assumptions through past hypotheses.

Philosophy	Phenomenological
Ontology	Social constructionism
Epistemology	Interpretive (hermeneutics)
Methodology	Qualitative
Approach	Inductive
Research Design	Mono-perspectival study (principal)
Method	Semi-structured interview

Table 1: Summary of Research Framework

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is a qualitative and experiential approach that focuses on the human lived experience based on the fundamental principals derived from phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith, 2007).

Phenomenology is an eidetic method that was developed by Edmund Husserl (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Phenomenology uses a philosophical approach to understand and examine the human experience (Smith et al., 2009). It involves reflection and deeper level thinking, which builds an intentional relationship between the participant’s awareness and the event. More importantly, its focus is on understanding the human experience from the perspective of those who experienced the phenomenon (Finlay, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). Interpretive phenomenological analysis recognizes the participant as a physical and psychological entity (Joseph, 2014; Smith, 2007). This credits them as active members in the world, whose reflection and actions have significant purpose and meaning (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). Thus, by encouraging participants to express their experiences freely, the research becomes phenomenological in nature.

Husserl's method was extended into existential philosophy and hermeneutics by the work of Martin Heidegger (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Hermeneutics is described as the theory of interpretation and is related to the ontological question of existence (Smith et al., 2009). For researchers, it can be challenging to access the perspective and ideas of participants. Such situations emerge when the participant refrains from full disclosure of information or when they struggle to describe their thoughts. When these events occur, it is the responsibility of the researcher to make sense of the participant's world. Therefore, researchers must take a hermeneutic approach to understand the meaning of the participant's lived experience by interpreting the historical, literary and cultural context (Smith et al., 2009).

Idiography is concentrated on the particular (Smith et al., 2009). IPA focuses on analyzing single or small case studies so that a meaningful understanding can be made about the participant and their experience. The idiographic approach has a narrow focus, which allows the researcher to develop a more detailed claim about the phenomenon, rather than a general conclusion (Smith et al., 2009; Quinn & Clare, 2008).

Choosing IPA as a Methodology

IPA builds meaning on how participants make sense of their lived experiences (Forrester, 2010). It is a methodology that frequently uses a small sample size, interviews and a set of participants, whose experiences relate to the research topic (Coolican, 2014). The IPA methodology was chosen as a result of these circumstances. Further, as an Ontario certified teacher and a registered early childhood educator, I have experienced working in both professions. These experiences have differed greatly and have impacted my understanding of how I am treated professionally and how colleagues and administration perceive my role. As a result of my experiential bias, I have chosen IPA so

that I can grasp an understanding of the experiences that have impacted the principals' perceptions. In doing so, I hope to unravel the lived experiences of the principals and to build a holistic description, which explains their involvement and perspective on the roles within the full day kindergarten program.

Smith et al. (2009) further explain that IPA research is generally focused on investigating novel or under-researched topics by extracting the participant's understandings of a certain phenomena. This relates to the research being explored, as FDK is a recent initiative. As a new phenomenon, Ontario elementary principals have only one to four years of experience with FDK. Applying an interpretive phenomenological analysis will allow me to explore, describe and interpret the perspectives of the participants. Moreover, I hope that such an exploratory approach will provide preliminary evidence that can be used in further studies.

Research Design

The data were gathered using semi-structured interviews. Semi structured interviews allow for an organic growth in conversation based on the interest and perspective of the interviewee. Semi structured interview resonates with the IPA model, which emphasizes discovering the meaning of the phenomenon from the experience of the participant (Merriam, 2014; Smith et al., 2009).

I investigated the lived experiences of four principals employed with a southwestern Ontario school board. The interviews took place in January 2015. The focus of the interviews was the principals' perception of the full day kindergarten program, with concentration on their role and the role of the early years team. The interviews were coded so that common themes could be recognized. These codes allow for interpretive

analysis of the data. Using this design, I hope to offer insight into how principals perceive their role and the role of the early years team in the FDK program.

Research Question

How do principals in a southwestern Ontario school board perceive their role and the role of the early years team in the Fully Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program?

Sample Size/Site/Participant Selection

In December 2014 all elementary school principals working for a Southwestern Ontario public school board received a participant recruitment email indicating the nature of the study. Principals who volunteered to participate were contacted via email and were asked to select an interview date in January 2015. The participants were sent a final confirmation email once they notified me of their availability date.

Based on my personal experience of talking with educators and administrators in the FDK program, I expected a small sample group. Many educators and administrators have shared that they are still adapting to the FDK teams and are unsure of how to address the relationship and members. As a result of these tensions, I estimated that four to six principals would respond to my email. Further, because the purpose of the study was to investigate how principals perceived their role and the role of the early years team, I predicted that the volunteers would be confident in their experiences and in their understanding of the FDK program. This is because those who agree to participate are likely to understand the validity and relevance of the study than those who refuse participation (Patel, Doku & Tennakoon, 2003).

Although I only received four volunteers, the perspectives of the participant group still have significant impact on the in-depth analysis of the FDK phenomenon. This is because IPA emphasizes that a sample of between three and six participants

provides more meaningful results in understanding a novel circumstance (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, insight on how the participants have made sense of their experiences can be of assistance to other administrators' who may face challenges in understanding the FDK program.

The participants in the study were four elementary school principals from a southwestern Ontario public school board. The participants' involvement was voluntary. To protect the identity of the principals and their schools, pseudonyms are used throughout the paper.

Participant A: Andrew

Andrew's school has offered FDK for two years and there are four FDK classrooms. Andrew is Primary/Junior Certified and has experience working as a kindergarten teacher.

Participant B: Margaret

Margaret began working at her current school in September 2014. Margaret was unaware of how long the school has offered FDK, however, Margaret has worked as an FDK team member for three years at her previous school. Margaret's school has two FDK classrooms. Her experience working with early years comes from completing prep coverage, working as part of the FDK team and participating in professional development workshops.

Participant C: Patricia

Patricia's school is in its first year of FDK and has one FDK classroom. Patricia has not taught early years but has three years of FDK experience from her previous school.

