Teachers’ Experiences with Full Day Kindergarten

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A note to my wonderful cohort, PJ 141: If you've ever seen the show Boy Meets World, the show ends with an extraordinary teacher, Mr. George Feeny, and his students saying goodbye. As his students walk out of the classroom, Mr. Feeny whispers, “I love you all.” The final scene ends with Mr. Feeny walking out of his classroom, saying “Class dismissed.”

This research paper marks the end of a wonderful two year journey that I have experienced with all of you. You have taught me so much, you are my Mr. Feeny. Thank you for making me feel so supported and I hope I can strive to be the brilliant teachers I know you will be. Class Dismissed.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research Problem

In September 2014, Ontario implemented the final stages of its full day kindergarten program. All four and five year olds now have access to a full day of learning. Kindergarten is an important step in a child's education. The acknowledgement of this fact is evident in The Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program, 2010-2011. It states, “The purpose of the program is to establish a strong foundation for learning in the early years.” (p. 1) In a report conducted by the EFTO, benefits of early childhood education programs include “better scholastic placement and improved scholastic achievement during the elementary years” and “gaining specific reading and mathematical knowledge.” The report continues, “By the end of their kindergarten year, nearly all children recognize their letters, their numbers and their shapes. The percent of children who can recognize words by sight and demonstrate an understanding of words in context...increased across the kindergarten year.” (p 9)

In this research, I use language as a measure of how much students are developing in FDK in comparison to half day kindergarten. This is because not only are students challenged academically, children are increasingly called upon to interact with their peers. This creates the need for spontaneous speech that involves jokes, riddles, and play with language. Schemas and knowledge are heavily challenged. The focus on language development in the classroom is an important one because it is where children spend a lot of their time. Another reason why the
focus on the classroom is important is because the classroom is the first real space in a child’s life, where a child experiences a social life. Preschool is also a very social environment but researchers have argued that in preschool, children lack the cognitive development that requires further exploration of language. In this paper, I will be exploring the experiences teachers are having with FDK and the opinions they are forming based on these experiences.

Children spend vast amounts of time in the classroom putting their mechanisms of learning into action. Linguists have identified that children in their early school years develop their language skills at a rapid rate. Linguists have already determined the standards for language development. With the help of modern technology and medicine, interdisciplinary subjects such as biolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and neurolinguistics, we now know, more than ever, about the processes in the human brain, mental functions, human behavior, and the output of language.

With the implementation of full day kindergarten in Ontario, an opportunity to explore or to check in on how this implementation is affecting Ontario’s teachers and students arises. Will the implementation of full day kindergarten in Ontario help our students acquire language so that they can solidify the foundations for language development throughout elementary school and beyond? Or are there other challenges that have emerged with the implementation of FDK?
**Central Research Question**

What are teachers experiencing with the implementation of full day kindergarten and how are their experiences shaping their opinions on the implementation of the program?

**Background to the Researcher**

I was initially drawn to the study of language in early education because as a bilingual person, I have been asked several times what language I think in. I have thought about the answer to this question several times and the only answer that I could come up with is both. This has proven to be an unsatisfactory answer to some. It is through the process of attempting to explain my own languages processes that I became interested in linguistics. As I read more about the developments in linguistics, I learned that much research was done in regards to children. I thought nothing of this until I decided to become a teacher. I taught in South Korea for a year and I believe my background in linguistics helped me as a teacher greatly. My interest in linguistics helped me better understand what kinds of linguistic developments and barriers these children faced. It allowed me to accommodate my lessons and empathize with these children who were learning a language that was not their first.

I was fortunate enough that I was able to communicate with my students in both Korean and in English. Some students expressed their frustration with the fact that their education system forced the learning of the English language on them but they were not able to reach the expected goals. It was important to me to express to my students that there are a variety of factors at play in the development of
language. Linguistics has helped me not only in understanding my own language capabilities and barriers but also those of my students.

**Overview of the Study**

To respond to the research problem and subsequent research questions posed, this study will be a qualitative one using purposeful sampling to interview two teachers regarding their views on full day kindergarten.

In chapter 2, I review the literature regarding the research and reasoning behind FDK but additionally, in the areas of child language study and the developments in the subject. In chapter 3, I will discuss the methodology of this paper. In chapter 4, I will report my research findings. Finally, in chapter 5, I will discuss these findings and their significance, implications, and recommendations.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Full Day Kindergarten Program

Currently, Ontario is implementing FDK on a draft version, since September 2010. Although a final version was scheduled to be released in 2011 (*Early Learning Full Day Kindergarten, 2010-11, p.1*), no such document is available.

