Educator Expectations in Full-Day Kindergarten: Comparing the Factors That Contribute to the Formation of Early Childhood Educator and Teacher Expectations

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ABSTRACT: Teachers incorporate information from various sources as they form their academic expectations for students. The student record of prior achievement is the most salient factor that educators use to form their expectations for children's achievement. Research on the factors that influence educator expectations has primarily focused on the ways teachers assimilate various pieces of information about students. More recently, there is an interest in moving away from this perspective and focusing more on teacher factors that may influence these differing expectations. The purpose of this research was to explore the factors that contribute to the formation of educator expectations in Full-Day Kindergarten. This study presents an in-depth examination of reports from Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and teachers on their teaching philosophies, roles, teaching practices, and interactions that support students in meeting curriculum expectations. This study elucidates the differences in the two groups in terms of how their expectations are formed and in turn how they may affect processes leading to child outcomes. Furthermore, this research responds to existing gaps in the educator expectation field by extending the research to include the early years.

## Introduction

Educational and psychological researchers have identified factors that influence school achievement, including educator expectations. There is a wealth of literature demonstrating relations between educator expectations and student school achievement (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2005; Kemp & Carter, 2005; Mistry, White, Benner, & Huynh, 2009). Educator expectations can positively or negatively influence student achievement outcomes (Good & Brophy, 2003; Rubie-Davies, Hattie & Hamilton, 2006; Weinstein, 2002). Educators incorporate information from various sources as they form academic expectations for children. Research on the factors that influence educator expectations is primarily focused on the ways teachers integrate information about students, for example, student characteristics and prior achievement. More recently, there is interest in moving away from a focus on student characteristics toward a focus on the ways teacher factors influence expectations (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Dweck, 2006, 2009, 2010; Hornby, Witte, & Mitchell, 2011; Weinstein, 2002). Despite a growing body of literature that addresses teaching factors such as differentiated teacher beliefs, behaviours and interactions (Dweck, 2006, 2009, 2010; Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2001; Rubie-Davies, 2015), more research is needed to understand the factors and processes that may be associated with varying expectations.

This research took place in Ontario Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) classrooms. Ontario's FDK program was phased in over five years, beginning in 2010, with a goal to provide universally accessible Junior (4-year-old) and Senior (5-year-old) FDK across Ontario. The primary purpose of the Kindergarten program was to establish a strong foundation for learning in an environment that is safe, developmentally appropriate and child-centred (Ontario

Ministry of Education, 2010). The FDK program provides a "single program with a single pedagogical and curriculum approach planned and delivered by qualified educators using common space and resources" (Pascal, 2009, p. 18). FDK is not simply a doubling of time; unique foundational elements include the professional knowledge base of ECEs and teachers and the implementation of a play-based curriculum. The FDK model with the inclusion of the unique team of ECEs and Kindergarten teachers provided an opportunity to compare the factors that contribute to the formation of educator expectations in Kindergarten.

In regard to educator training, ECEs must have completed at least a 2-year college diploma in Early Childhood Education that includes training in emergent and child-focused programming, observation methods and principles of child development. All teachers must have a minimum of a 3-year post-secondary degree, and have completed a Bachelor of Education program with a focus on curriculum and assessment (Gananathan, 2015). ECEs and teachers are expected to bring their unique skills and training in a collaborative and complementary way as partners. It is important to acknowledge the difference in training and potential pedagogical differences of the educators working within the Kindergarten program. Given the differences in training and roles of ECEs and teachers within the FDK program the factors that influence their expectations may differ. Educators who have a better understanding of how their students are performing may have more accurate academic expectations for their students, resulting in appropriate instruction and ultimately in improved outcomes. With this in mind, educators vary in the ways they obtain information about students; therefore, assessment practices may have an effect on educator expectations. Furthermore, educators may have differential opinions on grouping practices and interactions that are most beneficial for children's learning. Therefore, capturing this information using an inductive approach is particularly important in understanding factors that are associated with educator expectations in Kindergarten. The purpose of this study is to understand the factors and practices that may influence ECE and teacher expectations. Thus, this paper presents an in-depth examination of reports from ECEs and teachers on their teaching philosophies, roles, teaching practices, and interactions that support students in meeting curriculum expectations. This study reveals the differences in the two groups in terms of how their expectations are formed and in turn how they affect processes leading to child outcomes.

**Review of Literature**

**Formation of Expectations**

Educator expectations are defined as the expectations teachers have of their students in relation to their academic performance. For example, Rubie-Davies (2015) defines expectations relative to achievement. She suggests that high expectation teachers expect their students to make large learning gains (high relative to achievement); in contrast, low expectation educators have expectations that are low relative to achievement, defining expectations relative to student outcomes. Good (1987) defines teacher expectations as "…inferences that teachers make about the future behavior or academic achievement of their students, based on what they know about these students now" (p. 32). Alderman (2004) describes teacher expectations as student academic capabilities in relation to curriculum, that is, to what degree teachers believe students will meet curriculum expectations.

Teachers incorporate information from various sources as they form their academic expectations for students. Teacher expectations have been linked to student prior achievement (Mistry et al., 2009), perceptions of student effort (Muller, Katz, & Dance, 1999) and student characteristics such as diagnostic labels (Batzle, Weyandt, Janusis, & DeVierrti, 2010; Woodcock & Vialle, 2011), ethnicity (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007), social class (Sorhagen, 2013), gender (Dusek & Joseph, 1985; Robinson & Lubienski, 2011), and stereotypes (Jussim & Eccles, 1992; McKown & Weinstein, 2008). The student record of prior achievement is the most salient factor that educators use to form their expectations for children's achievement (Rubie-Davies, 2015). Research on the factors that influence educator expectations has primarily focused on the ways teachers assimilate various pieces of information about students (Rubie-Davies, 2015). More recently, there is an interest in moving away from this perspective and focusing more on teacher factors that may influence these differing expectations. These teacher factors include teaching beliefs and philosophies (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Rubie-Davies, 2015; Zohar, Degani, & Vaaknin, 2001), notions of intelligence (Dweck, 2006, 2009, 2010; Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000) and differential learning through planning and instruction (Arabsolghar & Elkins, 2001; Babad, 2009; Brophy, 1995; Hornby et al., 2011; Weinstein, 2002; Wößmann & Hanushek, 2006).