Participant D: Michael

Michael received his primary qualifications but has no experience teaching early years. Michael's school has offered FDK for five years, and he has been principal for the last two years. Michael's school has two FDK classrooms.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interview questions were designed from the content in the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program (2010) (Appendix A). The questions were used as a guide to facilitate reflection and deeper level thinking. To ensure that the perspective of the participants was accurately noted, the interviews were audio recorded and directly transcribed. All of the scheduled interview dates were arranged at the convenience of the participants. Each interview took place in a private room at the participant's school. The semi-structured structured interviews lasted between 20 minutes to 60 minutes, depending on the participants' responses.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. Only the perspectives of principals were investigated, do as to ensure a mono perspective research design. Bouma, Ling and Wilkinson (2012) state that the concept of interviewing is to provide a window on reality from the perspective of a participant. This provides a meaningful perspective by the participant because it identifies the issues and matters that are relevant to them and rich in data for the researcher. Such an approach attains preliminary evidence that can be used in expanding the existing literature (Bouma et al., 2012). Subsequently, the evidence was gathered using open-ended questions. This style of questioning encourages a meaningful dialogue, where the participants share their individual thoughts and experiences. This style of data collection reduces the likelihood of attaining fixed responses (Bouma et al., 2012).

In using a qualitative approach, it is important that the researcher separate the process of gathering and analyzing data. Although the absolute separation of collecting and analyzing data is impossible, Seidman (2012) suggests that the researcher avoid any in-depth analysis until all interviews are completed. This discourages the process of promulgating meaning from one participant's response to the next. Thus, following the completion of interviews, I completed an in-depth analysis of the transcripts using the analysis process recommended by Smith et al. (2009).

IPA is an analytic process, moving from a descriptive to an interpretive understanding of the data, with no prescribed method (Smith, 2007). The interpretive analysis provides deeper insight into the participant's account by identifying common themes (Lyons & Coyle, 2008). Smith et al. (2009) suggest a step-by-step model to assist researchers in the IPA process. As a novice researcher, I used the model to guide me in the analysis of the data (Table 2).

Step 1: Reading and re-reading
Step 2: Initial noting (descriptive/linguistic/conceptual) comments
Step 3: developing emergent themes
Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes
Step 5: Moving to the next case

Table 2: Steps for Conducting Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009)

Ethical Considerations

The research study has been reviewed to ensure that it respects the dignity and privacy of the participants. The research proposal received approval from the University of Windsor's Research Ethics Board (Appendix B) and was conducted according to the principles stated in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans. Approval to conduct research was also granted by the involved school board.

Once both institutions granted consent, elementary principals within this southwestern Ontario school board received a participant recruitment email (Appendix C) indicating the nature of the study. The email noted that it was a voluntary study, from which they could withdraw at any time. On the day of the interviews, participants were required to complete and sign a consent form. The consent form (Appendix D) provided greater detail on the purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks, compensation, inquiries and protection of identity. The participants were assured that the data would be stored securely and that identities would remain confidential. Lastly, the participants confirmed all direct quotes used in the research paper to ensure that their perceptions were accurately analyzed.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to investigate how elementary school principals perceive their role and the role of the early years team in Ontario's Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program. The data were collected and interpreted using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

The IPA methodology assumes the researcher's interest in understanding the experiential world of the participant through the analysis of the participant's perspective and experience (Breakwell, Smith & Wright, 2012). I applied the IPA model by analyzing the transcripts using a flexible and interpretive lens. Adopting this model allowed me to gain meaningful insight into the complexity of the participants' perspectives. Through my interpretive account of the transcripts, I was able to establish common themes and identify thematic groups, which are revealed through the integration of idiographic interpretive commentary and participant excerpts (Smith et al., 2009).

The following themes were drawn from the interviews guided by the questions and role as prescribed by the MOE: 1) Program Awareness; 2) Role as a Leader and Learning Partner; 3) Informal Assessment and Evaluation; 4) Navigating the Roles of Educators; and 5) Building a Team Culture.

Program Awareness

The principals demonstrated a basic knowledge and understanding of the FDK program. They were able to identify the differences between the previous and current curriculum and expressed their satisfaction with and optimism for the future success of the program.

One of the first differences identified by the principals was the FDK program's focus on fostering a child-centred, inquiry-based environment. Inquiry-based learning is a fundamental component of the FDK Program. It is a learning approach designed to capitalize on children's natural curiosity and interests through exploration and investigation. In doing so, children develop an understanding of their environment and a growing capacity for systematic observation, critical thinking and problem solving (MOE, 2010).

The changes made from the previous kindergarten program to the present day program were characterized by Michael as "night and day." He emphasized the difference through the program's focus of being "more student centred than it is teacher centered." This was confirmed by Patricia who noted that teachers are now concentrating on the student to "drive their instruction."

The program's emphasis on child-centred learning was also discussed by Andrew. However, Andrew felt that the intention to build a student-centred learning environment had always existed, but that it lacked the fundamental component of focusing on the students' interests. Andrew's belief may be a result of his past experience as a Kindergarten teacher. As a result, he noted the following when comparing the FDK program to the 2006 Kindergarten program,

More inquiry learning and starting the learning from where the students are at. It is something we have always wanted to do as teachers; starting where students are. But it was a bit more prescriptive and people tended to teach according to themes or different times of the year and now staff are looking at the kids in the classroom trying to understand where they are at.

Margaret expanded further on the transition to a child-centred, inquiry-based program,

Along with the logistics of being a full-day, everyday kindergarten versus a full-day every other day or half day is the new approach to kindergarten instruction with the inquiry-based learning, which has teachers following the lead of the students a lot more. We are getting away from the paper and pencil tasks and the carbon-copy crafts and just letting students lead their own learning and have the teacher there as a guide and facilitator.

After discussing the learning core of the curriculum, the principals delved into the resurgence of early childhood educators in the classroom. Patricia accredited the incorporation of ECEs as partners in the classroom as a significant stride: “The ECE being part of the team is phenomenal because they bring their expertise and another set of eyes with evaluation and assessment. They are able to assist. It’s a great team that’s come together.”

Andrew further recognized the value of having early childhood educators in the classroom, “The partnership with ECE and teachers has been a different phenomenon and so far successful.” He attributed the success to the specialized training and experience ECEs have in working with early years children, “I think the ECE are trained a little bit more in understanding where the kids are at and that has helped shape what is going on in the classroom as well.”

Subsequently, the principals gained their understanding of the program through firsthand experience and the use of ministry and board resources. Andrew and Patricia

were the two participants whose knowledge about the curriculum was primarily attained through observation and personal experience.

As a principal in his second year of implementation, Andrew turned to his colleagues from various schools with established FDK programs for assistance. He explained how he and his team would observe and then apply strategies used at other schools,

We really relied on the schools that went first and seeing, hearing what they had done and what worked and what didn't and brought back things. Like all grades in education you beg, borrow and steal what's working in other schools and try to incorporate it as well.