During the 2007 provincial election, the Ontario government committed to significantly reduce poverty and its effects. One way to accomplish this was to implement full day junior and senior kindergarten, which was to “benefit all children, but particularly children from disadvantaged families.” (McCaffrey, 2008) European countries have seen great success in offering universal early learning (OECD, 2006). In the United States, “the expansion of full-day programs is based on research that demonstrates the academic improvement these students achieve in terms of literacy and math skills, especially the former.” (McCaffrey, 2008) The benefits of such programs have been well researched and documented and support the vision, purpose, principles and goals of the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program enacted in Ontario (*Early Learning Full Day Kindergarten, 2010-11, p. 1-2*).

However, there is also evidence backing the opposite side of FDK. Philip DeCicca (2007) argues that “full day kindergarten has sizeable impacts on academic achievement, but the estimated gains are short-lived, particularly for minority children.” (p. 67) DeCicca continues regarding the success of FDK in disadvantaged families, “If you’re going to use your resources wisely and you care about the kids who are not doing well, then you’d probably be better off doing something more

Both sides have legitimate arguments and are supported by research and longitudinal studies. Whether one side is more advantageous than the other is an element that will be explored in this paper.

**Language Acquisition**

I provide here a literature review on language acquisition and development because it is the linguistic field that led me to my assumptions for this research; although findings did not necessarily reflect those assumptions. The literature on language acquisition and language development in children is vast and varied. To go through the literature that already exists, it is important to note these theories are divided into two parts. The first part involves language acquisition and the second part, language development. Language acquisition involves the mechanisms, which exist, whether internal or external, that supports the child’s ability to acquire language in the first place. Language development deals with the processes that occur in a child regarding language after the ability to use language is acquired but not mastered.

The study of children and their relationship with language is an old one. Herodotus, wrote of a case study regarding language acquisition in Book 2 of his *History*. He writes about the ancient Egyptian king, Psammetichus, who wanted to show that the Egyptians were the original human race. Psammetichus ordered a shepherd to raise two children. The shepherd was to care for the children but not
speak to them. Psammetichus believed that the children would develop the language of the oldest human race all on their own. Herodotus writes,

    he [Psammetichus] wished to find out what word the children would first utter, once they had grown out of their meaningless baby-talk. The plan succeeded; two years later...both children pronounced 'becos'...[It was] revealed that [the word] was Phrygian for 'bread' and in consideration of this the Egyptians yielded their claims and admitted the superior antiquity of the Phrygians. (Herodotus, History, Book 2)

Although our methods are different, we are still fascinated by the process of language acquisition. The twentieth and the twenty-first centuries have provided new models and revolutions in child language studies.

Theories on language acquisition are mainly divided into two parts. It is a nature vs. nurture debate. Noam Chomsky argues for nature. A champion for linguistic nativism, Chomsky argues that human brains have a language acquisition device (LAD) that allows children to acquire language. According to this view, all children are born with a universal grammar. This allows children to be receptive to the common features of all human language. An example of a common feature in all language would be a noun. Although it may be called something else in another language, nouns exist in all languages. It is important to note that it is children who are the focus of Chomsky’s theory (Chomsky, 1959).

On the other side of the spectrum, B.F. Skinner (1957) argues for nurture. He argues that language is acquired by conditioning, which includes imitating and associating with others and reinforcing behavior. Children learn words by associating sounds with objects, actions, and events. They also learn words by imitating others. Adults play a key role in this view because adults enable children
to learn words and syntax by reinforcement. Skinner’s view has been the target of more criticism. His view is criticized because:

1) Learning alone cannot account for the rapid rate of language acquisition.

2) There are infinite sets of sentences in language, all of which cannot be learned by imitation.

3) Children make grammatical errors, most of which cannot be learned through imitation, as adults often use correct grammar.

4) Children acquire language skills, even though adults do not consistently correct them.

Although this view has drawn much criticism, it is not without merit (Cattell, 2000; Bohannon and Bonvillian 2000).

Both sides have stressed the importance of inter-disciplinary studies.

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. Over the years, linguistics has gone through a shift towards the interdisciplinary route and has created interdisciplinary fields such as neurolinguistics and biolinguistics. Linguistics has attempted to break out from just creating theories and some have claimed, “a theory of human linguistic capacity must be biologically real.” (Kean, 1992, p. 403-404) One of the practical agendas that have been identified for neurolinguistics is that light must be shed on the mechanisms of learning (Kean, 1992, p. 414). Terms such as biolinguistics (biology and linguistics), psycholinguistics (psychology and linguistics), neurolinguistics (neurology and linguistics) have made it possible for collaborations and knowledge to be swapped between disciplines.
Although, as Chomsky (2000) says, there is proof that there are innate biological traits, the impact of social and environmental factors in the development of language in children cannot be overlooked. As much as language is innate, children also learn language. It is the role of educators to support our students in this learning process.

