Listening to the voices in the garden:

The enactment of curriculum in contemporary kindergarten

By

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Abstract

Kindergarten was originally conceived as a place for young children to playfully participate in self-initiated investigation and creative work to facilitate their development (Froebel, 1967a). However, over time, curricular mandates have shifted from Froebel’s original conception of kindergarten to prescriptive outcomes that have resulted in a more academically oriented curriculum that emphasizes skills and content in segregated subject areas (Russell, 2011; Stipek, 2004). These expectations and the accompanying accountability have led to the development of a different kind of kindergarten driven by a different set of goals (Stipek, 2004). There has been much discussion concerning the impact of shifting expectations on teacher practice (e.g., Goldstein, 2007b). Much of this research has surrounded a singular debate: the tension between the use of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and the obligation to teach prescribed curricular goals (e.g., Einarsdottir, 2008). However, this debate focusses solely on two dichotomous instructional logics and, thus, belies the complexities of the kindergarten classroom (Goldstein, 2007a). To gain a deeper understanding of how kindergarten is enacted in the evolving curricular landscape, this research looks beyond the challenges of integrating competing perspectives and into the interconnected factors at play in a classroom. Accordingly, in this study, I use a conceptual lens informed by Schwab’s conception of the eclectic (1971) and the four commonplaces (1973) to examine the multiple factors that contribute to the development of a kindergarten classroom environment. I re-envision the four commonplaces – subject matter, teacher, milieu, and learner – to align them with contemporary conceptions of educational purposes, practical theory, classroom climate, and childhood. Acknowledgement of kindergarten as an eclectic space provides a framework to explore the concurrent inclusion of both academic and developmental orientations. Using an ethnographic approach that integrates data from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and photo elicitation interviews with the students, I
robustly describe learning in three full day kindergarten classrooms in Ontario. The data demonstrate that a successful, albeit different, balance between academic learning and developmentally appropriate practices is present in each of these classrooms.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Throughout this dissertation we will journey through the realm of kindergarten learning and I believe that there is no better place to begin this journey than in a kindergarten classroom.

*Picture a teacher sitting in a circle with a group of four- and five-year-olds demonstrating one purpose for a pile of counters while explaining both what she is doing and the information that is gained through those actions. The class subsequently plays a game to enact the concept. Pairs of children share a ten frame and a pile of dinosaur counters, working collaboratively to create a pattern. Once created, a student closes her eyes while another one removes a dinosaur from the pattern. When the first student opens her eyes, she looks to determine what is missing.*

*Picture a teacher having her hair done in the make-shift salon that was a house centre when the day began, driving cars over a bridge that children have made out of the big blocks, or buying cookies from a bakery shop that was collectively created by three boys and a girl.*

*Picture five students sitting at a table writing, using a combination of pictures and words to communicate their thoughts. The teacher encourages the students to talk to their neighbours about what each is writing and to support each other if there is a need. Because of these discussions the room buzzes during these periods, not with the same loud fervour as during play-based centre time but rather with a constant hum of calm voices.*
Picture a group of students and their teacher dancing. These children love many songs but today they dance to their favourite, the Mack Chicken Medley, a mix of the chicken dance, head and shoulders, and the itsy bitsy spider. As they sing along the children and their teacher laugh, jump, and dance their way around the carpet ending the day on a predictably playful note.

My journey to this dissertation began in this classroom, with these children. These descriptions paint a picture of life in our kindergarten classroom; they are representative of the teacher I perceive myself to be. My classroom, while unique because of the people within, was not substantially different from those of my colleagues. I worked with many kindergarten teachers who modeled similar activities, sharing their pedagogical decision-making so that I too could create a kindergarten program that simultaneously embraced playful exploration and the learning of challenging academic skills. Wanting to learn how this balance could be achieved more effectively, I turned to the research literature only to find that this balanced approach was absent, replaced by a debate that dichotomized kindergarten education.

Purpose

Kindergarten was originally conceived as a place for young children to playfully participate in self-initiated investigation and creative work to facilitate their development (Froebel, 1967a). However, over time, curricular mandates have shifted from Froebel’s original conception of kindergarten to prescriptive outcomes that have resulted in a more academically oriented curriculum that emphasizes skills and content in segregated curricular subject areas (Russell, 2011; Stipek, 2004). Following the educational trend of standardization that began in the mid-1990s, contemporary kindergarten in North America is rife with standardized expectations that emphasize the mastery of academic skills (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Heydon & Wang, 2006). The inclusion of increasingly prescriptive academic expectations in
Ontario’s 2010 *Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program* document demonstrates the Ministry of Education’s participation in this academic movement. These expectations and the accompanying accountability have led to the development of a different kind of kindergarten driven by a different set of goals (Stipek, 2004).

There has been much discussion concerning the impact of these shifting expectations on student learning and teacher practice (e.g., Goldstein, 2007b; Ray & Smith, 2010; Stipek & Byler, 2004). Much of the research in this area has centered on a singular debate: the tension between the use of developmentally appropriate practices and the obligation to teach prescribed, academically-motivated curricular goals (e.g., Einarsdottir, 2008). A developmentally appropriate program provides support for the individual child’s social, emotional, and cognitive development. Conversely, an academically-motivated program gives priority to academic skills and content (Russell, 2011). The debate in the extant research largely dichotomizes instructional strategies by creating what I believe to be an artificial polarity between developmentally appropriate practices and academically-oriented mandates, which belies the inherent complexities of kindergarten teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Goldstein, 2007a). To gain a deeper understanding of how kindergarten is enacted in the face of the evolving curricular landscape, we need a comprehensive and realistic account of teaching and learning in the early years. My research looks beyond the challenges of integrating competing perspectives and into the interconnected factors at play in a classroom. This ethnographic study enriches the current understanding of the educational decision-making of kindergarten teachers and explores the students’ perspectives of their educational experiences.

Accordingly, in this study, I return to Schwab’s conception of the eclectic (1971) and the four commonplaces as a conceptual framework to engage the tension between developmentally
appropriate practices and academically-oriented mandates in a less polarized and dichotomous way. Specifically, I examine the multiple factors that contribute to the development of a kindergarten classroom environment through a re-envisioning of Schwab’s (1973) four commonplaces – subject matter, teacher, milieu, and learner – to better align them with contemporary conceptions of educational purposes, teacher beliefs and curricular stance, classroom climate, and childhood. While other researchers have examined the commonplaces as segregated factors, this research explores and describes their interplay. This conceptual framework serves a timely need given the existing policy and curriculum changes in kindergarten within the province of Ontario (Heydon & Wang, 2006).

In 2010, a new Full Day Kindergarten Early Learning Program was mandated that attempts to maintain the academically oriented expectations of prior curriculum documents while requiring a play-based approach to learning that embraces a developmental logic. The integration of the academic and developmental logics in the 2010 curriculum document require the enactment of a kindergarten program that addresses both logics in classroom environments making Ontario an ideal research setting to explore the negotiation between these two logics within kindergarten education. While the curricular changes occurring in Ontario kindergarten classrooms present the opportunity to research this enacted balance, they also provide a practical rationale for this research. That is, as the programming in these classrooms evolves, research that robustly describes the successful enactment of academic expectations through the use of developmentally appropriate practices will support teachers in their efforts to enact curricular expectations.

A classroom is a complex environment involving the interplay of program aims, philosophies of learning, and educational experiences of teachers and students. Researchers have
explored many factors that can impact classroom instruction including increasing academic expectations (Stipek & Byler, 2004), the prescriptive nature of curricular content (Goldstein, 2007b), time constraints (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006), pressure from colleagues teaching later grades (Goldstein, 2007a), the imposition of subject-specific textbooks (Tang & Maxwell, 2007), and the existing tensions between educational philosophies and teaching realities (Einarsdottir, 2006). These factors influence teachers’ instructional decision-making as they attempt to navigate through the resulting tensions. My research will gather information from classrooms during this time of unrest, depicting the current state of kindergarten in Ontario to facilitate informed discussions on the improvement of this program. Specifically, this ethnographic study seeks to answer the following questions:

1- What is the balance between academic expectations and developmentally appropriate practices in Ontario classrooms?

2- What is the perceived purpose of kindergarten education?

3- How do teachers negotiate a balance between curricular stance and mandated curricular expectations?

4- How is the kindergarten curriculum enacted in Ontario classrooms?

To answer these questions I introduce you to three classrooms and the people within.

**Introduction to the Focal Classrooms**

We begin in the Shady Lane classroom that is located in a mid-sized school in a suburban community on the outskirts of a city in Ontario. In this classroom, we meet Karen\(^1\) and 28 lively junior and senior kindergarten students. These students are the first group in their school to experience the full day kindergarten program.

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\(^1\) Pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation to protect the identities of the participants.
We then proceed to the Babbling Brook classroom that is located in a small town, 45 minutes outside a mid-sized city. In this second classroom, I introduce you to Samantha and the 25 junior and senior kindergarten students who share the classroom with her. Samantha and the senior kindergarten students are in their second year of full day kindergarten programming.

Finally, we enter the City Park classroom. Located in an inner city neighbourhood, this classroom is where we meet Linda and 25 junior and senior kindergarten students. This is their second year of full day kindergarten programming.

In this study, I describe the enactment of the kindergarten curriculum within these three classrooms. The sharing of data from each provides evidence of the diverse enactments of the full day kindergarten curriculum in Ontario. These teachers and learners share information concerning the inclusion of both the developmental and academic logics within each classroom thus supporting the integration of these seemingly dichotomous orientations. Through classroom observations and meaningful interviews with the various members of these classroom communities, this dissertation creates a comprehensive and realistic account of teaching and learning in the kindergarten years during this time of curricular transition.
Chapter 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

My study acknowledges the complex negotiations at play in a kindergarten classroom and the multiple factors that contribute to the development of a classroom learning environment. To explore these factors, I developed a conceptual framework informed by Schwab’s conception of the eclectic (1971) and the four commonplaces: subject matter, teacher, milieu, and learner (1973). I re-envisioned these commonplaces to better align them with contemporary conceptions of educational purposes, teacher curricular stance, classroom climate, and childhood. While other researchers have examined the commonplaces as segregated factors, through Schwab’s notion of the eclectic, I develop a conceptual framework that explores and describes their interplay in a complex kindergarten environment.

The Current Debate: Developmental Logic vs. Academic Logic

Developmental Logic

Rooted in theories of child development, supporters of a developmental logic advocate teaching practices that are guided by what we have learned concerning typical and individual child development (Graue, 2008). One of the documents central to this movement is Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8 (DAP) (NAEYC, 2009). The stated purpose of this document is to “promote young children’s optimal learning and development” (NAEYC, p. 1) and it is written, in part, as a response to the relatively novel inclusion of kindergarten in the elementary education continuum of academic learning (NAEYC, 2009). This inclusion has resulted in the development of standardized outcome-based curricular documents that are designed to prepare students for learning in later grades (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2010). The DAP addresses this issue both by supporting the enhanced alignment of early years and elementary education
and by warning of the potential negative effects of standards that narrow learning to particular academic areas (e.g., literacy), “focus on superficial learning objectives” (NAEYC, 2009, p. 4), and contain expectations that are too advanced for the age of the student. Instead, the DAP translates child development theory into 12 principles that should be considered when designing learning opportunities for young children. These include an emphasis on physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development, the creation of individualized learning plans that acknowledge children’s differing rates of growth, the need for teaching within a student’s zone of proximal development, and the importance of play and exploration to children’s learning.

Similar to the DAP (2009), some proponents of a developmental logic describe the issues presented by the curricular standards themselves, stating that many of the prescribed academic expectations are developmentally inappropriate for this age group (e.g., Elkind, 1972; Hatch & Freeman, 1988). However, most of the researchers who support this logic limit their discussions concerning the curricular standards, instead focusing on the influence of these outcome-based expectations on teacher practice and student learning (e.g., Nie & Lau, 2010; Parker & Neuhart-Pritchett, 2006; Stipek, 2004). These proponents are more accurately categorized as supporters of developmentally appropriate practice as opposed to subscribers to the broader developmental logic. Researchers who align themselves with this group problematize outcome-based standards when they lead to didactic instructional strategies rather than to child-centered, play-based strategies that they deem to be developmentally appropriate practices. A didactic approach is typically characterized by learning theories that embrace knowledge transmission. This learning is enacted through drill and practice. Conversely, constructivist approaches, rooted in the educational theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, are grounded in the belief that children construct knowledge through experience (Parker & Neuharoth-Pritchett, 2006). Subscribers to constructivist
learning theories describe knowledge as meaning making through connections between prior knowledge and interactions with real world situations (Nie & Lau, 2010). This theoretical perspective leads to the use of child-centered learning approaches such as child-directed activities, collaborative learning, and hands-on centres (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Constructivist approaches are commonly touted in the literature as developmentally appropriate for younger learners and thus best practice in a kindergarten classroom (Geist & Baum, 2005).

Though the DAP is widely accepted, one of the common criticisms is that it presents an orientational theory not a distinct practice. That is, while a developmental logic supports the inclusion of child-centered practices that are responsive to student needs, policy documents (e.g., NAEYC, 2009) and research addressing developmentally appropriate practices do not often describe how to integrate these practices into the learning of particular content areas (Graue, 2008; Van Horn & Ramey, 2003). Due to the limited procedural direction provided in this area, some teachers and researchers view a strict adherence to solely developmentally appropriate practices “as teaching without a plan” (Graue, 2008, p. 444) making it difficult to accomplish specific expectations that are described in outcomes-based curricular documents. The standards presented in these types of curricular documents are the primary concern for researchers who subscribe to an academic logic.

**Academic Logic**

Researchers and teachers who place academic learning at the centre of a kindergarten program describe the essential skills that kindergarten children must learn in order to build the foundation necessary for later learning. The inclusion of kindergarten in the academic continuum means that certain expectations must be met so that children have the knowledge necessary to meet the expectations required in subsequent grade levels. In many jurisdictions (e.g., Ontario),
this has resulted in the creation of a series of curriculum documents, where sets of expectations are prescribed, with each grade’s expectations building on those of the prior grade.

However, preparation for later grades is not the sole reason for the inclusion of academic learning in kindergarten. Both current research and policy documents espouse the early years as a “critical window of opportunity” (OME, 2005, p. 4) for learning “…when the brain’s plasticity, or adaptability, allows for greater information to be processed and absorbed” (Rushton & Larkin, 2001, p. 26). Because this time period is perceived as critical, many researchers advocate the use of instructional strategies “that directly target the critical skills that the student needs” (OME, 2005, p. 34). When used early in students’ academic careers, these strategies are said to provide students with the opportunity to gain the essential skills that are the foundation for later learning (Steele, 2004). For instance, research has shown the importance of phonemic awareness skills to kindergarten students’ future development as successful readers. That is, students who develop strong phonemic awareness skills typically develop into stronger readers while students who struggle to develop phonemic awareness skills in kindergarten are at risk for later reading difficulties (McNamara, Scissons, & Dahleu, 2005). In these later years, when teachers shift the focus from learning to read to reading to learn, those students who lack solid reading skills will quickly fall behind. Children who struggle with their reading will read less and have lower comprehension; as a result they will learn less. This situation, known as the Matthew effect, results in children falling further and further behind in all areas of their learning (Stanovich, 1986) and studies have shown that this effect can begin as early as grade one (McNamara, Scissons, & Dahleu, 2005). Thus, researchers who subscribe to an academic logic express the need to provide students with the opportunity to develop essential language skills before the
Matthew effect can begin. More specifically, these researchers describe the need to ensure that the development of academic skills begins in kindergarten (e.g., Steele, 2004).

As with the developmental logic, there are those who support the academic logic and those who oppose. Those who oppose the learning of academic skills in kindergarten typically problematize the direct instruction of skills, describing this approach as developmentally inappropriate because it leads to rote memorization rather than true understanding of academic concepts (Elkind, 2012). For example, Elkind (2012) describes the risk that children will develop an over reliance on the rote learning of skills such as sight word reading that will then impede their ability to reason and problem solve when attempting to comprehend more complex texts.

**Kindergarten as an Eclectic Space that Integrates DAP and Academic Logics**

While the debate rages on between these seemingly dichotomous discourses (e.g., Ray & Smith, 2010; Stipek & Byler, 2004), it is important to explore the possibilities that lie within these tensions (Goldstein, 2007a). This means considering the possibility of the concurrent inclusion of both academic and developmental recommendations, exploring their integration rather than arguing for their separation. Approaching the kindergarten curriculum in such a light is challenging. While I recognize the potential for this view to be more integrative and less reductionist, one still needs a framework within which to consider the learning potential of a kindergarten class. To help develop this perspective, I turned to Schwab’s (1971) conception of the eclectic.

In his exploration of the connection between theory and practice, Schwab problematizes the usefulness of generalized theories to particular practical educational situations stating that generalized theories largely ignore the similarities and differences in students, teachers, and classroom environments, instead “…generalizations are achieved only by processes of
abstraction or idealization” (Schwab, 1971, p. 496). However, classrooms and the people learning within them rarely, if ever, reside in the constructed worlds of educational theory. The problems of these constructed realities are further compounded by the number of discrepant theories that are designed to inform educational practice (e.g., behavioural sciences, sociology, etc.). Schwab acknowledges that these individual theories serve to increase our understanding of the learning of students, but clearly states that each is inadequate on its own, focusing narrowly on individual parts of bigger problems. For instance, sociological research advocates for the education of the child about their role and purpose within society. This perspective is, in part, supported by proponents of developmentally appropriate practice that advocate for teaching children how to exist within the social realm of a classroom. However, sole use of this theory would result in the inadequate education of children who may relate wonderfully with peers and adults but are neither literate nor numerate. According to Schwab, to promote a richer and more holistic educational experience, it is necessary that educators and educational researchers take a more eclectic approach, an approach that integrates theories from these multiple disciplines allowing “…a practical healing, a recourse to temporary and tentative bridges built between useful parts of bodies of knowledge in the course of their application to practical problems. This is one group of the eclectic arts” (Schwab, 1971, 502).

Schwab called for the eclectic in educational research insisting that educators and educational researchers bring together theories that have the potential to improve classroom practice in a manner that acknowledges their interconnected existence within a classroom environment. The typical definition of “eclectic” describes a process whereby one simply chooses from various sources to create a mixture of approaches and considerations. When Schwab describes the eclectic, he is being more precise, drawing on the philosophical integrative
definition as in the following: “One who holds that opposing schools are right in their distinctive doctrines, wrong only in their opposition to one another; culls from the teachings of different schools such doctrines as seem to him probably true” (Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia.).

It is this eclectic philosophical stance, where bodies of knowledge are respected, acknowledged, and integrated that is at the root of the conceptual framework in my study. Rather than engaging in the current debate that emphasizes the role of teacher practice while under valuing the roles of the learners and the learning environment, I suggest that Schwab’s conception of the eclectic allows us to focus on the particular events in the life of a teacher and students while still recognizing and interpreting the complex environment that is a kindergarten classroom.

Using Schwab’s (1973) commonplaces – subject matter, teacher, milieu, and learner – and aligning them with contemporary conceptions of educational purposes, teacher beliefs and curricular stance, classroom climate, and childhood, I will explore the interplay among them to develop a comprehensive account of kindergarten life and learning.

**Schwab’s Four Commonplaces**

In his description of curriculum development, Schwab identifies four interrelated commonplaces: subject matter, teacher, milieu, and learner (1973). The subject matter encompasses the essential learning related to knowledge and competencies. The teacher is responsible for deeply understanding this subject matter and enacting the curriculum within the learning environment or milieu. The learner is the intended beneficiary of this curriculum and knowledge of the background, intellectual, and emotional needs of the child is essential for both curriculum development and enactment.
According to Schwab (1973), each of these commonplaces plays a central role in curriculum development and none should be considered as more significant than the others. While each commonplace has its own unique theoretical underpinnings, they are necessarily connected (Fox, 1985) and each necessarily influences the others (Sack, 2008). The interplay among subject matter, how a learner can come to understand it, and the manner in which a teacher introduces the subject matter in the classroom milieu are all essential to our understanding of the practical enactment of curriculum. Each of these commonplaces and the literature that informs their theoretical underpinnings is explored in the following sections.

**Subject Matter**

Schwab (1973) describes subject matter as the “scholarly materials” (p. 502) included in a curriculum. That is, the subject matter consists of the knowledge that learners must gain during a particular time period of schooling. As this research explores teaching and learning in the early years, the subject matter is interpreted as the educational purposes that are communicated through curricular learning expectations for kindergarten students. Debate about what these expectations should consist of is prominent in the literature (e.g., Goldstein, 2007b; Nie & Lau, 2010; Ray & Smith, 2010). The primary debate centres on the tension between the historically prominent developmental conception of kindergarten and the more recent mandate towards increasing academic standards in the early years (e.g., Eirnasdottir, 2008).

**Historical conceptions of kindergarten.** Historical conceptions of kindergarten embraced the individualized development of children. Children were believed to have an innate desire to learn and it was the teacher’s job to “...encourage the child[ren]’s impulse to activity, investigation and creative work” (Froebel, 1967a, p. 92), to observe children, and to help protect and guide their individual development. Educators were not to give the children answers, but
rather to give them the tools to discover the answers on their own (Corbett, 1989). These discoveries were made through children’s play as they experimented with manipulatives (e.g., Froebel’s spheres and cubes) and imitated the activities that surrounded them (Froebel, 1967b). The expectations for student learning were not formalized and educators were warned of the dangers of academic learning for this age group (e.g., Elkind, 1972). Instead, the early kindergarten classroom was child-centered and the teacher’s role was to provide the necessary tools and conditions to enable a child to direct her or his own learning.

**Shifting conceptions of kindergarten.** Conceptions of kindergarten have shifted dramatically since this inception. With the numerous changes to curriculum documents over the last 20 years, there has been a global trend in education toward standardization and standards-based learning (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Kindergarten has not been exempt from this trend and is now rife with standardized expectations that emphasize the mastery of academic skills (Heydon & Wang, 2006). The adoption of standardized content supports conceptions of kindergarten as primarily academic (Hatch & Freeman, 1988), not strictly because the expectations are standardized but because the expectations dictate knowledge acquisition in segregated curricular areas. Specifically, these curricular expectations dictate what children should know and be able to do when they leave kindergarten (Russell, 2011). Evidence of this shift is present internationally as research emerges from numerous countries concerning the increasingly academic nature of kindergarten and the impact of these expectations on teachers’ instructional strategies (e.g., Greece - Doliopoulou, 2010; Iceland - Eirnasdottir, 2006; Jordan - Abu-Jaber, Al-Shawareb, & Gheith, 2010; United States - Hatch, 2002). Canada is not exempt from this proliferation of academic expectations in the kindergarten years (e.g., Wien, 2004).
Ontario’s active participation in the academic movement is demonstrated through a brief analysis of three Ontario Ministry of Education documents addressing the kindergarten years: *The Kindergarten Program* (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 1998), *The Kindergarten Program Revised* (OME, 2006), and *The Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program* (OME, 2010); and one document created by the Ontario Teachers’ Federation: *Curriculum Guidelines for Junior Kindergarten* (Ontario Teachers’ Federation, 1973). Russell’s (2011) model of document analysis provides a useful framework for exploring the contrasting conceptions that presently dominate discourse concerning kindergarten: developmental versus academic. “In brief, a developmental logic frames the purpose of kindergarten as supporting the individual child’s social, emotional, and cognitive development, while the academic logic emphasizes academic skills and content” (Russell, 2011, p. 239).

The 1973 document *Curriculum Guidelines for Junior Kindergarten* explicitly embraces Froebel’s conception of kindergarten, beginning in the introduction with a description of his vision. The focus throughout the document is on the development of the whole child including the building of relationships, the value of play to children’s learning, and the importance of social development. There are no prescribed academic expectations in this document. Instead, learning activities focus on the provision of resources that will promote children’s exploration. For example, the house centre was considered an important place for social and emotional learning.

... in a home centre it will be obvious that some young children, having had very little experience with other children, will ‘do their own thing,’ while a few children may organize themselves to take on the parts of mother, father and the doctor. The latter group
of children will be learning the complicated skills of human relations. (Ontario Teachers’ Federation [OTF], 1973, p. 19)

These skills involved learning how to function in a classroom with other children and learning the behavioural norms of a school setting. However, through these play-based centres, teachers were also expected to provide opportunities for academic learning for those students who were developmentally ready.

For example, if she places a variety of food containers in the home centre, children will begin to place milk cartons, eggs, and ice cream into the refrigerator, soap, dish cloths and cleaners under the sink, and corn flakes, flour and sugar on a shelf. Some children will be able to identify the labels on the boxes and if pencils and paper are placed in the centre a few children may begin to write grocery lists. (OTF, 1973, p. 19)

A brief analysis of this document reveals a primarily developmental logic. The prevalent focus is children’s social and emotional development and while some academic skills are discussed, the qualifiers some and may demonstrate that these skills will be learned when and if the child is developmentally ready.