Here one can see how Andrew used external resources to assist him in enhancing his and his team's program knowledge so that successful practices could be put in place.

Although Margaret's resources were mainly ministry and board documents, she also mentioned incorporating classroom visits as a current learning tool for her and her team, "our team is actually heading out in two weeks to visit another classroom to take away their learning."

In contrast, Patricia's previous school was part of the first year rollout of FDK. Her experience has helped her support her current team as they go through their first year of implementation. She further assists her team by adopting the school observation strategies that Andrew mentioned,

I rely a lot on my past experience with my year one school. I was able to take from my experiences from the past, visiting other schools and that

really helps us to understand what it looks like, sounds like, what are the tools teachers are using and what administrators need to be supportive of.

Ministry resources were used by all four participants. The principals felt that the ministry and board had been successful in keeping them updated and informed about the FDK curriculum. Andrew stated, “Our board has a myriad of resources available and has provided professional development along the way.” Michael also mentioned how he and his team have been applying the formal resources to guide them through implementation, “We’re using the curriculum guides from the ministry and a number of workshops that the board has provided.” The supports provided by the board and ministry were further recognized by Margaret,

There are awesome kindergarten resources, a lot of ministry resources available, there some DVDs and webcasts. There are some monographs that are helpful, an ETFO document, “Thinking It Through” that has some excellent ideas. There is an inquiry-based book that we just received that helps with the understanding of inquiry, as well as David Suzuki resources that we use to help with the learning and bring nature into the classroom.

The principals developed their understanding of the FDK program from a blend of first-hand experiences, classroom observations and ministry documents. These resources lay the groundwork for the basics of the program and in doing so have principal’s role as the FDK team leader.

Role as a Leader and Learning Partner

During the interviews, principals were asked to reflect on how they would describe their role as a leader in the FDK program. The principals identified themselves

as collaborative and supportive leaders whose knowledge and understanding of the program was ongoing.

Becoming an informed leader involves learning collaboratively with the staff (Sackney & Walker, 2006). Collaborative learning is significant in program implementation because the principal and teacher are working toward a common goal (Sackney & Walker, 2006). This case was particularly true for Andrew and Margaret, who were both working at a school that was in its first two years of implementation.

When discussing his leadership role in the FDK program, Andrew described himself as a partner on a “learning curve,”

[I’m] a partner in the learning that is going on in there. I think I made it clear from the beginning that even as a former kindergarten teacher there is a lot of learning, we are all still learning to approach kindergarten and FDK with a different lens. It is a learning curve. We looked at it as a policy implementation with three to five year timeline with both implementation success and implementation dips. Lots of opportunities for learning and stopping and redoing it afterwards. I see myself as a collaborative partner with what’s going on and certainly a partner in the learning because I have taught kindergarten, but that does not make me a specialist in it.

Margaret also characterized her leadership role as a collaborative learner and identified her FDK team as the “experts”:

A co-learner. I learn with them. They truly are the experts in kids that age because I haven’t taught kids that age. They definitely know a lot more

about that age of child. I like to learn with them, go in the classroom, watch, ask questions. I like to be involved in the learning. I like them to be involved in the planning. I will constantly ask them what's going well, what are your challenges, how can I support you, where do you want to go next with your learning, what do the kids need?

By viewing her team as the specialists in the field of early years, Margaret is empowering and validating her staff's instructional autonomy (Eyal & Roth, 2010). She continued to support the personalized needs of her team by recognizing the need to differentiate her leadership approach,

Same thing with my staff learning and professional learning, if the staff meeting doesn't meet the needs of the team, I'm going to differentiate my staff meeting so that they have something else to do that meets their needs, I'm not going to have them sit through something that is irrelevant.

Margaret and Andrew's style of leadership captures the essence of a transformational leader, as they work with their staff. Such actions contribute to an increase in teacher capacity, motivation and program commitment (Hallinger, 2003).

In contrast, Patricia distinguished herself more as a lead than a partner:

I'm more of the lead at this point because it is a year one for them so they are looking to me for resources and with questions because of my experience with FDK. So I am more of a lead than a partner at this point.

It is important to mention that at her previous school, Patricia identified herself as a partner and working team-member. This is because she and her FDK team were

initiating the implementation process together. However, Patricia's current style of leadership is reflective of her school's current context. By situating her leadership parallel to the team's needs, she is fostering security and optimism towards change (Wood, 2005). Personalized guidance is a reflection of the principal's understanding of the staff and school's current needs (Hord, Huling-Austin, 1986).

Similarly, Michael described himself as an instructional leader,
I am the instructional leader of the building, so I am supporting them in their roles (teacher and ECE) whether it is behavioural with the students, instructional guides. I am there to support them in their needs...to supervise and make sure they are doing what they are supposed to be doing.

Applying a top-down approach, Michael can be characterized as more of a programmatic leader. He is responsive to the needs of his staff but also facilitates direction and instruction by using his knowledge and understanding of the program (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

Although Andrew and Margaret expressed themselves as collaborative leaders, they continued to be the lead supports in implementing the FDK program. Moreover, all of the principals interviewed labeled themselves as supportive leaders for the FDK team and program.

Andrew explained that even as a collaborative learner, he is still able to support the team by sharing his knowledge about the program,

I have the opportunity to support what's going on in the classroom and as a principal I've always said I'm part of the support staff. I am a leader in

the building but I also support what's going on in there. I have the opportunity through principal meetings and system initiatives, see and hear a bit more than what they are exposed to in the classroom; I learn as I go and I bring that learning back to the classroom.

Knowledge transfer promotes staff expectations, collegial trust and program effectiveness (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Moreover, principals who share a vision, create goals and provide personalized support have an impact on teacher instruction, which positively effects student achievement (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003).

Apart from being a supportive leader, Andrew also held himself accountable for ensuring program success,

As a lead learner I am the leader of the school. I have to take responsibility in what happens in the school, but as a leader too I can influence a lot but the real work is done in the classroom. So my job is to try and find ways to work with staff, to share learning and to learn from them and support them in what they are doing.

Similarly, Patricia saw great value in supporting her FDK team. Her support was not just verbal, but also active. She made an effort to be present and actively involved in the implementation process:

I believe that going in and asking them "what do you need, what's happening" and getting their feedback. For me to support them is huge because that will make them continue to want to change and to bring the new philosophy in. Me being visible in the room is important because I am

there and they know. I am aware if the team is having issues and then I can interact and intervene as quickly as possible and go from there.