**Language Development**

It is within this framework that language development is studied. After a child has acquired language, they make rapid progress. Language development acknowledges the importance of both innate and learned language. Language development is a continuous process. By the time children are 3 or 4 years old, most children, everywhere in the world have acquired the major elements of the language spoken around them. Language development assumes that this is a universal human achievement (Noam Chomsky and James McGilvray, 2011, p. 11).

By the time children reach kindergarten, they have amassed a vocabulary of about 8000 words and almost all of the basic grammatical forms of their language (past, present, future). Children can handle questions, negative statements, dependent clauses, compound sentences, and a variety of other constructions. They have the capacity to use language in many different kinds of social settings (i.e. tell jokes to friends, speak politely to grandparents, etc.). Once children enter school, development occurs even more rapidly. New cognitive attainments make it possible for school children to talk in ways they could not do so in preschool (Gleason 2006; Cunningham 2011).
Elementary school years are critical in the development of a child’s language skills. Children are increasingly called upon to interact with their peers and use language spontaneously. Greater stress is on decontextualized text, language that is not tied to the here and now (Gleason, 2006, p. 1-2).

Linguistics has already entered the classroom in terms of teaching language to students. But some have argued that this may not be enough. Fillmore and Snow (2000) state, “A thorough grounding in educational linguistics [the systematic and intensive preparation and research of linguistics as it relates to education] would support teachers’ undertakings overall, and in particular teaching literacy skills.” (p. 4) Looking at the effects of full day kindergarten on language acquisition and development will provide a test on the validity of this statement.

A Note Regarding Atypical Language Development

For the purpose of this paper, attention will be paid to typical language development. However, it is important to mention atypical language development as well. Most children acquire the complexities of language quite quickly. Unfortunately, not all children acquire language easily and well. The study of atypical language development provides information on a number of topics. First, it allows researchers to evaluate claims regarding innate elements for the normal acquisition process (Ratner, 2009, p. 84). Marcus and Rabagliati (2006) note, “Human developmental disorder offers special insight into the genetic, neural, and behavioral basis of language because they provide a way to study naturalistically what cannot be controlled in the lab.” (p. 397) Secondly, the study of language disorders in children represents an attempt to findings about the typical language
acquisition process to practical problems (Ratner, 2009, p. 84). Thirdly, and most importantly, it allows adults, such as teachers, to accommodate students so that students can achieve their full language potential. Even if attention is not paid to atypical language development in this paper, the study of atypical language development is just as important as the study of typical language development.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This research study uses qualitative research methods, which includes a review of the literature in the linguistics field and face-to-face interviews with two teachers. It is conducted under the guidelines of the Masters of Teaching program at OISE to investigate the implementation of full day kindergarten.

Qualitative research is defined as a study that begins with assumptions (Creswell, 2012). The main assumption in this research is that some linguists, particularly linguists who champion for biolinguistics, theorize that there is a critical period for language development in children. This period begins when most children will begin or have begun kindergarten. Therefore, full day kindergarten must be beneficial to language development because it is during this time that children excel in developing language. This is why language is used as the measure of progress between half day kindergarten and full day kindergarten. If this theoretical framework holds any weight in reality, perhaps it would be beneficial for theories in biolinguistics to be used to inform teachers, curriculums, and in general, to be implemented on a broader scale. However, to make this assumption is problematic for many reasons. Some linguists argue that this is merely just a theory and to believe in biolinguistics entirely would be to say to some extent that all children must to treated based on their biological make up.

Furthermore, qualitative research uses data collection in a natural setting that is sensitive to the people and places under study. Data was also collected in this research and it was analyzed, both inductively and deductively, and organized into themes and patterns. As the study progressed, there was an emergent design. The initial plan for the research was not tightly prescribed and changes were made as more data was collected.
Some of the research questions changed. The researcher made every effort to include the voices of the participants and the reflexivity of the researcher (Creswell, 2012).

**Instruments of Data Collection**

Two instruments were used to collect data: a literature review and informal, semi-structured interviews. The literature review can be found in chapter two of this paper and was conducted for the purpose of providing an expert background in the research behind FDK and in the study of linguistics and the study of language development in children.

Regarding the interviews, teachers were given questions at the scheduled time of the interview, conducted outside of school time at the convenience of the participants. They did not include questions that are sensitive in nature or likely to evoke emotional responses. Participants also maintained the right to decline to answer in these interviews. These interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length.

The information gathered during these interviews was for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding for each participant’s beliefs, comments, concerns, practices, knowledge, and overall opinions regarding the implementation of full day kindergarten and its effects on language development.