This developmental logic was the guiding focus for kindergarten until 1998 when the Ontario Ministry of Education published The Kindergarten Program. While the focus on self-discovery that was integral to the initial conception of kindergarten in Ontario was not entirely lost, there was a transition to reframe play in the early years as less developmentally oriented; instead, play was described as a tool for learning a number of academic expectations through the planning of “productive play activities that have specific learning goals” (OME, 1998, p. 7). Moreover, this was the first ministry document to include specific expectations for kindergarten children’s academic learning (OME, 1998). These expectations were categorized into segregated
subject areas including language, mathematics, science and technology, personal and social
development, and the arts. The segregation of learning into traditionally academic subject areas
demonstrates the introduction of an academic logic to kindergarten in Ontario (Russell, 2011).

While some of the traditional thinking about kindergarten had been integrated into The
Kindergarten Program document (1998), slight differences in the language gave insight into the
emergence of a more academically-oriented philosophy of kindergarten learning. An
examination of the wording of the 1998 document revealed that a subtle change to the wording
resulted in a not so subtle change to the philosophy. The word may, which had so frequently
been used in past documents, had been replaced by the word will.

With encouragement and teacher guidance, they will begin to perform such reading-
related activities as repeating words, naming characters, and identifying signs, labels,
names, letters, and letter sounds. They will also imitate writing activities by
experimenting with writing notes, grocery lists, numbers and letters, and using symbols
that are meaningful to them. (OME, 1998, p. 5, emphasis added)

There was no longer the same emphasis on providing learning opportunities for those students
who were developmentally ready. The emphasis had shifted towards the assumption that every
child was ready to learn academic skills and thus every child was expected to achieve the listed
expectations. However, The Kindergarten Program (1998) did maintain some of its alignment
with the developmental model by acknowledging that “[c]hildren develop knowledge and skills
in the various areas of learning at different rates and in different ways” (OME, 1998, p. 9). This
statement, and others of its kind, demonstrate the concurrent inclusion of developmental and
academic logics.
*The Kindergarten Program Revised* (2006) continued to describe “each child [as] unique and ha[ving] individual needs” (OME, 2006, p. 2). However, another subtle difference in the language appeared in the 2006 kindergarten program document that demonstrated a further shift in the priorities of the program. Compared to earlier documents where learning experiences were intended to promote children’s “…total development, physical, social, emotional and intellectual” (OTF, 1973, p. 7), the 2006 document promoted learning experiences that “…provide a strong foundation for their future intellectual, physical and social development” (OME, 2006, p. 1). Once again, through the examination of the language in this document, the shifts in program goals can be observed. Intellectual development now stood at the forefront. This reality was compounded by the fact that *The Kindergarten Program Revised* (2006) contained 23 additional academic expectations for students.

The increasingly academic focus of kindergarten was further evidenced by the increase in the learning expectations for the language subject area from the 1998 document to its revision in 2006. In the latter document, the levelling of students’ reading abilities was discussed for the first time. “…read patterned and simple texts...patterned text, levels 2, 3; simple text, level 4” (OME, 2006, p. 38). While it may have only been a footnote in the document, this was the first overt declaration that kindergarten children were to be learning more than reading readiness skills. They were to be reading by the end of kindergarten.

The most recent iteration of the Ontario kindergarten program, *The Full-Day Early Learning Program Kindergarten Program* (2010) included few additional academic expectations. The revisions to this document were more focused on the learning of academic standards through the use of developmentally appropriate practices. The infusion of developmentally appropriate practices was accomplished by including a new introduction to the
curriculum document that discussed the integration of play-based learning into kindergarten classrooms. This child-centered, play-based approach could demonstrate a return to the developmentally appropriate practices that were previously championed. However, this integration is complicated by the continued inclusion of subject specific curricular expectations. Further, the descriptions of play that were prevalent in the 1973 document were replaced by the concept of play-based learning. Specifically, the term ‘play-based learning’ differs from the exploratory child-directed play of the past. The 2010 document includes descriptions of the teacher’s role in carefully planned play (e.g., “A child notices the question ‘How many scoops?’ posted at the sand table by an EL-K team member. The child begins to count the scoops” [OME, 2011, p. 88]) and purposeful questioning (e.g., “You noticed the question I wrote at the sand table. What did you find out?” [OME, 2011, p. 88]). These strategies can be quite useful to further the learning of students, but the imposed integration of the teacher into every activity in the classroom to ensure that academic expectations are learned limits the child-directed, experiential, and cooperative nature of the activities and minimizes the focus on the development of social skills and on learning to function within a school environment.

The infusion of teacher involvement in all classroom activities to ensure that educators “provide a rich variety of materials and resources, and interact with children to clarify, expand, or help articulate children’s thinking” (OME, 2010, p. 15) alters the focus from child-centered to teacher-directed and guided practice. This alteration is similar to Froebel’s (1967a) described focus on teachers creating the necessary environment for learning; however, this approach differs notably because of its assumption that all learning needs to be guided by an educator to ensure that children are learning the prescribed curricular expectations. The inclusion of play-based learning in Ontario’s current kindergarten curriculum document demonstrates the inclusion of a
developmental logic. However, the continued inclusion of all the academic expectations from the 2006 document that are segregated into subject specific curricular areas demonstrates a sustained alignment with an academic model of kindergarten (Russell, 2011).

The increasingly academic nature of the kindergarten program documents demonstrates Ontario’s participation in the academic movement. The shift in these and other kindergarten curriculum documents can and has led to an exploration of the dichotomization of pedagogical practices that mirror these logics: developmental and academic (e.g., Einarsdottir, 2006). However, the research that I am proposing acknowledges the tension between these logics but maintains that learning emerges not simply in this tension but also from the interplay among all four commonplaces. The inclusion of the subject matter commonplace in discussions of kindergarten classrooms is essential as it demonstrates a shift in what children are expected to learn and how teachers are expected to teach. However, heeding Schwab’s (1973) warning against an overemphasis on a single commonplace, focus on subject matter alone will not provide a complete picture of the learning taking place in a kindergarten classroom.

Subject matter does influence teaching. Extant research has found that teachers who are accountable for the teaching of an academically-oriented kindergarten curriculum will often integrate a teacher-centered educational philosophy in their classrooms with a focus on didactic instructional techniques (e.g., Booher-Jennings, 2005; Fung, 2009; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Tang & Maxwell, 2007). However, strict assignment of classroom learning to a dichotomous instructional category (i.e., developmental versus academic) belies the complexities of teaching kindergarten and fails to consider the role of the other commonplaces in classroom learning. For example, while teachers of contemporary kindergarten are subject to normative pressures to focus on these mandated academic skills (Goldstein, 2007a), these teachers do
“...have agency and make choices about what to emphasize” (Russell, 2011). The following section explores Schwab’s (1973) teacher commonplace including the teacher decision-making inherent in the navigation through the tensions resulting from increasingly academic conceptions of kindergarten.

**Teacher**

The subject matter commonplace is an essential factor in the development of pedagogy. These curricular goals mandate what children are to learn thus influencing teacher practice. However, teachers’ pedagogy is also influenced by many other factors including teacher beliefs and curricular stance. As Schwab (1973) asserted, consideration must be given to teachers’ knowledge, practices, and personal characteristics. Teachers are active participants in educational decision-making as they facilitate the enactment of curriculum in the classroom. These decisions are, in part, guided by their beliefs about children and the learning process, as well as their perspectives on the mandated curriculum.

**Teacher beliefs.** Teacher beliefs are defined as implicit assumptions about children, the learning process, pedagogical stance, and instructional strategies (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010). Teachers have implicit theories that underlie these beliefs concerning the students they teach, the subject matter, and their responsibilities as educators (Fang, 1996). These theories are developed as the result of personal educational experience and professional learning during teacher education programs and professional development sessions (Abu-Jaber et al., 2010).

Teachers’ educational beliefs are in large part founded on their perspectives of educational purpose, that is, their perceived goals of instruction. For instance, Stipek and Byler (2004) found that teachers who perceive the primary goal of learning to be the acquisition of basic skills often believe in and thus enact a teacher-centered instructional stance. In these types
of classrooms, lessons are often focused on discrete skills, facts, and procedural knowledge and students demonstrate their learning through worksheets and the repetition of facts (e.g., reciting the alphabet, rote counting). Teachers for whom the development of independence and social competency are the primary learning goals often believe in and enact a child-centered educational environment (Stipek & Byler, 2004). In these classrooms lessons often integrate experiences based on prior learning with a focus on developing students’ understanding of concepts (e.g., math experiences that are contextualized in everyday routines such as attendance; phonics instruction embedded in meaningful texts such as storybooks). In a child-centered classroom, learning is demonstrated in a variety of ways, instructional conversations between students and teachers are frequent, and activities encourage student problem solving. Understanding the role of teacher beliefs in pedagogical practice requires thinking about the complex interplay of beliefs and practice. Stevenson (2009) describes this interplay in her discussion of practical theory.

Practical theory is defined as teachers’ beliefs about educational purpose and educational stance. Educational purpose can be equated with the aims of teaching (Gordon, 2005); that is, what the teacher is trying to accomplish and what he or she is hoping the students will accomplish. These purposes can be described narrowly when the aims focus on student behaviour, active student participation in lessons, and students’ abilities to recall information (Stevenson, 2009). Researchers have found that teachers who express narrow educational purposes often use teacher-directed instructional strategies in their classrooms. For instance, in Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett’s (2006) surveys, interviews, and observations of 34 kindergarten teachers the researchers found that teachers with a focus on controlling student behaviour often use teacher-directed strategies. As one participant stated:
If you don’t keep them busy, the choices that they make are play without purpose. I have no problem with play, like center time, if there’s a purpose...It is more ‘my’ purpose...I direct them and I tell them where to go. (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006, pp. 72–73)

The teacher in Fung’s (2009) case study demonstrates that a focus on the narrow educational purpose of information recall can also lead to didactic instructional strategies. This teacher’s emphasis on students’ ability to recall factual information led her to dominate instructional time with teacher-focused questioning.

The theme story is the soul of a day...out of which the other activities are developed...children have to have a good grasp of it and factual questions are essential...so I am the sole story-teller in the activity...the children are the listeners and answer my questions. (Fung, 2009, p. 20)

This quotation is accompanied by a description of a typical activity observed in the teacher’s classroom. This activity involved a small group of children recording the steps on a worksheet while the teacher modelled how to make rice. In these two examples, the narrow educational focus of the teachers resulted in teacher-centered instruction to ensure proper student behaviour and the learning of the necessary factual information.

When conceived of more broadly, educational purposes include student engagement, positive student-teacher relationships, the development of student independence, and students’ ability to integrate information using higher-order thinking skills. As part of Goldstein’s (2007b) study of the impact of the changing kindergarten curriculum on teacher practice, one participant reveals her personal belief in a broad educational purpose:

We are really building a foundation for the kids, and [to do that] we need to let them be 5 years old and not expect them to be 10 years old in the classroom. Five-year-olds have
different needs than 10-year-olds would have as far as the amount of time they can stay on task. They need some play time, because that’s how they learn best. And they need to experiment with things. (Goldstein, 2007b, p. 387)

This statement of beliefs was accompanied by a description of the researcher’s classroom observations where the students collaboratively engaged in four hands-on math centres including games, building with pattern blocks, and playing with dominoes. From these descriptions, it would seem that this teacher’s beliefs about the need for age-appropriate hands-on learning were enacted in these activities. This once again demonstrates the relationship of teacher beliefs and teacher practice as this teacher’s broader educational purpose led her to create activities that supported social development, independence, and the learning of academic skills through open-ended collaborative activities.

Teacher practice in each of these classrooms was influenced by the focal teachers’ perspectives on educational purpose. However, curricular expectations also influenced the teachers’ decision-making. Though different in their individual approaches, each teacher integrated learning activities that were designed to encourage student learning in designated subject areas (e.g., math, reading comprehension). The necessary integration of these curricular expectations means that curricular stance also plays an important role in shaping the teaching and learning context (Stevenson, 2011).

**Curricular stance.** Curricular stance is defined as the teachers’ beliefs about the integration of mandated curricular expectations in classroom learning (Stevenson, 2011). Some teachers may believe that they must adhere strictly to prescribed curricular goals while others may believe that they can adapt the expectations to align with their perspectives on the needs of students and on the learning process. The curricular stance of a teacher, whether of strict
adherence or adaptability, will impact the enactment of curriculum and thus is an essential component of the conceptual framework informing the proposed research.

Current research exploring the relationship between teacher beliefs and curricular stance does so through a discourse of dichotomy. Much of the research in this area has centered on an “either or” debate: practices are either developmentally appropriate or they are academically-oriented using didactic instruction to teach prescribed curricular goals (e.g., Einarsdottir, 2008; Nie & Lau, 2010; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Stipek, 2004). However, this debate focuses solely on two dichotomous instructional strategies and teacher practice is not so easily simplified (Goldstein, 2007a). If we return to the teacher from Goldstein’s (2007b) study whose beliefs and practices demonstrated a subscription to a child-centered educational stance, a closer reading of her quotations reveals that this type of categorization is not so simple. Later in the article, this same teacher describes the pressures that accompany the academic emphasis and her occasional acquiescence to these pressures. “I do do worksheets occasionally...The parents like them because they look like real work” (Goldstein, 2007b, p. 394). The parental pressure that this teacher describes is not the only challenge influencing teacher practice and curricular stance.

Other factors also influence teachers’ instructional decision-making including time constraints (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006), pressure from colleagues teaching later grades (Goldstein, 2007a), and the imposition of subject-specific textbooks (Tang & Maxwell, 2007). Goldstein’s (2007b) participant quotations accompanied by her description of the observed classroom activities demonstrate that teacher practice cannot be categorized by polarizing conceptions of teaching. Teacher practice exists along a continuum with many teachers utilizing both didactic and developmentally appropriate practices when they deem necessary (Parker &
Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006) and differing in their views concerning the appropriate balance while not completely abandoning either (Stipek & Byler, 2004).

Framing classroom learning in terms of two dichotomous instructional approaches is limiting. While the research addressing the shifting expectations for teacher practice does describe the interrelated nature of the subject matter and teacher commonplaces by acknowledging the role of curricular expectations, teacher beliefs and practical knowledge (e.g., Einarsdottir, 2006), these are not the sole determinants of the learning that takes place within a kindergarten classroom. Teachers are educational decision-makers whose choices are influenced by many pressures both internal (e.g., their personal beliefs about learning) and external (e.g., the subject matter). However, “the presence of an authority figure, i.e. the teacher, can certainly affect the dynamics of a classroom, but cannot determine the functions in a more holistic sense” (Stanley, 2005, p. 42). To develop a more holistic picture of the learning that emerges in a kindergarten classroom, contextual factors (Fang, 1996) including Schwab’s (1973) notion of milieu must also be considered.

Milieu

The research developed in the current study aims to explore how kindergarten is enacted in the current curricular landscape. An important element of this landscape is the context in which learning occurs. This context can impact teacher practices (Goldstein, 2007a) as well as student engagement in learning activities (LaParo, Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2006). In Schwab’s (1973) description of the four commonplaces, this context is referred to as milieu, which he conceived as the classroom, school, and community in which learning occurs. Milieu also includes consideration for the backgrounds of the learners and the educational goals of the community. This is a broad definition of milieu that reaches beyond the scope of this study. As
the contemporary kindergarten classroom is my focal context, the definition of milieu will be constrained to the classroom, focusing on the backgrounds of the learners in relation to educational institutions, on the classroom climate including both the instructional and emotional climates, and on how physical space influences the learning that occurs within a classroom environment.

**Backgrounds of learners.** A classroom is a complex learning system shaped by rules and routines that differ substantially from those that children may experience in home, daycare, or preschool environments. This system is rule-bound requiring that students act in a manner that is conducive to learning within an environment where many same-aged children are clustered into a single classroom. Thus these rules, which Schwab (1973) refers to as the “rules of the game” (p. 509), are dictated by the institutional context in which learning occurs (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008) and students entering kindergarten need to learn how to exist within this institutional environment, become aware of these new expectations, and alter their behaviour to suit this novel milieu.

Children do not often arrive at school with the knowledge of the inherent functioning of an institution. For example, circle time is a central element in most kindergarten classrooms. For some children, sitting in a circle with a large group of children is a novel experience that requires different behavioural norms from those experienced in other settings. In a classroom, when the teacher is reading a story, students must sit quietly, typically with crossed legs and their hands in their laps while listening attentively and looking at the teacher. Many children’s prior experiences with listening to stories in non-institutional settings may have involved sitting in a parent’s lap and interacting throughout the reading. This type of behaviour is not considered acceptable or feasible in most classrooms. Still other children will have no prior experience with
books at all and thus they must learn not only about the expected behaviours, but also about listening to and understanding stories. This is but one example of the institutional expectations that children encounter when they enter the classroom milieu. Further expectations include scheduled eating times, proper interpretation of bell ringing as an indication of transition times, and the requirement to line up with classmates when moving from one location to another.

While these rule-based experiences are considered institutional norms, they are often unfamiliar expectations for many kindergarten children. Some learners may have experience with some of these norms in their preschool settings but many others will require guidance. While the mandated subject matter typically addresses the academic learnings central to schooling, the need to teach these students how to function within a classroom environment will impact how instructional time is spent. Furthermore, increasing student knowledge of these institutional expectations also promotes student awareness of the classroom routines and behavioural expectations thus allowing for the possibility of engaging learning opportunities that are not constrained by teacher control. Simply stated, when students can function independently within a classroom environment, more child-directed, open-ended learning activities are possible. The learning of institutional norms is important to the functioning of a kindergarten classroom and thus is an important consideration for this research study. These contextual realities are unique to the first years of formal schooling and demonstrate the impact that milieu has on learners and teachers. However, this impact is not unidirectional. The participants also impact the milieu.

**Classroom climate.** Consideration for the milieu of kindergarten classrooms and for the role of learners and teachers in the creation of this milieu is essential to understanding the creation of a classroom climate that facilitates both institutional and academic learning. While
often addressed in the research, classroom climate is rarely concretely defined (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). Instead, research about classroom climate typically discusses measuring this construct (e.g., National Institute, 2002), the relationship between classroom climate and student learning (e.g., Pianta et al., 2002), and methods for creating a positive classroom climate (e.g., Ratcliff et al., 2010). The factors observed during the data collection of prior research studies can serve to inform the creation of a working definition of classroom climate. These factors include learning format, teaching activities, child engagement, emotional support, and instructional support (LaParo, Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2006). Research findings demonstrating that classrooms with positive climates have been found to support positive student self-concept (Shapiro, 1993), student motivation (Anderson, Hamilton & Hattie, 2004), the development of pro-social values (Westling Alldoti, 2002), and social competence (Brophy-Herb et al., 2007) can also serve to inform a definition of classroom climate.

The information from the above studies leads to the development of the following working definition of classroom climate: the atmosphere created within a classroom community that has the potential to support students personally, socially, and academically. Based on this definition, one can consider two central components: the instructional climate and the emotional climate (Phillips, Gormley & Lowenstein, 2009).

**Instructional climate.** The instructional climate involves the impact of the classroom atmosphere on student learning (Claxton & Carr, 2004). Researchers who examine this climate tend to focus on the role of the teacher in the creation of the classroom environment. According to Claxton and Carr (2004), based on data collected through classroom observations in early years’ classrooms accompanied by the analysis of student learning portfolios, there are four types of learning environments that teachers can create. The first is a prohibitive environment. A
prohibitive instructional climate is typically a tightly scheduled classroom where students are moved quickly from one activity to the next with limited, if any, time allotted to student exploration, prolonged engagement, or individualized experiences. The second type of environment is *affording*. An affording instructional climate provides a variety of learning opportunities but there is little value placed on children’s individualized learning and few strategies are used to extend this learning. The third type is an *inviting environment* where students are encouraged to ask questions and to learn collaboratively. The final type of learning environment outlined by the authors is *potentiating*. In a potentiating instructional climate student learning is extended through their participation in shared activities that are guided by both students and teachers. According to Claxton and Carr (2004), it is a potentiating classroom climate that results in the most positive outcomes for learners because this type of environment provides students with the opportunity to problem-solve and internalize new learning through hands on activities that are child-directed but teacher supported.

Regardless of the type of instructional climate that exists within a classroom, this climate will influence the enactment of curricular expectations. For example, according to Claxton and Carr (2004) a prohibitive classroom environment will limit children’s learning to the acquisition of factual information while a potentiating classroom will encourage higher-order thinking skills. Thus consideration for the instructional climate in research about classrooms will contribute to our understanding of the functioning of contemporary kindergarten. However, as previously stated, instructional climate is not the sole contributor to classroom climate. The creation of an emotional climate can also have an impact on classroom milieu.

*Emotional climate*. The emotional climate includes the impact of classroom environment on relationships both between the teacher and the learner and the learner and his or her peers.
And this climate, like teacher beliefs and instructional climate, plays an important role in the enactment of curricular expectations. The importance of positive child-teacher relationships has been discussed in both the research (e.g., Fumoto, 2011; Phillips, Gormley, & Lowenstein, 2009) and in policy documents (e.g., NAEYC, 2009) because of the role of these relationships in school adjustment (Buyse et al., 2009), social adaptation (Hamre & Pianta, 2001), and academic learning (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999).

The extant research on classroom climate has been primarily quantitative in nature describing the causal relationships between discrete relational factors (e.g., the impact of teacher-child relationships on student participation in classroom activities). While the segregation of relational factors does not holistically describe classroom climate, when taken together, these studies provide insight into how a classroom’s emotional climate interacts with children and their learning. In research on classroom climate, teacher-child relationships have been characterized as either close or conflictual (Buyse et al., 2009). A close relationship is described as warm, open and supportive, providing space for children’s questions and feelings of security (Buyse et al., 2008). Research has found that children who experience close relationships with their teachers are more motivated and engaged in classroom activities (e.g., Buyse et al., 2009). Conversely, conflictual teacher-child relationships are characterized by a lack of rapport that is stressful for students (Buyse et al., 2008). This type of emotional climate can foster negative feelings about school and disengagement (Buyse et al., 2009).

Research concerning teacher-child relationships has described the impact on emotional well-being (Fumoto, 2011), behaviour (Buyse et al., 2008), and academic competence (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). For instance, Ladd, Birch, and Buhs (1999) found that close relationships led to improved student participation in classroom activities. This, in turn, resulted in higher academic
achievement. Hamre and Pianta (2001) extended this knowledge through their longitudinal study which described the impact of these relationships on later academic competence and behavioural adjustment. The 179 students in this study were followed from kindergarten through eighth grade.

While teacher-child relationships are important for the development of classroom climate, peer relationships also play an important role. Children’s feelings of belonging in a classroom further contribute to the development of classroom community (Lash, 2008). As well, when children have networks of friends and are accepted by their classmates they adapt more positively to kindergarten (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999). These positive peer relationships have actually been shown to have a greater impact on achievement than teacher-child relationships (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999).

**Physical space.** As demonstrated through current research on classroom climate, the impact of personal characteristics and interpersonal relationships on a classroom milieu is, in large part, created by the people within the classroom, both teachers and learners. The interaction among the people within a classroom environment can influence the development of classroom climate, which in turn influences the learning that takes place. However, teachers and learners are not solely interacting with each other; they are also interacting with the physical space in which the learning occurs. The design and creation of this space is both influenced by the people within (e.g., teachers design the layout according to the needs of the learners) and influences the learning in which these people engage (Upitis, 2004). For instance, a classroom where the space is primarily occupied by rows of desks can be said to promote the learning of students through independent work in their own designated spaces. Whereas a classroom with open spaces and learning centres can be said to promote both collaborative learning in spaces that enable groups
of learners to gather with or without the teacher and opportunities for learner exploration at the various centres throughout the room.

Many prominent approaches to the education of young children have emphasized the importance of the spaces inhabited by teachers and learners. For instance, Montessori (1986) described the importance of creating a space that is designed specifically for younger learners. This type of space included small-scale furniture that allows children to move the furniture to meet their learning needs and the provision of learning materials that were easily accessible for children to use as they learned through exploration and play. Educators in Reggio Emilia classrooms also emphasized the potential invitational nature of a classroom space (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007). More specifically, these educators described the importance of seating learners together at tables where they could work collaboratively (Thornton & Brunton, 2010) and the inclusion of a variety of learning centres that contained realistic objects that encouraged children to explore and learn through their interactions with these objects (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007). Froebel also addressed the role that objects can play in the education of kindergarten-aged learners through the inclusion of gifts (i.e., wooden shapes) that sparked exploration and thought (Froebel, 1967b).