Patricia's commitment to her team can be linked to her own experience of implementing the program in its first year. She understands the learning process and has witnessed the outcomes of the program first hand:

It's a whole new curriculum so I've had to learn the curriculum and see it in action. It's a great curriculum, a great ministry initiative, it needs to stay and I believe it will help our students in the long run.

Margaret also supported her staff by making the effort to meet their needs:

I listen to them, their needs. Try to think outside the box for solutions because kindergarten is very different from grades one to eight. In my previous school I didn't schedule recess for my kindergarten classes because it doesn't always work to stop class at 10:45 to do recess. They were allowed to do their outdoor play whenever they wanted. All three classes could do it at once, or one could go out and the other didn't. We had that flexibility built in to their schedule. It just allows them to not have to say "ok everybody stop what you're doing because it's time to go outside." It allowed them to go out for 30 minutes one day or not go out until the end of the day. It just gave them that flexibility and I always tried to be aware that kindergarten isn't necessarily the same.

Again, her actions are an example of a transformational leader. She recognizes the instructional autonomy of her staff and is both flexible and responsive to their needs.

The principals were able to situate themselves within the social context of the FDK program. In doing so, they constructed their identity as a leader and team member. However, their style of leadership appeared to evolve as they continued to develop their understanding of the roles of the teacher and ECE.

Navigating the Roles of Educators

A major change brought on by the implementation of the FDK program is the resurgence of early childhood educators. It is a progressive initiative that has placed the expectations and professional recognition of ECEs in the classroom under reform. In contrast to past kindergarten programs, the Ontario Ministry of Education now recognizes ECEs as co-educators and experts in child development.

The participants in the study have been in education long enough to remember the roles of ECEs in the classroom before being reintroduced to Full Day Kindergarten. Margaret explains,

Prior to full-day everyday kindergarten, the perception was that the early childhood educator in the kindergarten classroom was the assistant. So they would clean out the paint trays, wipe the tables, cut out the things needed for the craft, maybe do a circle once in a while. They weren't an integral part of the planning and in the assessment and evaluation.

Andrew expands further, "I had an ECE in my classroom and it was very much a teacher-led classroom, with the ECE cutting and pasting and removing kids from the classroom." Based on Margaret and Andrew's recollection, it appears that the ECE was recognized as an assistant whose contribution to the classroom did not exceed the level of custodial maintenance and discipline.

However, the roles and responsibilities of ECEs have evolved. Early childhood educators are recognized by the Ministry as instructional partners in the classroom who use their expertise in child development to plan and facilitate developmentally appropriate learning activities (MOE, 2010). These changes have led to an identity renewal for ECEs. Michael notes that: “their role has become even more important now because of the age of the kids coming in now. They have a wealth of experience that they bring into the kindergarten room.”

Patricia explains that this transformation has been a learning process for principals and educators,

We have all been on this learning curve. The ECE is not just sitting at the back of the table cutting. The ECE is an integral part. The ECE is interacting with kids. The ECE is assisting with assessment and evaluation, setting up curriculum. Whereas before they were sitting at the back table doing the cutting. So, it has evolved and it is slowly getting here.

The value of ECEs’ contribution to the classroom is clearly emphasized; however their roles and responsibilities seem blurred. This was evident when I asked the principals to clarify the roles and responsibilities of early childhood educators.

Andrew explains,

It is sometimes hard to differentiate but there has to be lines of demarcation there. I would say the teacher is ultimately responsible for the program in there and he or she works as a partner with the ECE and therefore both of them could be doing virtually anything in the classroom.

The planning and the reporting assessment and evaluation is ultimately the teacher's responsibility. But anything else goes within the classroom, and if you have a good partnership between the teacher and ECE, then their roles are kind of interchangeable.

Andrew's explanation of the role of the ECE in FDK closely resembled the description in the FDK curriculum document (MOE, 2010). He later added,

But I think ultimately more responsibility for learning does fall to the teacher and that may be a result of the differentiation in pay, differentiation in status or the illusion of professionalism, although they are both professionals. I think people see teachers at a different spot than the ECEs, rightly or wrongly. I think my understanding of it has evolved through what has happened. But I still go back to 5 years ago, that it is a partnership and that the roles are interchangeable.

Like Patricia, Andrew's understanding of the ECE's role seems to be a learning process. He identifies the roles as interchangeable, but also unequal. This creates contention between what is required and expected from the team members. The power imbalance between the teacher and ECE was further observed in Michael's response,

[ECEs] are teaching partner but they are also support staff to the teacher. They will identify the needs of the students, work with small groups of students and with a large group of students. [ECEs] will also help the teacher with assessments... [ECE] do not sign off on report cards; they work on the report cards together. They jointly come up with the

comments but the teacher has full responsibility. They program plan together, have discussions together and plan weekly together.

Similar to Andrew's response, there is a disconnect in the identity of the ECE.

Michael refers to the ECE as a teaching partner, but also as "support staff." These titles are conflicting because a partner implies an equal and support staff implies an aid.

Nonetheless, all of the participants viewed the teacher and ECE in the FDK program as partners, regardless of the discrepancy between their roles. Margaret commented, "now I perceive them as a team and I expect that they are working together on the planning and that their planning is cohesive." When asked what helped her develop this understanding, she said:

Living it, being part of it. Some of the professional development opportunities that the board has provided really stressed that it's a team and making sure that we understand that there is very little difference in the responsibility of the ECE and the teacher.

Andrew compared the Teacher-ECE relationship to his own administrative partnership:

I think it's a partnership, like a principal working with a VP, we are administrative partners. I would look at the teacher and ECE both as leaders and they would have to negotiate how that looks and sounds like in the classroom. And I think to varying degrees it is a partnership in the classroom.

The example Andrew gave is evidence of being a self-reflective leader. He was able to make connections and perceive the relationship from position of the early years team. Moreover, it shows that he grasps the importance of the teacher and ECE as resourceful and knowledgeable individuals who depend on one another to achieve success.

Andrew concludes by saying:

The partnership with ECE and teachers has been a different phenomenon and so far successful. It hasn't been so in every school but we have had a pretty positive experience. To have an ECE in there who is really good at understanding where kids are coming from; where teachers took a more academic or pedagogical approach to learning. I think the ECE are trained a little bit more in understanding where the kids are at and that has helped shape what is going on in the classroom as well.

The principals' understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the FDK team members continues to grow. This proved to be particularly true in the case of the redefined role of the ECE. However, the principal's awareness can further develop by engaging, monitoring and evaluating the program and team.