The interview questions are:

**Interview Questions**

1) How many years have you been teaching?
2) Which grade do you have the most experience in? Do you have experience teaching other grade?
3) How many years have you been teaching kindergarten (JK/SK)?
4) What do you enjoy most about teaching kindergarten?
5) What are the advantages of full day kindergarten?
6) Are there particular advantages for children’s oral language development? (As the children have more time for social interactions with peers?)
7) What are the difficulties you have faced with the implementation of full day kindergarten?
8) What difficulties do you predict for the future of full day kindergarten?
9) Overall, what are your professional feelings regarding the implementation of full day kindergarten?
10) How important is full day kindergarten in terms of children’s language development?
11) When do you think students go through the most rapid growth in terms of language acquisition and development?
12) What changes have you observed, if any, in your JK students’ oral language development in their year in full day kindergarten? Your SK students?
13) Do you think you have more time for language in your daily schedule with full day kindergarten?
14) What are your observations regarding student stamina when they are in full day kindergarten?
15) Do you think that full day kindergarten will have lasting effects for students and their language development?
16) Do you find that there is a difference between students who have attended preschool prior to attending kindergarten? If so, how and if not, why do you think that is the case?
17) In your experience, has full day kindergarten provided more opportunities for increased social interaction with each other and with adults?

18) Apart from taught language, do you find that students are taking advantage of the increased social interactions which allow students to explore language and come into greater contact with a greater variety of social contexts? (Longer time to talk to classmates, teachers, perhaps more assemblies?)

19) In your experience, does full day kindergarten affect students with special needs?

20) How supportive are parents of the full day kindergarten program? What are some of the reasons they state to support their opinion?

21) Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns for me?

Participants

This research spoke to two knowledgeable educators and asked them questions relevant to their experience. Participants were selected based on their amount of experience and knowledge of full day kindergarten. Teachers were also selected based on their number of years teaching. For this study, two very experienced teachers, both with teaching experience of 10 years or more, were chosen. However, one participant has two years teaching in FDK and the other, this is their first year with FDK. Participants were located through practicum experiences and referrals made by associate teachers.

Data Collection and Analysis

The most common sources of qualitative data include interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 2002). Interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study and critical examination and careful interpretation was used to organize the data. The challenge for the researcher was to identify categories and connections, develop
themes, and offer well-reasoned, reflective conclusions through the analysis of this data (Schutt, 2012).

Merriam (2009) argues the importance of collecting data and analyzing it simultaneously. Researchers can get overwhelmed with the amount of data collected. Collecting and analyzing simultaneously is a process of organization, reduction, consolidation, comparison, and reconfiguration. It allows for an emergent design to occur. Although data analysis occurred after data was collected through interviews, it was also an active process while data collection took place.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

This research is conducted under the Ethical Review Protocol of the University of Toronto.

In regards to the rationale of this study, the Ethical Review Protocol stipulates that this study is an assignment for students enrolled in the Master of Teaching program at OISE/UT.

In regards to methodology, the Ethical Review Protocol stipulates that this study included a literature review. It also required two knowledgeable interviewees. Interviewees were contacted in advance of the interview and the exact reasons for the interview were discussed and explained. Potential participants were called on the telephone, visited, or communicated with online. After the participants agreed to participate in the interview, the participants were provided with the interviewer’s contact information and they were presented with a letter of informed consent (see appendix A). Once the participants agreed to be interviewed, the interviewer scheduled a meeting or a telephone interview and conducted the interview at the participant’s convenience, outside
of school time. No participant was ever forced to agree to an interview and was informed that they can stop the interview at anytime. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the project at anytime and their right to decline to answer any specific questions.

In regards to confidentiality, the Ethical Review Protocol stipulates that data gathered from this research is to be treated as confidential. The names of participants, schools, and school districts are not revealed.

**Limitations**

A significant limitation to this research study lies in the methodology. As the Ethical Review Protocol states, this research will not involve classroom pupils or observations of the classroom. This limited the variety of perspective and lenses this research could be viewed through.

For the purpose of this study, only kindergarten teachers were interviewed. It would be interesting to gain information on the opinions of teachers who specialize in other grades and see the long-term effects of full day kindergarten on language development. The small sampling of this study prevents the reader from seeing larger trends in language development and made the research susceptible to certain biases. One of these biases lies in the focus on the perspective of kindergarten teachers.

The study does not include classrooms with specialized programs, such as gifted programs or special education programs. These classrooms could reveal more information relative to the strengths and weaknesses of full day kindergarten.
Strengths

This research is built on the knowledge of experienced educators. Their expertise and insight on the classroom and students provided a rich pool of data. As such, the data provides an “insider’s viewpoint” and provides understanding and description of their personal experiences of the phenomena, in this case the connection between full day kindergarten and language development.