**Teacher beliefs, Interactions and Expectations**

There is a lack of attention in the expectation literature to the role of teacher beliefs. In understanding the formation of educator expectations, it is not sufficient to examine personal characteristics of teachers; teacher beliefs also need to be explored (Rubie-Davies, 2015). Understanding the translation of teacher beliefs to classroom practices is important in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the ways beliefs influence instruction. In a 1996

literature review, Fang documented the many ways in which teacher beliefs influence instruction and thus affect the learning opportunities of students. This review included a focus on the ways implicit beliefs influenced reading and writing teaching approaches. Fang (1996) concluded that teacher beliefs and values ultimately influence teaching pedagogy. Some researchers suggest that the most significant beliefs that teachers hold are those that focus on the causes of student achievement and behaviour (Arabsolghar & Elkins, 2001; Zohar et al., 2001). Zohar et al. (2001) interviewed teachers about the suitability of higher-order thinking approaches for students of differing abilities. Forty-five percent of the teachers believed that higher-order thinking approaches were not appropriate for low ability students. In fact, thirty percent of teachers in this study reported never using higher-order questioning with students whom they characterized as being low ability. Many of the teachers reported that these students would be best taught through a transmission approach. This suggests that teacher beliefs, like expectations, may lead to differing instructional interactions, which ultimately affects what children learn.

High differentiating teachers treat students with varying abilities in distinct ways, in comparison, low differentiating teachers, although also aware of differences in abilities, do not differentiate their treatment in the same way. Several scholars have used the Teacher Treatment Inventory to understand how teachers treat high and low ability students (Kuklinski & Weinstein, 2001; Weinstein, Marshall, Brattesani, & Middlestadt, 1982). Using observations and the results from questionnaires and interviews with students, Weinstein (2002) determined specific practices that were associated with high and low differentiating teachers. High differentiating teachers adopted an entity perspective of intelligence in which they placed students in fixed ability groupings and often emphasized performance goals and extrinsic rewards (Weinstein, 2002). Furthermore, high differentiating teachers publicly made direct comparisons between high and low achievers. Alternatively, low differentiating teachers held incremental understandings of intelligence. These teachers fostered intrinsic motivation, had interest-based groupings in which peer support was encouraged, and developed positive relationships with students. Low differentiating teachers believed that it was the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that all students were learning and viewed student mistakes as an opportunity to reflect upon their own practice.

Since the seminal work of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), there have been hundreds of studies seeking to understand the ways differential teaching interactions can be portrayed to students. In the classic work of Brophy and Good (1970) teacher behaviour was observed in four first grade classrooms to understand differential teacher behaviour with both high and low expectation students. Findings revealed that teachers held high standards for

students for whom they had high expectations and often praised this type of behaviour when it occurred. Alternatively, teachers accepted poor standards of work from those students for whom they had lower expectations and were far less likely to praise these students for their good performance. Cooper and Good (1983) added to this work by demonstrating that teachers tend to interact with students in public if they have high expectations of them. In contrast, they interact in private with students for whom they have lower expectations. Exploring the impact of differential behaviour of teachers helps to explain the effect of self-fulfilling prophecies of teachers with their individual students (Rubie-Davies, 2010).

**Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instruction involves tailoring instruction to meet the individual needs of students within a classroom. The goal of differentiated instruction is to support all students in learning effectively regardless of ability (Tomlinson, 2014). A potential cause for concern is when instruction is differentiated in a way that reduces opportunities for some students to learn. Rubie-Davies (2015) believes that, "Although providing differential learning opportunities may be common practice…does not necessarily mean it is best practice" (p. 35). Despite justified pedagogical reasons for differentiation in planning and instruction, the ultimate goal should be to enhance the learning opportunities of all students. Thus, it is essential to understand the implications for differential planning and outcomes particularly in relation to providing quality learning opportunities for all children. Differential planning results in differential instruction, which ultimately can result in disproportionate opportunities to learn. Once differentiation exists there is potential for sustained expectation effects. Therefore, researchers and teachers alike should consider when differentiation is acceptable. Differentiation is appropriate when learning outcomes are maximized. Differentiation is of concern when it reduces the opportunities for particular students and increases the gap between high and low ability students (Rubie-Davies, 2015). Of course, it would not be suitable or supportive to demand that a student struggle throughout a lesson that was not developmentally appropriate; however, all students regardless of ability should be challenged in their learning environment. Unfortunately, the way differential instruction is enacted in many classrooms results in inequitable learning opportunities for low ability children.

One of the ways that educators manage varying abilities of students in their classroom is through placing children in ability groupings (Dweck, 2006; Hattie, 2009; Hornby et al., 2011; Rubie-Davies, 2015; Timperley & Robinson, 2002; Weinstein, 2002). Ability groupings enable educators to manage a range of ability levels in various curriculum areas (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006). Teachers report that ability grouping enables them to manage

student diversity while making teaching tasks more manageable (Wößmann & Hanushek, 2006). Some teachers report that ability groups allow children to learn more effectively (Cahan, Lichevski, Ygra, & Danziger, 1996) specifically in curriculum areas that are hierarchical such as math (Chorzempa & Graham, 2006). Advocates of ability groupings believe that student learning is increased because teaching can match the appropriate pace and level of instruction for each group (Hornby et al., 2011).

A further look at the research on the effectiveness of ability grouping on student learning reveals potential negative implications. The early work of Good (1987) revealed the lasting impacts of ability groupings. The streams that students were in, in secondary school, were traced back to the ability groups these children were placed in when they were in primary school. Teacher expectation effects have been shown to have a stronger influence in classrooms that ability group (Good & Thompson, 1998). Hattie (2009) reports that if there are any benefits to ability grouping at all, they are minimal. Opponents of ability grouping argue that children in the lower groups are provided with lowered quality instruction (Hornby et al., 2011; Weinstein, 2002). Teachers have lowered expectations for the students in the bottom groups which results in slowed instruction that is repetitive (Weinstein, 2002).

Despite the growing body of literature on differentiated teacher beliefs, behaviours and interactions, there is a need to further understand the factors that are associated with educator expectations. Most of the research that exists focuses on differential interactions with high or low ability students. Although there is emerging research on high or low expectation educators, the factors and interactions that may influence expectation levels of educators needs to be explored. The current study begins to address this gap by further exploring the potential factors that may influence expectations, including teaching philosophies and descriptions of educator roles and practices such as grouping strategies and interactions that educators believe are most helpful in supporting students. Furthermore, this research responds to existing gaps in the educator expectation field by extending the research to include the early years. Educators teaching in Ontario's FDK program participated in this research. The FDK program is taught in collaboration by two teaching partners: a registered Early Childhood Educator and a certified teacher. Thus, the inclusion of Kindergarten educator expectations, particularly the unique team of ECEs and Kindergarten teachers in Ontario's FDK program, adds an important piece to our current understanding of educator expectations.

# Research Question

What are the factors that contribute to the formation of ECE and teacher expectations (educator expectations for children's learning outcomes) in Full-Day Kindergarten?

# Methodology

The method section describes the setting and participants, instruments, research design, analysis procedures and techniques used to establish trustworthiness of the findings. This study uses qualitative research methods collected with ECEs and teachers.