Informal Assessment and Evaluation

Evaluation is a key component of ensuring the success and efficiency of a new initiative. It is an ongoing process that can take place within a formal and informal context. Successful principals engage, facilitate and monitor practices to understand the progress and identify necessary changes (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2007).

All of the principals in the study implemented informal evaluative strategies to monitor the teacher-ECE team. Patricia explains:

I do it informally. I will go in and there are certain things that I look for. I have a checklist for what I look for. Setting timelines with them. I go in and monitor and see how it can be done and how I can help them get it. Me being visible in the room is important because I am there and they know. I am aware if the team is having issues and then I can interact and intervene as quickly as possible and go from there.

It is important to note that there is no formal evaluation or assessment tool to measure the team's progress, therefore, Patricia has developed her own. Based on her concern for meeting the team's needs, it can be assumed that her checklist is reflective of her vision of the program, as well as the teams.

Similarly, Margaret's form of evaluation also involved informal observation, "I am constantly in the classrooms, walking around, talking to teachers, talking to kids, looking at walls, figuring out what's going on. So that's indirect supervision." By evaluating both the partnership and the environment, Margaret is able to make connections between the cohesion of the team's working relationship and program output.

Andrew's evaluation of the team was conducted both directly and indirectly. Moreover, he emphasized sharing the positive results of his evaluation with his team,

A regular way of doing it, I think just going in and celebrating the things you see in there and the blogs the teachers have going, they're highlighting what's going really well and they get to share their ideas

together and the best practices come out. As far as evaluation goes, I can say this is what I hear and see we need to be doing and if we're not then there is a bit of peer pressure to start looking.

Sharing what is observed is a way for principals to encourage educators to be conscious and purposeful in their actions. It also teaches them ways to be reflective and how to self-evaluate. Andrew not only shared his input, but he modeled evaluative strategies by working with his team to assess the program:

In December we watched a video from the LMS and we highlighted what was going well and what we saw and what we heard. Then we took a step back and said how are we doing. On a chart we highlighted everything from the video that we thought was a great idea and then on the other side we said where are we, what stage are we at in implementing this. And that was a really good way of stopping and really evaluating where we were at the time. We needed to do that because we have a completely new kindergarten team this year. Because we have a relatively new team, we stop and use some school base learning time and if this continues to be the model, every chance we had we went with what are we seeing and hearing from the learning today and where are we at in implanting it. Is there some things we want to start, stop or continue and what do we want to learn more about and that kind of guides the next PLC into what we want to learn.

Margaret applied a similar shared informal evaluation approach with her previous team.

So we would come together as a team of nine and we would talk about what's going well, what are the challenges, what do we want to tweak, how are we going to make this better for kids. Because you have to be a cohesive team it's going to be good for kids. ... The second year we encouraged them to have formal weekly meetings with their classroom teams and as part of the agenda what went well this week, what challenges did we have this week and admin could be invited if they wanted. And those two things helped.

As leaders of the FDK team, Andrew and Margaret modeled effective strategies and provided valuable resources to assist their staff. These actions are reflective of a transformational leader, as they helped to build team initiative and autonomy (Hallinger, 2003).

As a result, each participant applied informal evaluation and monitoring. The choice to conduct informal assessment can be a result of several factors. Informal evaluation provides principals with the opportunity to actively engage with the staff, to get involved with the program and model the desired vision (Rogus, 1983).

Despite the principals' use of and satisfaction with informal evaluation, Andrew still notes the importance of conducting formal assessments.

One of the best ways to assess the program and give feedback is through teacher performance appraisals and support staff appraisals. That's a real formal way of doing it. Your pedagogy and model come screaming

through the feedback you get from performance appraisals. That is the biggest way of doing it, but that only happens once every 5 years.

Michael also mentioned the importance of performance appraisals during his interview. The principals seemed to value formative assessments for its constructive and personalized evaluation but there were also signs of disappointment in its infrequency and level of inequality. Margaret explains,

We have a proposal appraisal cycle. Teachers are on their appraisal cycle at this time. ECEs are not, they are appraised using the support staff appraisal system. One of the frustrations for [ECEs] and as well as for administrators, is that their perception is that they're somewhat equal, and they should be planning together and they should be doing the assessment and evaluation and reporting to parents. However, ECEs don't get prep time, ECEs don't get freed up for some of the professional learning that we have. ECEs work 7-8 hour shifts and when they're done, they're done. So there's not that staff meeting participation unless they volunteer. So that is a bit of a frustration

Again, the challenge of navigating roles and levels of equality persist even when evaluating the team. Teachers and ECEs in the FDK program are paired as partners in planning; however, formative systems of evaluation suggest the opposite.

Informal evaluation has provided the principals greater insight into the program's strengths and areas of need. It has also helped them develop a deeper understanding of the team and its individual members. Using this knowledge,

principals are able to provide the necessary guidance and tools to foster an effective, collaborative and confident team.

Building a Team Culture

All participants stressed the importance of building a team culture among the FDK staff. A collaborative partnership merges the expertise of each educator to create an optimal learning experience for students. It builds trust, confidence and emphasizes the value of its members. Moreover, it is a process that requires willingness, communication, shared understanding and most of all, the lead of the principal (Perry & Stewart, 2005; Sackney & Walker, 2006).

Margaret explains how forging relationships requires clear and purposeful modeling,

As a principal I have to kind of deliberately lay the groundwork for the relationships to be developed and my messaging needs to be very clear that you are a team; you need to function as a team; [and] you need to model appropriate relationships in front of the kids. So I think the messaging [provides] the groundwork for the relationship.

Margaret recognizes her responsibility as the team, program and school leader and the impact of her actions. She builds a vision that incorporates the needs of her staff and models the necessary actions to achieve such goals. Further, she highlights the importance of communication when she uses the term “messaging.”

Communication keeps members of the group informed about the program, their individual roles and how their roles affect one another (Moye, Henkin & Egley, 2005). Andrew elaborates on this further.

I think communication is the real key in making sure the ECEs feel they have a voice and they feel confident and comfortable talking about what's been going on and what they're experiencing, and same thing with the teachers. You're a partner in there and you need to communicate effectively and together you are a FDK team, four or eight of you together, with EAs and DSWs as well, you're a team in there and all the kids belong to all of you in there and they really see that. Even though a kid may be in a different classroom, they're part of the FDK complement and they are everyone's responsibility. So I think keeping the lines of communication open has been a big thing.