An asset of qualitative research in general is the naturalistic setting from which the data is collected. This with the combination of the responsiveness of qualitative research, that is changes that occur during the conduct of the study, allows the data in this study to form to context. Classroom conditions, school situations, and participants’ needs were paramount in the conduct of this research. This allowed for the study to be conducted in depth and in detail.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

When I first began this research paper, I had specific answers in mind through which I predicted this research would follow in the direction of. However, after completing both interviews, these outcomes were different to the answers that I had anticipated and are now shaping and changing the scope and direction of my research. I had originally planned to focus on full day kindergarten and its effects on language development only. My original basis for such a research was the critical period theory, which states that children will go through a rapid growth of language development in early childhood, roughly around the kindergarten years. Therefore, I believed that full day kindergarten would have a positive effect on the language development of the students in full day kindergarten, believing they may have more instructional time. However, as the interviews took place, I began to realize that the narrative of full day kindergarten was much more complex. The interviewed brought up many challenges they faced as well as possibilities that I had not factored into my research, such as the possibility that students were receiving enrichment programming elsewhere, prior to full day kindergarten, that involved far more funding and resources. With the implementation of full day kindergarten, parents no longer enrolled their children in these programs and so places such as the Ontario Science Centre cancelled their programs as well.

Teacher to student ratios also posed a problem to the original research idea in that although there was more time in the day, teachers were now faced with the problem of teaching more students in the day. Therefore, teachers did not necessarily gain more instructional time with each student.
Although the original intent of this research was to focus on language
development in kindergarten children, the challenges that teachers face before even
getting to language instruction has become an important focus to this research process.
Although I will still be looking at language development in full day kindergarten,
language development itself has become a lens or measure to look at the impact of the
implementation of full day kindergarten.

Further analysis and consideration for the context surrounding the data collection
(the step of describing as stated by Gay and Airasian, 2003, p. 231) also changed the
direction of the research process. When the focus of this research was being developed
last year, I had anticipated a wider context for this research. I wanted to have some
interviewees with more experience than others, different kinds of school environments,
etc. However, I found that even within interviewees with similar experiences, settings,
etc., there were a myriad of phenomena to be studied. It was only after the interview
process and the analysis of data that I found this to be the case. For this research, my
interviewees were two very experienced kindergarten teachers, working at the same
school in a high-income neighbourhood.

When I was interviewing my participants, language development was a way to get
the participants to think about their answers. I had expected the participants to give me
answers only related to language development, however, this was not the case when the
actual interview took place. The following are the findings:
Advantages/Disadvantages of Full Day Kindergarten

The most important advantage of FDK for both participants was resilience and independence. Children develop resilience as they have to fend for themselves a lot. One participant noted that if you can get through FDK, you will become stronger and able to cope with disaster situations. This “toughness” was fuelled by a need for almost complete independence, due to the decrease in interaction time with an adult. Both participants noted that students get more independent time in FDK. This has resulted in more interactions and social situations amongst students.

One participant had hoped the advantage of FDK would be more time with less children. Meaningful relationships could be made with both parents and students with the increased amount of time a teacher spends with students. However, the opposite has happened and the number of students and class sizes have become the deterrent that is, “not going to make it possible to achieve the potential benefits [of FDK].”

This participant found that the SKs are ahead of the SKs under the old, half-day instructional time. Just by osmosis, SKs should be observing more information as they are in school for a whole year, rather than half a year. However, the teacher felt unconfident when ascribing FDK for the sole reason for SK improvement, “This could just be a strong cohort...or they could have hit their developmental stride earlier.”

Another participant clearly stated that FDK has made no difference in her students’ language development.

If FDK has proven to be an advantage for resilience and independence, it has been detrimental for students’ self-regulation, self-esteem, and confidence. The most important contribution to this was class size and classroom environment. As class size was such a
major challenge for both participants in FDK, a separate theme has been created in this research to accommodate the massive impact.

In response to the idea that young FDK students are now required to attend more assemblies, one participant replied:

A lot of the program probably doesn’t make sense to them at all, what we do. I don’t understand why I’m doing this and I’m more on edge as a teacher because the building isn’t designed appropriately so they are going through extremely heavy doors [going to an assembly or to get outside] and I’m screaming, ‘Get your hands out of the cracks in the door, don’t push it!’ They’ve got a teacher whose very afraid for safety and is on edge because you’ve got way too many of them going through strange configurations of the building.

Students have been integrated into the school environment without considering their age and this caused an even greater chaotic environment. It has also fallen on the teacher to control the chaos and this has affected instructional time. Not only has free play become difficult to manage but giving students challenging activities as well. One participant has recognized that he is spending far too much time just managing behaviour and difficulties that students are facing with the new FDK environment.