## Setting and Participants

Participants were recruited from two school boards in the greater Toronto Area. Thirty educators, (15 ECEs and 15 teachers) participated in the research. Compete demographic information from the educator demographic survey is presented in Table 1. Participants reported their age, total years of teaching experience, total years of teaching experience in Kindergarten, and their highest level of education.

Table 1. *Educator Demographic Characteristics*

| Characteristic | Description | ECE (n=15) *n* (%) | Teacher (n=15) *n* (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 15 (100) | 15 (100) |
| Age | 20-24 years | 1 (6.6) | 0 (0) |
| | 25-29 years | 5 (33.3) | 1 (6.6) |
| | 30-34 years | 4 (26.6) | 2 (13.3) |
| | 35-39 years | 2 (13.3) | 3 (20) |
| | 40-44 years | 1 (6.6) | 2 (13.3) |
| | 45-49 years | 0 (0) | 2 (13.3) |
| | 50-54 years | 1 (6.6) | 1 (6.6) |
| | 55+ | 1 (6.6) | 4 (26.6) |
| Years Teaching | 1 year or less | 1 (6.6) | 0 (0) |
| | 2-4 years | 5 (33.3) | 1 (6.6) |
| | 5-9 years | 4 (26.6) | 2 (13.3) |
| | 10-14 years | 4 (26.6) | 4 (26.6) |
| | 15-19 years | 1 (6.6) | 5 (33.3) |
| | 20-24 years | 0 (0) | 2 (13.3) |
| | 25 + years | 0 (0) | 1 (6.6) |
| Years Teaching Kindergarten | 1 year or less | 1 (6.6) | 3 (20) |
| | 2-4 years | 5 (33.3) | 4 (26.6) |
| | 5-9 years | 4 (26.6) | 5 (33.3) |
| | 10-14 years | 4 (26.6) | 2 (13.3) |
| | 15-19 years | 1 (6.6) | 1 (6.6) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | College diploma | 8 (53.3) | 0 (0) |
| Highest Level of Education | Post-diploma certificate | 2 (13.3) | 0 (0) |
| | Bachelor's degree | 4 (26.6) | 0 (0) |
| | Post-graduate certificate | 0 (0) | 12 (80) |
| | Post-graduate degree | 1 (6.6) | 3 (20) |

**Instrument**

*Educator Questionnaire.* The educators completed the Educator Questionnaire in October 2015 (approximately 35 minutes) while the principal investigator was on site. The educator questionnaire provided information in regard to educators' teaching philosophy and practices. The questionnaire included four open-ended questions/descriptions: 1) Describe your teaching philosophy, 2) Describe your role as an ECE/Teacher in the FDK Program, 3) What kind of interactions do you think are most helpful in supporting your students in meeting the curriculum expectations? (Describe), and 4) Describe your grouping strategies within your classroom. The educators were also asked to indicate their basis for evaluation, more specifically, what information they use in estimating their expectations for children's learning outcomes in Kindergarten.

**Research Design and Analysis Procedures**

This study employed a general inductive approach for analysis of qualitative data. This approach provides a systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data that produces reliable and valid findings (Thomas, 2006). In considering limitations, the general inductive approach is not as strong as other analytic strategies that are used for theory or model development; however, it provides a straightforward approach for deriving themes in the context of focused research and evaluation questions. An inductive approach provides insights into how individuals experience a particular phenomenon or situation (Rowan & Huston, 1997). The purpose of this study was to further understand the factors and practices that may influence ECE and teacher expectations, and therefore, the general inductive approach provided the structure and simplicity required in interpreting educator responses to the questionnaire data.

Thomas (2006) clarifies the data reduction process of an inductive approach by describing procedures for creating meaning from complex data through the establishment of summary themes. The present study followed the 5 procedures of inductive analyses as outlined by Thomas (2006). These procedures include: preparation of raw files, close reading of text, creation of categories, examination of overlapping coded and uncoded text, and continuing revision and refinement of category system (pp. 241-242). The intended outcome of the procedures is to

establish a small number of themes (between 3 and 8) that capture the key aspects of the themes identified in the raw text. This procedure was followed for each educator group and each question in the educator questionnaire.

**Trustworthiness**

Thomas (2006) describes two types of coding consistency checks including independent parallel coding and a check on the clarity of codes. This study achieved trustworthiness through a check on the clarity of codes and transferability through the use of thick descriptions. Following the procedure for developing themes as described above, an initial coding of the raw data was completed. Next, a trained research intern was provided with the research objectives, the themes developed and a description of each theme without the raw data attached (Thomas, 2006). The research intern was instructed to assign the themes to sections of the raw questionnaire data. The two coders met to check the extent to which the intern allocated the themes to the same sections of the raw text. Reliability was calculated by comparing agreements divided by agreements and disagreements. Inter-rater reliability of over 92% was obtained for each question of the educator questionnaire.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss establishing trustworthiness through transferability, the potential applicability of the findings to other contexts. Therefore, transferability depends on the degree of overlap among the original research and contexts in which the results may be transferable. In qualitative research, the focus is not about generalizing findings to the population but rather about having a database that makes transferability of judgements possible. One way of enhancing transferability of qualitative research is through the use of thick descriptions. Thick descriptions, in this study, included details of the context of the research and participants, direct quotations, and interpretations. This is in keeping with the work of Ponterotto (2006), who argues the use of thick descriptions of the sample, setting, and procedures in providing a context for clear understanding of the study results.

# Findings

A general inductive approach to analysis revealed similar and divergent themes for ECEs and teachers. Tables 2 - 6 provide a list of emerging themes, a description of each theme, and an example quotation from the ECE and teacher responses. The descriptions for the themes were developed using the responses of the ECEs and teachers; therefore, the language of the educators was integrated into the descriptions. In some cases, the topics that the ECEs and teachers discussed were similar in theme yet different in their descriptions. Therefore, the descriptions of the themes vary for the ECE and teachers to reflect the variation in their responses. These descriptions provide

further clarification in understanding the emerging themes. The results are presented using the educator questionnaire items as headings.

**Teaching Philosophy**

The ECEs and teachers were asked to describe their teaching philosophies. All 30 educators, 15 ECEs and 15 teachers, discussed play- and inquiry-based learning when describing their teaching philosophy. Although these themes emerged from both educator groups, the ways in which they were described in relation to teaching philosophy differed. ECEs described both play- and inquiry-based learning as central to their teaching philosophies and guided their learning and interactions with children. In contrast, the teachers discussed the inclusion of these approaches as part of their teaching philosophy. For example, the teachers would describe play- or inquiry-interactions as a way to extend learning from teacher directed lessons. One teacher discussed play-based learning as a tool for developing social skills, "My philosophy on teaching employs structure in the classroom, using routines to help students be confident and comfortable in the class. I believe students can learn from each other during playtime or play-based learning but it is mostly a social piece. Directed instruction is fundamental when a completely new topic is being introduced. I think that playing comes in as a way to inspire them to learn more" (T6).