The physical and social environments created by active classroom participants influence both the learning of the subject matter and teacher practice. Thus, the inclusion of milieu including the backgrounds of the learners, the creation of both instructional and emotional climates, and the physical space in which learning occurs are essential elements to the proposed research that aims to describe the enactment of curriculum in contemporary kindergarten. But beyond their backgrounds and relationships, one must also consider the role of the learners themselves in the shaping of a kindergarten classroom.
Learner

The role of the learner in the classroom collective cannot be ignored. Learners are, after all, the intended beneficiaries of the curriculum (Schwab, 1973) and their learning will be impacted by the increasing standardization of kindergarten curricula. As Schwab (1973) declared, it is essential to consider children’s knowledge, development, and competences when examining aspects of curriculum in schools. However, Schwab’s (1973) conception of childhood “...as a stage in development toward their probable destiny as adults” (p. 503) insinuates that children are not fully developed individuals but rather are individuals in process. Based on current research, I believe that this perspective inadequately represents the capacity of young children and requires reframing for use within contemporary conceptions of learner and curriculum.

Historically, many academics have viewed children as “future adults” who are not yet fully formed individuals, and thus not yet developmentally capable of being active research participants (Cremin & Slatter, 2004; Harris & Barnes, 2009; Mayall, 2008). However, recent research and international policy changes have demonstrated a shift from this perspective. There is now empirical evidence suggesting that young children, from three to six years of age, can share reasonably consistent self-conceptions (e.g., Measelle, Ablow, Cowan, & Cowan, 1998), accurate personal experiences (e.g., Hogan, 2005), and opinions about educational experiences (e.g., Einarsdottir, 2005). Accessing these experiences can create a more expansive picture of children’s learning by helping researchers understand the child’s perspective on the impact of the pedagogical and curricular choices made daily by educators. This change is reflective of the paradigm shift in the study of the sociology of childhood. In her discussion of the new sociology of childhood, Matthews (2007) described the occurrence of this shift in three central areas:
recognition of children’s competence, conceptions of homogeneity versus heterogeneity, and children’s relationships.

**Recognition of children’s competence.** New conceptions of childhood recognize that children have agency. They are capable and competent social actors who can and do affect the societies in which they live (Schiller & Einarsdottir, 2009). Children do not passively adopt adult culture and adult ways of being. Instead, children actively construct their own worlds (Matthews, 2007). These worlds are created largely through their relationships with peers.

Developmental psychologists have long underestimated young children’s friendship knowledge and skills, assuming that there are developmental stages through which children must progress to build adult conceptions of friendship (Corsaro, 2003). However, Corsaro (2003) and other researchers (e.g., Lash, 2008) have found that children’s conceptions of friendship are not underdeveloped adult conceptions but rather a distinct peer culture. This peer culture, while informed by the adult culture that surrounds them, can be created independently of these adults (Matthews, 2007). For instance, Lash’s (2008) exploration of the development of peer culture in a kindergarten classroom found that one element of this peer culture was a shared understanding of the adult rules. Alternatively, this study also describes the role of shared resistance to these rules among peers. Evidence of this resistance appears in the children’s conspiracy to hide their constructions from the teacher in order to keep them for later play activities and the children’s expressed competition with the other group of children who shared the classroom environment. This competition developed despite the teacher’s frequent attempts to establish a sense of community that included both groups of children. Researchers who acknowledge children’s competence (e.g., Corsaro, 2003; Lash, 2008) are discovering that children are social actors who are influenced by and influence classroom cultures through their active role in the creation of
peer culture (Matthew, 2007). Thus, the children in a classroom environment will influence the climate through the relationships that they form and the peer culture that emerges.

**Conceptions of homogeneity and heterogeneity.** Prior conceptions of childhood, which dominated thinking for the last century, assumed the universal development of the child regardless of context (Matthews, 2007). These ideas emerged from developmentalist conceptions of children and childhood that have long attempted to describe children’s development as a series of firmly sequenced stages that are independent of context (Mayall, 1994). This notion further enforces conceptions of children as people in process and justifies the sole reliance on adult perspectives of their experiences (Matthews, 2007). However, these conceptions of childhood place children in the role of passive recipient of knowledge and the role of objects of study (Harris & Barnes, 2009). Newer notions of childhood sociology actively resist this conception of children, insisting on the inclusion of heterogeneous conceptions of children. That is, the knowledge that children are individuals whose particular backgrounds and natures will uniquely influence both the classroom environment and their individual learning. This perspective leads these researchers to insist on documenting the actual experiences of children in a variety of settings (Matthews, 2007). This declaration is indicative of the third and final shift in conceptions of childhood, which acknowledges the importance of children’s relationships, the unique nature of child-adult relationships, and the inherent power differential between adults and children.

**Relationships.** The conception of children as “in the process of becoming” described in the prior section is further problematized by scholars who subscribe to the new sociology of childhood because it considers only the individual child’s progression through the developmental stages (Matthews, 2007). This perspective fails to consider the impact of children’s relationships
on their development. These relationships, as has been discussed previously, influence children in many ways. The most prominent consideration for many of these scholars is the power differential that exists in relationships between adults and children. Children, for reasons of age, size, and adult pre-conceptions, are often othered in contemporary society (Lahman, 2008; Smith, Duncan & Marshall, 2005). This perspective is perpetuated in the research where children are viewed as passive objects of study and has led to the pervasive examination of children’s experiences through the eyes of the adults who surround them (Parkinson, 2001; Pascal & Bertram, 2009) by collecting data about children’s experiences solely through the perspectives of teachers or the observations of adult researchers (Cremin & Slatter, 2004). The predominance of this type of data collection further communicates perceptions about a child’s inability to speak for himself or herself. Research concerning student engagement is a prime example of a body of work that imposes adult perspectives on children’s experiences.

Research addressing student engagement primarily uses teacher reports (e.g., Bodovski & Farkas, 2007) or researcher observations (e.g., LaParo, Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2006). This type of research relies on adult observations of children’s level of participation, off-task behaviour, and body positioning during instructional activities. However, engagement is a complex concept, which cannot be solely examined by the aforementioned observational criteria. Newman (1992) defines student engagement as learners making “a psychological investment in learning. They try hard to learn what school offers. They take pride...in understanding the material and incorporating or internalizing it in their lives” (p. 3). Student engagement, viewed through this rich description, is more than a student’s ability and willingness to participate in adult-directed activities in a manner that adults determine acceptable. Engagement is an internal construct that is difficult to determine without asking the learner directly. This may lead to adult
misconceptions about levels of student engagement in learning activities and observational data that may inaccurately represent student experiences.

Pollard and Triggs (2000) in their studies of the impact of increasing standardization in primary school found that while many teachers shared the belief that they were developing autonomy, confidence, and independence in their learners, the students communicated a differing belief. The belief that teachers were firmly in control and that there was little opportunity for choice. This finding resulted in, “...little evidence of pupils’ active engagement with the learning implications of teachers’ pedagogic intentions, expectations or strategies” (Pollard & Triggs, 2000, p. 287). The differing views of these teachers and students demonstrate the need to include children’s voices in educational research. Thus, to more accurately represent the current state of kindergarten, the learner’s perspective is included in the conceptual framework that informs this study.

Summary

With this study I aim to enter the discussion about the shifting curricular landscape of kindergarten education without engaging in the dichotomous dialogue that permeates much of the research. The conceptual framework that I have developed facilitates this goal by broadening my focus to the eclectic interplay among all four commonplaces within a classroom environment thus enabling the creation of a more holistic, non-dichotomizing picture of life and learning in a kindergarten classroom. This holistic picture allowed me to look beyond the dichotomy to describe the negotiated balance between the academic and developmental logics that was enacted in three full day kindergarten classrooms in Ontario. To capture this picture required the use a methodology that valued and included the perspectives of all the members of the classroom community. This methodology is described in detail in the following chapter.
Chapter 3
Methodology

The purpose of this research is to create a comprehensive picture of the kindergarten classroom that embraces the interplay among Schwab’s four commonplaces (1973). To create a comprehensive picture of life and learning in each of the focal kindergarten classrooms, I elected to use an ethnographic approach. Ethnography “seek[s] to construct descriptions of total phenomena within their various contexts and to generate from these descriptions the complex interrelationships of causes and consequences that affect human behavior toward and belief about the phenomena” (LaCompte & Preissle, 2003, p. 3). To describe these relationships I used an ethnographic approach that embraced Geertz’s (1973) concept of thick description. That is, I used extensive observations in each classroom to create a holistic picture of the experiences of the members of each classroom community. In addition to observational data, Geertz advocates collecting data from the members of a community to ensure that the meanings assigned to activities and interactions by these members are both understood and communicated by the researcher. Thus I interviewed both the teachers and the students in these classrooms to gain their perspectives. Conducting research with younger children is often problematized in the research (Cremin & Slatter, 2004). However, the use of photography to contextualize conversations with young children and access their perspectives has been used successfully in many research projects (e.g., Capello, 2005; Eirnasdottir, 2005; Smith, Duncan, & Marshall, 2005). As the use of photography has become so commonplace in the everyday lives of people in North American culture, the use of cameras within a classroom is a comfortable medium for most students (LaCompte & Preissle, 2003). Thus I elected to use photo-elicitation to gain access to students understanding of their educational experiences.
I collected data in three full day kindergarten classrooms to provide a diversity of educational experiences while allowing me to spend enough time in each classroom to conduct extensive classroom observations and to speak with the members of each classroom community. Data collection in each classroom took place over ten days, consisting of extended classroom observations complemented by semi-structured interviews with both teachers and students. The inclusion of both groups of participants acknowledges the complex processes of teaching and learning and the central roles that each group plays in the creation of a classroom environment and in guiding the selection of instructional strategies (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008).

**Participant Recruitment**

Once school board clearance was provided, I contacted principals in schools where the full day kindergarten program was implemented to request permission to contact their kindergarten teachers about the research project and to ask for recommendations about which teachers they felt were exemplary. Once permission was provided, I emailed teachers to request their participation. This proved a challenging process as only one teacher agreed to participate based on email solicitation. However, this first teacher invited me to a professional development session where I was able to introduce myself to other kindergarten teachers in the full day program. After meeting in person, several other teachers agreed to participate in this research project. I then used a purposive sampling strategy to select “information-rich cases” (Patton, 2002, p. 230) that yielded insight into the current state of kindergarten in three Ontario kindergarten classrooms. Specifically, I selected three teachers who were identified by administrators and colleagues as exemplary teachers.

The first teacher who agreed to participate in this research project was Karen. She had been teaching for 22 years within the school district. Four of these years were as a kindergarten
teacher with another ten years spent supporting the learning of kindergarten teachers as a school
district consultant. In January and February of 2012, when I collected the data, she taught at a
school located in a suburban community on the outskirts of a mid-sized city in Ontario. This
neighbourhood had a population with diverse economic backgrounds. The school had a free
healthy snack program for those students in need but not all of the families required this type of
support.

Samantha, the second teacher who agreed to participate had been teaching for 19 years,
four of these years in a kindergarten classroom. Samantha’s other teaching assignments had been
within the elementary panel with ten of these years spent teaching in a program for children with
developmental disabilities. In April and May of 2012, when I collected the data, she was
teaching at a school located in a small town approximately 45 minutes from a mid-sized city.
The community consisted primarily of middle class families.

Linda, the final teacher participant, represented the perspective of a novice teacher. She
had four years of teaching experience with the last two in a kindergarten classroom. Her first two
years as a teacher were spent teaching in the intermediate grades before transitioning to the full
day kindergarten program where I collected data in May of 2012. All of her teaching experience
was at the same school located in an inner city neighbourhood in a mid-sized city. This
community had a predominantly low socio-economic status and all children in the classroom
took advantage of the free healthy snack program.

Once each teacher’s interest was registered, I dropped off a package at their school’s
main office containing the teacher letter of information and consent form as well as a letter of
information and consent form for each student in the classroom (see Appendix B). These were
then sent to parents and/or guardians and collected by the teacher. These forms were distributed
to students’ families because the classrooms of these three teachers served both as the observation sites and as the pool from which the student participants were selected. Parental consent was obtained when signed consent forms were returned to the classroom teacher and subsequently collected by me. I received parental consent from 11 students in Karen’s classroom, nine four-year-olds and two five-year-olds; 17 students in Samantha’s classroom, four 4-year-olds, eight 5-year-olds, and five 6-year-olds; and three five-year-old students in Linda’s classroom.

I then sought oral student assent by explaining the photo-elicitation interview process to the students and inviting them to participate. To facilitate this discussion, I created a picture book with photographs of two kindergarten-aged students (who were not participants in the research) and read this book to the students. The photographs of the two children demonstrated the activities that students were asked to participate in including taking photographs of the classroom environment and activities, selecting the photographs to be included in books about kindergarten, and annotating these books with my assistance (see Appendix C). While the use of a picture book is not an established method for gaining child assent, the familiar nature of this medium allowed me to communicate my needs in a manner that was both comfortable and appropriate for this age group. I invited all the children from whom parental consent had been received to participate in all three stages of the data collection. Their refusal or inability to participate in one activity did not preclude them from participation in the others.

**Classroom Observations**

To gain a deeper understanding of curricular enactment in kindergarten, I used extended classroom observations exploring all four commonplaces: subject matter, teacher, milieu, and learner. Using qualitative observational strategies that embrace an anthropological stance, this
study aimed to capture a picture of the life and learning within each of these three kindergarten classrooms (Wragg, 1994). These observations allowed me to explore the enactment of subject matter in classroom lessons and learning activities, the teachers’ pedagogical approaches, the milieu that supported learning in each of these classrooms, and the learners’ participation in classroom life and learning. Specifically, these classroom observations focused on four key dimensions of the kindergarten classrooms that have been discussed in previous research (e.g., Goldstein, 2007a; Stipek, 2004): instruction (e.g., circle time), instructional pace (e.g., quantity of content), student activities (e.g., centres, seat work), and classroom climate (e.g., teacher/student and student/student interactions, responsibilities, activity selection, and design and use of physical space). Fieldnotes, photographs, and video of the classroom environment, teaching strategies, and learning activities served as the primary data sources for this portion of the ethnography. The photographs facilitated the subsequent analysis of the milieu by allowing me to clearly capture the classroom environment and how children interacted with classroom spaces and resources. Further, I used these images during photo-elicitation interviews with children (described in detail in the photo-elicitation section). The use of video data allowed for the contextualization of fieldnotes during analysis and for me to better capture the interactions taking place during classroom activities (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Parkinson, 2001).

While the central purpose of the extended classroom observations was to gather data concerning the four key areas listed above (i.e., instruction, instructional pace, student activities, and classroom climate), this period also helped the children in the classroom acclimatize to my presence. As subsequent data collection involved accessing the students’ perspectives, it was important that I develop a rapport with these students that encouraged open communication. To this end, I used a participant observation approach (Wragg, 1994). Specifically, I began by
conducting full day observations in each classroom. But I did not conduct these observations as a quiet and unresponsive observer. Rather, I responded to student questions and participated in some of their learning activities. I was able to use this approach because of my seven years as a classroom teacher in a public Ontario school board, including three years as a kindergarten teacher. These full day observations allowed for an adjustment period that acknowledged the sensitivity of this age group to both unfamiliar people and changes in their routine while also building rapport with the students from whom I subsequently collected data.

**Interviews with Teachers**

Each of the three teachers was interviewed at the end of the data collection period. This enabled me to conduct initial classroom observations without allowing the teachers’ stated educational perspectives to influence the observations. During the interviews, I used a semi-structured set of questions to explore teachers’ perspectives on the changes to the kindergarten program, instructional decision-making, practical theory including beliefs about educational purpose and curricular stance, and the challenges they perceived to be impacting the classroom environment (see Appendix D). As recommended by Goldstein (2007b), I engaged in ongoing data analysis throughout my fieldwork. The resulting interpretations served to inform the questions that I asked teachers in semi-structured interviews. This information was used to guide the asking of participant-specific questions to increase the depth of my understanding of what I had observed and to check the accuracy of my emerging interpretations (Goldstein, 2007a). These interviews were audio recorded to improve the trustworthiness of the data.

While these formal interviews were the primary method for exploring teacher perspectives, informal conversations occurred during classroom observations. These conversations addressed topics that were central to this research and that provided contextualized
comments about the teachers’ practice or beliefs. To ensure that these data could be used to further my understanding of the teacher’s perspective, both a summary and any key quotations were recorded in the fieldnotes.

**Interviews with Children**

Over the last two decades, researchers have been exploring a variety of methods that provide young children with the opportunity to participate actively in research. This research has resulted primarily in the development of interview strategies designed to help researchers overcome two of the challenges that are central to working with young students: developmental appropriateness and the power differential between adults and children (Capello, 2005; Davis, 2007; Parkinson, 2001; Stephenson, 2009).

**Developmental appropriateness.** Young children are developmentally capable of sharing information about their experiences (Harris & Barnes, 2009), but it is the role of the researcher to develop methods that facilitate access to this data. The most direct route to accessing children’s views is to collect data with the children themselves. This process results in the need to develop interview strategies that are developmentally appropriate for children in the early years. The extant research concerning effective practices in the education of young children frequently describes the role of constructivist strategies (e.g., Einarsdottir et al., 2009; Nie & Lau, 2010; Stipek, 2004).

In constructivist approaches, children actively construct knowledge through participation in learning opportunities that are both child-centered and hands-on (Parker & Neuharsh-Pritchett, 2006). Translating this approach into an interview technique means using active approaches to the data collection (Parkinson, 2001) that allow children to construct meaning throughout the research process in order to share these meanings with researchers. Thus the standard asking of
questions while sitting with the researcher may not be the most productive strategy for use with this age group. Instead, researchers must provide children with opportunities to actively engage in the research process. Through their active involvement, children can share their perceptions of the connections between their prior knowledge and the research experience. Many researchers have begun to integrate these types of data collection strategies with young children such as, photo production and elicitation (Clark, 2007), engaging with children during play (Gussin Paley, 2007), and children mapping their learning environments (Clark & Moss, 2001).

**Power differential between adults and children.** The challenges involved in a standard interview approach are further compounded by the existing power differential between children and adults. This power differential is inherent in a child’s realm but is often most prominent within a school setting. For instance, when children line up to enter the school and wait for the teachers on duty to permit them to enter and when children comply with their teacher’s demand that they sit quietly during lessons in their designated spot, this power differential is evident. It is a reality, that “[i]n school, teachers direct student activities, and any sense of choice or autonomy has been allowed by some adult or school authority” (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p. 70). Even recess, ostensibly a time for “free play” is heavily regimented by the authority figures who decide when, and for how long, this event occurs. While these may be institutional realities that allow the efficient and effective functioning of a school, they also serve to communicate the supremacy of the adults, which inherently places the children in a position of inferiority.

Within a school setting, the established pattern is often the adult as provider and child as recipient of knowledge. How the child interacts with the researcher could be affected by their lived experiences as receivers rather than as co-creators of knowledge. If the researcher assumes the role of authority figure, the children may give socially desirable responses that follow the
existing cultural pattern. That is, children may share what they believe the researcher wants to hear, much like they would search for the correct answer to their teacher’s question (Greene & Hill, 2005).

**Photo-elicitation.** Prior research is rife with discussions concerning the benefits of using photography to facilitate interviews with young children. Much of this discussion concerns the benefits to providing an alternative mode of communication. Children in the early years have not yet had the opportunity to develop a sophisticated use of language. We often view these children as incapable of providing information until “… they can offer an adult-like perspective in adult language” (Hogan, 2005, p. 27). However, this perspective negates a child’s ability to contribute to research when it is conducted in developmentally appropriate ways. While children may not have access to the extensive vocabularies of their adult counterparts, they do have a unique and valuable understanding of their world that can be accessed through appropriate data collection methods. The use of photography can help to mitigate the communication challenges by allowing children to communicate through both visual and verbal means (Cappello, 2005; Clark, 2007; Thomson, 2008). While this strategy can help to improve the child’s ability to communicate with the researcher, it can also improve the researcher’s ability to communicate with the child.

Every field of inquiry has a particular vocabulary and education is no exception. The prevalent use of specific terminology helps to solidify the use of these words within the field and helps to generate commonly accepted definitions. These words are often commonplace in the vocabularies of researchers, used frequently in both oral and written language. These words are commonly used when casually conversing with participants and during more formal interviewing. However, children are not privy to this vocabulary. They may not use these words in their everyday interactions, and they may not assign those words that they do use with the
same meaning intended by the researcher. For example, children could use the word “smart” in reference to such diverse abilities as identifying letters or tying up shoelaces. Educational researchers may be more inclined to define intelligence in terms of academic ability; however, we may have forgotten how challenging shoelaces can be. Considering the inclusion of the term “smart” in prior educational research (e.g., Measelle, et al., 1998) and other similarly subjectively defined terminology such as “work” (e.g., Punch, 2004), and “play” (e.g., Linklater, 2006), to name just a few, researchers are confronted by the possibility of misinterpreting children’s perspectives.

The use of differentially defined words by researchers can result in a communication gap, with children misunderstanding the questions and researchers misinterpreting the answers. The use of photography can help mitigate the barrier potentially created by vocabulary by visually contextualizing the conversation (Cappello, 2005; Stephenson, 2009). Further, when children are invited to create the images used during interviews this can create increased ownership in the children (Meo, 2010) by putting them in charge of an element of the data collection (Einarsdottir, 2005) thus allowing them to guide the interview (Cappello, 2005). Prior research has revealed that this not only increases the comfort levels of the participants (Cappello, 2005) but also can allow for the emergence of unexpected topics that serve to enrich the data (Meo, 2010).

Photo-elicitation refers to the use of photographs during interviews to elicit responses from participants (Meo, 2010). While the use of photographs is consistent, there is substantial variation in how these images are used. Some researchers make use of photographs that are taken and assembled without the participation of the interviewee. These images are used to elicit the views of the participants by providing a conversational focus to the interview. In contrast, for some researchers, photographs are not merely a tool for elicitation but are part of the data
collection. In these cases, researchers elect to have participants take the photographs themselves. The photographs are then used to elicit responses during an interview (Thomson, 2008).

Researchers working with young children have explored many variations of the strategies listed above with varying levels of success. For instance, Yan et al. (2005) used pre-selected photographs of children who were not participants at the focal setting to investigate children’s perceptions of play. Each of the images was presented to the kindergarten-aged participants who were asked to classify the activities portrayed as “play” or “not play” and explain the reasons for their classification. While this method ensured that the research topic was central to the interview and that this topic was communicated both orally and visually, because the photographs were not of the participants nor their educational setting, the children assigned no personalized meaning to the photographs, potentially limiting the investment of the participants and, in turn, the quality of the data.

In their study investigating children’s perspectives of their learning, Smith et al. (2005) also opted for the use of researcher-produced images. However, the photographs that they used were of the focal children participating in classroom activities. These images were displayed on a laptop during interviews with pairs and small groups of four year olds. Through the use of this photo-elicitation strategy, the researchers encouraged responses with more personal meaning from the children because the images were of themselves or their friends. However, the use of strictly researcher-produced photographs limited the ability for children to communicate their perspectives non-verbally. The children’s only contribution to these data was their oral responses to the images provided by the researcher.

In contrast to the prior two examples, Eirnasdottir (2005) opted to have five- and six-year-old children take photographs during her exploration of children’s perceptions of quality in...
their Icelandic preschool. The participants took the researcher on a guided tour of their classroom while taking photographs of the areas that they felt were most significant to their learning. On a subsequent visit, Einarsdottir showed the printed photographs to the children and interviewed them individually to discuss the content of the pictures and why the children considered these images salient. This method allowed the children to actively participate in the data collection process, both orally and through the creation of visual images, potentially allowing for a greater diversity of data and the participation of children who were less capable of oral communication. The sole use of student-produced images resulted in child-directed research. However, not including research-produced images meant that only those activities that took place during data collection periods were photographed and discussed. This limitation meant that potentially important activities, not salient or observable during data collection, may have been missed.

Procedure. In each classroom, I gathered data from students in small groups of between two and five children as recommended by prior research (e.g., Graue & Walsh, 1998; Parkinson, 2001). These previous studies suggested that speaking with young children in groups can lessen anxiety and promote the sharing of more truthful responses (Einarsdottir, 2005). To create groups I collaborated with the teachers who recommended the students that they felt would work together positively. Students with special needs were included in these groups when the teachers and I agreed that this would be a positive experience and that they would be able to communicate their thoughts in this type of setting. However, in one of the classes, the teacher expressed the belief that a student with special needs would be more successful if I interviewed him individually. I agreed and met with the student one on one. I then met with each of the nine groups (see Table 1) on three separate occasions with the ultimate goal of collaboratively
creating a book about kindergarten. Each of these interviews was audio recorded and transcribed to ensure that children’s verbatim wording was captured.