Speaking to the experience of other teachers as well, one participant responded:

Many teachers are disgruntled. There are plenty of advantages but we can’t realize them. Right now, I’m disillusioned but I still think the argument is sound with less kids and more time with them. FDK is underfunded but it could be wonderful if there were less children in each class...As educators, we want to create richer environments. But they put more kids in a smaller space and that’s precisely what is not going to work.

Both participants stressed the negative aspects of FDK more than the positive, expressing the need to reconsider FDK within their school.
Class Size/Classroom Environment

Current primary class size caps sit at 20 or fewer students for 90% of a board with up to 10% of a board’s classes allowed up to 23 students. However, the FDK program has been exempted from these class size caps. There is no cap for FDK classrooms, due to an addition of another educator in the classroom. Instead, the policy states that school boards are required to uphold an average of 26 students per classroom across the board. (EFTO, 2015) Potential benefits that were initially thought of were more time with less children and in turn with less children, more meaningful relationships. It was suggested that although the research and reasoning behind FDK was sound, because of the class size, FDK has not met hopes and expectations.

A further consequence of a chaotic and very full environment is that three years olds are self-regulating poorly. Findings suggest children are at a young age when they are thrown into this environment and this is having a negative impact on their development. There were too many children to keep up with in one space. As a result, this changed the classroom environment, creating a chaotic, often frantic one. There were too many children to keep up with and keep an eye on. Both participants noted that fewer children would make a large impact. Both teachers suggested that there would be more time to spend with their students, if the environment would become quieter and less frantic, and there might even be calm and peace to allow children to nap. Too many children and chaos, teachers are forced to tightly control their classroom or children are “bouncing off the walls.” This gives students the message that “they’ve been naughty or doing the wrong thing all the time.” In addition to this, there is a lack of support in this
kind of environment. The consequence is a negative impact on self-esteem, regulation, and confidence.

According to Mark, 27 students in a FDK is not a large number in Toronto. He noted that, “If that was my class, honestly, I wouldn’t get a single thing done.” He found that 27 students was challenging enough, “Policy makers don’t realize that 20 is a good number, adding 7 more kids is like doubling the classroom. It’s cuts down 1:1 [student to teacher] interaction in half.”

Participants also mentioned the correlation between space and the level of aggression in the classroom. One participant brought up the psychological research regarding personal space, noting that as you crowd a space, anti-social behaviour goes up. Yet the newly renovated spaces for FDK classrooms were designed ineffectively to accommodate such a large class size. One participant found that although, “the argument is that there are two adults in the space so the ratio of student to adult is less, [however] even adding an additional adult into the classroom is taking up space.” He found that cubbies were too small and student items, especially winter clothes, also crowded the classroom environment.

**Child Development**

The biggest concern for one participant was that some children are simply too young for FDK. She found that JKs in particular are not coping well, unless they are JKs that were born in the beginning of the year, and so are further developed than those children born in the September to December months. Those JKs that are having difficulty were falling asleep by the end of the day, not getting enough attention for their development, unable to self-regulating, and in the extreme, soiling themselves. The
teacher has even suggested to some parents, “if you can come and get them, even a couple of days, you can take them home [earlier], let them nap, let them rest.” She noted that when you come to school, “what you need developmentally is being taken away from you.” Ultimately, the participant found, “I’m really seeing the JKs are kind of lost and their lucky if they’re born earlier, that’s the general pattern I find.”

Although another participant ascribed the problem to another source, this participant also found students were not getting the sleep they needed for their development, “I actually talk about that with my parents at Curriculum Night… How much sleep your child is getting? Did you know that children this age need 12 hours of sleep?” The participant also noted, “But I think that’s an endemic in our culture, I mean, even some adults are sleep deprived. And I think it might be under recognized how much of an issue that is for little kids. It’s partly due to FDK but they had long days even before FDK.”

As for how FDK has affected student stamina, the participant noted that it is more exhausting for students to be in a social situation and active listening skills, such as a classroom, than to be physically active. Along with the sleep deprivation and students spending more time in the classroom social environment, the participant found that students were exhausted, lacking in what they needed for developmental growth.

**Enrichment Programming**

One of the consequences of staying in school for the whole day is that the time to participate in enrichment programs has been taken away from kindergarten students. I stress here that the school where the teachers that I interviewed are a part of is in a higher socioeconomic community. Speaking to a parent who was part of developing the FDK
program, one participant learned that FDK was initially intended for lower income communities. She stressed that it would be great for those communities because they may not have enrichment in the other half of the day: “They probably would be getting tremendous oral skills and there’d be a lot more resources in the classroom had they just left it to communities that demonstrated a need.”