Themes specific to the ECEs included discussion of constructivist pedagogy and developmentally appropriate practices. Responses under the theme of constructivism included theoretical aspects in thinking about socio-cultural learning theories as described by Vygotsky and more practical applications such as educators acting as a scaffold for children's learning. One participant stated: "Supporting the children where he needs support. For me it is about being that scaffold if needed, giving just a little bit of help so that he can solve the problem" (E10). The themes that emerged from the ECEs' teaching philosophies focused on child-centred practices and interactions that are in line with the reviewed literature on child-centred approaches (Chung & Walsh, 2000; Moyer, 2001; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, 2016a).

Themes specific to the teachers focused on structure and teacher-directed practices. Ten of the fifteen teachers discussed some aspect of teacher direction as being part of their teaching philosophy. Responses included direct instruction as part of an introduction to a lesson as well as direct instruction throughout the completion of an activity. One participant compared her own practices to that of her teaching partner, "I will admit that my teaching partner has embraced play-based learning more fully. I believe there is a strong need for structure and teaching of

lessons directly with the inclusion of play times or extended inquiry periods. When teaching directly you have the opportunity to see what children don't understand during the lesson and while children practice" (T3).

A final theme that captured the teacher descriptions of their teaching philosophy was the importance of routines in Kindergarten. Seven of the fifteen teachers discussed routines, these responses focused on the important role routines play in children's learning. For instance, one teacher discussed the idea that children should come to school with an understanding of how the day will progress, "Every single day we start the school day in the same way. The children know to hang up their stuff at their cubbies and then to find their name on their table and sign in. This routine is so important so we have time for all the learning to happen" (T9). Another teacher discussed the tools she uses in her classroom to ensure students are aware of the routines for the day, "I use visual boards so that the children can quickly look up and see what task they should be doing" (T14). The message that routines are fundamental in the early years in providing the necessary environment to allow for learning was evident in the responses of these seven teachers. The themes that emerged from the teachers' philosophies were focused on teacher-directed interactions and structure with features of play as supportive elements or extensions to learning.

Table 2
*Teaching Philosophy*

| Educator | Theme | Description | Example from Questionnaire |
|---|---|---|---|
| ECE | Inquiry-based learning | A pedagogy that allows children to take the lead and uses children's questions to explore topics or problems. A teaching approach that focuses on the process of learning, which is assisted by the facilitator. | "I learned about inquiry-based learning in my ECE training. I really liked the idea that learning is co-constructed and it's not about the educator having all the answers. I take on an inquiry perspective in tackling children's misconceptions and questions. It is all about kids" |
| | Play-based learning | A context for learning that is child centred. Play provides children the context to develop and learn social, emotional, and cognitive skills. | "Even before completing my ECE diploma I knew that children learned best in an environment that promoted play. My diploma and experiences as an ECE have showed me how effective a play-based approach is. Children develop skills in multiple domains when they are in an environment that supports their need to play and learn from play." |
| | Constructivism | A theory of learning that suggests that children learn best when they are actively engaged with their world (people, experiences, materials). | "I am a constructivist. The whole idea of the zone of proximal development and scaffolding, support the child right where they are, it just makes sense!" |
| | Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) | A teaching approach that is grounded in research on how children develop in the early years. | "All interactions with children should come from knowledge of child development, quality environments, and the individual child. NAEYC principles include a focus on DAP." |
| Teacher | Inquiry-based learning | An educational pedagogy that involves activating student curiosity through a series of hands on learning activities that follow the children's interest. | "Inquiry-based learning is a more effective way of teaching topics over time. Students become more engaged because it is based on their interest. It is more than just a unit plan, it is an effective pedagogy to teach broad topics based on student curiosity." |
| | Play-based learning | A student-centred pedagogy that provides children with opportunities to extend thinking. | "Play-based learning and inquiry-based learning are similar, but I think in Kindergarten play provides students an opportunity to practice their understanding of lessons in a fun and engaging way." |
| | Teacher directed | Explicit teacher instruction that often takes place during an initial lesson. Direct instruction can also include the teacher modeling examples and guiding students during execution of the lesson during review and practice. | "I generally follow a structured procedure in teaching new concepts. Play-based learning is important to success but concepts need to be explicitly taught, especially letter sounds. I teach the sounds in a direct way during whole group and the children practice together at play time."<br><br>"In order for a program to run well the students need to know what they should be working on. I think structured routines help students to feel a bit more safe in the classroom." |
| | Routine | Having a daily routine that students are well aware of. This can include routines for snack, learning centres, whole group interactions, recess, etc. | |

**Role in Kindergarten Program**

The educators were asked to describe their role in the FDK program. Ten teachers and eight ECEs described their role as program planners within the Kindergarten program. Both educators described their role in planning short- and long term- plans, such as individual lesson plans, day plans, unit and inquiry plans or inquiry mapping. A theme that came out of program planning for the ECEs was their role in planning and setting up the classroom environment. This was a role described by eight of the ECEs. One ECE stated that setting up the environment was her, "… favourite part of my job" (E3). Although similar responses were found in the types of planning the educators do, with the exception of setting up the classroom environment, there was a difference in the language used by ECEs and teachers. The ECEs used the word "support" to discuss their involvement with planning, whereas a teacher stated that lesson planning was "…a major part of my role" (T6). The idea of being a support for the teacher was prominent in the ECEs responses, therefore, it warranted recognition as its own theme. Ten of the fifteen ECEs specifically stated that part of their role was to "support the teacher" (E12) or "support their teaching partner" (E1). Two additional ECEs suggested a hierarchy in educator roles through discussion of taking on assistant related responsibilities, "I assist with the goals that Mrs. [last name] has for the class. Assisting mostly with transitions" (E15). Another ECE stated, "Assisting with the daily responsibilities that come with teaching in FDELK [Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten]" (E6).

In thinking about this hierarchy further, nine of the fifteen teachers described themselves as program leads. Responsibilities focused on program planning, assessment and reporting. One teacher stated, "My ECE is not responsible for report cards, therefore, I take the lead to ensure they are completed using information from the assessments I have done" (T12). Another teacher reported, "I have training in the developmental reading assessments we use in [name of school board] so I generally take on that responsibility myself" (T8). The theme of assessment, evaluation, and reporting came out of these types of responses. The teachers described formal assessments they were using in their classroom. In comparison, the theme of observation came out of the ECE responses. The ECEs and teachers described their use of assessment practices quite differently. The ECEs focus on informal interactions, observations, and documentation, whereas the teachers focus on formal assessments.