Andrew mentions an important component of the FDK program when he discusses the team in its entirety. It is not just the teacher and ECE in one classroom that define the early years team, rather it is every FDK classroom in the building, which consists of teachers, ECEs and support staff. His efforts are an example of building and maintaining a learning community, as he encourages a shared vision, goals and collaboration for the purpose of ensuring student well being.

The emphasis on communication, vision and shared discussion resurfaces in Patricia's approach to creating a team culture,

Every year before school starts we sit down as a team and outline everyone's roles because when you have new members coming to the team. ECEs may not be comfortable with certain roles that they haven't established in the past like assessment, carpet time etc. I sit down to look and see what everyone brings and what everyone is comfortable with. I am

a leader in establishing those roles and from there I understand where I'd like to see FDK go, and set up goals with the team to build their confidence and make them a stronger part of the classroom, particularly ECE...I am there to assist. We do this a couple times a year to make sure we are on track and to evaluate and monitor. And to let them know that I am a member as well.

Patricia works towards constructing a safe environment that will motivate the teacher and ECE to support, value and respect one another. Establishing this type of relationship will build the confidence of the team and of its individual members.

For Michael, building a team culture requires supervision and it means being visible, present and supportive,

My role is the facilitator, to supervise and make sure they are doing what they are supposed to be doing. And what support I can give, what can I help with, whether it's money, supplies, help dealing with behavioural issues, having team meetings, getting other board personnel to come in and observe the classroom and offer suggestions for improvement.

Michael took more of a supportive, instructional approach to foster a team among his FDK staff. He aided them in areas that required attention and monitored them through their journey.

Regardless of the principal's chosen approach, building a team culture requires effort, trust, patience and time. It also requires the cooperation of the staff because in any teaching-team process, members will be challenged by individuals' level of experience, personality and pedagogy (Perry & Stewart 2005). Margaret

and Patricia showed an understanding of the team members' individual differences, while emphasizing the importance of cohesion and teamwork. Margaret describes,

I really stress that they are a team and that there shouldn't be a hierarchy and someone coming into the classroom shouldn't be able to identify who the teacher and ECE is. It should be seamless. I encourage them to co-construct the report card comments. That being said, it is legally the teacher's responsibility to do the report card. However, I do encourage them to do it together and encourage them both to sign it. I encourage them both to have communication with parents. Ultimately, it is the teacher's responsibility but I encourage them to share that ownership. In my opinion, if the parents refer to them both as teachers then they are doing a good job in that partnership.

Margaret lays the foundation for a confident partnership by acknowledging the value and autonomy of the educators, both individually and as a team. She further explained how she dealt with FDK staff tensions at her previous school, "They came [to my home] for lunch. There was no agenda, there was no talking school, it was just getting to know each other so that on September 1st you weren't thrown into a classroom with someone you are married to all day...you don't have a choice and don't know them. We did that and it seemed to help." Taking the educators out of the context of school helps the team to see each other as individuals and creates a more personalized connection. Moreover, extending her invitation to the teacher and ECE shows that she respects, values and depends on both.

Similarly Patricia acknowledges the individualized roles, responsibilities and habits of each member.

Ultimately, it is her (teacher's) classroom and her responsibility.

Evaluation is something she is responsible for but she works closely with the ECE and writes the report card in consultation with the ECE. For this point in time she does the majority of the teaching because that is what she is comfortable with at this point in time. She is the one who communicates with me if there are any issues with students. Right now she feels this is her role, as opposed to the ECE coming to me to share information pertaining to the students.

Patricia recognized the teacher's resistance to share the classroom responsibilities. As a result, she established goals and a vision to assist the ECE in having more of an equal part.

So next we are looking at the ECE getting more of a role at carpet time and getting to the point where the ECE takes on a math lesson, as opposed to the teacher teaching it. Keeping it a balance and not necessarily the teacher up here and the ECE down here and more about bringing them to a balance and making them feel more comfortable in that environment. It depends on the ECE and teacher and their comfort level. They think of it as "how much power do I want to give up in the classroom" and instead should be thinking it's more of a partnership. It is a philosophy that needs to change. So hopefully bringing them more to a balance and making them both comfortable to the environment.

Patricia is leading her team towards a shared vision. She developed the goal based on the needs of the staff and program and facilitated action by providing direction.

Successful leaders facilitate a team culture that promotes collaboration, collegiality, trust and support. They embrace innovation and encourage their staff to be challenged (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006). The principals' efforts to build a team culture are evidence that they recognize the importance of developing a collaborative teacher-ECE partnership and early years team.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to investigate principals' perceptions of their roles and the role of the early years team in the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program. While analyzing their responses, I moved from a descriptive to an interpretive understanding of the data. This allowed me to construct common themes based on the meaningful accounts of the participants' lived experiences and to discover the complexities of the early years team relationship. The themes: Program Awareness, Role as a Leader and Learning Partner, Informal Assessment and Evaluation, Navigating the Roles of Educators and Building a Team Culture emerged from the data. These themes were deeply embedded in the principals' accounts and provided meaningful insight into the principals' perceptions of the early years team.

In the following section, I will highlight my interpretation of the key findings by addressing the research question: "How do principals in a southwestern Ontario school board perceive their role and the role of the early years team in the Fully Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program?," as well as the limitations of the research and recommendations for the future

Principal Self-Perception in FDK

The implementation of the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program has extended the obligations of a school's principal. The principals interviewed recognized that their responsibilities had broadened when they explained that their title now included being a member of the early years team. The principals gained an understanding of their role from the use of ministry resources, personal experiences and by engaging with the

FDK team and students. The principals discussed their position in greater detail during the interview. While reflecting on their position, the principals perceived themselves as leaders, supporters, learners and communicators in the new FDK program.

The principals were all self-identified leaders who were confident in their identity as a supportive principal. They explained that they made themselves available to the team and provided assistance whenever needed. When discussing their leadership role further, it became apparent that not all styles were the same. Based on the responses, I classified three out of the four principals as transformational leaders. As explained in the literature (Beurgre, Acar & Braun, 2006), transformational leaders inspire their staff to take initiative and adapt their practice to reflect the organization's needs. Andrew and Margaret were the most obvious transformational leaders because they identified themselves as collaborative partners who promoted teacher motivation and instructional autonomy (Eyal & Roth, 2011). I also recognized Patricia as a transformational leader, even though she identified herself as a lead. Patricia remodeled her leadership style to meet the current needs of her FDK team (Hallinger, 2013). As principal of a first year school, Patricia's FDK team still needed to build their content knowledge and comfort level with the program. Therefore, Patricia reoriented her leadership practice to meet her team's needs, so that a collaborative partnership could eventually evolve. In contrast, Michael adopted an instructional approach. He offered his assistance when it was needed but for the most part he focused on managing the delivery of the instructional program.