Table 1

*Student Participant Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shady Lane</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>Individual Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Lara</td>
<td>Tamara</td>
<td>Corey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Derek</td>
<td>Greta</td>
<td>Hayley</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brittany</td>
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<tr>
<td>Babbling</td>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>Beth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brook</td>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>Clarissa</td>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wesley</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Debbie</td>
<td>Steven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toby</td>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Park</td>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brady</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*First Interview.* To promote students’ comfort and to ensure that they were immersed in the focal environment, I conducted the first interview in a corner of the classroom. I began this interview with an explanation of the procedure to students to ensure that informed assent was achieved. The remainder of this interview was then devoted to the production of children’s photographs. The use of a camera can be an unfamiliar activity for children and prior research has demonstrated that this lack of familiarity can result in less than ideal images (Linklater, 2006). To mitigate this potential challenge, I began by providing the children with time to practice using the camera to take photos of objects in their immediate surroundings. This provided practical instruction on the functioning of the camera and minimized the novelty effect of the camera, thus allowing for the production of more purposeful photographs during the photo-taking session.
To further promote the taking of purposeful photos, following this exploration, we discussed the important places and things in their classroom environment that the children felt should be in a book about kindergarten. I explained to each child that he or she would get to take two photographs of what he or she felt were the most important places, activities, and/or people. This restriction on the number of photos helped me ensure that later interviews were conducted with a manageable number of photographs (Stephenson, 2009) and that the children were thoughtful when selecting the images they wished to capture (Linklater, 2006). Due to the imposed limit on the number of photos, I invited learners to check and retake their photos to ensure that they were satisfied with the produced images (Dockett & Perry, 2003), an advantage of using digital cameras.

Most of the participants were able to select and take their photographs after a brief group discussion about the important places, activities, and people in their classroom. A few children, however, struggled either to come up with or to select an idea. When these struggles occurred, I invited students to take me on a walking tour of their classroom to make their selections. All students were able to make decisions using one of these two approaches.

**Second Interview.** During the second interview, I shared the child-produced images with the groups. These photographs were supplemented by my own photographs that were taken during classroom observations. While all photographs were kept for later analysis, the number of photographs selected for the elicitation process was limited. Prior research describes successful elicitation interviews with the reported number of photographs ranging from 30 (Stephenson, 2009) to 100 (Cappello, 2005). However, discussions in the extant research have indicated the cumbersome nature and limitations imposed by the inclusion of too many photographs. For this reason, I did not share all researcher-produced photographs and child-produced photographs
during interviews. Instead, my own photographs were shared only when they captured activities, objects, or places, not included in child-produced images, that were relevant to the research questions. Also, I omitted any duplication in child-produced photographs. The total number of photographs shared was 42 in Shady Lane, 38 in Babbling Brook, and 30 in City Park. While there was some variation in the number, there was consistency in the subject matter of researcher-produced images from each class (e.g., small group learning, student-led play, whole group academic activities, transitions, etc.).

These interviews took place in a quiet place outside of the classroom. This location varied from school to school because of differing availability, but all were within sight of the children’s classroom (i.e., hallway, empty unused classroom attached to the students’ classroom, and a small resource room with a window to the hallway).

Once assembled, I reminded each group that the purpose of this interview was to look at the pictures from their class and determine which should be included in a book about kindergarten. After this explanation, I again sought child assent. Subsequently, I shared researcher-produced and child-produced photographs with the students. To begin, I placed five to ten photographs on the floor in the middle of our circle and asked the children to select pictures that showed something important about kindergarten and to explain to the group what was happening in the picture and why they felt it was important. I then invited the other children in the group to comment on that photograph, sharing both reasons they agreed with the selection and/or reasons that they disagreed. This procedure was repeated for each set of five to ten photographs until the entire class set had been shared with the group. All photographs that students selected were then put into a pile of pictures to be included in our book. In instances where there was an inconsistent view of the importance of the photograph, the majority ruled.
Students were permitted to select as many pictures for their book as they felt warranted inclusion. The completed student books contained from five to fifteen pictures.

**Third Interview.** Prior to the third interview, each group’s selected pictures were collated into book format, with one picture per page. I strategically sequenced these pictures, grouping together photographs that I felt showed similar activities (e.g., child-directed play, whole group lessons, academic learning activities, etc.) in the hope that it would promote discussion about the common theme that was emerging.

Each photo in the book was then reviewed individually by the group allowing them to confirm or change their selections. The students discussed the words that should be used to describe each picture and its significance. Using the ideas shared during these discussions, I recorded the students’ words under the photograph, rereading them to ensure that the students were satisfied. There were several instances when students added what they considered necessary information or actively disagreed with what was written. For example, after a photo spawned a discussion concerning writing in their journals, I reviewed the annotation with the students:

**Researcher** I wrote down from what you told me: “We write and colour in our journals.” Is that what you want it to say?

**Chloe** No.

**Researcher** What should this page say then Chloe?

**Chloe** That it, that it, that it’s about...caterpillar...because...

**Researcher** Do you want it to say that it’s about the Very Hungry Caterpillar? Is that the part that’s missing for you?

**Chloe** Yeah.
Researcher  What would you like it to say?
Chloe  I would like it to say that the hungry caterpillar is eating and eating until he gets really fat until he turns into a butterfly. Done.

As the students discussed each picture, I took the opportunity to ask some questions from my semi-structured interview protocol to ensure that clear descriptions were recorded and relevant research questions were answered (see Appendix E). These questions were not asked in a particular sequence but rather were posed when they fit within the students’ conversational focus. For example, as students described a photo of the class sitting together on the carpet while the teacher guided them through a lesson, they made statements such as “She is learning us how to read so we can get ready for grade one” (Beth) to describe the activity. This photo was followed by another one of the teacher conducting a guided reading group with four students. The group once again shared information about the teacher stating, “While they’re reading on their own she comes along and works with me” (Caroline). This provided an opportunity for me to ask the students “What is [the teacher’s] job?” Other questions asked during the third interview included (a) What do you do in kindergarten? (b) What are you supposed to learn in kindergarten? (c) What is a kindergarten student’s job? (d) What do you play in kindergarten? (e) Do you learn anything while you are playing? (f) Are playing and learning the same or different?

**Modified process.** One student, Corey, was non-verbal and was diagnosed with autism. To actively include Corey in the research, I made several modifications to the process described above. He declined to participate in taking photographs and his inability to verbalize his thoughts inhibited his ability to annotate his book. However, he actively participated in the photo sorting activity.
To begin this interview, I placed 10 photographs face up in a pile in front of Corey. Approximately half of these photographs were common to the ones viewed by the other children in the class while the other five were specific to his individualized kindergarten program. Corey began by looking through the pictures one at a time while I observed his physical reactions. When looking at certain photographs, Corey’s self-stimulation through stereotypy (i.e., hand flapping) and verbalizations indicated excitement about what he was seeing. He looked at each picture three times before we began the selection process. As he looked at each picture for the fourth time, I tried to remove each picture from the pile. Corey’s reactions were clear as he held firmly to some pictures, not allowing their removal while he looked at others but had no visible reaction to their removal. After I repeated this process twice, Corey began to push rejected photos towards me with no prompting while continuing to refuse to allow me to take five of the photographs by holding tightly to them when I tried to take them and pulling them towards his body. To verify the consistency of his responses, I attempted to return each rejected photo to Corey one by one. Each of these photos was pushed back towards me, confirming that Corey did not feel they should be included in his book. In the end, Corey selected five photographs that were put in his book about kindergarten. These photographs showed many activities that were also selected by other children in the class including circle time, the learning of letter sounds, and pre-writing activities. While the book he created was wordless, the photo sorting activity provided the opportunity for Corey, a child who is not verbally proficient, to participate actively by selecting representative pictures and to communicate his perspective with me.

The photo elicitation interviews resulted in two different sources of data: verbatim transcripts of each group’s three interviews and the annotated books that the groups created (see Appendix F for a detailed description of these books). Corey’s interview resulted in one data
source: a wordless picture book. All of these data sources were included in the analysis phase of this study and 19 of the 30 student participants were quoted in this dissertation.

Data Analysis

Data from each individual classroom was analysed as a single set. Each data set consisted of fieldnotes, photographs, and video to capture the observational data, a verbatim transcript of the teacher interview accompanied by fieldnotes describing any impromptu communication, and verbatim transcripts of the three photo-elicitation interviews with students and the annotated books created by each group of students. To analyze these data sources I used a three phase analytic approach (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Three phase data analysis process

Initial Analysis
- Typical day narrative creation
- Insertion of narrative vignettes in typical day narratives
- Line by line coding of transcripts and student books

Secondary Analysis
- Categorization of data into commonplace framework

Tertiary Analysis
- Within class thematic analysis

Narrative construction. In the initial analysis I wrote narratives describing a typical day. This narrative was constructed from the extensive fieldnotes, photographic data of classroom activities and physical spaces, short video recordings of classroom activities, and interview transcripts. The resulting narrative outlined the typical daily schedule of each class including student arrival routines, instructional times (e.g., circles), eating times, activity times (e.g., centres and seat work), and dismissal routines. These activities were written in the sequence in
which they typically occurred and were accompanied by a detailed description of where the activity took place and the actions of the teacher and students during this time. This narrative provided a concise summary of the fieldnotes, photographs, and videos by painting a holistic picture of a typical day in each classroom. Within each narrative, I then used fieldnotes and video data to robustly describe typical daily activities. For instance, when the narrative listed that the class met every morning in a circle for language instruction, I described an activity that was representative of the activities that I observed during these circles in detail.

**Data coding.** Following the creation of the class narrative, all verbatim transcripts were open coded (Patton, 2002). Each transcript was coded line-by-line to capture participants’ meanings (Charmaz, 2002) one transcript at a time. The teacher data consisted of a single data point, the teacher interview, and was thus where I began my analysis. This same process was then used for the multiple student data sources: three interview transcripts per group and the annotated student books. For instance, the three teachers all shared their beliefs about how children learn: “[Children learn] through repetition and meaningful hands on experiences” (Linda). These statements were coded as “beliefs.” As well, the students made statements about their responsibilities within the classroom: “You’re the line leader for that day, you take up attendance, you stack chairs” (Caroline). During open coding, I coded these statements as “responsibilities.”

After open coding all the transcripts, a template inspired by the conceptual framework described earlier in this paper was used to analyze these data (see Appendix G). This template contained one section for each of the four commonplaces (i.e., subject matter, teacher, milieu, and learner). The subject matter section contained data that addressed learning expectations. In the teacher section, I included data concerning the teacher’s perceived role as well as her beliefs
and curricular stance. In the milieu section, I included information about students’ institutional knowledge and classroom climate, both emotional and instructional. In the final section, the learner, I included data concerning student competence, roles, and responsibilities. Additionally, there was a section for relevant information that emerged from the data but that did not fit strictly within one of the commonplaces. For example, all the students spoke a great deal about play including the types of activities they enjoyed and the learning that occurred, or did not occur, during child-centered, play-based learning activities. Data that addressed play was included in the “other interesting information” section of the template as this type of discussion crosses multiple commonplaces and was essential to understanding the emergence of learning in the classroom environment. Within each of the commonplaces, I used a method of constant comparison to determine data that could be categorized to enhance meaning. For example, many of the learners described tasks or behaviours that they were responsible for within their classroom (e.g., “to keep your hands off” [David]; “my job in kindergarten is I learn stuff” [Chloe]; “to play and be nice and to learn” [Brady]). These data were grouped together into a category entitled “learner jobs” because they described the learners’ perceived jobs as kindergarten students.

The described template was used to analyze teacher data from both the verbatim interview transcripts and summaries of informal conversations that were recorded in my fieldnotes. A separate template was then used for each student group. That is, for a single student group the annotated book and all three of the verbatim interview transcripts were analyzed using a single table. While there was variation in the amount of data that appeared in each commonplace section, no template for any classroom contained blank sections. That is, the data from each classroom contained information about the subject matter, teacher, milieu, and learner
commonplaces. In addition, the “other interesting information” section of each template contained data. These data addressed, but were not limited to, such topics as play, learner awareness of assessment approaches, and learner debates concerning the usefulness of different reading strategies.

Using each classroom’s data templates, I looked for commonalities. That is, I looked for information that was consistent across the teacher and student data summaries to develop themes. For example, in Shady Lane, both the students and the teacher repeatedly discussed the importance of learning to interact positively in the classroom environment and the supports that were in place to facilitate these interactions. In addition, the members of this classroom discussed the foundational skills that must be developed while in kindergarten including letter identification, name recognition, etc. Descriptions of these two learning purposes led to the development of the theme: “Purpose of kindergarten: Learning to coexist while developing critical foundational skills.”

While consistency among all groups presents the ideal scenario for theme development, if all student groups discussed a topic that was not shared by the teacher, these data were used to contribute to the development of a theme. For instance, in Babbling Brook, the student groups consistently discussed their responsibility for the learning of their peers. While this topic was not addressed by the teacher, the consistency of this data from the four student groups meant that it was an important and novel contribution to the data and thus I considered this to be evidence that learner accountability was fostered in this classroom. These data were, thus, included in the theme: “Enactment of learning: Fostering learning accountability and independence.”

Both the constructed narrative and commonplace templates were used to inform the writing of the results. The constructed narrative, combined with photographic and video data,
were used to create a picture of each classroom to help the reader develop an overall sense of the environment. My analysis of the commonplaces resulted in the emergence of four themes that were consistent in all three classrooms: the existing negotiated balance between academic learning and developmentally appropriate practices, the purpose of kindergarten in each classroom, the enactment of each teacher’s curricular stance, and the enactment of learning within each classroom environment. While consistent across the classrooms, these themes emerged in different forms in each of the classrooms. For instance, while discussions concerning the purpose of kindergarten were found in each classroom’s data set, the identified purposes within the classrooms were different. As a result, in my descriptions of each of the three classrooms there is a heading entitled “Purpose of kindergarten” that is followed by a description that more precisely describes the purpose in that classroom (i.e., Shady Lane – Purpose of kindergarten: Learning to coexist while developing critical foundational skills; Babbling Brook – Purpose of kindergarten: Fostering independence to facilitate academic learning; City Park – Purpose of kindergarten: Developing institutional and academic knowledge). These four common themes were used to structure the descriptions of each of the three focal classrooms.
Chapter 4

Results: Learning from Three Exemplary Classrooms

There is a great deal of contemporary research concerning the increasingly academic nature of kindergarten education (e.g., Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Heydon & Wang, 2006). This standards based movement is supported by research demonstrating both the cognitive capabilities of these young students and the need to ensure that they develop the requisite skills during this critical window of opportunity for learning (e.g., Rushton & Larkin, 2001). However, accompanying this curricular shift is a body of research that espouses the need for developmentally appropriate practices that respect the young age of the students and their corresponding developmental needs (e.g., Geist & Baum, 2005). Proponents of a developmental orientation encourage child-centered practices that provide the opportunity for children to construct knowledge through hands on learning experiences. These constructivist practices must also consider the individual development of the child and challenge children to achieve at a level just beyond their current mastery (NAEYC, 2009).

These seemingly dichotomous orientations to kindergarten education have resulted in research that addresses teacher decision-making and the ability, or inability, of teachers to integrate these orientations. Most of this research concludes that teachers primarily subscribe to either the academic or the developmental logic and this subscription directly impacts their teaching (e.g., Nie & Lau, 2010; Parker & Neuhart-Pritchett, 2006). That is, teachers who subscribe to an academic logic use primarily didactic instructional strategies that focus on the acquisition of academic skills. On the other hand, teachers who subscribe to a developmental logic integrate child-centered learning opportunities that are primarily focused on developing the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive domains of the individual child.
The extant research in this area focuses primarily on the influence of the prescribed subject matter and teacher beliefs on classroom learning. While I acknowledge the significant role that curricular expectations and teachers play in educational research, the results in this chapter demonstrate the holistic picture of kindergarten learning that can be created when researchers acknowledge the role of the learner and the milieu. Thus, in this chapter I present the findings from three full day kindergarten classrooms in Ontario where academic expectations are required and the use of child-centered, play-based learning is mandated.

The results of this study show the possibilities presented by the mandated integration of the academic and developmental logics. In each of the three full day kindergarten classrooms, a balance between these two logics was actively, though differently, negotiated. That is, while the programming emphases in these three classrooms were different, both logics were found in each. To structure these results, I describe the classroom environment, the negotiated balance of academic learning and developmentally appropriate practices, the interpreted purposes of the kindergarten years, the negotiation between curricular stance and classroom practice, and the enactment of learning in each classroom.

**Shady Lane Classroom**

Shady Lane is filled to the brim with toys, manipulatives, and learning resources. These materials are distributed across three zones. The first consists of a large open carpeted area in the middle of the room. The whole class gathers in this area twice daily with the students selecting their own spaces and the teacher, Karen, sitting in a chair at the front. Beside her is a large easel with chart paper that she often writes on during teacher-directed lessons. At other times, this configuration is used for read-alouds. First thing every morning, though, this space is dedicated to sharing time when students can request the opportunity to show or tell something to the class.
There is no schedule for this activity; rather Karen says she selects those students who have that “look on their face that they really need to say something that day.”

Bordering this carpeted area on two sides is the second zone. In this space, there are a variety of play-based centres including a small plastic workshop, a house centre, a block centre, a train table, two computers, and a small reading nook. During child-directed activity time, this space and the carpeted area are transformed into a hive of activity. Toys such as cars, dolls, animal figurines, and puzzles are pulled from the shelves and the room erupts with the boisterous noise of children’s play. During this time, Karen interacts with the students, who are eager to show her what they’ve created. She also supports small groups in learning activities and helps students manage their behaviour.

Abutting the carpeted area on one side is a tiled floor with four tables, which are rarely used during play times except when play dough or art supplies are provided by Karen. Instead, these tables are used during snack and lunch times and once a day as the children complete teacher-directed centres with teacher-designed academically-focused activities. Students are grouped by Karen, assigned a center, and provided with direct instruction about how to accomplish the assigned task.

In this classroom, the use of these three-zoned spaces mirrors the division in the daily schedule between academically-focused periods and student-directed learning periods. While they are both included daily, there is little overlap in these learning orientations.

**The Challenge of Finding a Balance between Academic Learning and DAP**

Finding a balance between academic learning and developmentally appropriate practices is often described as challenging. Much of the existing research describes a dichotomous selection process, where teachers elect to focus on either academic expectations through didactic
instructional strategies or developmentally appropriate practices that place the child in the centre of the learning process. Karen readily acknowledges this struggle: “we know that children absolutely need these skills before they leave or else there is not a lot of catch up time, if any. So how do we make sure that happens while we’re taking their lead?” This quotation demonstrates the heart of the struggle occurring within this classroom. Nevertheless, Karen does not dichotomously select a singular instructional orientation; instead she includes both approaches in a segregated manner. That is, the academic learning in this classroom is primarily teacher-directed but the children are provided with opportunities to direct their own learning during daily play-based centre times. This segregated inclusion of both orientations is evidenced in three themes: the acknowledgement of the multiple purposes of kindergarten, the inclusion of a flexible curricular stance, and the differing goals of teacher-directed and child-centered learning times.

**Purpose of Kindergarten: Learning to Coexist While Developing Critical Foundational Skills**

Kindergarten is the beginning of a child’s formal education. This introduction to the formalized learning environment results in an introduction to “the hidden curriculum, the social piece, social skills, being able to get along with others, having empathy for each other” (Karen) because, for many, it is the first time they’ve been surrounded by a large group of children. In this classroom, learning how to interact positively with these peers is of primary importance and, as such, the development of classroom community takes priority over academic learning, at least at the beginning of the school year. According to Karen, before any academic learning can occur, the students need to feel part of the classroom community because “they learn best by feeling
validated, feeling secure” and “trying to have them feel as though the classroom is their
classroom and then introducing more of my agenda as time goes on.”

Community building underlies much of what happens in Shady Lane and the students in
the class share Karen’s thoughts about the importance of learning to coexist positively in the
environment. When discussing their roles and responsibilities, groups of students consistently
referred to the impact their behaviour has on their peers. For example, when discussing the
blocks as a preferred location for play in the classroom, two of the four groups felt it essential to
include information about safety in their annotated books reminding their readers to “stack [the
blocks] lower so a person doesn’t get hurt” (Brittany). The students further shared their
understanding that classroom rules were enacted to ensure the safety of all: “There are a lot of
rules because someone could get hurt” (group 4, annotated book).

Accompanying the acknowledgement of student responsibility for the safety of others
was the need to learn to interact positively with their peers. During these discussions, the
students acknowledged that positive peer interactions were not simply behavioural expectations
but rather were part of the learning that occurred within a kindergarten classroom where students
were actively “learning how to play nicely” (Brittany). This active learning process in this
classroom is facilitated by instruction in useful strategies and the inclusion of structures that
assist with the integration of these strategies in the classroom environment. One prime example
is the peace table where “the children can fix their problems” (group 4, annotated book). This
small table is covered in a yellow brick tablecloth and sits in the middle of the classroom carpet,
an indication of its central importance. I observed it being used regularly throughout my time in
the classroom as the students met there and Karen modeled problem resolution. This regular use
resulted in students having an advanced understanding of the role of this table to their classroom community: “It has a brick cloth on it because it’s really to build friendships” (Brittany).

While the building of friendships and the need for constructive conflict resolution are key to the positive functioning of a classroom, Karen further expresses the importance of community building to the future wellbeing of the students in the class during her interview:

We have one little fellow with very special needs and he will be, this is his neighbourhood school, he will be here the next 8 to 9 years and he needs to have a network of people who will support him and that network should not be adults, it should be the children and so I think just you know bigger than an individual child, it’s a place to build community. One that hopefully will last with them.

In addition to the social inclusion of students with special needs, the community in this classroom extends to the rest of the school. The kindergarten students interact regularly with older students who act as their learning buddies, meeting weekly to collaboratively participate in activities such as computers, crafts, and play. Older students are also frequent volunteers in the classroom who help with the running of learning centres, reading books to the students, and preparing classroom materials.

While learning to successfully coexist within a classroom environment is of the utmost importance in this classroom, this does not preclude the inclusion of necessary academic learning. Karen readily acknowledges that there are skills that are essential for kindergarten students because “there is a critical period where skills can develop so I think that is the purpose of kindergarten as well.” The students also discuss the skills that they are expected to learn during kindergarten with every group discussing phonemic awareness (e.g., letter sound identification) and number sense (e.g., counting to 30). While these skills are often those dictated
by the curriculum document, Karen also focuses on the foundational skills that support the learning of skills that are directly addressed in the document (e.g., mechanics of writing). The expectations that are addressed in this classroom are, in part, guided by the curriculum document but the teacher consistently emphasizes the role of child development in her educational decision-making.

**Curricular Stance: Professional Knowledge of Child Development Guides Program Planning**

In Ontario kindergarten classrooms, the curriculum document is mandated and the expectations listed therein are required learning for all students. Karen acknowledges the importance of the curriculum document, expressing her belief in the need for standardized expectations that ensure that all students are receiving the instruction necessary during the kindergarten years.

Having a standardized curriculum I think is critical. We did not have that 22 years ago...[teachers] could talk about the skills but how they really relate to the development from K to 12, I don’t think that we had a sense of that and I think that is really what the curriculum brings now. It is that sense of it is a building block to the next step.

This quotation further reinforces Karen’s belief that kindergarten is part of the elementary continuum of learning meaning that there are skills that students must learn in order to be successful in later learning situations.

Despite her overt support of the curriculum document, Karen does not allow it to guide all the learning that occurs within the classroom.

I have toyed with do you begin with the curriculum or do you begin with who the students are? What comes first?...but I guess essentially we are responsible for the
curriculum so I’ll start with that as being the number one factor but very close behind that are the children who come in through the door and the profiles they bring.

While this quotation seems to indicate that Karen gives the curriculum document primacy, she explicitly describes her flexible curricular stance stating, “I think you can always make an argument for why or why not something else may be included.” This flexibility developed, in part, as a result of her previous job supporting the learning of elementary teachers as a school district consultant. During the ten years she spent in this role, Karen “had the opportunity to dig in a little bit to some research and [was] able to learn what is important and what [she] can let go of.” For example, while the curriculum document contains five specific expectations that explicitly state that students are to communicate in writing by the end of senior kindergarten, Karen has made the conscious decision to omit writing from her kindergarten program.