A final theme that came out of both educator responses was that of a facilitator. ECEs and teachers described the importance of their role in "facilitating children's learning" in the Kindergarten classroom. Therefore,

despite key differences in the enactment of roles in relation to assessment practices, both educators see themselves as important in supporting children's learning.

Table 3

*Role in Kindergarten Program*

| Educator | Theme | Description | Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| ECE | Program Planning | Program planning includes short- and long-range plans (individual lesson plans, day plans, unit/inquiry plans) | "I support with planning. I write out the day plans, think about materials for learning centres, selecting inquiry topics, supporting with all the plans." |
| | Facilitator | Descriptions include facilitating children's learning through educator interactions. | "I think that in FDELK it is important that the educators are more facilitators of children's learning than anything else. We are there to guide them." |
| | Support Teacher | Descriptions in regard to supporting the classroom teacher. | "Definitely a support for the teacher. She is ultimately the one who makes the final decisions and so for me it's thinking about how I can best help her in achieving success. Working with a partner isn't new to me." |
| | Observer | Descriptions include completing observations such as running records and anecdotal notes. | "Being an ECE we know the importance of observation, observation, observation. Mostly anecdotal notes for planning and portfolios." |
| | Set-up classroom environment | Roles relating to setting up various learning centres in the classroom (block, literacy, inquiry, technology centres). | "My favourite part of my job is that I get to set up the learning centres. Looking at my observations and thinking about children's interest and then adding materials to learning centres or selecting a focus for dramatic play" |
| Teacher | Program Planning | Program planning includes short- and long-range plans (individual lesson plans, day plans, unit/inquiry plans) | "Lesson planning is a major part of my role. Ensuring that curriculum expectations are inherent in the plans that are provided." |
| | Facilitator | Descriptions included facilitating children's learning through educator interactions. | "A major aspect of our PD is to think about intentional play-based learning and our role within that is to facilitate children's learning in our classrooms." |
| | Program lead | Describe being the lead educator responsible for program planning and assessment. | "We have a lot of responsibilities as the teacher. I have spoken to the other K teachers and they agree we are the program leads and it is up to us to make sure that we are thinking about the curriculum." |
| | Assessment, evaluation & reporting | Formal assessments such as developmental reading and school readiness assessments were described. Discussion of evaluation and reporting focused on report cards. | "I am always assessing and evaluating the students to make sure all students are meeting curriculum expectations for K." |

**Helpful Interactions**

The educators were asked to describe interactions they thought were most helpful in supporting their students in meeting the curriculum expectations. All 30 educators, 15 ECEs and 15 teachers, stated that play was one of the interactions that is most helpful. Despite all educators using the word "play" in their responses, there were clear distinctions in the ways in which play interactions were described. All of the ECEs described the notion that play offers multiple opportunities for children to meet the curriculum expectations. Some examples include:

"There is not just one time of the day that the curriculum is taught, it is sort of covered through everything that we do. Even during washroom time the children are learning" (E9).

"That is sort of a hard question to answer, because I just think play is the way you teach curriculum in the early years, it's not that [it is] just supporting children's learning, it is learning" (E3).

"…when the play environment is right, there are lots of opportunities to learn" (E13).

Responses from the teachers suggested that play was key in supporting students in meeting curriculum expectations; however, evidence of specific time periods or places for teaching and mastering the expectations was the focus, "I plan the activities for each day using the curriculum. I've been teaching for 12 years now, I know the curriculum by heart and I know the type of lessons that play can best support… building blocks activities for problem solving and math expectations… read alouds for comprehension expectations" (T1). Another teacher stated, "During play I see these "AH-HA" moments where children just sort of get the lessons or question they were exploring" (T13). One teacher articulated the idea of a particular lesson being dedicated to a specific expectation, "all the lessons are planned in relation to a curriculum expectation. If we are doing a math lesson it's because the children are interested and because its focus [is] on a clear expectation for math learning" (T5).

The educators gave specific examples of grouping size as helpful interactions. Twelve ECEs reported small group interactions and ten teachers reported whole group interactions as being most helpful in supporting children in meeting the curriculum expectations. One ECE suggested that small groups were most helpful when an educator could be actively engaged in the small group activity with the children, "It is a luxury and the easiest when myself or Miss [name] can be present while the children are working in small groups. It allows us to see how the children engage with materials but also tells us right away if they [the children] just don't get something" (E10).

The teachers' responses in relation to whole group contexts was in keeping with the idea that it is best when an educator is present; however, differed in the context most helpful in providing that additional support. "I think that people don't realize how wonderful a whole group meeting can be for teaching a lesson. The lesson can be taught

using the Smart Board or chart paper and all the students have time to ask questions" (T15). Another teacher suggested that whole group interactions allow for the teacher to see how children are responding to the lesson: "I do most of the instruction during whole group so that all students can participate and I can see how different children respond" (T13). In summary, it appears that both ECEs and teachers believe it is important for an educator to be present or involved in instruction and activities to support children in the moment; however, these educators differed in the context in which they describe their presence as being more beneficial.

A final theme that came out of the ECE responses was that of a "motivation for learning." The idea that children need to be motivated in order to learn was reported by six ECEs. A major focus in these descriptions was providing children with choice so that they were more likely to "buy in" and be motivated to participate. For example, "Ultimately it's the idea of motivating them to learn. I think the only way you can do that is by including their interests" (E7). Another wrote, "…giving them choice, so if they are choosing the centre they are going to be playing at they will be more motivated I think" (E14). This notion is summarized by one ECE who stated, "At the end of the day it's about the kids and what they are interested in and want to do. You need them to buy in or else they won't be motivated at all" (E11).

The major that emerged from the teacher questionnaire was direct instruction. The theme of direct instruction was not discussed in isolation but described as a delivery method for meeting curriculum expectations. For example, the teachers often described a three-part-lesson type structure in which they would describe a whole group, teacher led lesson that included a follow up discussion and further consolidation at learning centres. One teacher articulated this by stating: "I believe students need to be taught the basics through a balanced program of teacher directed/generated activities… I think the teacher directed piece comes first in thinking about expectations to provoke further thinking followed by an opportunity to play and practice" (T5). Another teacher shared an example from her classroom, "When teaching a new concept or lesson I start with teaching the concept more directly as to model behaviours and interactions, usually after a 10-minute whole group meeting the children go to learning centres and participate in extension activities" (T11).