Even as self-identified leaders, the principals showed their vulnerability by acknowledging that the experience has been a continuous learning process. The principals' self-awareness is a foundation for future steps. By developing a greater

understanding of their experiences, the principals can build a deeper understanding of the program, which will positively affect their leadership and the quality of learning in the FDK community (Perry & Stewart, 2005).

The principals understanding of the new initiative influences the degree of implementation success (Virgilio & Virgilio, 2001). All of the principals interviewed described a basic understanding of the program. Their expertise was mainly rooted in their understanding of the early years educational philosophy that is used in the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program. With confidence, they explained the meaning and purpose of play-based learning, a child-centred environment, and inquiry and emergent curriculum (MOE, 2010). They could compare and contrast the current and previous programs and recognized the necessity of the implemented curriculum changes. The emerging focus was on creating a child-centred environment, removing the teacher as the one directing the learning.

With their wealth of knowledge gathered from ministry resources and personal experiences, the principals shared their insight so that the educators could build a deeper understanding of the new curriculum. They emphasized the importance of communicating and sharing their insight with the team. Communication is an essential component of a successful program implementation because it provides expectations for the members involved (Turk et al., 2002). The principals kept their staff informed about the program by communicating ways to enhance the educators' curriculum understanding and instructional practices (Virgilio & Virgilio, 2001).

Principal Perceptions of the Role of the FDK Team

Re-conceptualizing the role of the ECE from an assistant to a partner in the classroom is evolving more in theory and less in practice. Traditionally, early childhood educators have been characterized as babysitters and care givers (Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin & Vanderlee, 2013). The implementation of the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program remodeled the Ministry of Education's perception of ECE professionalism. The Ministry is recognizing ECEs' expertise in early childhood development and their contribution as co-educators in the FDK program. As a result, the principals' perceptions of the FDK team reflected the Ministry's new initiative, which recognizes the teacher and ECE as partners. However, discrepancies surfaced between what was said and what was occurring in the school environment.

A principal's level of clarity and understanding of the roles within a team affects member competency and partnerships (Anderson, 2013). The principals described the ECE and teacher as partners with interchangeable roles. They explained that both educators were expected to plan, evaluate, assess, talk to parents and collaborate on report cards. However, the perception shifted when the principals labeled the classroom as "ultimately" the teacher's responsibility and recognized that the ECE did not receive the same pay, prep time or sign off on report cards. The inconsistency between the expectations of the ECE in the program and the reality creates animosity within the ECE group and a dilemma for principals in conceptualizing the ECE's role in the classroom. Moreover, the ECE's contribution in the class was dependent on the teacher's willingness to share power. This issue is consistent with the findings by Gibson and Pelletier (2012), who discovered that a hierarchy exists between teachers and ECEs in the FDK partnership, causing ECEs to often take the role of the assistant. As much as the

principals emphasized that the teacher and ECE in the FDK program were a team, there still remained a discrepancy in delineating their roles.

Limitations

There are various limitations that pertain to this study. Although rich in data, the IPA method generally involves small sample size (Smith et al., 2013). Four principals in a Southwestern Ontario school board provided the data for this study. The limited number of participants raises concern for generalizability (Yardley, 2000). Further, the participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. Those who volunteered had a minimum of two years of FDK experience, which may have affected their perception of the program, their roles and the roles and responsibility of the early years team.

As a researcher, it is difficult to get at the root of what is actually going on. The analysis gave me a surface understanding, rather than a deep understanding. This was evident when the role and identity of the ECE in the FDK program was discussed. Within this context, the principals' responses moved from reflective to politically correct statements, which closely resembled the Ministry of Education's program mandate. Political correctness is a restricted language, which deters social or political disapproval (O'Donnell, 1992). As representatives of Ontario's Ministry of Education, it is understandable that the principals would undertake a politically correct approach when addressing a newly revised position. However, adopting this language suggests uncertainty in the role and professional identity of ECEs.

Recommendations

The observed ambiguity in the roles and responsibilities of ECEs in the FDK program reinforces the dilemma addressed by Sam Hammond. Based on the principals'

perceptions and literature review, I suggest policymakers, principals and researchers consider the following recommendations.

Build Relationship of Trust

Trust was a dominant component in building relational ties in the literature (Jurasaite-Harbinson & Rex, 2010; Moye, Henkin & Egley, 2005; Peters & Pearce). However, the term was not addressed in the interviews. The principals stressed the importance of communication and emphasizing that the teacher and ECE are a team, yet no one mentioned the significance of building a trusting relationship. Although communication is an essential piece in constructing relationships, the likelihood of its effectiveness is slim when members do not trust in each other's expertise and ability (Turk et al., 2002). This is because trust provides a foundation for a successful and reciprocal relationship (Kutsyuruba, Walker & Noonan, 2010). In order to build trust, there needs to be an understanding of the identity of the team's members and team building strategies in place (Perry & Stewart, 2005). As a result, principals need to move away from stressing a surface relationship and focus on laying the groundwork for a trusted partnership.

Define Roles and Responsibilities

Despite the importance of keeping staff informed about curriculum, the principals gave little weight to communicating the roles of the early years team members. It is the principal's responsibility to refine the roles in the program so that teachers can effectively adapt to the change (Gooden, 2000). Even though the principals identified themselves as communicators in the program, they seemed to have lacked the delivery of the roles and responsibilities within the partnership. To gain a clearer understanding, the educators in the FDK program should be part of the process and share their experiences and

expectations as members of the team. As a result, a universal and concise definition of the roles and responsibilities of the members of the early years team need to be developed, understood and modeled.

Formal Assessment

Currently, principals conduct teacher and support staff appraisals as formal individualized assessments for the members in the FDK team. This reemphasizes the difference between the value and role of the teacher and ECE. There is no formal evaluation system designed to assess the dynamics of the team's relationship and instructional practices, nor are they evaluated on the same playing field. The principals in this study relied on informal assessment to monitor the program. Developing a formal assessment instrument that assesses the quality and productivity of the team could facilitate consistency in understanding the identity of the early years team and the role of the educators.