When asked about her decision not to provide instruction in communicating ideas through writing nor to provide the student activities that support this development, Karen acknowledges that her view may not “necessarily be the popular response but pedagogically I believe that.” Because of this belief she ignores the writing expectations stating that she doesn’t believe in “pressuring them to get their thoughts on paper until mechanically they are able to do that.” Instead, her “writing program” involves instruction in the mechanics of writing including “formation, proper pencil grip, pressure...[and] comfortable positioning.” The children in this classroom rarely discussed writing in their interviews; the only exceptions were the expression of an inability to write or to share the importance of learning the mechanics of printing: “When we learn how to write...we learn how to print our names” (Brittany). While a functional grip is discussed in the curriculum document, it is not a writing expectation but instead is a single specific expectation in the health and physical activity section demonstrating that the Ministry
does not intend printing to be a significant part of the writing program. Rather, the document focuses on writing as the creation of meaning on a page, which is not addressed in this classroom.

While Karen overtly excludes writing instruction in her classroom, she acknowledges and thoughtfully integrates the foundational skills necessary to help children succeed when writing in later grades. Specifically, a great deal of explicit instruction in phonemic awareness was observed during teacher-directed lessons and learning centres. The students also shared the importance of learning phonemic awareness as every group discussed the need to identify letter sounds and their developing knowledge of letter sound blending. Phonemic awareness and its role in the development of children’s reading and writing abilities is discussed thoroughly in the introduction to the document and is accompanied by four specific expectations. The inclusion of phonemic awareness instruction combined with the exclusion of writing instruction demonstrates Karen’s support of the kindergarten curriculum document tempered by a professional belief system that informs the omission of expectations that she believes to be developmentally inappropriate for kindergarten-aged children. Karen maintains a primarily developmentalist orientation, stating that it is critical that teachers “understand the developmental norms of the continuum of development that happens for children and try to tie that with the expectations of the curriculum.”

**Enactment of Learning: Differing Goals of Teacher-Directed and Child-Centered Learning**

As her earlier quotation about the challenge of finding a balance between academic learning and developmentally appropriate practice illustrates, Karen finds it challenging to “take their lead” during child-directed play while integrating the academic learning of the “skills they absolutely need.” This questioning results in the current lack of a clearly negotiated balance and,
for this reason, academic learning and child-directed learning activities are largely segregated in this classroom. Academic learning takes place primarily during teacher-directed learning times, which occur during a once daily circle time where students’ expressed roles are “listening,” “watching,” and “being quiet.” The central purpose of these circle times is to impart the necessary information to the students. For example, during one observation Karen introduces the concept of creating consonant-vowel-consonant words through sound blending.

The class sits in a circle looking at the teacher. She has three blocks in front of her and a pile of letter cards. She begins by asking the students to help her identify the letter sound and shows them a letter, H. The students respond with the /h/ sound in chorus and are positively reinforced by Karen. She then places the letter card on the first block before showing them a second letter, A, and reminding them that it is a vowel and thus is like glue sticking the words together by singing a song they previously saw on a DVD about letter sounds. Karen then asks them to identify the sound A makes and the whole class shouts /a/ before she places it on the second block. She then shows the final letter card, T, and asks Ramona to identify its sound. She does so successfully and Karen places this card on the final block. She then models sliding the blocks together to build a word saying the sounds as she moves the blocks then blends them into the word hat. Addison excitedly asks “can we have a turn?” and Karen responds by reminding the students of appropriate behaviour and then choosing Sean to come up and make a word. She tells him that he cannot change the A or the T and then gives him the letter B to put at the beginning. Sean quickly decodes the word and announces to the class that it says bat. Karen then models the process of blending the three letters more slowly before following the same sequence with four other student volunteers.
This lesson is typical of the style of lesson observed in this classroom. The students are invited to share their thoughts while the teacher maintains focus on the targeted academic skill demonstrating the integration of academic learning in this classroom. While this lesson does involve student participation both through choral responses to teacher questioning and the active role of student volunteers, the students in this class consistently describe the passive role that they play during these learning times. The following is an excerpt from a conversation that emerged when I showed them a picture of circle time:

Researcher: What is the class doing?
Lara: Doing nothing.
Researcher: They are doing nothing?
Brittany: Well they’re just listening to the teacher. (group 2)

This passive student role during instructional times was echoed by a second group who, when asked about their learning in the classroom, stated that they “go to the carpet, listen with your ears, and turn them up” (Tamara).

Considering Karen’s shared belief that students “need to feel as though they are contributing,” the passive role described by the students seems contradictory. However, with further analysis of Karen’s developmentalist beliefs, a division emerges between the students’ need to “take the lead in their learning” (Karen) and the developmental appropriateness of devoting class time to increasing student awareness of academic learning expectations. For instance, in their school, every teacher is expected to post specific learning goals on the wall to ensure that expectations are clearly communicated to students. However, Karen’s response to this structure demonstrates her questioning of the ability of young children to comprehend these expectations:
Learning goals are posted in the room. The children are informed of the learning goal but I’m not sure that they would be able to articulate that...they’re not there yet...and I’m not even sure that that precise of a learning goal is important for them at this level.

This quotation clearly demonstrates the continual process of negotiation occurring within Karen as she indicates her uncertainty about this decision. However, her current belief that kindergarten-aged students are not developmentally able to process specific learning goals limits their ability to reflect on and describe their learning and the learning of their peers. Instead the students describe the teacher’s role in determining what they are to learn and, when asked what she teaches them, the students stated “her stuff” (Derek) reflecting their perceptions of her control of the academic learning that occurs.

While Karen directs the academic learning that occurs within the classroom, she explicitly states that the kindergarten classroom is a “learning environment where they really have the opportunity to be able to take a lead in their learning but also can respond to someone else taking the lead based on good pedagogy.” This shared leadership occurs during segregated times. Students need to be able to respond to the teacher’s lead during teacher-directed academic learning times. To complement this structure, students are provided with child-centred play-based learning periods an average of twice daily. During these play times, the purpose is strictly child-driven:

In our board there was an additional word tacked on to play and that was purposeful play. So the children are not involved in play but they are involved in purposeful play, which kind of struck me as being interesting because if I were four I would think that no matter what I was playing with I would have a purpose. Right? And so by suggesting then that
we move away from play to purposeful play it almost gives an adult control or an adult
directed tone to play and I’m not sure that that’s where we want to go. (Karen)
The students are the directors of this play and any learning that occurs is child-directed. The lack
of student involvement in explicit discussions about the learning that occurs within their
kindergarten classroom inhibits the development of students’ metacognition and thus their ability
to communicate this learning effectively. When I asked the students about what they learned
during play, the following is an excerpt from a typical response.

Researcher: What are you learning when you play with the babies?

_No response from the group_

Researcher: Are you learning something?

Kids in chorus: No

Researcher: What are you doing?

Greta: We’re just playing with them. (group 2)

While the children did not share information about the learning that occurred during these play-
based activity times, learning was observed throughout these periods including the ability to
positively negotiate social situations, improved motor development through play dough
manipulation, colouring, and picture drawing, exploration of volume at the sand and water
tables, and the development of visual-spatial sense while constructing marble mazes. While
much learning did occur during these child-directed times, this learning was not discussed or
extended by Karen who shared the belief that her role “is to be involved in the play and be a
model for the other children to see that someone’s idea is a valuable idea because I’m
participating in it.” This quotation serves to reinforce Karen’s belief that the primary purposes of
play-based learning times were to encourage social development and to allow individual children
to guide their learning. While there was potential for the integration of academic learning, this was not emphasized. This reinforces the segregation of learning that occurs within this classroom where academic learning occurs during teacher-directed times and play-based learning times allow the space and time for individualized student development.

In Shady Lane, a developmental orientation is evident. There is a concerted focus on ensuring that students develop the social and emotional skills necessary to succeed within an educational institution, daily play-based learning times are purely child-directed providing the time and space for students to construct their own knowledge, and academic skills are not introduced when they are deemed to be developmentally inappropriate for four- and five-year-olds. However, this inclusion of a developmental orientation does not preclude the inclusion of academic learning. Explicit instruction in essential academic expectations occurs regularly, ensuring that students have the foundation necessary to learn more advanced academic skills in the future. While the developmental and academic orientations are largely segregated, they are both acknowledged and included.

**Babbling Brook Classroom**

The classroom is open and bright. Tables line one side while a large carpeted area occupies the other. Every space within this classroom is multi-functional. During three daily circle times, when the whole class comes together, the students sit on the carpeted area with the teacher, Samantha, in a chair at the front. The walls that surround the teacher are covered in learning resources that are referred to throughout these circles and that change with the focal learning topic (e.g., calendar, KWL charts, shared reading poems). These resources are not mass-produced but rather are created by Samantha for and with the children. While they consist mostly
of words, hand-drawn pictures are included wherever possible to encourage students who are not yet proficient readers to interact with the resources.

During two daily play-based learning times, this same carpeted space transforms into a hive of activity, with buckets of blocks and other manipulatives pulled from the shelves and children gathered together in numerous small groups. Amidst this play, Samantha can often be found sitting on the carpet working with small groups of students leading guided reading or focused exploration of math manipulatives. This level of activity spreads throughout the room as groups of students take over tables to draw pictures and write messages for friends and family, or they play games. During these child-directed times, every available space presents an opportunity for activity. On several occasions, the small foyer by the outside door became a flight path for paper airplanes. While perhaps a traditionally frowned upon activity, in this classroom, students were encouraged to learn from this new-found fascination. Books about planes were brought into the classroom for the children to read. Different patterns and materials were also provided so students could experiment and determine how to create the most aerodynamic planes. This ever-evolving classroom environment supports the multitude of instructional strategies and learning activities that occur within the space.

**The Inclusion of Academic Learning and Developmentally Appropriate Practices**

Existing research suggests that learning in a kindergarten classroom is either primarily academic in focus which typically leads to teacher-directed practices or centres on developmentally appropriate practices. However, this classroom does not fit solely into either category, but rather bridges the gap between these two seemingly dichotomous logics. In this classroom, the high academic expectations that are prescribed by the province’s curricular expectations guide much of the learning that occurs. However, the teaching and learning
opportunities embrace the multiple domains of child development (i.e., social, emotional, and cognitive), encourage learning both during teacher-directed instructional times and through child-centered play-based activities, and ensure that the students are heard, valued, and influential in their own learning. This blend of academic and developmental logics emerges in several ways in this classroom: through the acknowledgement of the multiple purposes of kindergarten, the balancing of curricular expectations and students’ developmental needs, the creation of an environment where learning is a collaborative process, and the fostering of learner accountability and independence.

**Purposes of Kindergarten: Fostering Independence to Facilitate Academic Learning**

As the first year of formal schooling, the purpose of kindergarten is often questioned. In this classroom, there is no singular response to this question but rather the acknowledgement that there are multiple coexisting purposes that shift as the year progresses. At the beginning of the school year, most students have had minimal exposure to formalized educational settings, thus, Samantha describes the need to introduce students to institutional norms including routines and expected behaviours: “The purpose for junior kindergarteners in September is ultimately that of socialization, that’s where their learning curve will be. What is a line? What are indoor shoes? How do I manage my snack? And that increase in independence.” This institutional knowledge is the necessary foundation providing students with the ability to function within the environment and begin to learn the academic content that is emphasized in the Ministry curriculum. When “they have that under control, their purpose and their focus is then more of an academic focus” (Samantha).

In this classroom, this academic focus occurs through a segregated, subject-specific approach. That is, lessons and learning activities address a particular expectation in one area of
the curriculum document (e.g., reading, writing, or number sense). While there is some overlap (e.g., writing on chart paper while discussing a science concept), the lesson’s primary focus is a singular concept or skill. The introduction of these skills and concepts typically occurs in whole group or small group settings. These settings also change as the year progresses and student abilities evolve: “At the beginning of the year we started whole group and now I have divided them into the JKS and the SKs giving them more explicit instruction within the smaller groups revolving around reading and writing” (Samantha).

The goals that guide the learning in this classroom acknowledge that kindergarten is part of the continuum of learning. Thus one of the purposes of kindergarten is to provide students with the institutional and academic knowledge necessary to experience success in subsequent grades: “They need to have some or all of the readiness skills to be able to walk into that grade one classroom...confident and ready” (Samantha). This preparatory purpose was not only articulated by the teacher but was echoed by the students who expressed the need to learn the academic skills necessary to complete academic work at the grade one level: “people read books in kindergarten to practice reading for grade one” (Caroline). However, the students were not solely focused on the need for these skills in grade one but also shared the perspective that the learning in kindergarten was intended to help them achieve lifelong learning goals: “because then when you grow up you can’t read but when you are little if you read then you can read” (Stella).

The essential roles of academic and institutional learning are communicated by the members of this classroom thus demonstrating their infusion within the classroom environment. Accompanying these two essential components is the development of the learning skills that students must possess in order to successfully function within a learning environment including
independence, self-regulation, and focus. Pragmatically put, students need to be able to “sit down and write something, complete a task, and carry on” (Samantha). However, according to Samantha, for students to develop these skills, the development of a positive emotional climate must be prioritized.

The emotional climate has to be first and foremost before any teaching can happen. Kids are going to have to be able to self-regulate. Kids are going to have to feel safe. Kids are going to have to know where the expectations are and that there are limits and lines and rules and responsibilities...in a way that is kind and considerate and respectful.

Establishing a positive emotional climate is of primary importance because it is the foundation upon which all learning occurs. Learning in this classroom is informed by both curricular expectations and student development.

Curricular Stance: Balancing Curricular Expectations and Student Development

The standardized curriculum is mandated in Ontario. Though individual teachers may feel differently about the impact it has on their professional practice, every teacher must consider the established curricular expectations when planning a kindergarten program. Samantha openly expresses the role that the curriculum has in her planning: “I have a legal responsibility to the curriculum expectations. I need to assess those and report on them and the documentation that happens around that so I am tied to that.” This curricular stance means that curricular expectations necessarily inform what is taught in this classroom. The inclusion of segregated subject areas in the curriculum thus means that programming must integrate opportunities for students to meet academic expectations in multiple areas (e.g., reading, writing, math, science). Whole group lessons observed in this classroom address subjects such as science through the exploration of living versus non-living things and math as the students learn about the names and
value of coins. Observed small group learning activities also centered on subject-specific learning such as daily guided reading groups.

As evidenced in these, and other, observed learning activities, Samantha places great importance on the learning of academic skills. However, she also expresses a belief that while the document may dictate the instructional content, it still provides flexibility concerning how the expectations are addressed within individual classrooms: “I think the kindergarten curriculum is written in such a way that it does allow flexibility and freedom to meet those expectations at different times through the year, teacher directed or child directed.” This flexibility is deemed necessary because “the group of children change[s] every year...and I have to adapt to what their needs are.” Thus not all learning can be dictated by curricular expectations. It is also important to consider the strengths and needs of the learners, including their differing backgrounds and prior learning experiences.

I think that children depending on their family, their socioeconomics, their experiences, their past, bring a wealth of knowledge, even in their short little lives, of how they learn best and I think it is the teacher’s responsibility to sit back and watch and then help them build on the skills they have already developed and introduce them to new skills to expand the way they learn in other areas. (Samantha)

In this classroom, the knowledge of each child’s existing abilities is integrated with the knowledge of the curricular expectations to design a program that is simultaneously curriculum- and child-focused. This type of learning environment acknowledges the role of student experiences in determining the learning that takes place within the classroom.
Enactment of Learning: Sharing the Power within the Classroom

The flexible curricular stance that exists within this classroom affords the opportunity for the development of a unique learning environment. This classroom integrates the knowledge and abilities of the teacher and learners to develop a collaborative learning environment where direct instruction and child-centered learning practices coexist. According to Samantha, “direct instruction give[s] them some new knowledge, whether it be in small groups or one on one or in a whole group.” For instance, during one observation students were introduced to the concept of quantity prediction.

During the second circle of the day, the class meets in a circle on the carpet. As the lesson begins, Samantha places a pile of blocks in front of her. She then says that she predicts that the pile has two blocks in it and asks the students if this is a good prediction. Students who wish to respond raise their hands and Natasha is selected by the teacher. She responds that two is not enough and then holds up her fingers stating that she can “see more blocks than that.” After explaining this strategy to the rest of the class, Samantha reinforces Natasha’s response that two is not a good guess, asks what a better guess would be and asks the students to “explain their thinking.” Wesley volunteers and suggests that Samantha put her blocks in a row to help her with her prediction. The teacher lines up her blocks stating that “now it looks like there are a lot more than two.” Samantha then returns to her original question, asking what would be a good prediction. When no one responds she guesses 20 and asks the students to help her check her prediction by counting the blocks. She leads the counting, moving each block as it is counted to model proper one-to-one correspondence. As a class they count 18 blocks in total.
This teacher-directed lesson focuses on a singular academic subject area and the teacher maintains control of the discussion and topic at all times ensuring that the focal expectation is addressed. This lesson is not unique in structure to others observed in the classroom. However, this is not the sole learning strategy used but rather is used primarily to introduce new knowledge or skills and is followed by “the time and the tools to then play with it and experience and manipulate in such a way so it makes more sense to them” (Samantha). This lesson is followed by an opportunity for students to predict and count their own individual piles of blocks and share their thinking and results with their peers. Subsequent to this exploration the teacher reviewed the strategies that were used successfully throughout the activity.

During the above lesson, students were responsible both for listening and participating during a structured teacher-directed lesson and were subsequently provided with the opportunity to participate more actively through a hands-on follow-up. However, these are not the only types of learning experiences observed in this classroom. I observed play-based learning opportunities daily as well as child-directed learning opportunities. According to the teacher,

Play is extremely important but it is a chance for them to practice the skills that they’ve been taught. When the direct teaching happens and then they’re allowed to play and explore and change things up within their play, their play changes. When the tools of their play change, their play changes and their experiences are just different, like their world is opened up. It gives them a chance to process, to ask questions about that, to share their knowledge with other people and feel really good about themselves, and with all that happening through play it comes out in ways that they’re most comfortable and it is amazing to watch.
This quotation demonstrates Samantha’s belief that play provides opportunities for students to practice skills and internalize concepts that are introduced during teacher-directed lessons. When asked about their play, the students echoed the sentiment that play reinforces learning: “we are playing with money because people like money and because we’re learning about money” (Ella). While this statement explicitly communicates an understanding that learning can occur during play-based activities, further explanations illustrate a more sophisticated understanding about the type of learning that occurs during particular play-based activities: “when we play we sometimes learn...sometimes in the bank we learn what money is and what the money is called” (Natasha). However, lest we forget that these students are four and five years of age, they remind us by infusing discussions of play with reminders that playing with friends in their classroom is a fun activity that does not always result in the learning of targeted academic concepts: “I like playing stuff, everything” (Wesley).

Samantha recognizes the importance of enjoyment, sharing her understanding that “getting their input is going to keep them interested in what is going on...and they are going to be excited because it is their idea and I think that is contagious.” During the observations, the class was learning about money. To complement this learning, the members of the class collaboratively decided to transform one of their centres into a bank. The inspiration for this decision came from Mary whose mother had recently started working at a bank. This student shared stories of her mother’s work often and described the connection between the money they were learning about and the money her mother worked with. The other students were intrigued by this connection and when it came time to select a new centre for the classroom this was suggested and democratically voted for.
Before the classroom bank could become fully serviceable, Samantha and the students spent several periods brainstorming what is done in a bank and the resources they would need to complete these tasks including cash registers, money, credit cards, counters, and signs that communicated the hours of operation and name of the bank. This final suggestion was followed by brainstorming possible names for the bank and a democratic vote to determine the winner. This sign and others were made by student volunteers who independently used phonetic spelling to annotate their colourful signs.

The process of selecting and creating the class bank demonstrates the oft-observed inclusion of children’s voices in this classroom. The classroom was treated as a collaborative environment that was continually evolving to support new learning and student interests. This involvement was inspired by Samantha’s belief in the importance of developing in the students a sense of ownership of their learning environment: “[I’m] looking at ways that I can give them more say and more ownership in the classroom and getting them to develop more play areas that are theirs, their decisions and their writing.” While this approach was, in part, designed to develop ownership, this was not the sole goal of the inclusion of students’ voices. Through integrating child-directed learning opportunities that support the focal learning expectations, in this classroom, another, more central goal, was to “make them conscious learners” (Samantha). This goal involved teacher questioning during play-based learning activities to extend and challenge student thinking with the ultimate goal of modeling for students how they could ask themselves and each other these challenging questions.

During several of my interviews, student discussions provided evidence of their evolved learning consciousness. For instance, one group had a focused debate on the importance of using pictures to construct meaning from texts.
Researcher: Who can tell me what is happening in this picture?

Steven: They’re reading.

Researcher: They’re reading. What else is happening?

Steven: They’re looking at the pictures.

Researcher: They’re looking at the pictures. Toby what do you think is happening in this picture? What do you want to tell me about it?

Toby: They’re looking at the pictures.

Researcher: Okay Natasha. What can you tell me about this?

Natasha: We were looking at the pictures and reading the book.

Researcher: Am I right in saying we are reading a book and looking at the pictures? Is that right?

Toby: No.

Researcher: That’s not what is happening here?

Steven: Yeah it is.

Researcher: What do you want to add Toby?

Toby: I want to add just reading.

Researcher: Oh you don’t want it to say looking at the pictures?

Steven: Why Toby? Then they don’t know when they’re right or not right.

Natasha: Toby, we were looking at pictures because I know because I was in there.

Researcher: Steven you just had a good point. You said the pictures help you know if what you’re reading is right or not right. Maybe Toby we can write we are reading our books but then we can add Steven’s part to a different
sentence. So Steven we can write the pictures help us know if we are right or not right. What do you think?

Steven Right.

Toby Right. (group 1)

This conversation shows the depth of the children’s insight into their own learning. In this classroom, this type of consciousness was fostered through active child participation in classroom decision-making and also through establishing the structures and routines that encouraged student accountability and independence.

**Enactment of Learning: Fostering Learner Accountability and Independence**

The classroom was organized with children’s physical attributes in mind ensuring that all materials were physically accessible to the young learners and were organized and clearly labeled to promote the use of these resources throughout the day. Ensuring that manipulatives and other resources were returned to their designated homes further facilitated their use by the students. These organizational strategies were not only created to encourage student use but also to ensure student ability to independently return items to their proper home thus facilitating use by other students: “The materials also need to be at kid level and put in a way that they can be organized by the kids. The kids can successfully organize the materials and put them away with care and respect” (Samantha). This is but one of the important responsibilities that was instilled in the learners from the first day of kindergarten. Further responsibilities were infused into daily routines such as signing in upon arrival at school “so the teachers know we’re here” (Natasha), returning their communication bags, and cleaning the classroom. While cleaning up the classroom may seem an obvious and simple task, the significance of this responsibility was communicated by the learners who shared more than aesthetics and manners as the reasons for
Instead, they described the essential role that this responsibility played in maintaining student safety: “Stella is cleaning up the blue sand so no one gets hurt” (group 4, annotated book).

This sense of responsibility extended beyond daily, routine tasks to student learning. The students were responsible for their own learning. This means that the teacher assessed their learning through regular individualized conferences, providing them with feedback on their areas of strength and need and guiding them as they reflected on whether or not they had practiced enough to accomplish their goals since the last conference:

Primarily it is around reading and the importance of reading. I think it shows to them that I value where they are and they feel good about themselves. They have to be accountable too for some of the like ‘I practiced at home or I didn’t practice at home and I’m accountable.’ (Samantha)

The students echoed this accountability by describing the need for learner independence during academic tasks: “we have to sound it out by ourselves” (Natasha). However, to further emphasize the collaborative nature of this learning environment, students shared that this independence was combined with teacher support when needed: “with teacher’s help...she points to the words and she says them when we don’t know them” (Mary).

The teacher’s role was multi-faceted. Samantha taught new skills and supported students as they engaged in new learning activities. She also expressed a belief in the need to provide constructive feedback to students both to help them extend their learning and to develop the confidence to accept feedback in a positive manner. Thus, individualized conferences also presented the opportunity to become “comfortable in getting feedback...of how to make it that little bit better and take that constructive criticism and be confident in that and feel good when
they’ve done that little bit extra” (Samantha). This feedback structure supported student academic learning while also helping them develop an understanding that learning does not occur in isolation but rather is a collaborative activity. This collaboration extended from the typical teacher-to-student structure to include the role of student-to-student learning support.