Table 4
*Helpful Interactions*

| Educator | Theme | Description | Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| ECE | Play | Responses focus on having large blocks of time dedicated to intentional play throughout the day to support children in discovery of new ideas and consolidation of learning. | "I think there are multiple opportunities throughout each day to meet the curriculum expectations through play-based spaces." |
| | Small group | Descriptions include small group interactions where children work together on a variety of activities, sometimes with the educator as well. | "A lot of what we do is at small groups. Centre time is in small groups, play and inquiry in small groups." |
| | Motivation for learning | Responses focus on motivating children by providing them with choice in deciding what activities or interactions they were interested in. | "At the end of the day it's about the kids and what they are interested in and want to do. You need them to buy in or else they won't be motivated at all." |
| Teacher | Play | Examples include providing children with "play time" as a way to consolidate learning following a lesson. | "During play I see these "AH-HA" moments where children just sort of get the lessons or question they were exploring." |
| | Whole group | Interactions or instruction during whole group time. | "I do most of the instruction during whole group so that all students can participate and I can see how different children respond." |
| | Direct instruction | Explicit teacher instruction that takes place prior to individual work time. | "I believe students need to be taught the basics through a balanced program of teacher directed/generated activities… I think the teacher directed piece comes first in thinking about expectations to provoke further thinking followed by an opportunity to play and practice." |
| | Family involvement | Providing parents/families with examples of activities they could work on with their children at home or involving parents as volunteers in the class. | "Families are one of the greatest helps. I try really hard to think about ways that parents can extend learning that we are doing at school at home with their children." |

**Grouping Strategies**

The educators were asked to describe grouping strategies they use within their classroom. Seven ECEs and nine teachers discussed cooperative learning groups. Responses from both educator groups were very similar and focused on the social dynamics in Kindergarten classrooms. Two of the ECE responses included making decisions for cooperative learning groups: "If I am going to make a choice for a group of children, I focus that choice on who I know works well together" (E2). Another stated, "Social dynamics can be a bit interesting in Kindergarten, we like to mix it up but we do have to think about what an effective environment is" (E8). Two teachers also focused their response on the social dynamics in the classroom, "There are some children who just can't work together. We have tried and tried and tried!!! Now we help them make a better choice" (T11). The second teacher stated, "There are definitely a few leaders in our class, we utilize some of their team building skills and place them as group leaders in cooperative groups" (T2). Other educators focused their response on the ways in which cooperative grouping has benefits for the overall Kindergarten program. One teacher said, "In one PD workshop I learned about cooperative learning groups it really does have benefits in a larger way not just for the children in the group but I find that when we have them work on cooperative skills in their groups it has an impact on learning outside" (T10). The ECE in this classroom stated, "my teaching partner [name] went to this training and she learn[ed] about giving a common goal to the group and the group sort of works on achieving that goal together. We have found that it works wonders" (E10).

A theme that emerged from both educator groups was the idea of having "no plan" in regard to grouping. Six ECEs and five teachers described the notion that the focus of play-based FDK is free play where children are making decisions about where they want to play and who they want to play with. Responses of both educators were very similar for example, one ECE stated, "We don't really have a plan for grouping. During centres the students select where they want to go and who they want to play with. No real grouping plan" (E5). A teacher stated, "I don't think I have a grouping strategy, we let the students pick who they want to work and play with. That's sort of the goal of FDELK [Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten]" (T15). Other educators focused on the natural unfolding of groupings, as demonstrated by an ECE: "We don't have a plan for who works with who as it just happens. Children end up working with other children at different activities. I think it's the same way that we think about play, we follow their [the children's] lead" (E4).

The main distinction in educator responses in regard to grouping strategies had to do with heterogeneous/flexible grouping and ability grouping. Responses from eight ECEs included heterogeneous/flexible groupings, none of the ECE responses included positive support for ability groupings. In contrast, eight of the teacher responses focused on ability grouping, and none of their responses focused on flexible groupings. The ECEs used the term "flexible grouping" and their descriptions were in keeping with that of descriptions of heterogeneous groupings found in the literature (Dweck, 2006, 2010). Direct examples from ECEs include:

"I use flexible grouping. I don't think it's right to put children in ability groups in Kindergarten, there is a huge range in all areas so mostly groups are made based on topics of interest" (E3).

"I'm pretty flexible in terms of who I place with who. Sometimes I think one child should try working with another and so I will switch it up" (E6).

"In our class we use a range of grouping strategies for learning… small group, partner, independent work" (E7).

"I have a practice of putting children in groups of various abilities, I think that makes for the biggest learning potential" (E9).

Eight of the fifteen teachers describe using ability groupings in their practice. Six of the eight examples focused solely on literacy groups, and two of the teachers discussed literacy and math ability groupings in their classroom. "I have reading groups, math groups, and topic interest groups. I am doing DRA [developmental reading assessments] with the students right now so I may make some changes to the leveled groups for reading soon" (T11). Two teachers focused heavily on the different reading levels of students in Kindergarten: "I taught grade two for three years before coming to Kindergarten. Kindergarten is so different because there is such a difference in abilities for reading, some children don't know their alphabet and others are reading four word sentences. So ability groups" (T4). Another teacher stated, "The range in our class is wide, more than I have ever seen. We use leveled readers and guides in different reading groups" (T1).

Table 5
*Grouping Strategies*

| Educator | Theme | Description | Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| ECE | Cooperative learning | Placing children in groups with children they work well with (careful consideration for social dynamics in the classroom). | "In our class we think a lot about social dynamics, who works well with who." |
| | No plan | The idea that FDK should consist mostly of free play where children are making decisions about where they want to play and who they want to play with. | "We don't really have a plan for grouping. During centres the students select where they want to go and who they want to play with, no real grouping plan."<br><br>"I use flexible grouping. I don't think it's right to put children in ability groups in Kindergarten, there is a huge range in all areas so mostly groups are made based on topics of interest." |
| | Heterogeneous/Flexible grouping | Using a variety of organizational strategies for instruction that is flexible, children can be grouped based on interest, choice, topic, etc. Labeling of groups is minimized in flexible grouping. | |
| Teacher | Cooperative learning | Placing children in groups with children they work well with (careful consideration for social dynamics in the classroom). | "Cooperative learning groups are the only groups we actually plan out in advance." |
| | No plan | The idea that FDK should consist mostly of free play where children are making decisions about where they want to play and who they want to play with. | "I don't think I have a real grouping strategy, we let the students pick who they want to work and play with. That's sort of the goal of FDELK"<br><br>"I have reading groups, math groups, and topic interest groups. I am doing DRA with the students right now so I may make some changes to the leveled groups for reading soon." |
| | Ability Grouping | Practice of grouping children together based on their abilities in the classroom (examples focused on literacy and math groups). | |

**Basis for Evaluation**

        The educators were asked to report their basis for evaluation, in other words, what information do they use in estimating their expectations for children's outcomes. Six ECEs and four teachers reported that they were using notes that they had written during conferences, one-on-one meetings with the students, to provide their expectation score. Both educators described these conferences in similar ways, for example, one ECE stated, "We have one-on-one meetings with the kindies. I used the information from these notes to respond" (E3). One teacher stated, "Information from our conference meetings" (T1).