Furthermore, she noted that in a community such as this one, a lot of the students would get interaction time with an adult, whether a parent at home or a nanny. If not, they would gain enrichment somewhere else. However, these enrichment opportunities have now been taken away as parents have complained that although they would like to enroll their children in half day programs such as ones offered by the Ontario Science Centre or Royal Conservatory, these programs have been cancelled. To put it another way, although FDK may provide additional resources to communities of lower socioeconomic status, FDK actually took away time from students that would have been used for enrichment programs, far better resources and funded. The opinion of this participant is that certain neighbourhoods could have really benefitted from this program with the additional resources versus other neighbourhoods who do not need FDK as much.

**Language Development**

Language development of FDK students were looked at as a lens to view student progress in FDK relative to half day kindergarten. Both participants have stressed the minimal impact that FDK has brought to language development in their students. However, both presented unique interpretations of why they thought this was so.

One participant stressed the importance of enrichment programs. She found that there was plenty of time for students to have talk time with peers but less talk time with
adults because there are too many children in the classroom. She compared her FDK program to her half-day program, saying that when it was just half day, she would have more time to spend speaking with children and working with them. In addition, students had mornings/afternoons with adults in enrichment programs, parents at home, etc. Therefore, students received a full day’s worth of student to adult interaction. She noted, “Peer talk time is not necessarily advancing your oral skills.” FDK was properly supporting her students in their language development. Although there was more time for language in her schedule, whether it be one more language centre or extra story times, students in this community had received enrichment programs in half day kindergarten that were better funded and resourced.

Mark reported that his best guess was that there may be benefits to oral. With the expanded schedule, there should be more time for language. However, so far his experience has not reflected his hypothesis and reasoning:

I don’t feel like there is more time for anything. It takes twice as long for a larger group to do anything compared to a group of 20. I lose a lot of time. There are two adults in the room but we spend more time managing behaviour and aggression. If the numbers were lower, there would be more opportunity for interaction.

Language development also depends on the child and their developmental clock. The participant added that students generally go through the most language development and acquisition in SK. However, he notes, “I think that there’s a lot of kids who would find this environment [FDK] very difficult and would not reach their full potential.”

**Support for Students with Special Needs**

Although students with special needs were not specifically looked at for this research, it was imperative to note the opinions of both participants when it came to this
topic. With the implementation of FDK and the changed cap on classroom sizes, both participants expressed concern about how this kind of environment affected those students who required additional support and how the challenge of lack in support contributed to the overall classroom environment.

Mark noted, “Lots of behavioural issues in the class would disappear if it was calmer [in the classroom] and there were less kids.” For many of the students with special education needs, this participant felt that FDK was exactly the wrong kind of environment. Additionally, as a teacher, FDK made it very difficult to provide an environment to support special needs. The participant went on to comment that students who may not show up as requiring special needs support act out more in the classroom because of the additional stimuli that has been added into the classroom since the implementation of FDK.

Laura felt that some students are not managing to self-regulate properly and in addition, were being affected by children with behavioural needs, who are not receiving the proper support that they need:

“We’re getting children with special needs more and more in our classroom with no or minimal support. There’s no cap, so you could have 36 children with two adults, one of whom has to shadow between one and six children. Sometimes there’s four children on the autism spectrum in one kindergarten classroom of two adults. These are children with such high needs that they all need that one on one support through the day. And they’re not getting it and it’s not fair, it’s not right.

The implementation of FDK has brought about changes that are not promoting the support of the students who require special needs.
Parent Opinions

Although a handful of parents are not happy with the implementation of FDK, they have shown general support for the teachers in their endeavours in FDK. One participant noted that the parents are very supportive of him because he has been a teacher in the community for a while and has an established relationship with the parents. However, once parents have a chance to come into the classroom, they are taken aback. Parents have also given him the feedback of their children telling them stories about physical, aggressive play on the playground. It has become a frantic situation and most kids are not handling well at the moment. Parents are “supportive of you as a teacher because they think you are amazing. But maybe they go home and say, ‘How can this be a good thing for my kid?’”

Laura found that although SK parents do not complain much, as their children were already in FDK the year before so they cannot compare their FDK experience with half day, JK parents are noticing changes in their children:

I definitely get the feedback from my JKS, “What happened to my child, I had the sweetest, nicest little child, she was fully toilet trained, and now they’re soiling themselves, they come home and I don’t even know them, they’re yelling at me, they’re having meltdowns.” That’s what I get.