Throughout the interviews, the learners both modeled and discussed their role in each other’s learning. This learning structure was most obvious when students discussed the role of senior kindergarten students in the learning of junior kindergarten students. During classroom observations, senior kindergarten students were often seen helping the younger students segmenting the sounds in the words to help them with their writing. After a conversation about the importance of learning to write in kindergarten, the students in one group chose to annotate a picture in their book of students writing at a table with the words “[Teacher] is writing with the juniors. The seniors also help the juniors” (group 2, annotated book). This quotation illustrates the belief that the teacher is not the sole person in the classroom responsible for student learning. Students were also responsible for actively participating in the learning of their peers.

Babbling Brook presents a balanced approach to kindergarten learning, integrating both the academic and developmental logics throughout the daily schedule. Academic learning occurred throughout the various learning periods. Circle times provided the opportunity for the learning of focal skills through both explicit teacher instruction and participatory discussions and activities. Play-based learning times provided the opportunity for students to explore and internalize these focal skills through hands-on learning activities. Further, during these learning times students constructed knowledge in other areas of interest (e.g., how to create the most aerodynamic airplane, the functioning of a bank). These interests were both acknowledged and actively integrated into other learning activities (e.g., learning about money through the creation
of a class bank). While the learning in this classroom was primarily academic in nature, once students had acquired the requisite institutional knowledge, the enactment of this academic learning occurred through the use of developmentally appropriate practices that considered children’s learning in multiple domains (i.e., physical, social, emotional, and cognitive) by ensuring that they played an active role in the construction of their knowledge and the development of the classroom environment, both emotional and physical.

**City Park Classroom**

Situated in a school with only one traditional kindergarten space, this class has taken over a smaller primary classroom with no cubbies and no washroom. The floor space in this small classroom is mainly occupied by six tables, the teacher’s desk, and a horseshoe table where small group and individualized guided instruction takes place. The surrounding walls are lined with learning centres where toys and interactive centres encourage children’s play. Along the window there is a house centre, a painting easel, and a shelf full of craft materials. On the opposing wall there are computers and a carpeted area where blocks and other toys are located. In the final corner of the room is a carpet bounded by a chart stand, two walls covered in learning materials, and a shelf of puzzles and books. While this carpet is small, the whole class gathers in this space during the five daily circle times. Each child has a teacher-assigned spot where they sit while the teacher, Linda, occupies the chair beside the chart stand.

Outside of these circle times, the students spend one period a day at the tables where their seats are designated by nametags. During this period they complete teacher assigned seat work which is typically paper-based. These papers are completed with the shared tools located in the centre of each table including pencils, crayons, glue sticks, and scissors. These same seats are where they eat their snacks and lunches.
During the remaining two periods of the day, every corner of the classroom becomes a hive of activity as children play in centres. At the beginning of these centre times, Linda puts out play-based activities on every table including manipulatives, felt boards, white boards, a kidney bean filled sensory table, play dough, and toys such as castles and Lego. These activities are pre-selected by Linda who also restricts the number of students permitted at each centre. The students, however, are free to select where they will go, how long they will stay at each centre, and how they will use the resources in their play.

**Including Developmentally Appropriate Practices in an Academic Environment**

As the debate wages on in the research about the challenges of including both academic learning and developmentally appropriate practices, this classroom provides a third example of how this negotiation is enacted. This classroom is primarily an academic learning environment where subject-specific curricular goals are central to the learning that occurs. Students engage in five instructional periods per day when Linda guides them in the learning of subject-specific topics including but not limited to phonemic awareness, sight word recognition, and number representation. However, this emphasis on academic learning is tempered by the developmental needs of students. That is, students’ developmental readiness influences the introduction of particular skills. This learning is scaffolded throughout the year to allow students the time to first develop the foundational skills before the more challenging skills that are prescribed by the curriculum document are introduced. This focus on academics tempered by knowledge of child development emerges in several ways in this classroom: through the acknowledgement of the multiple purposes of kindergarten, through programming that is curriculum driven but is beginning to integrate a developmental orientation, and through the creation of an environment that is largely teacher driven but does acknowledge the role of children in their own learning.
Purposes of Kindergarten: Developing Institutional and Academic Knowledge

As previously discussed, kindergarten is a child’s introduction to formal schooling. For different teachers, this introduction takes different forms and, thus, kindergarten has varying, albeit related, purposes. Linda shares a perspective that is highly influenced by the community in which she teaches:

I don’t necessarily believe that kindergarten is for everybody. I think the government was smart about which schools they selected as full day kindergarten. It wasn’t by accident that they picked the schools in this area and I think they realize that those are the kids that need it most because early intervention is a key to how successful they are. And so many kids from other areas might already have an environment similar to this at home or at daycare even if it’s every other day.

The community where this classroom is located has a high incidence of low socioeconomic status where the parents are often “intimidated by educators” (Linda) because of their own limited educational experiences. This understanding of community dynamics, in part, informs Linda’s perspective on the central purposes of kindergarten: to help students develop the institutional knowledge necessary to function in a school environment and to develop the academic skills that are essential learning in the kindergarten years.

Linda’s determination to ensure that children get what they need is, in part, inspired by the community where this classroom is situated. In this community, opportunities for rich learning environments do not abound and thus Linda expressed the belief that the classroom is, for many, the sole opportunity to learn essential skills and gain necessary knowledge: “their physical environment affects them so much and we only get to control it here which is only half of their day, not even.” Her belief in the importance of physical environment means that one of
the goals for the students in this classroom is to learn to function successfully within a school environment: “It’s about getting them ready for what school is going to bring them and what their day looks like when they’re in a school environment” (Linda). This goal takes primacy at the beginning of the school year as “the first month is often just about routines and establishing that” (Linda). Once these routines have been established, the learning in the classroom quickly shifts to an academic purpose.

The central focus of this classroom is the development of academic skills that will allow students to meet the expectations of the curriculum document, which serves as the “guide of what we need to do” (Linda). The academic focus of this classroom was observed during the five daily circles, each of which was designed to instruct students in subject-specific areas. For instance, the first circle every day involved the reading of a morning message composed by Linda. This was complemented by activities such as asking students to identify sight words imbedded in the reading and list these words on chart paper. The primary purpose of this activity was the introduction and practice of reading strategies to facilitate students’ independent reading and provide them with a resource to support their independent writing. The second circle typically centered on a science concept such as the life cycle of a butterfly. The third circle was calendar time when the class counted the number of days they had been in school and reviewed the days of the week and months of the year. During the fourth circle, the teacher provided instruction in targeted math skills. The following is an example of a typical math lesson:

The students sit around the perimeter of the carpet with a hula hoop in the middle. Linda invites Brady to pick a number between one and 20. After selecting his number, Brady is asked to put that many blocks in the hula hoop. When he is finished, the rest of the students are invited to count the blocks and verify his accuracy. During this counting,
Linda models the use of a counting strategy that reinforces the development of one to one correspondence. To do so she lines up the blocks in single file to ensure that each is counted only once.

The observation of several similar circle activities demonstrated the provision of instruction in subject-specific areas that align with the academic subjects and expectations listed in the kindergarten curriculum document.

These curricular expectations were addressed daily during five academically-focused circle times. The amount of time set aside each day for academic learning demonstrates its importance in this classroom. Further evidence of the significant role of academic learning was provided by the students throughout their interviews as they repeatedly described the development of academic skills and chose to include photographs in their book that primarily pictured their participation in academic learning activities (e.g., the calendar, the sight word wall, student writing samples, retell book responses). These pictures were complemented by a simple yet pointed description of the purpose of school: “because it’s school and school is where you learn” (Brady).

The focus on academic learning in this classroom was largely guided by the curriculum document. However, Linda also communicated the important role that kindergarten plays in the continuum of elementary learning. That is, the expected learning in kindergarten is necessary preparation for their learning in subsequent grades: “a lot is their foundation...I really want them to be so successful in grade one so there is this aspect of being able to get it all in” (Linda). This quotation not only communicates the preparatory purpose of kindergarten but also contains evidence of the pressure felt by Linda to ensure that students learn the skills necessary to be successful learners. In this classroom, these skills were interpreted primarily as the academic
expectations that are listed in the kindergarten curriculum document which guided much of the programming.

**Curricular Stance: Curriculum Driven but Integrating a Developmental Orientation**

As evidenced in prior research and the descriptions shared in this results chapter, teachers have differing perspectives on the role of the curriculum in their professional decision-making. Linda repeatedly expressed the significant role of the curricular standards in informing her programming decisions: “we need to be able to cover the entire curriculum.” This strict adherence to curricular expectations is often the result of the accountability structure that is gaining prominence in schools. This structure includes the imposition of instructional strategies (e.g., learning goals and success criteria) and the obligation to submit long range plans to school administration. This accountability structure influenced Linda’s programming decisions: “I still have to submit long range plans. I still have to submit day plans...With the other kindergarten teacher we’ll work together and develop a plan on how we’re going to structure our year in terms of the curriculum.” In the research, it is commonly claimed that teacher planning that places curricular expectations at the core tends to prioritize curricular expectations over student development. While Linda definitely placed significant importance on academic learning, communicating that it is one of the central purposes of kindergarten, she also acknowledged that curricular prescription of a particular skill was not necessarily accompanied by child readiness. Thus Linda readily expressed her belief that she did have the flexibility to determine when particular academic skills were introduced to students and that these decisions were, in part, influenced by her knowledge of child development:
As we all know from many studies, they are developmentally not always there to start learning them first thing in the year. You need to start with word awareness and syllables and rhyming before we can really match those letters and letter sounds.

It is clear from this quotation that curricular expectations guided much of the decision making in this classroom; after all, the phonemic awareness skills described as more appropriate for earlier in the school year are still expectations listed in the curriculum document. However, this strict curricular adherence was accompanied by a belief in the importance of allowing student ability to guide instruction.

In discussing her own growth and development as a kindergarten teacher, Linda described her emerging understanding of the role of the learner in her educational decision-making: “they can teach me a lot about what they’re ready for and not to push it too soon because it’s just not going to work...that’s different for every kid.” This description of individualized student needs demonstrates a subscription to developmentally appropriate practices where children’s experiences are considered influential in their learning. The inclusion of a developmental orientation was further reinforced by Linda’s consideration of the multiple domains of learning. While the cognitive domain is of primary importance in an academic learning environment, Linda recognized the importance of the emotional development of her students to support their learning: “You want them to love it so you have to be careful how much you push it to happen because you still want it to be an experience that they’re going to enjoy.”

Student comments further supported the love of learning that was emphasized in this classroom. As Chloe clearly stated:
My job in kindergarten is to learn stuff and learn stuff and learn stuff until I come into an adult because I like learning and I like playing and I like learning stuff and I like reading.

That’s my stuff to do. The end.

In this statement, Chloe clearly articulated the primary purpose of kindergarten as it was enacted in this classroom: to learn the necessary academic skills in a supportive environment designed to create a love of learning in students.

**Enactment of Learning: Teacher-Directed Learning Environment**

The City Park environment was purposefully designed to encourage student learning of academic skills and institutional norms in a supportive milieu. This environment was carefully created by Linda who determined the areas for learning and directed how this learning was to be demonstrated throughout the day. The five daily circle times were the instructional periods when the teacher “tells us what we’re learning about” (Brady). These lessons were followed once daily with a student activity that was completed at student desks. The observed follow-up activities were paper-based including journaling responses to assigned topics, phonic-based letter sound worksheets, and life cycle of a butterfly booklets where students copy sentences using proper printing. These tasks were designed to provide evidence that students could successfully demonstrate the acquisition of the focal skill. For instance, following a math lesson about showing numbers in various ways (i.e., word, numeral, and picture demonstrating quantity) the students were asked to return to their assigned seats to complete the following activity:

They would each have to show me. They get their own marker and their own piece of paper and they get to show me. But I would tell one kid 12 and the other child a three.

You need to show me 12. You need to show me three. Everyone at the table would have a
different number so they can’t copy off each other but they are all in the same whole group assessment activity. (Linda)

As evidenced in this quotation, this type of follow-up activity was designed to provide evidence of student learning of a pre-determined academic skill.

The described activity was not hands on, nor did it provide the opportunity for students to explore and construct their learning, leading many to label it a didactic instructional activity that failed to integrate consideration of children’s developmental needs. However, upon further analysis, Linda did describe the differentiated nature of the task which, while certainly in a limited manner, did consider the varying rates at which individual children develop and learn, one of the principles of developmentally appropriate practice. The importance of child development was further demonstrated through the inclusion of two child-directed play-based learning periods each day.

The inclusion of play-based learning opportunities in this classroom demonstrated an acknowledgment that play is an important vehicle for child development in all domains: physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. However, like most learning in this classroom, there was an undercurrent of academic skills development guiding these periods demonstrating an emphasis on the cognitive domain. Maintaining the academic focus of the classroom, play was described by Linda as:

something we’ve explicitly taught and then being able to apply it. Again, putting it into an experience that makes sense to them and so whether it be reading, writing, any sort of math that’s being taught and then having it in play-based scenarios where they’re actually showing what they know through something that they’re more familiar with.
This instructional approach maintains the teacher instruction – student follow-up activity structure described earlier where student activities were designed to encourage students to demonstrate the acquisition of academic skills. To ensure that the appropriate skills could be demonstrated, Linda selected the centres that students could visit during play-based periods and strategically placed learning materials there to encourage student exploration of targeted skills.

While the primary purpose of play in this classroom was the demonstration of academic skills, Linda did describe the limits to the learning that can occur within a play-based setting:

I don’t expect my phonemic awareness study that we do in our morning message and building words and playing with sounds and all that we do for five minutes every morning is going to happen at the centres. I really don’t think that all the time they’re going to be like “Oh phone /f/ /f/ oh it makes that sound.” No, it’s not. If people did that all the time they would be bored of it but there are those times when it is appropriate and it does come out.

While the demonstration of academic skills was Linda’s described purpose for the inclusion of play-based learning in the classroom, some of the resources that she selected promoted imaginative play rather than academic learning (e.g., castle and characters, plastic bugs and magnifying glasses). The inclusion of toys for strictly playful purposes demonstrated further acknowledgement of the developmental needs of some students:

It’s just developmentally sometimes where they’re at and I sometimes have to be okay with the fact that they’re going to play and it’s going to be about the social interaction that they’re having with the other people at that centre. (Linda)

While the demonstration of academic learning was a central goal of play within this classroom, it was accompanied by the potential for child development in other domains. The dual purposes of
play in the classroom, however, were not expressed by the students. These children described a disconnection between play and learning describing play as “doing fun stuff and playing with toys and building” (Chloe) while “learning is about when you read and you do some fun stuff and you count numbers” (Chloe). This mental separation of learning and play demonstrates that the students in this classroom have not grasped the related nature of these activities. Perhaps this is, in part, due to their lack of influence over the design of play-based centres that encouraged learning as compared to their control over the play that they engage in at centres with imaginative toys.

While the lack of student awareness of the learning occurring during play may lead one to assume that students’ metacognitive abilities were not fostered in this classroom, this would be a false assumption. While there was no observed explicit interaction concerning the learning that occurred at play-based centres, there was a great deal of discussion among students and the teacher about student learning and how that learning could be improved. In this classroom, learning goals were communicated openly and all parties used these to inform their learning:

I do love learning goals and success criteria because it keeps me on line. It keeps them on line. They know what they need to do. They see it and we come up with it together. They get it and then it’s like okay how are we going to get there? (Linda)

One strategy used to share writing success criteria with students was the use of a growing wall. On this wall there were four pictures of a flower at various stages of growth and under each picture was an example of writing. As the flower grew, the quantity and quality of the writing improved. The students demonstrated their understanding of these expectations by explaining the wall’s purpose:
This is our growing wall. You start as a seed, to a little popped up seed, to a little flower, and to a big flower...You do little drawings at first like scribble...Then a letter and a scribble is that one. Then the next is more letters. (Chloe)

The collaborative development of learning goals demonstrates the acknowledgement of learner competence that existed within this classroom. This competence was further evidenced during a guided assessment lesson. After numerous read-alouds of The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle (1969), the students were asked to sequence pictures from the story and orally retell it to the teacher. These individual retells were videotaped. On a subsequent day, the class watched these videos and engaged in discussions about their strengths and areas for improvement. While Linda guided this reflection, peers were also active participants in the evaluative feedback. Providing this type of feedback can often be challenging with younger learners whose assignments are often oral; however, the use of video contextualized the learning allowing for the productive whole class discussions that helped develop student awareness of their own abilities, provided peer models for academic success, and created a supportive environment where constructive feedback enabled growth. This feedback structure was a prime example of the academic focus of this classroom infused with developmentally appropriate practices that acknowledged individual development, promoted interaction among learners, and supported student metacognitive development.

City Park was overtly an academically driven learning environment where teacher-directed learning in subject-specific areas occurred during multiple periods throughout the day. These instructional periods were complemented by the completion of assigned student tasks whether as seat work or during play-based centre times. While this academic learning was central, several structures and activities that were part of this learning environment were...
developmentally appropriate. The students were provided with daily play-based learning periods and while not all of the activities were student-centered, opportunities for imaginative play and pure exploration were provided. These activities were included because of Linda’s acknowledged recognition that hands on learning through play is a developmental need of early learners providing them with opportunities to develop social competence, self-regulation, and cognition. Further consideration of child development was integrated through reflective discussions about learning goals and student work. These discussions, while centered on providing feedback concerning student work, provided the opportunity for Linda and the students themselves to discover strengths and areas for improvement allowing for future instruction to be situated at a level just beyond their current mastery thus acknowledging the individual rates of development while providing the opportunity for student growth.

**Summary**

Each of these classrooms presents a unique learning environment where both academic learning and developmentally appropriate practices were found. While the balances may have been differently negotiated, none of these classrooms dichotomously included a developmental or academic orientation. Instead, in this study, the exploration of the four commonplaces – teacher, subject matter, learner, and milieu – in each classroom learning environment allowed for the creation of a holistic picture of learning that acknowledged the complexities of these environments and demonstrated the role of each commonplace in the enactment of learning.
Chapter 5

Discussion

This study is situated in the evolving curricular landscape of kindergarten education where the infusion of increasingly academic expectations is causing much discussion in the literature (e.g., Russell, 2011; Zeng & Zeng, 2005). This discussion primarily addresses the differing requirements of developmentally appropriate practice and academically focussed programming. Many researchers have joined this discussion sharing results that dichotomize the developmental and academic logics. In these studies, the results reported primarily focus on the impact that teacher beliefs have on classroom practice (e.g., Goldstein, 2007b; Ray & Smith, 2010). That is, a teacher who subscribes to a developmental logic will use developmentally appropriate practices in his or her classroom. Conversely, a teacher who subscribes to an academic logic will use didactic instructional strategies to promote student learning of academic content and skills. Instead of supporting the debate that artificially dichotomizes the developmental and academic logics, the results in this study demonstrate that kindergarten programming can, in diverse ways, integrate a balance that meets multiple developmental and academic purposes.

Discussion of Classroom Narratives

Negotiating a balance between academic learning and developmentally appropriate practices. In 2010, the Ontario Ministry of Education began the implementation of the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program. This implementation was accompanied by what the Ministry described as a new kindergarten curriculum that provided “an engaging, play-based educational program” (OME website). While the new mandated kindergarten program document does describe the importance of play in the kindergarten classroom, the curriculum is not entirely
new. Instead, this program document maintains the academically oriented expectations of earlier kindergarten documents (e.g., OME, 2006) while mandating a play-based approach to student learning (OME, 2010). The current policy and curricular context has left teachers in the full day program to negotiate the balance between the learning of mandated academic expectations through play-based developmentally appropriate practices, a negotiation that the data demonstrates is simultaneously challenging and possible.

The data from each of the three focal classrooms demonstrate a commitment to the curricular document mandated by the Ministry of Education. Each teacher described her belief in the importance of a standardized curriculum that ensures that all kindergarten students are learning the academic skills necessary for later success. The students and teachers also described the infusion of child-directed, play-based learning into their classrooms. While the data from all three classrooms included evidence that both of these components were integrated in their respective learning environments, each differed in the enacted balance between the instruction of academic standards and the use of developmentally appropriate practices. Shady Lane largely prioritized social and emotional learning in relation to a developmental continuum prior to the teaching and learning of curricular expectations. In contrast, City Park primarily promoted student growth toward the academic curricular expectations with a secondary focus on developmentally appropriate learning. Babbling Brook endeavoured to merge both orientations simultaneously in an effort to integrate developmental understandings with curricular priorities. Regardless of the central focus of programming in each classroom, all were committed to the learning of academically-oriented curricular standards primarily through the use of developmentally appropriate practices. These goals aligned with the purposes of kindergarten shared by the teachers and children in the three focal classrooms.
**Purposes of kindergarten.** In the data from each of the three classrooms, two central purposes of kindergarten were communicated: the introduction to a formalized learning environment and the development of academic skills that are necessary for success in subsequent grades. The difference was in how these purposes were interpreted and enacted.

The development of the institutional knowledge that is necessary when students first enter a formalized school setting can be interpreted as a behavioural expectation; that is, how the student is required to behave when they are in this type of learning environment. In all of the three focal classrooms, learning how to function successfully in a classroom environment was of central importance; however, the specific behavioural expectations differed. In Shady Lane, these behavioural expectations centered on learning how to interact positively with peers and creating structures that would enable students to develop the skills necessary to monitor and improve their own peer relationships independently (e.g., the peace table). Institutionally appropriate behaviour was also enforced in Babbling Brook though the approach differed. In this classroom, the development of independence was also a central goal; however, this independence centered on the learning of institutional routines such as their morning routine which included putting away their own belongings, signing in on the attendance sheet, and preparing for circle. The ability to complete these tasks independently meant that students could function positively in their classroom environment. This focus on the development of routines was also emphasized in City Park, where stability was emphasized through consistent daily routines (e.g., each morning began with snack, a teacher directed circle time followed by play-based centres) in order to create the type of stable environment that many of these students did not experience in their homes. This approach provided a comfortable and reliable environment where academic learning could occur. Though the specified behavioural expectations differed in each of the
classrooms, in all three the development of institutional knowledge was foundational to students’ independent functioning within a classroom environment.

Similar to the development of institutional knowledge, the learning of academic skills was also emphasized in each of the three focal classrooms. And, once again, the interpretation and enactment of these academic expectations differed. In Shady Lane, the development of foundational skills that support the learning of specific academic expectations was of primary importance (e.g., proper pencil grip and mechanics of writing) accompanied by the learning of skills that if developed early will support later learning (e.g., phonemic awareness). Many of these foundational skills were mandated in the kindergarten program document; however, not all of the expectations in this document were addressed (e.g., writing). The learning of all curricular academic expectations was enforced in both Babbling Brook and City Park where the students were provided with the academic knowledge necessary to experience success in subsequent grades. This academic knowledge was informed by the kindergarten program document that places kindergarten on the continuum of elementary learning. That is, the expectations mandated in kindergarten are extended in Grade one (e.g., kindergarten – “begin to use reading strategies to make sense of unfamiliar texts in print [e.g., use pictures; use knowledge of oral language structures, of a few high-frequency words, and/or of sound-symbol relationships]” [OME, 2010, p. 87]; Grade one – “identify a few reading comprehension strategies and use them before, during, and after reading to understand texts, initially with support and direction [e.g., activate prior knowledge by brainstorming about the cover, title page, or topic; describe how they visualize a character or scene in a text; ask questions about information or ideas presented in a text: I wonder if...?, What if...? Why did...?: identify important ideas in a text]” [OME, 2006, p.39]). As a result, the teachers in Babbling Brook and City Park expressed the belief that it was
their responsibility to address all of the expectations mandated in the kindergarten program
document to promote student readiness for the subsequent grades.

Academically focused learning was integrated in each of these three classrooms to
differing degrees. While this academic learning is mandated in the Ontario kindergarten program
document, each teacher’s curricular stance, that is, her beliefs about the integration of mandated
curricular expectations in classroom learning (Stevenson, 2011), played a role in the enactment
of these expectations within each of the three focal classrooms.