        Both ECEs and teachers described using information from their assessment practice; however, ECEs never used the word "assessment," instead the theme that emerged from their responses was "observations." When discussing their use of observations, they talked most often about running records and anecdotal notes, much like they did in response to the question, "describe your role in the Kindergarten program." One participant stated, "I take anecdotal notes most often. I feel most comfortable with this type of observation and it provides me enough info" (E10). Another stated, "I am using mostly documentation information that I collected recently. Lots of notes and some running records and checklists" (E3). In comparison, the teachers did use the term "assessment" and this was the most common response provided by the teachers. Twelve of the teachers reported using information from assessments to provide an expectation score for Study 2. What was most interesting about these responses was that all twelve teachers discussed using formal or direct assessments. The most commonly reported assessment was the DRA, followed by the Kindergarten readiness assessment, and the Early Development Instrument (EDI). Two teachers discussed math assessments but they did not state the name of the assessment they were using, "…also math assessments and counting" (T1) and, "I used the scores for the math assessment" (T11). It was interesting that these two teachers reported using math assessments as a basis for evaluation, specifically because this study did not ask about math expectations only their expectations for children's self-regulation, early reading and vocabulary outcomes. Although only two teachers reported the use of math assessments as a basis for evaluation, it is possible that the educators are using global evaluations of students based on a variety of assessments completed in the class to provide the expectations for self-regulation, early reading, and vocabulary.

        A final theme that came out of the responses from six ECEs was that of "interactions with children." Responses focused on the many ways that they interact with children throughout the day and the idea that they are able to utilize these informal interactions with children to provide their expectation score. One participant stated, "I

am with the children all day, I know how they are doing" (E6).  Similarly, another shared, "I see the children for 6.5 hours a day. I play and learn with them. I just know" (E9). Other ECEs further capitalized on this idea that they spend a lot of time with the children but spoke about being with the children during speciality groups. For example: "I am with them always, at gym, at music, at recess, at play" (E13). Another ECE stated, "Especially their self-regulation we can see that during transition time when we go to music and drama" (E7). These quotations capture the idea that the ECEs use information from informal interactions with children to report their expectations.

Table 6
*Basis for Evaluation*

| Educator | Theme | Description | Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| ECE | Conferencing | One-on-one conferences/meeting with children. | "I meet individually with children and record using our class Ipad. Thinking back on the conferences that I just had last week was helpful in providing the ranking." |
| | Observations | Observations such as running records and anecdotal notes. | "I looked at the records I have from my daily observation book." |
| | Interactions with children | Informal interactions with child throughout the school day (learning centres, play, gym, music, small group, recess, conversations, etc.) | "I'm with them [the students] all day, so it is pretty easy for me to know how they are doing." |
| Teacher | Conferencing | One-on-one conferences/meeting with children. | "My ECE and I have conferences with the students to understand their level for math and reading." |
| | Formal/direct assessments | Formal assessments completed by teacher during a one-on-one interaction (developmental reading and math assessments, readiness assessments). | "I am always assessing their [the students] learning. In our Board we use formal assessments mostly at the beginning of the school year and after each reporting period to rethink planning." |

# Discussion and Conclusion

A wealth of literature has demonstrated the ways in which teaching beliefs and philosophies influence planning decisions, interactions, and instruction (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Fang, 1996; Hattie, 2011; Rubie-Davies, 2015; Zohar et al., 2001). This study included the voices of both ECEs and teachers in Kindergarten. Results revealed key distinctions in teaching philosophies of the ECEs and teachers. The ECE responses to the teaching philosophy question were child-centred (inquiry-based learning, play-based learning, constructivism and developmentally appropriate practices). The teacher themes were mixed in that they included teacher-directed interactions and a focus on classroom structure (routine), with the addition of child-centred elements such as play- and inquiry- based learning. The distinctions found in educator philosophies in this study are further reflected in the educator responses about their basis for evaluation and the questions related to classroom practices (grouping strategies and helpful interactions). Building on the work of previous scholars, this research demonstrates the ways in which teaching philosophies can influence teaching practices and expectations in Kindergarten.

When ECEs described interactions they believed were most helpful in supporting students in meeting the curriculum expectations, they were child-centred, similar to their responses in regard to teaching philosophy. The themes that emerged from the ECE responses included play, small group interactions, and a motivation for learning. In providing these examples the ECEs discussed the multiple opportunities to teach the curriculum in the FDK program. Recent research has shown that Kindergarten children respond to opportunities for self-regulation significantly more often in small group and play contexts (Author/s, XXXX). Similarly, children demonstrate the highest engagement during play and small group contexts. Therefore, not only are play and small group interactions child-centred, children demonstrate significantly greater engagement and self-regulation in these interactions compared to whole group contexts (Author/s, XXXX). Although teachers in this study described play as an interaction that is most helpful in supporting children in meeting curriculum expectations, their responses were mixed in that play was only part of the interaction. Play was often described as a follow-up component of a lesson. Teachers described whole group contexts and direct instruction as being key for the delivery of new material in a lesson. Therefore, like the responses of ECEs, we see a mapping of teaching philosophies to teachers' responses to the questions about interactions they think are most helpful in meeting curriculum expectations.

A further application of teaching philosophies was present in educator descriptions of grouping strategies. The main distinction in educator responses was in the themes of heterogeneous/flexible grouping reported by ECEs

and homogenous/ability grouping reported by teachers. A review of the work of past scholars reveals some of the practices that are associated with high and low differentiating teachers. For example, Weinstein (2002) revealed that high differentiating teachers adopt an entity perspective of intelligence in which they placed students in fixed ability groupings and often emphasized performance goals and extrinsic rewards. Low differentiating teachers hold incremental understandings of intelligence and have interest-based groupings in which peer support was encouraged. Although the present study did not probe educators in regard to their beliefs about intelligence (entity versus incremental perspectives), the ECEs' responses in relation to flexible groupings map onto the findings about incremental perspectives whereas the responses of teachers map onto an entity perspective. Despite not capturing intelligence perspectives, the present study did capture educator philosophies that are in keeping with the findings about grouping approaches seen in previous work. This work, and the work of others have highlighted the ways beliefs and philosophies influence instructional behaviours. The existing research on the practices of high and low expectation educators reveals distinctions in educator groupings (Weinstein, 2002). High expectation educators are less likely to ability group and more likely to place children in flexible groupings (Rubie-Davies, 2007, 2008). A look at the research on the effectiveness of ability grouping on student learning reveals few positive benefits (Hatie, 2009). More work is needed to understand how teaching beliefs and philosophies are translated into teaching behaviours and how these behaviours influence student learning, specifically in relation to grouping approaches. Future research should seek to understand why educators choose particular grouping strategies over others in their practice while seeking to understand the ways in which educators can work with more flexible grouping arrangements (Rubie-Davies, 2015). Researchers should consider including observation and interview data in seeking to unpack the associations among teacher beliefs, practices, and expectation. Additionally, future research should consider the ways school administration can shape and influence educator beliefs and practices.