The participant also noted that because of the increased chaos in the program, parents are getting lost in the shuffle and are not getting informed as much.
Chapter 5: Discussion

What teachers have experienced through the implementation of FDK has been the question driving this research. According to the participants of this research, their experiences have been negative. They have experienced challenges regarding the co-ordination of the program, lack of support, and most importantly class sizes and the classroom environment. Although there were certain advantages noted, such as the building of resilience, independence, and a toughness that may allow students to cope in a disaster situation, these benefits are minimal compared to the disadvantages. FDK has proven to be detrimental in the relationships participants have with their students. It has caused fewer students to teacher interaction time, less time to build relationships with parents, a negative impact on the well-being and proper development of their students, and the failure to support students properly. Ultimately, this particular community did not need FDK.

Teachers felt that when it came to language development as a measure of the difference in FDK and half day kindergarten, students showed no improvement, due to the many challenges they faced by the implementation of FDK.

Implications/Recommendations

Although much research has been done previous to the implementation of FDK in Ontario, the actual implementation has brought a number of challenges. There have been advantages as well. But whether the advantages outweigh the disadvantages is a matter that needs much further discussion, now and in the future.
The thoughts of this researcher, after reviewing the perspectives of the interviewees, are that FDK has been implemented too quickly and too vastly, without considering the needs of the diverse communities and student population within the TDSB. In the community that is a part of this research, both participants stressed the need to go back to the old system. They believed that half day kindergarten much better accommodated the community and the students. Although Mark believed that FDK would allow him to gain more interaction time with each student, this was not the case. He felt that half day kindergarten gave him much more one on one interaction with his students without causing them the unnecessary stress of crowding a large number of students in a small classroom. Laura felt that FDK created a chaotic environment for her students and she felt that half day kindergarten gave her more control in managing her students and their behaviour.

I note here that my interviews come from only one community and two teachers whose experiences come from the same student population. However, both have identified that they prefer half day kindergarten due to the challenges they have faced and the change in student attitudes. This leads me to believe that while some communities might benefit from full day kindergarten, this specific community did not.

Spending more time with their students in the day did not necessarily equate to more teaching time either. When I first began this research, I thought FDK would absolutely benefit students because there would be more time to teach language and it is at the age when children go through the most rapid growth when it comes to
language (see Noam Chomsky, 2000). However, the challenges that both teachers faced because of the increase in class size took over the class time.

If FDK is to work, one recommendation I would make here is to decrease class sizes so that teachers are able to spend time with each student and provide the support that these developing students need. Furthermore, it would decrease the chaotic, frantic, sometimes aggressive environment that both teachers felt were major challenges in their teaching. Decreasing the class size would also allow the valuable one to one interaction that young students need at this age.

Class space was also an issue and changing the square footage of the class space would be a tremendous benefit to the FDK program in this community. Laura noted the classroom as being a third teacher for her students and yet she felt the difficulty of managing her classroom in such a small space, relative to the amount of students in the class. Mark noted the effects of anti-social behavior as more and more crowding occurred in a space and this is what he felt was happening to his students. Changing the classroom size and allowing students to move around and explore their class space would change student behavior and would also help the teacher use the classroom effectively.

Kindergarten is an important time in a child’s life. Therefore, we should take as much care in the investment of this education. My recommendation is that we need to look at the needs of a school’s kindergarten program, to see whether FDK is truly necessary, and to implement accordingly. In this particular community, FDK was not needed because students were able to receive enrichment opportunities in other environments that were better resourced and funded. Students were
continuing to learn outside of the school environment. In a community where students are unable to receive such an opportunity, where learning is not necessarily continued and where students access such resources, I believe that FDK would be an excellent opportunity, provided that class sizes and the classroom support students’ learning. FDK should be implemented where it is necessary.

**Limitations and Implications for Further Study**

Because my research did not involve pupils or parents’ perspectives nor observations of the classroom, my recommendations are based on a limited variety of perspective.

For the purpose of this study, only kindergarten teachers were interviewed. It would be interesting to gain information on the opinions of teachers who specialize in other grades and see the long-term effects of FDK. The small sampling of this study prevents the reader from seeing larger trends in the attitudes towards FDK and made the research susceptible to certain biases.

It would be beneficial to research other communities and focusing on a wider scope, where FDK is more beneficial for the kindergarten population.

Another aspect that would be beneficial to focus on is the long-term effect of FDK. This program has only been in effect for one-two years, depending on the school. Teachers’ experiences may change as time goes by and it would be interesting to research those changes.
Date:

Dear ,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching student. I am studying ________________ for the purposes of a graduate research paper. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 30 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you, outside of school time.

The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Eun Hye (Grace) Kim.
(647) 879-4113
gracekim268@hotmail.com
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by ____________ and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature:

Name: (printed) ____________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________
References