Curricular stance. Each of the three teachers expressed a legal responsibility to the
Ontario Ministry of Education’s kindergarten program document. However, they did differ in
their expressed beliefs concerning the integration of academic expectations and what informed
this instructional decision-making. Karen, the teacher in Shady Lane, expressed her belief in the
essential role that a standardized curriculum plays in student learning, describing its role in
ensuring that teachers know what learning is necessary for kindergarten students. However, her
perspective was tempered by a belief in allowing children’s developmental readiness to guide the
introduction of academic skills, with some skills being omitted entirely (e.g., writing). This belief
in developmental readiness meant that Karen addressed the curricular expectations that she
considered appropriate for kindergarten-aged students. Like Karen, Samantha, the teacher in
Babbling Brook, communicated her flexible curricular stance by expressing her belief that she
could adapt curricular expectations to align them with the needs of her students. However, while
Karen omitted curricular expectations from her program based on her beliefs concerning child
development, Samantha allowed child readiness to guide how and when academic expectations
were enacted but she addressed all of the curricular expectations at some point in the school year.
Similarly, Linda, the City Park teacher, expressed her belief that all the curricular expectations
must be addressed during the kindergarten years. Her determination to ensure that all of these expectations were addressed thoroughly and in a logical sequence meant that prior to the beginning of the school year, Linda created a long range plan that covered the entire academic year. However, her rigid curricular stance was tempered by her belief in the importance of helping students develop a love of learning. To ensure that this love was ignited rather than extinguished, Linda expressed the need to ensure that learning occurred at a pace that was appropriate for younger students. That is, while the sequence of skills was predetermined in her long range plans, student learning determined the pace at which these skills were taught.

Each of these three teachers had a different curricular stance that informed, in part, her approach to curricular enactment. Thus the enactment of learning within each of the three focal classrooms differed.

**Enactment of learning.** In each of the three focal classrooms, learning of the academic expectations discussed above was often enacted through the use of teacher-directed instruction. In each classroom, circle times were used to introduce new skills and while student participation was often encouraged, the lessons were planned by the teachers who then directed the learning that occurred through direct questioning (e.g., “I estimate that I have two blocks. Is this a good estimate?”) and structured student tasks (e.g., estimate the number of blocks, count to confirm your estimate). Some of this teaching could be considered didactic in nature because all three teachers positioned themselves at the front of the group of students, explained, and demonstrated concepts with little, if any, student input (e.g., Shady Lane – teaching consonant-vowel-consonant [CVC] words by writing them on the board; Babbling Brook – teaching the names of coins by drawing each coin on chart paper and labeling them; City Park – teaching message writing through writing on chart paper). However, one cannot strictly assign these teachers to a
didactic instructional category because in each classroom interactive activities were also used to actively engage students (e.g., Shady Lane – student participation in the use of letter blocks to demonstrate the blending of sounds in CVC words; Babbling Brook – students learned to estimate through the guided use of personal sets of blocks; City Park – students demonstrated their understanding of number concepts by drawing and writing on their personal white boards). Additionally, these circle time instructional activities were complemented by the inclusion of child-directed play that represented the concurrent inclusion of developmentally appropriate practices. However, the purpose of this play differed from classroom to classroom.

In Babbling Brook, while direct instruction was the primary strategy for introducing new knowledge, play times were intended to provide students with the opportunity to practice these new skills and internalize the new concepts. Thus centres were designed that allowed for the exploration of academic concepts in a play-based context (e.g., the development of a class bank where students had the opportunity to interact with money following a series of lessons concerning the names and values of coins). The play that emerged within these centres was child-directed. The connection between teacher-directed and child-centered learning was clear in Babbling Brook. However, the approaches in Shady Lane and City Park differed.

In these two classrooms, teacher-directed learning activities, such as those described above, were primarily academic in nature and any follow-up activities were teacher-designed and teacher-directed (e.g., Shady Lane – following a lesson about number concepts, students drew the members of their family and then counted and recorded the number on a paper; City Park – following a lesson about the life cycle of a butterfly, students independently completed a booklet about the life cycle of a butterfly). In Shady Lane, this approach was contrasted by the play-based times that were entirely child-directed, with no teacher-imposed limits on the resources
that students could use and no teacher direction concerning how students interacted with these resources. The result was a play-based learning time when the children played with toys and developed social skills while academic learning occurred only incidentally. In City Park, play times were also child-directed as the children chose the centres where they played and directed the play that occurred, however; the centres that the children could choose from were limited by the teacher who determined which centres students could access and pre-selected the learning materials that would be at each centre.

There is both similarity and difference evident in the enactment of learning in each of the three focal classrooms. In all, academic expectations were addressed and developmentally appropriate, child-centered play times were included. The difference was in the connection between the academic and developmental approaches, or lack thereof, and the quantity of time dedicated to each. And so, despite the fact that all teachers were using the same curricular documents, meeting the same academic standards, and working within the same school district, the programming within the focal kindergarten classrooms differed widely. This finding suggests that these teachers maintained enough pedagogical autonomy to tailor curricular mandates to fit with their curricular stance and pedagogical approach. While each of these teachers needed to alter their kindergarten programming as a result of the new kindergarten curriculum document, they were nonetheless able to find a balance between provincial mandates, their own pedagogical stance, and the needs of their students, thus maintaining and engendering unique spaces of teaching and learning at the kindergarten level.

This pedagogical autonomy indicates that teachers can maintain the ability to determine the learning needs within individual classrooms. To support this autonomy, this study sought to inform teacher educational decision-making by providing examples of the negotiation process of
differing teachers and the enactment of these negotiations within individual classrooms. However, this study presents data from only three classrooms in a single school board and while differences emerged there is a commonality in the curriculum document that may limit the usefulness of these findings for teachers who face different curricular mandates. Further research illustrating differing methods for negotiating this balance within individual classrooms would productively support teachers’ educational decision-making while allowing for the maintenance of pedagogical autonomy.

The maintenance of pedagogical autonomy is indicative of the multiple approaches that are developed by teachers who are negotiating the balance between academic learning and developmentally appropriate practices. However, while many teachers are actively seeking the educational possibilities that exist in the integration of the academic and developmental logics, much of the extant research ignores these possibilities, choosing instead to focus on an artificial dichotomy.

**Acknowledging and Overcoming ‘Tunnel Vision’**

This study is intended to contribute to the research concerning the evolving curricular landscape of kindergarten education without joining the existing discourse of dichotomy. Research that dichotomizes teaching and learning by assigning them to a singular logic, whether academic or developmental, limits the ability of the research to illustrate the enacted realities of classroom life and learning, and the usefulness of the research for practice. Teaching and learning emerge from more than a foundational logic but rather from the interplay among all four commonplaces – subject matter, teacher, milieu, learner – each of which uniquely informs the learning that takes place within individual classrooms.
The data in this study demonstrate that a balance of both the academic and the developmental logics existed within each of the focal kindergarten classrooms. And while I describe the current balance, this balance was not stagnant in any of the classrooms. Each teacher described the challenges of negotiating this balance and the ever-evolving nature of this negotiation. Their shared acknowledgement of the need for continual renegotiation presents theoretical areas for consideration. Perhaps most importantly, this negotiated classroom balance demonstrates the need to end the battle between supporters of academic and developmental logics, acknowledge the strengths of each, and determine how best to combine the knowledge gained from each of these valuable bodies of literature.

There is substantial research to justify the inclusion of academics in a kindergarten curriculum to ensure that students learn essential academic skills during a critical window of opportunity (e.g., Dion, Brodeur, Gosselin, Campeau, & Fuchs, 2010). There is also convincing research describing the need for the inclusion of developmentally appropriate practices that support student development in multiple domains including social, emotional, physical, and cognitive (e.g., Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, & Milburn, 1995). Rather than perpetuating the battle between these two logics, research should acknowledge the strengths of each, determine areas of commonality and areas of discrepancy in these two bodies of research, and explore the negotiated balances that teachers are implementing in their classrooms.

While the academic and developmental logics are important to kindergarten education, and thus important to educational research about kindergarten, the extant research that dichotomizes these logics suffers from what Schwab (1971) refers to as ‘tunnel vision.’ Researcher tunnel vision concerning the primacy of either a developmental or academic logic within individual classrooms, or the belief that teacher practice is influenced solely by a singular
logic, inhibits the ability to conduct research that illustrates enacted classroom realities because no single theory informs all the teaching and learning within a complex classroom environment. That is not to say that subscribers to either logic are incorrect in their assertions, but rather to present the possibilities that emerge when the strengths of each are acknowledged. For instance, the inclusion of developmentally appropriate practices acknowledges the need to support child development in multiple domains (i.e., social, emotional, physical, and cognitive) in a manner that acknowledges the role of young children in the construction of knowledge based on interactions between prior knowledge and hands on learning (NAEYC, 2009). Additionally, the inclusion of academically oriented learning expectations ensures that students learn essential skills to succeed in later learning (e.g., phonemic awareness) while at a chronological age when cognitive plasticity allows for the absorption of this information (Rushton & Larkin, 2001; Steele, 2004). Both of these theoretical stances are clearly supported in prior research making the inclusion of both essential (e.g., Dion et al., 2010; Stipek et al., 1995). As Schwab asserts, when two theories are supported by evidence, as both the academic and developmental logics are, “[e]ach, then, deserves respect and mastery” (1971, p. 508). This type of acknowledgement can lead to an acceptance of plurality, rather than dichotomy, within a classroom environment. More specifically, an acceptance of plurality recognizes that both logics are “different facets differently viewed, each of which is some part of the whole” (Schwab, 1971, p. 512, italics in original).

Research into kindergarten education, though conceptually interesting, has little impact on kindergarten learning if it remains entirely in the theoretical realm ignoring the practical enactment of what is learned. Schwab’s quotation about the need to accept plurality, and his call for eclectic research, provide an important lens through which to look at educational research.
This lens reminds the researcher that the translation of educational research into practice requires an acknowledgement that the enactment of learning is different from classroom to classroom. Specifically, in a kindergarten classroom, there is no singular solution to the integration of academic learning and developmentally appropriate practices, as is evidenced by the results of this study. Rather, research that supports the development of productive educational practices paints a picture of the enacted learning within classrooms. It is in these classrooms where the balances negotiated between these logics evolve based on the interplay among the people who work to develop skills and learn academic content within an ever-changing milieu. Where this balance lies is specific to the classroom environment and the people interacting within it. The existence of differing negotiated balances is supported by the results of this study that demonstrate that kindergarten programming can, in diverse ways, integrate a balance that meets multiple developmental and academic purposes.

Unlike much of the extant research concerning the inclusion of academic learning and developmentally appropriate practices (e.g., Einarsdottir, 2006), the current study did not rely solely on teacher interviews and/or classroom observations. An overreliance on data describing the interaction between teacher and subject matter can limit our understanding of the curricular enactment in a kindergarten classroom by ignoring the role of the students and the milieu in which the learning occurs. The development of a conceptual and methodological framework that acknowledges and actively includes the four commonplaces (i.e., subject matter, teacher, milieu, and learner) allowed me to create a robust description of life and learning in three kindergarten classrooms and elucidated the inclusion of both logics unique to the people and the milieu in each classroom.
The Interplay of the Commonplaces in a Kindergarten Classroom

A classroom is an eclectic learning environment that emerges as the learners and teacher interact within a milieu where they engage in the learning of subject matter. Each of these four commonplaces (Schwab, 1973) plays an influential role within a classroom environment thus affecting the enactment of learning.

People enter a learning environment with personal histories as well as individual learning aptitudes and preferences. For instance, Linda’s stated curricular stance and enacted professional practice demonstrated a propensity toward an academically oriented kindergarten program. Her subscription to this logic is, in part, derivative of her prior experiences as an intermediate educator where she taught dictated curricular content matter on a rotary schedule that strictly divided the subject areas into administratively determined periods. This prior experience, combined with her stated belief in the need for strict adherence to curricular expectations, meant that Linda subscribed to and strove to enact a primarily academically oriented kindergarten program. However, Linda was but one of the people interacting within City Park. When Linda’s professional history and beliefs interacted with the learners in the classroom, the learning environment necessarily changed. For instance, the learners in this classroom lived in a community with low socio-economic status and predominantly unstable home lives: “You just realize that they’ve had so much crap, for a lack of a better word, so sometimes you just need to step back and just let them know how wonderful they are in those hours that you have them” (Linda). So, while she may have subscribed to a predominantly academic logic, the backgrounds of the students with whom she worked informed the needs of these learners. Because of their personal histories, these learners required more than a timetable that prescribed the learning of particular academic skills during particular times. Instead, they required a safe and stable
classroom environment where this learning could take place and their needs were accommodated:

It really tears my heart strings when I hear a kid go “I’m hungry” at 11:30 and I go “I can’t even let you eat yet. We really need to keep going.” I think, how can I change this where they could just sit down and have something to eat when they need it. (Linda)

Despite Linda’s expressed belief in the need to maintain a structured academic program, the needs of the learners in City Park led to a shift in the programming, making a strict adherence to the academic logic challenging and leading Linda to reconsider how student needs could be better supported by shifts in the daily structure. Proponents of developmentally appropriate practices consistently recommend this consideration of the physical needs of the students in the class (NAEYC, 2009).

The interplay among the backgrounds of the teacher and the learners in City Park demonstrates the influence that each can have on the emergence of a kindergarten learning environment. The conception of the learner commonplace represented in this example aligns with Schwab’s (1973) original description of the learner where he indicated that knowledge of the learner was essential to the development of classroom curriculum. However, more contemporary understandings of child competence support the inclusion of knowledge from the learner (Matthews, 2007). That is, including children’s perspectives in the research by speaking with them directly, rather than simply acknowledging their presence in the classroom environment and collecting necessary information from the adults who surround them.

Subscribing to the tenets of the new sociology of childhood means acknowledging the contributions of learners to the creation of a classroom environment by inviting them to share
their perspectives on their role in the enactment of learning, whether as passive recipient or active constructor of knowledge.

The instructional intentions of their individual programming decisions were clearly communicated by Karen, Samantha, and Linda. During teacher-directed learning activities these intentions could be more controlled by the teachers. However, during the child-directed learning activities that were integrated in all three of the focal classrooms, these intentions were more readily influenced by the learners. For instance, in Babbling Brook, Samantha’s stated instructional intention during play-based learning was to provide students with the opportunity to explore academic skills that were introduced during teacher-directed lessons in order to facilitate greater comprehension and internalization of concepts. Learner feedback did support this intention as the students described the relationship between some play-based activities and the focal learning in the classroom. However, the information shared by the students indicated that these activity times were not limited to this type of learning. They also described the responsibilities they learned to assume including both more traditional responsibilities such as cleaning up the classroom and interacting positively with their peers, and the perhaps unanticipated responsibility of supporting peer learning. These responsibilities were not described by the teacher when asked about instructional purpose and learning goals. Nevertheless, the learners were quite explicit when discussing the importance of developing the ability to work without teacher support “we have to sound it out by ourselves” (Natasha) and of the role they played in each other’s learning stating, for example, that they helped their peers “to spell things if they want to spell I love you or something” (Clarissa). These types of statements demonstrated the introduction of new information by the learners. Furthermore, these data illustrated the learners’ understanding of the need for self-regulatory behaviour in a classroom.
environment, the importance of which is described both in the Ontario kindergarten curriculum document (OME, 2010) and in the standards for developmentally appropriate practices (NAEYC, 2009) making the acquisition of self-regulatory skills essential to both the acquisition of academic skills and global student development. In addition, learner statements that described the importance of supportive peer interactions demonstrated the interplay between the learner and milieu commonplaces and the role that milieu plays in student learning.

When the students described their role in supporting the learning of their peers and shared the importance of interacting positively with other members of the classroom, they were sharing a valuable piece of data about the importance of emotional climate to a classroom learning environment, including their role in the creation of this climate. The learners in all three focal classrooms discussed the emotional climates of their classroom environments describing the structures that were put in place to support positive social problem solving in Shady Lane (e.g., peace table), the importance of supporting peer learning in Babbling Brook (e.g., helping spell words), and the opportunity to share positive experiences with their teacher and peers in City Park (e.g., leaving positive notes for each other). Regardless of the structure used to create a positive emotional climate, the learners in all three classrooms described both its importance and their role in its creation. Additionally, the learners described the importance of the teacher’s role in fostering a positive learning environment with the students in Shady Lane stating that Karen “take[s] care of the children” (Victor), the students in Babbling Brook sharing the love they felt from their teacher “our teacher loves us more than anything” (Clarissa), and the students in City Park describing the security that Linda provided by “keeping us safe and learning” (Chloe). Discussions with the learners thus provided evidence not only of the importance of emotional
climate, but also of the interplay among the learner, teacher, and milieu commonplaces in their classrooms.

Consideration of the four commonplaces in this study allowed me to create a more holistic picture of life and learning within each classroom. The inclusion of data collection strategies that provided information about and, when possible, from the commonplaces enriched my understanding of the interplay among the commonplaces and their importance to teaching and learning within a classroom environment.

The Inclusion of the Commonplaces in Classroom-Based Research

In this study, the exploration of kindergarten learning was improved by the use of a conceptual framework that embraced Schwab’s (1973) four commonplaces. Acknowledging the role that each commonplace has in the enactment of learning facilitated the creation of a more nuanced and holistic picture of life in each of the three focal kindergarten classrooms. However, the benefits of a conceptual lens that integrates the four commonplaces is not limited to a kindergarten classroom. Classroom-based research at any level can facilitate a greater understanding of the role of a teacher’s curricular stance in the enactment of curricular expectations, how the subject matter can both dictate learning and be moulded to the learning environment, the role that milieu plays in learner interactions with the environment and with the people within a classroom, and the role that learners have in the enactment of learning within a classroom environment.

While all of these commonplaces have been explored individually in the research (e.g., Olson & Craig, 2009), the use of all four commonplaces in a single study is rare. For instance, the extant literature has often addressed the interplay of the teacher and subject matter commonplaces, discussing the impact of curricular expectations on teachers’ instructional
approaches (e.g., Goldstein, 2007b) and, in turn, how teachers’ curricular stances impact the delivery of a curriculum including the decision to modify or maintain expectations (Stevenson, 2011). However, the milieu and learner commonplaces are less commonly addressed in the research and yet, as demonstrated by the results of this study, these two commonplaces play an important role in the enactment of learning within a classroom environment.

The milieu of each classroom, when explored through observational methods, did provide valuable information about the learning activities that were enacted within the classroom. For instance, the dominance of individual student work spaces as demonstrated by the table setup in City Park provided evidence of the individual seat work that students completed in that classroom environment, while the open and flexible physical spaces of Babbling Brook provided evidence that students were participating in diverse learning activities. However, the sole use of observational data limits the understanding of this commonplace – Babbling Brook did have flexible spaces where child-centered learning was possible and City Park did use the tables to encourage students to complete teacher-directed work. However, the students in Babbling Brook also spent time sitting at tables completing assigned work and the students in City Park, despite the limited available space, did participate in diverse hands-on learning activities. Thus, judgements based on physical space alone would not accurately capture the diversity of learning experiences that happened in each classroom.

Additionally, observational methods alone would not have demonstrated the significant role of the emotional climate to the enactment of student learning. To access this information required the inclusion of both the milieu and the learner commonplaces as well as an acknowledgment of their interplay. When these commonplaces were considered in concert, the students were able to share information about how their interactions with the space (e.g., flexible
learning spaces) allowed them to direct their own learning (e.g., child-centered learning times) and, in turn, provided the opportunity for students to demonstrate their responsibility for maintaining the physical environment and their accountability to each other’s learning.

Acknowledging and exploring the interplay among all four commonplaces can enrich classroom-based research by allowing the researcher to create a more nuanced and authentic picture of the enactment of learning within a classroom environment. However, one of the least addressed commonplaces in the literature, perhaps because of the challenges involved, is the integration of learners’ voices. Despite the challenges, the results of this study demonstrate that the voices of even the youngest learners can be included and, when included, can contribute novel and valuable data. It is important to consider the challenges presented by collecting data from young learners and the strategies that can be used to overcome these challenges.

**Collecting Data from Learners**

Through this study, I advocate the careful design of data collection and analytic processes that acknowledge children’s agency and competence. This means not only designing methods that are influenced by knowledge of child development but also allowing children to influence these data collection strategies if the planned design does not align with participant needs. For instance, prior to entering the first classroom, I planned to use classroom tours to assist all children with selecting the important places, activities, and people in their classrooms to photograph, an approach drawn from prior research (e.g., Pascal & Bertram, 2009). I believed that this technique could provide a positive introductory data collection strategy and facilitate the production of children’s photographic data. However, many of the children I interviewed made their selections before we could begin our tours, making this additional step unnecessary for most children. The following is a typical exchange with a participant:
Researchers: Should we go and have a walk around the classroom to look? I can bring the camera.

Brady: No maybe I’ll just try to figure out what I want.

Brady then walked into the classroom and directly to the number chart at the carpet that the students use daily to count the number of days they had been in school. This participant, and many others, clearly communicated that no further steps were needed to prepare him to take his photographs, and his readiness guided the interview process. This fluidity in the data collection procedures acknowledged the children’s agency by allowing them to determine when they were prepared to complete each step of the data and thus actively guide the process.

**The importance of contextualizing questions.** Knowledge of child development and prior research suggest that children sometimes struggle to understand adult questions when these are asked out of context. Prior research has demonstrated the usefulness of photographs to providing a conversational focus for students and of contextualizing the questions (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Stephenson, 2009). This process can help children overcome the challenges of understanding questions and of memory blocks (Hurworth, 2004). In this study, the photographs used to elicit responses were produced by the children themselves or were of activities in which they participated. These photographs were participant-centred and, thus, increased the comfort levels of the participants, most of whom eagerly shared their perspectives of the photographic content and more generalized information about their classrooms. Furthermore, the use of photographs to elicit responses from the students invited the emergence of unexpected topics, promoted more detailed responses, and elicited different responses than those shared by other participants or detected during classroom observations. However, not all children were capable
or comfortable sharing their perspectives orally. Thus it was important to provide opportunities for children with verbal challenges to actively share their perspectives.

**Communication challenges.** One of the most significant challenges when conducting research with young children is the barrier presented by communication. The use of photos in data collection can help children overcome these communication difficulties (Hurworth, 2004). Researchers must be able to both clearly communicate their purpose and questions to children and understand children’s responses. In this study, I preferred when children were able to participate in both the photographing and the verbal elicitation resulting from discussions about these photos. However, the method I describe allowed students who could not or did not wish to provide verbal responses to my questions to contribute meaningfully to the research. These children were further involved through the use of a photo sorting strategy which facilitated non-verbal participation in the process of analysing the photographic data.

In this study, Corey was an active participant despite the fact that he was non-verbal and was diagnosed with autism. While he declined to participate in taking photographs and his non-verbal status inhibited his ability to help annotate his book, he actively participated in the photo sorting activity. Despite the successful use of photo elicitation described in this study, Corey’s story highlights a limitation that is often imposed on the use of visual data in research. When the practical and methodological challenges of collecting and analysing photographic data have been overcome, the ethical challenges of the identification of individual children and locations through photos remain (Lodge, 2009). These ethical challenges are most salient during the dissemination of research projects that involve the use of photographs. When images are a central element of the data in a research project, as is the case with Corey who was unable to
share any verbal data, the sharing of these photographs in conference presentations and publications is desirable. However, this problematizes the need for participant anonymity.

I did not apply for ethics clearance to share the photographic data that resulted from this research and while I initially saw no limitations to this approach, I now feel that I may have silenced some of the participants, like Corey, with this decision. And, so, I feel it is important to address the benefits to the inclusion of photos in publications. The use of child-produced photos facilitates the participation of children who may not be capable of or comfortable sharing their perspectives verbally. When the images produced by these children are not shared, the ‘voices’ of these children are missing, thus leading to an incomplete picture. The inclusion of verbatim quotations is often touted as one of the primary methods for increasing the trustworthiness of many qualitative data collection methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups) (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). These photographs are, in one sense, the ‘quotations’ that these children have shared and should thus have a place within the dissemination of these studies. Future research should engage in continued discussions about how to overcome these ethical challenges.

The data yielded from this research clearly demonstrate that involving children in this age group in the collection and analyses and using these discussions to ask targeted questions about their learning goes beyond producing usable data – it unlocks key perspectives for truly understanding children’s educational experiences. And the inclusion of these perspectives provides data that would otherwise be missing from the research.

**Conclusion**

The primary aim of this study was to create a holistic picture of learning in contemporary kindergarten. Through the use of multiple data collection methods, I generated a robust description of the perceived purposes of kindergarten, the role of curricular stance, and the
enactment of learning in three full day kindergarten classrooms. I situate the need for this research in relation to the existing standards-based context of kindergarten education and the current challenge of balancing developmentally appropriate programming with academic mandates (Goldstein, 2007b; Gullo & Hughes, 2011). Given this context, the results of this study are significant to both practicing teachers and educational researchers.

**Significance for Teachers**

The descriptions of the three focal classrooms demonstrate that the balance between the developmental and academic logics is unique to the learning environment and the people interacting within. For educators, this uniqueness demonstrates the continued existence of pedagogical autonomy that challenges them to determine the balance that is most appropriate for the learners, the milieu, and themselves. The descriptions in this study illustrate three different approaches to this negotiation, each offering unique strengths, which present teachers with possibilities for their own professional practice. Continuing to describe the enactment of learning in exemplary kindergarten classrooms will provide teachers with diverse models from which they can develop their own pedagogical approach to the learning of academic expectations through the use of developmentally appropriate practices.