A continued divergence of themes was seen in educator responses to questions about their basis for evaluation. The ECEs described using observations whereas the teachers described using formal/direct assessments as their basis for evaluation. The *Growing Success- The Kindergarten Addendum* document describes the policy for assessment, evaluation and reporting for Kindergarten in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016b). Three aspects of assessment are discussed in the document: assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning. Assessment for learning helps educators adapt instruction to the individual needs of children; assessment as learning refers to providing feedback and applying strategies to support students in self-

assessment while including children in the learning process; and assessment of learning evaluates children's growth in learning for reporting purposes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016b). Educators are called to include all aspects of assessment into their practice, while understanding that the primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning while supporting children in becoming self-regulating, independent learners. Interestingly, it is the teachers, not the ECEs who are provided with professional development training and workshops in applying these assessment practices in their classrooms.

The educators in this study were not probed directly about their assessment practices in their classrooms; however, they were asked to share the basis (reference) for evaluation. ECEs described their observation practices through completing running records and anecdotal notes. This is in keeping with assessment for learning in that the ECEs are using observations and evidence of children's learning to report their expectations. The *Growing Success-Kindergarten Addendum* describes this process as "pedagogical documentation" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016b). The teachers reported using direct and formal assessments of children's learning, this is reflective of assessment of learning which is more summative and used for reporting purposes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, 2016b). In this study, it appears as if ECEs and teachers are using different methods of gathering evidence for students learning, at least in the case of reporting their expectations for children's learning. This finding is noteworthy in that a wide variety of assessment practices should be utilized to improve student learning. The practices associated with assessment for learning and assessment as learning are given particular focus in the *Growing Success-Kindergarten Addendum* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016b). Going forward, research should seek to unpack the key distinctions in assessment practices, more specifically, additional research is needed to understand the ways in which various assessment methodologies influence educator expectations in the early years.

Distinctions in assessment practices were further revealed in educators' descriptions of their role in the Kindergarten program. Similar to responses to their basis for evaluation, ECEs described their role as observers, and teachers revealed their role in assessment, evaluation, and reporting. A look inside the curriculum document and the description of their roles helps to understand the educator responses. The language used to describe the roles of the educators varies. When describing the teacher's role, the word, "responsible" is used, when describing the ECE's role the terms "bring" and "contribute" are used. In describing the role of teachers the document states: "…teachers are responsible for…formative assessment (assessment for learning) and evaluation, based on the team's assessments of children's progress; and formal reporting and communication with families." In describing the role

of ECEs the document states, "Early childhood educators bring a focus on age-appropriate program planning… contribute to formative assessment (assessment for learning) and evaluation of the children's learning "(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 8). Although the assessment practices of ECEs are more closely tied to the description in regard to assessment for learning, it is possible that teachers are feeling pressured by their responsibility for assessment and formal reporting to families so that they are more inclined to use formal assessment techniques.

Educator responses suggest a hierarchy of roles, with ECEs stating that they see themselves in a supportive role to the teacher and teachers describing themselves as program leads. A 2011 study, exploring the teaching structure of ECEs and teachers in the FDK program also found a hierarchical structure in the relationship of ECEs and teachers (Gibson & Pelletier, 2012). In this study, half of the ECEs stated they had less of an influence on the program decisions relative to that of the teacher. Furthermore, more than half of the teachers stated that they had more authority than the ECEs and one quarter reported delegating tasks to the ECE. Approximately 35% of the ECEs reported acting as an assistant to the teacher (Gibson & Pelletier, 2012). The work of Gibson and Pelletier (2012) specifically probed for a hierarchy in the relationship and structure. Despite not specifically asking about a hierarchical relationship in the present study, the themes that emerged from the ECE and teacher responses demonstrate a hierarchy in regard to the ways in which the educators execute their responsibilities in the classroom. These teaching teams are mandated to work as partners together; the findings from this study suggest that more work is needed to truly optimize the teaching partnerships within Kindergarten classrooms in Ontario.

In conclusion, there were key distinctions in the educator responses to the questionnaire. Overall, ECEs responded with a child-centred focus that was reflected in multiple themes including: inquiry- and play- based learning, small group interactions, developmentally appropriate practices, motivation for learning, and constructivist pedagogies. The themes that emerged from the teacher responses were mixed. Although teachers included aspects of child-centred elements in their responses such as inquiry-based and play-based philosophies, they often described these interactions as happening subsequent to directly teaching a lesson. A more teacher-directed, structured lens was evident in the themes that emerged from the Kindergarten teachers. The child-centred elements that the ECEs describe are in line with previous literature on the beliefs and practices of high expectation, low differentiating educators. The more structured teacher-directed themes that emerged from the teacher responses are more consistent with that of low expectation, high differentiating educators. It is important to recognize the unique nature of this

study in considering the significance for future research. More specifically, the uniqueness of teachers and ECEs working together as partners in Ontario FDK classrooms.

The significance of this study is threefold: (1) this study begins to unpack the factors and practices that influence educator expectations in Kindergarten; 2) this study includes the voices of ECEs and teachers and provides a comparison of themes that emerge when educators are given an opportunity to reflect on their practices; and, 3) previous research on educator expectations focuses on the perspective that there is something about students that leads teachers to form differing expectations for them. This research moves away from a focus on child characteristics, and focuses on educator factors that influence educator expectations. Although there were some commonalities in themes that emerged from the educator responses, this research highlights important distinctions in teaching philosophies, educator roles, teaching interactions (grouping approaches), and the basis for student evaluation by the educators that may be useful in understanding educator expectation levels. Future research should seek to explore within-group differences to further understand educator practices and interactions that may influence expectations within each group. Furthermore, details in regard to the number of years ECEs and teachers had worked together as partners in the FDK were not available. Therefore, future researcher should seek to include these contextual variables to provide a complete understanding of the teaching histories of both educators. However, with next steps in mind there is a potential limitation to studying educator expectations in groups, in that studying all educators as a group means that the individuality of educators can be lost. This study sought to address this potential limitation through the use of thick descriptions from both sets of educators, which documents the variability of differences among educators within a group. Thick descriptions included details of the context, participants, and direct quotations provided by participants. In addition to thick descriptions, the number of participants whose responses fit under each theme was presented. To further address this potential limitation future research should go beyond capturing information from educator questionnaires and interviews, and begin to understand classroom interactions through observational data. This would provide the opportunity for researchers to work with teaching teams to better understand the decisions they make in their classrooms while further understanding the practices and interactions that may be associated with varying expectation levels of educators in Kindergarten.

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