Conclusion

The investigation of how principals perceive their role and the role of the early years team sheds insight into the progression, understanding and application of the components of the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program. Five themes emerged from the data: Program Awareness, Role as a Leader and Learning Partner, Informal Assessment and Evaluation, Navigating the Roles of Educators and Building a Team Culture. The themes provide a general conception of how principals identify their leadership role while providing evidence of their supportive nature within the classroom. When seeking deeper understanding through IPA, I found that issues in building team relationships and in delineating the roles of the educators in the FDK program continue to be an area of concern.

Subsequently, professional development opportunities regarding the role and responsibility of the team and members should be put in place for administrators. This will assist administrators in understanding the early childhood profession within the context of the FDK program. Developing a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the FDK team will facilitate effective leadership practice. Further, research regarding teacher-ECE pairing should continue to be investigated. Teaching-team partnerships require a working agreement, where partners have an understanding of each others working responsibilities and professional knowledge (Hestenes et al., 2009). Thus, understanding of how teams are affected when being paired should be considered when configuring early years teams.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Questions

- a) How many years have you been an FDK school?
- b) How many FDK classrooms do you have?
- c) Do you have experience or additional qualifications in working with early years?
- d) What differences do you see since the 2006 Kindergarten Program was revised to the New FDK Program?
- e) What resources and or tools are you using to guide you in the implementation and development of the program and team understanding?
- f) What type of leader do you identify yourself as?
- g) How would you identify your role in the early years team?
- h) Describe the roles and responsibilities of the teacher (OCT) and ECE (CECE) in the FDK program.
- i) How do you manage supervision of the teacher and ECE?
- j) How do you conduct program evaluation?
- k) What strategies do you have in place to facilitate collaboration amongst the early years team?
- l) How does your team plan and implement the program? What is your role in this?
- m) What challenges have you faced with the program?
- n) What successes have you experienced with the program?
- o) How has the implementation of the full day kindergarten program impacted your understanding of early years education and the early years team?

Appendix B

Ethics Approval

This is to inform you that the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board (REB), which is organized and operated according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the University of Windsor Guidelines for Research Involving Human Subjects, has granted approval to your research project on the date noted above. This approval is valid only until the Project End Date.

A Progress Report or Final Report is due by the date noted above. The REB may ask for monitoring information at some time during the project's approval period. During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. Minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered when submitted on the Request to Revise form.

Investigators must also report promptly to the REB:

- a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
- c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

Forms for submissions, notifications, or changes are available on the REB website: www.uwindsor.ca/reb. If your data is going to be used for another project, it is necessary to submit another application to the REB.

We wish you every success in your research.

Appendix C

Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Sara Shahbazi and I am a graduate student for the Education department at the University of Windsor and I am working under the supervision of Dr. Geri Salinitri. You are receiving this email as a request for your participation.

The title of my research project is *Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program: Perspectives from the Principal*. The purpose of this study is to explore elementary school principals' understanding of the FDK program, the dynamics of the early years team and their role as a member of the team.

Principals belonging to the GECDSB, who have implemented the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program for 1 to 4 years, are invited to share their experiences with FDK.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- 1) Partake in a single in-depth, audio-recorded interview on your experience with the full day kindergarten program. I will conduct the interview and it will last approximately 40 minutes. The interview will be completed at a time and location that is convenient for you. All information attained in this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your consent.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please email me at shahbazs@uwindsor.ca. An email will be sent back to you to verify your commitment, followed by a phone call to arrange a meeting time that is convenient for you. If you have any inquiries or concerns about the study, please feel to contact me by email.

Please respond by January 23, 2015 to confirm your participation.

Sincerely,

Sara Shahbazi

Appendix D

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (Principal)

Title of Study: Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program Team: Perspectives from the Principal

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Sara Shahbazi and supervisor, Dr. Geri Salinitri from the Education Department at the University of Windsor. The results of the study will contribute to Sara Shahbazi's thesis work.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Sara Shahbazi from the University of Windsor by email, shahbazs@uwindsor.ca or by phone. Dr Geri Salinitri can be reached by email at sgeri@uwindsor.ca or by phone 519-253-3000 ext 3961.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to investigate how south-western Ontario elementary school principals perceive the dynamics of the early years team and their role as a member of the team.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- 1) Partake in a single in-depth interview on your experience with the full day kindergarten program. The lead researcher (Sara Shahbazi) will conduct and audio-record the interview. The interview will last approximately 40 minutes and will be completed at a time and location convenient for you.
- 2) Consent to the audio taping of interviews and understand that this is a voluntary procedure, which you are free to withdraw responses at any time. To withdraw statements you must give verbal or written consent to the lead researcher, Sara Shahbazi. Your name and school will not be disclosed and that taping will be kept confidential and securely stored by file number.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The interview will be audio recorded. An audio recording consent form will be given to you on the day of the interview. You will be given a pseudonym and the name of your school will not be disclosed. You are free to answer or not answer the questions during the interview. The information that you provide will remain confidential it will not be shared with anyone besides Dr. Geri Salinitri and myself. You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The study will expand on the research on full day kindergarten in Ontario. Data from the interviews will give insight into the leadership of principals in full day kindergarten and the relationship of the early learning team. Moreover, it will provide you with the opportunity to reflect on your experience with program.

COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not receive payment for participating in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

To ensure confidentiality, your name and the school that you belong to will only be available to the lead researcher (Sara Shahbazi) and Dr. Geri Salinitri. However, it is possible that a person who is strongly familiar with the school may be able to discern the participants of the study. The report will be written in a manner that will minimize this outcome.

Audio recordings of the interviews will remain secured and locked in Dr. Salinitri's office until the research has been published. When research is published the audiotapes will be destroyed and disposed of.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You have the choice to refrain from answering any questions in the interview. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you must inform the lead researcher verbally or in writing. You will be given ample opportunity to examine the data before publication, any part of data that the participant requests withdraw of will be removed. If for any reason, the researcher has the need to withdraw the participants from the study, the participant will be notified and an explanation will be given.

FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

A summary of the findings and any post-study information will be made available via internet.

Web address: www.uwindsor.ca/reb

Date when results are available: You will receive an email with information pertaining to the above website when the data is complete.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications and in presentations.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program Team: Perspectives from the Principals described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

Signature of Investigator

Date

VITA AUCTORIS

NAME: Sara Shahbazi

PLACE OF BIRTH: Windsor, ON

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1990

EDUCATION: Holy Names High School, Ontario Secondary School
Diploma., Windsor, ON, 2008

University of Windsor, BA/B.Ed/ECE., Windsor,
ON, 2013