Specific to this research is the enactment of learning through play-based approaches. In the three focal classrooms, play has a different educational purpose. That is, in Shady Lane and City Park, play-based times are integrated into the class schedule to encourage students’ social and emotional development. While in Babbling Brook, play is more concretely connected to the learning of academic skills. It is not my intention to advocate for one purpose over another in this research, however; with this information, teachers can begin to reflect on the purposes of play in their classrooms and whether the integration of more academic or social skills into play-based
contexts could benefit the learning of their students. Furthermore, while play-based learning is a developmentally appropriate approach to learning for young children, it is not the only method for integrating developmentally appropriate practices (e.g., the use of letter blocks to model the building of consonant-vowel-consonant words in Shady Lane). Teachers should continue to consider not only the value of play as a developmentally appropriate practice, but also how they can integrate developmentally appropriate practices into instructional periods within their classrooms.

**Significance for Educational Researchers**

The debate in the extant literature concerning the integration of the academic and developmental logics creates an artificial dichotomy between the orientations. This dichotomy was created, in part, through the presence of tunnel vision in the current kindergarten research (Schwab, 1971). The existence of both of these logics within the focal classrooms and the existence of a curriculum that mandates their integration suggest that it is time for educational researchers to move beyond the debate and toward an acknowledgement of the strengths of academic and developmental bodies of research, seeking the integration of the learning from each. Future research must consider how essential academic skills (e.g., reading) can be developed during the developmental window of opportunity presented during the kindergarten years using empirically-validated instructional strategies that are, or are supported by, developmentally appropriate practices.

**Final Thoughts**

The integration of the academic and developmental logics has presented a challenge throughout this study. Both of these bodies of research present convincing evidence of their role in the learning of students. As a teacher, I am not inclined to take sides. Instead, I want to create
a learning environment where my students can develop the skills necessary to experience success in a positive learning environment. The creation of this type of environment is best accomplished in a classroom where academic skills are taught using developmentally appropriate practices. As a researcher, I am aware of the challenges presented by integrating diverse literatures where the information may, at times, seem contradictory. However, the data from the focal classrooms present evidence that the integration of the developmental and academic logics is possible in a classroom setting and thus educational researchers should endeavour to support, rather than debate, this integration.
References


Geist, E. & Baum, A. C. (2005). Yeah, but’s that keep teachers from embracing an active curriculum overcoming the resistance. *Young Children on the Web, 1–8.*


Linklater, H. (2006). Listening to learn: Children playing and talking about the reception year of
early years education in the UK. *Early Years*, 26(1), 63–78.


NAEYC. (2009). *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8* A position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.


Ontario Ministry of Education Website. Retrieved October 24, 2012 from

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/kindergarten/whatwillmychildlearnanddo.html


Ontario Ministry of Education. (2005). *Education for all. The report of the expert panel on literacy and numeracy instruction for students with special education needs, kindergarten to grade 6.* Toronto, ON: Queen’s Printer for Ontario.


Appendix A

October 27, 2011

Mrs. Angela Pyle
Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Education
Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen’s University
511 Union Street
Kingston, ON K7M 3R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-583-11; Romeo #: 6006368
Title: "GEDUC-583-11: An Ethnography of Contemporary Kindergarten"

Dear Mrs. Pyle:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-583-11: An Ethnography of Contemporary Kindergarten" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen’s ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article D.I.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (Article 6), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access the form at https://eservices.queens.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://eservices.queens.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Guil Irvig, at the Office of Research Services or irviggg@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

John Stevenson, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kapier, Faculty Supervisor
    Dr. Lesly Wade-Woolley, Chair, Unit REB
    Erin Wickham, c/o Graduate Studies and Bureau of Research
Appendix B

Letter of Information for Teachers
“An Ethnography of Contemporary Kindergarten”

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project conducted by Angela Pyle, a former kindergarten teacher and current PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University, entitled “An Ethnography of Contemporary Kindergarten.” This study was granted ethical clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the TCPS: Ethical Conduct of Research involving Humans, and Queen’s policies.

**What is this study about?** The purpose of this research is to explore how new curricular mandates and existing knowledge about child development are influencing the current state of kindergarten in Ontario. I am inviting you and the children in your class to participate in this research project over the course of approximately one month.

**Classroom Observations.** Over a one month period I will observe your classroom for approximately ten days. These will be full day observations and because I am looking to explore the typical instructional strategies and learning opportunities this should not substantially interfere with your typical daily plans. I will ask your permission to videotape, audio record, and take digital photos of your classroom environment, the activities that children participate in, and the instructional materials that are used.

**Interview.** In connection with these observations, I will ask you to participate in one interview that will be approximately one hour in length. This will take place at the end of the second week of observations. During this interview, I will ask about your beliefs about children’s learning, your professional decision-making, and the challenges you face as a kindergarten teacher. I will ask your permission to audio record this interview.

**Interviewing Students.** At the beginning of this one month period, I will ask that you send a letter of information and consent form home with each child to inform parents and/or guardians of my presence in the classroom and request permission to speak with their child. I will not collect any data from a child if a parent and/or guardian does not consent. Students will also be asked if they would like to speak with me and participate in data collection activities. If they decline, they will be excused from participation. For those students for whom consent is received, students will be invited to give me a guide tour of the classroom in small groups, take photographs of important classroom places and activities, and work with the researcher in a small group to annotate these photographs.

**Is my participation voluntary?** Your participation and the participation of your students are entirely voluntary. You should not feel obliged to discuss anything you find objectionable or that makes you feel uncomfortable. You may withdraw from this study at any time without reason at any point, and you may request the removal of your data. If you withdraw and request the removal of your data, all data related to you will be destroyed immediately. You can withdraw by contacting the researcher (Angela Pyle angela.pyle@queensu.ca).
**Will my responses be kept private?** This research may result in publications and academic conference presentations. Your name, school’s name, and the names of your students will not be attached to any form of the data that you provide. A pseudonym will replace your name on all data that you provide to protect your identity. The members of my supervisory committee will have access to the data after the pseudonyms have been inserted.

Any audio recordings made will be transcribed and then the tape will be destroyed. Your confidentiality and that of your students cannot be entirely ensured because of the use of video and photography. However, this visual data will be used only for data analysis purposes and will not be displayed in publications or presentations.

All data including transcripts, photos, and videos will be kept on a password protected laptop and the associated paperwork will be kept in a locked cabinet. In accordance with Queen’s policy, data will be retained for a minimum of five years and then destroyed.

**Are there any potential harms or benefits?** There are no known risks or direct benefits to your participation in this project. However, the research and educational communities will benefit from the information gathered which will enrich the current understanding of the educational decision-making of kindergarten teachers and explore early years students’ perspectives of their educational experiences.

**Questions?** Any questions about study participation may be directed to Angela Pyle at angela.pyle@queensu.ca or my supervisor Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kapler at rebecca.luce-kapler@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ex# 77273. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

Thank you for your time.

Angela Pyle
PhD Candidate
Queen’s University
Faculty of Education
Consent Form for Teachers
“An Ethnography of Contemporary Kindergarten”

I have read and understood the letter of information for this research project. I have been given sufficient opportunity to consider the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction. If at any time I have further questions or concerns, I can contact Angela Pyle (angela.pyle@queensu.ca), Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kapler (rebecca.luce-kapler@queensu.ca), or the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

By signing this consent form, I am indicating that I agree to participate in the research study as described in the letter of information including classroom observations, one interview and the collection of data from students. This research will take place over a one month period.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty and request the removal of my data. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data now and in the future.

I grant permission for the researcher to collect information about my classroom only under the following conditions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIO RECORDINGS</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>INITIALS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I grant permission for audiotaped recordings of me during interviews to be used during data analysis.</td>
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<th>VIDEO RECORDINGS</th>
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<th>PHOTOGRAPHS</th>
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<tr>
<td>I grant permission for digital photos of me to be used during data analysis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I grant permission for digital photos of my classroom to be used during data analysis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I grant permission for digital photos of learning materials to be used during data analysis.</td>
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___________________________________________________________
Name of Participant

___________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant

___________________________________________________________
Date

Please sign one copy of this consent form and return it to Angela Pyle. Retain the second copy for your records.
I would like to invite your child to participate in a research project conducted by Angela Pyle, a former kindergarten teacher and current PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University. This study was granted ethical clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the TCPS: Ethical Conduct of Research involving Humans, and Queen’s policies.

**What is this study about?** The purpose of this research is to explore how new curricular mandates and existing knowledge about child development are influencing the current state of kindergarten in Ontario. Your child’s teacher has consented to having me in the classroom over the course of approximately one month.

**Classroom Observations.** During this month I will observe your child’s classroom for approximately ten days. These will be full day observations and because I am looking to explore the typical instructional strategies and learning opportunities this should not substantially interfere with the typical daily learning of your child. With your consent, some of these observations will be videotaped and/or photographed.

**Interview.** I am requesting your permission to speak with your child about his or her perspectives of his or her classroom experiences. Specifically, I will ask your child to take me on a tour of the classroom and describe the activities that take place in each location. This tour will happen in small groups of two to three children. I will also ask your child to produce photographs of the classroom and learning activities that they will share with me. This sharing will once again take place in small groups. To complete these activities I will speak with your child in a small group on three separate occasions each lasting approximately 20 minutes for a total of 60 minutes over a one month period. With your consent, these conversations will be audio recorded.

**Is my child's participation voluntary?** Your child’s participation is entirely voluntary. A refusal to participate will not impact your child’s schooling in any way. You may withdraw your child from this study at any time without reason at any point, and you may request the removal of your child’s data. If you withdraw and request the removal of your child’s data, all data related to your child will be destroyed immediately. You can withdraw by contacting the researcher (Angela Pyle angela.pyle@queensu.ca).

After receiving your consent, I will consult with your child about his or her willingness to participate in the research. He or she will be informed of the research activities through the use of a picture book describing expectations for participation. Your child can choose to stop participating at any time and a decision not to participate in one activity will not preclude them from participating in others.

**Will my child’s responses be kept private?** This research may result in publications and academic conference presentations. Your child’s name and the school’s name will not be attached to any form of the data that your child provides. A pseudonym will replace your child’s
name on all data to protect his or her identity. The members of my supervisory committee will have access to the data after the pseudonyms have been inserted.

Any audio recordings made will be transcribed and then the recording will be destroyed. Your child’s confidentiality cannot be entirely ensured because of the use of video and photography. However, this visual data will be used only for data analysis purposes and will not be displayed in publications or presentations.

All data including transcripts, photos, and videos will be kept on a password protected laptop and the associated paperwork will be kept in a locked cabinet. In accordance with Queen’s policy, data will be retained for a minimum of five years and then destroyed.

**Are there any potential harms or benefits?** There are no known risks or direct benefits to your child’s participation in this project. However, the research and educational communities will benefit from the information gathered which will enrich the current understanding of the educational decision-making of kindergarten teachers and explore early years students’ perspectives of their educational experiences.

**Questions?** Any questions about study participation may be directed to Angela Pyle at angela.pyle@queensu.ca or my supervisor Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kapler at rebecca.luce-kapler@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ex# 77273. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

Thank you for your time.

Angela Pyle  
PhD Candidate  
Queen’s University  
Faculty of Education
Consent Form for Parents
“An Ethnography of Contemporary Kindergarten”

I have read and understood the letter of information for this research project. I have been given sufficient opportunity to consider the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction. If at any time I have further questions or concerns, I can contact Angela Pyle (angela.pyle@queensu.ca), Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kapler (rebecca.luce-kapler@queensu.ca), or the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

By signing this consent form, I am indicating that I give consent for my child to participate in the research study as described in the letter of information including three small group interviews and the production of photographs. These activities will take a total of approximately 60 minutes.

I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my child at any time without penalty and request the removal my child’s data. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the data now and in the future.

I grant permission for the researcher to collect information about my child only under the following conditions:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I grant permission for digital photos of my child to be used during data analysis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I grant permission for digital photos taken by my child to be used during data analysis.</td>
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____________________________________________________  ______________________________
Name of Child                                      Name of Parent

____________________________________________________
Signature of Parent

____________________________________________________
Date

Please sign one copy of this consent form and return it to teacher’s name. Retain the second copy for your records.
Appendix C
Child Assent Book

I will be here watching what you and your teacher do, writing all about it, and taking some pictures.
First I will ask you to show me the important places and things in your classroom.

You can take some pictures of the most important places and things.
On another day I will bring your pictures and some of my own so you can tell me why they're important.

Together we'll make a book about kindergarten.
Appendix D

Teacher Interview Questions

Biographical information
- Educational background
- Years of teaching experience
- Years teaching kindergarten
- Prior teaching experiences

In your opinion, how do young children learn best?
- What do kindergarteners need?
- What do you see as the purpose of kindergarten?
- What is the role of play in children’s learning?
- How do you define play-based learning?

How do you decide what to teach and how to teach it?
- What factors influence your decisions?

How much freedom/flexibility do you have when making teaching decisions?

What is the role of the classroom environment in student learning?
- How do you make decisions about the design of the physical space?
- Tell me about the emotional climate in your classroom? How do you develop this climate?

How do you assess student learning in your classroom?
- What factors influence these practices?
- How does this information inform your teaching?
- Has the new program document prompted any changes to these practices?

I’ve noticed that you often work with small groups or individual students. What is your primary purpose during these times?
- What do you typically work on?
- Is this time primarily instructive or assessment oriented?

How do you think your teaching has changed over the years?
- Has the new/standardized curriculum prompted any changes?

What changes would you make to your current circumstances to improve kindergarten for you and/or your students?

What are the biggest challenges you face as a kindergarten teacher?
Appendix E

Student Interview Questions

What is teacher’s name job?

What is your job?

What do you do in kindergarten?

What are you supposed to learn in kindergarten?

What do you play in kindergarten?
  • Do you learn anything when you’re playing?
  • Are playing and learning the same or different?
## Appendix F

### Summary of Annotated Student Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shady Lane</th>
<th>Description of Picture</th>
<th>Annotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Teacher writing on chart paper in front of class.</td>
<td>Karen is writing with a pencil and the kids are at the carpet watching her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chart stand with lined paper.</td>
<td>We can draw on the chart and Karen teaches us stuff. She keeps her stuff under her chart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group of students completing a craft at a table.</td>
<td>The kids are making hearts so we can put Valentines inside our heart bag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two students completing worksheets.</td>
<td>They are drawing a house with family in it because we are learning about families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two students completing worksheets with dice on the table in front of them.</td>
<td>We are doing centres. Lara and Ramona are playing with the dice to learn about numbers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A table topped by a yellow brick patterned tablecloth.</td>
<td>If we have a problem at recess or activity time we go to the peace table. We figure out our problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student building with blocks.</td>
<td>Lara is building a castle with blocks. The kids in our class love hard blocks and squishy blocks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A shelf with a toy castle and barn.</td>
<td>We play with this castle to find a handsome prince and princess. We play during activity time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karen with two students holding a stack of letter cards.</td>
<td>Tamara is singing Corey a song. Karen is singing with Tamara.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student created paintings on a wall in the hall outside the classroom.</td>
<td>Our family paintings are in the hallway. We look at them when we’re getting ready for outside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A student standing at a table where large Ziploc bags labeled with student names are spread out.</td>
<td>These are our mailbags and we go home with them. When there is stuff in it from home we bring it to school but not our toys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Karen with two students holding a stack of letter cards.</td>
<td>Karen is teaching Corey all the sounds the letters make.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karen reading a book as the class sits on the carpet.</td>
<td>They are sitting at the carpet listening to a story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group of students completing a craft at a table.</td>
<td>We are making Valentines for our grade 7 buddies because we love them and the lunch helpers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two students playing with a pile of letter cards.</td>
<td>They are using the letters to make words. Sticky letters like A, called vowels, put them all together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two students completing worksheets with dice on the table in front of them.</td>
<td>Lara and Ramona roll the dice to see what number they get then they check the box.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Close up of a yellow brick patterned tablecloth.</td>
<td>We go to the peace table to fix our problems. Then you reach into the envelope to get a certificate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student building with blocks.</td>
<td>Lara is building a tower. Blocks are for playing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A box of large building blocks.</td>
<td>You need to stack these blocks lower so a person doesn’t get hurt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dollhouse.</td>
<td>We pick dolls we want to be and then we play with them. We don’t kick the dollhouse because it might break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three dolls in a bin.</td>
<td>We take care of the babies because they don’t want to be alone in the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three students playing with marble works.</td>
<td>They are building with the marble works so the marble can go all the way through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three students playing at the water table.</td>
<td>We are playing in the water and learning how to play nicely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Student building with blocks.</td>
<td>She is building with blocks because it’s fun. She is making a castle or maybe a tent or maybe a big dinosaur or maybe a school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three students playing with marble works.</td>
<td>They are playing with marbles and we love playing with marbles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train tracks on a table.</td>
<td>It’s to play with the cars and the cars drive around and the trains go around.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books on a bookshelf.</td>
<td>We read the books.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two computers on a table.</td>
<td>We play the games and touch the mouse.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A table topped by a yellow brick patterned tablecloth.</td>
<td>When you get in trouble you go to the peace table and say sorry.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four students working with Karen at a table.</td>
<td>We are selling apples.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chart stand with lined paper.</td>
<td>You need to learn letters and the movie tells us the H says /h/.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen.</td>
<td>Karen is our teacher. We go to the carpet and listen. She teaches us letters like the S says /s/.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen’s desk.</td>
<td>This is Karen’s desk. It’s important because she works at it and then she comes to the carpet with us.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The gym.</td>
<td>We do somersaults and roll over in the gym.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Student standing with Karen at the front of the class.</td>
<td>This is Andrew sharing. It is nice to share toys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karen and the students are sitting in a circle on the carpet while Karen models using letter cards to spell consonant-vowel-consonant words.</td>
<td>All the letters make sounds and the class is putting the letters together to make words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karen writing on chart paper while the students sit on the carpet watching.</td>
<td>Karen is showing the kids the letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karen reading a book as the class sits on the carpet.</td>
<td>Karen is reading a book for all the kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chart stand with lined paper.</td>
<td>You have to be quiet when the teacher is talking about saying the words like T-A-D spells tad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karen with two students holding a stack of letter cards.</td>
<td>Karen and Tamara are singing the letter sounds to Corey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two students completing worksheets with dice on the table in front of them.</td>
<td>They are doing centres. They are writing the numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. There are lots of dice for the children to use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bins of books are on a bookshelf.</td>
<td>The books are for book and blanket time when the kids have a rest so they don’t have a bad day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Train tracks on a table.</td>
<td>The kids use trucks and cars at the table but you can’t smash it because it would hurt them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A box of large building blocks.</td>
<td>The kids build things like castles and buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A table topped by a yellow brick patterned tablecloth.</td>
<td>The peace table is there so the children can fix their problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two computers on a table.</td>
<td>Computers are special but sometimes people run up and turn it off so you tell the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karen.</td>
<td>Karen takes care of the children so they don’t get hurt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Ey</td>
<td>The class is sitting in a circle singing letter songs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The students sit on the carpet while Karen shows them letter cards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karen with Corey showing him letter cards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karen with two students holding a stack of letter cards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corey writing on a whiteboard with the Educational Assistant.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babbling Brook</td>
<td>Description of Picture</td>
<td>Annotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Samantha doing guided reading with four students.</td>
<td>We are reading books. The pictures help us know if we are right or not right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A student playing with a number puzzle.</td>
<td>Jordan is putting the numbers in the right order. The 0 is at the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early childhood educator working with three students at a table.</td>
<td>We are drawing. ECE is helping us because she is our teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five students playing in the workshop.</td>
<td>We are playing in the workshop. We are learning how to build toys and houses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three students playing with a cash register.</td>
<td>We are playing with the cash register to learn about money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha watches while two students write on chart paper.</td>
<td>Samantha is teaching the kids to write about the earth and then they read it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chart created by Samantha that has two columns; one for living things and one for non-living things.</td>
<td>We are learning about living and non-living things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A bulletin board with students names written on stars.</td>
<td>This is the star of the day. When it’s your turn you get to feed the fish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A student playing with the calendar.</td>
<td>When we do calendar we learn about counting numbers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three students playing with blocks.</td>
<td>They are building a huge castle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A student is sweeping the floor.</td>
<td>Stella is cleaning the floor all by herself so it will be safe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A hand holding a pencil over a paper covered in students’ names.</td>
<td>We are signing in so that teacher knows we’re here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Samantha doing guided reading with four students.</td>
<td>Samantha helps us learn to read the letters in the books. In our class we love to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha stands in front of the class pointing to a chart.</td>
<td>Samantha is teaching us about numbers and money. Our whole class is learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student playing with a number puzzle.</td>
<td>Jordan is doing his numbers. He likes to play with number puzzles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood educator working with three students at a table.</td>
<td>ECE is writing with the juniors. The seniors also help the juniors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chart created by Samantha that has two columns; one for living things and one for non-living things.</td>
<td>We are learning about living and non-living things because it’s important to take care of animals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bulletin board with pictures of students playing.</td>
<td>The kids in these pictures are playing and learning. You play outside but you can do both inside.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three students playing with blocks.</td>
<td>They are building a tower because they are playing castle. They are also learning to be nice to each other.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Samantha doing guided reading with four students.</td>
<td>We are learning to read because if we don’t know how to read we can’t spell and if we can’t spell we can’t write our sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha stands in front of the class pointing to a chart.</td>
<td>Samantha is teaching us about money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Five students playing in the workshop.</td>
<td>When we play we get to learn about stuff. These kids are playing in the workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three students playing with a cash register.</td>
<td>We are playing with money because we are learning about money. Money is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A student is writing on construction paper.</td>
<td>She is writing. It helps her with her reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A table and two chairs.</td>
<td>At the tables we eat, we draw, we colour, and we read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two students smiling at the camera.</td>
<td>We love our friends so we ask them “Will you please play with me?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A bulletin board with pictures of students playing.</td>
<td>Our teachers put pictures of us on the wall so everyone will know what we look like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A bulletin board with students names written on stars.</td>
<td>This shows the star of the day. The star of the day has important jobs like feeding the fish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three students playing with blocks.</td>
<td>We are making a big castle out of blocks. We are playing and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A bookshelf with books.</td>
<td>Some books are fiction. They are not real. Some books are non-fiction. They are about animals and flowers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A hand holding a pencil over a paper covered in students’ names.</td>
<td>We write our names so Samantha knows we are at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A fish in a fishbowl.</td>
<td>Our fish is named Rainbow. We</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Samantha doing guided reading with four students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha is teaching the kids to read. They are looking at the pictures and reading the books. The kids are doing a good job.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha stands in front of the class pointing to a chart.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha is helping us get ready for SK and grade one by teaching us about money.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chart created by Samantha that has two columns; one for living things and one for non-living things and a fish in a fishbowl.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samantha taught us about living and non-living things. Our fish is Rainbow and we take care of him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early childhood educator working with three students at a table.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECE teaches the kids about numbers and helps us with what Samantha is teaching us. ECE is important and special.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A student is writing on construction paper.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Debbie is drawing and writing words. You need to know how to write in grade one.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A hand holding a pencil over a paper covered in students’ names.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Someone is signing their name so the teacher knows they are at school. That is our job.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Six students pose for the camera.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no kindergarten without kids. The kids in our class are our friends.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A bulletin board with students names written on stars.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The chart tells you when you are going to be the star. When you are the star you get a turn to do the calendar by yourself. Everyone gets a turn to be the star.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A bulletin board with pictures of students playing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>These are pictures of kids learning while they are playing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three students playing with blocks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caroline, Debbie, and Alexandra are building a castle. They are having fun.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Park</td>
<td>Description of Picture</td>
<td>Annotation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The calendar.</td>
<td>This is the calendar. We learn about numbers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student putting blocks into a hula hoop.</td>
<td>He is using building blocks to make it higher.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two charts with sight words.</td>
<td>These are our sight words. We try to figure them out.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student completing a printing worksheet.</td>
<td>David is writing his sounds /ie/ /iel/.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A page in a student’s writing journal.</td>
<td>We write and colour in our journals. This is about the hungry caterpillar eating until he gets really fat and turns into a butterfly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A student retelling a story while Linda videotapes her.</td>
<td>Chloe is telling Linda the story so she can write it in her book. Then we take it home and show our moms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

Analytic Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Matter (learning expectations)</th>
<th>Learner (competence, relationships)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher (beliefs &amp; curricular stance)</td>
<td>Milieu (institutional knowledge, instructional &amp; emotional climate, physical space)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Interesting Information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>