Identifying Core Elements of Meaningful Collaboration between Designated Early Childhood Educators and Ontario Certified Teachers in the Full-Day Kindergarten Program

By

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IDENTIFYING THE CORE ELEMENTS OF MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION BETWEEN DECES AND OCTS IN THE FDK PROGRAM

Abstract

This study investigated the core elements of the meaningful collaboration between Designated Early Childhood Educators (DECE) and Ontario Certified Teachers (OCT) and how the co-planning process enhances their collaborative relationship. Two teams, consisting of DECEs and OCTs, who have collaborated together for two years in the Full-Day Kindergarten program in Ontario, provided strategies and insights on how to co-plan and how to enhance their meaningful collaboration. Through semi-structured interviews with the teams, participants described equality in co-planning as a method of shared planning responsibilities that results in a strong learning environment. The primary theme that emerged was that co-planning has a positive impact on collaboration and understanding between teaching teams and finally, lack-of-time and conflicting approaches were seen as barriers to co-planning between teaching teams.

Key Words: Full-Day Kindergarten Program, Ontario Certified Teachers, Designated Early Childhood Educators, co-planning, meaningful collaboration
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

The implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) has marked a historical milestone as of September 2010 in the province of Ontario. The most recent change, prior to the implementation of FDK, was the introduction of junior kindergarten in 1944. As early as 1944 the Ministry of Education realized the importance of the first seven years of life for children and the critical period of brain development (Cantalini-Williams & Tefler, 2010). The evidence is conclusive that there is a positive correlation between effective early learning programs and positive academic outcomes for young students later in life, and economic benefits for society (Callaghan, 2012). Research has shown that “economists, biologists, and social scientists agree early childhood development is a prime time investment opportunity for society” (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007, p.135).

Charles Pascal released a report entitled “With Our Best Future in Mind” in 2009 describing the comprehensive outline for the implementation of the full-day kindergarten program. Pascal’s report states compelling research from both Canadian and international sources to support the belief that early childhood development marks the foundation for the academic success and life-long learning (Pascal, 2009). Upon releasing this report, the Ministry of Education considered establishing the Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment Act in 2010 (Callaghan, 2012). This act obligates school boards across Ontario to implement full day early learning for four and five year olds (Ministry of Education, Backgrounder April 23, 2010). According to Bill 242, Full-Day Learning Early Leaning Statute Law Amendment Act, both Ontario Certified Teachers (OCT) and Early Childhood Educators (ECE) work collaboratively together to deliver a program which is inclusive, safe, rich and stimulating.
Some of the positive impacts of the FDK program include but are not limited to benefits for students’ overall well-being, improvement of readiness for grade one, and academic success in school (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). In addition, the students who have attended Full-day kindergarten compared to half-day students were absent less during the school year (Gullo, 2006). Also, full-day kindergarten students showed consistent academic progress during the kindergarten year compared to half-day students (James, 2000). There is also tentative evidence that full-day kindergarten provides stronger, longer-lasting academic benefits for children from low-income families (James, 2000).

Full-day Kindergarten educators have distinct background knowledge (Callaghan, 2012); however they have complementary skills in teaching. ECEs must have completed a two year Early Childhood Education diploma, have been registered in a good standing with the College of Early Childhood Educators, and are also governed under the Early Childhood Education Act (Callaghan, 2012). Kindergarten Teachers must have completed their bachelor of education program, be registered with the Ontario College of Teachers and they are regulated by the Education Act (Callaghan, 2012). This co-teaching structure is unique to the full day kindergarten program and research has begun to identify a positive correlation between teacher-ECE collaboration and program quality in FDK classrooms (Gibson and Pelletier, 2010; Clark Tozer, 2012).

There is an evident benefit of co-teaching in education system for both educators and young learners. Research has found that there is an increased level of engagement in students when co-teaching is practiced (Boudah, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1997). In addition, co-teaching not only provides teachers with more opportunities to give individualized attention to their students, but it also enables them to increase their interaction with students (Murawski, 2006). In
co-teaching settings, both educators have the advantage of incorporating varied perspective while sharing responsibilities (Chiasson, Yearwood, & Olsen, 2006). They can also make decisions as a team which will empower their collaborative structure and ultimately enhances teacher-child engagement (Malaguzzi, 1998; McNairy, 1988).

1.1 Articulation of the Research Problem

Integrating DECEs into the FDK program can create challenges for both educators in this program. Research has found that challenges include power differentials and hierarchy, sharing the physical space and resources, modifying professional identity, and understanding the roles and responsibilities (Corter et al., 2007; Gibson & Pelletier, 2010; Desimone, Payne, Fedoravicius, Henrich & Finn-Stevenson, 2004).

Challenges were faced by both DECEs and OCTs when the FDK program was introduced in Ontario due to the implementation of a new curriculum as well as professionals from different disciplines working alongside one another (Romain & Petersen, 2011). Previous literature has examined some challenges of the FDK program such as: financial struggle, space limitation, and play-based academic structure, all of which are essential in students’ overall well-being and development (Gillis, 2013). However, minimal literature has focused on examining the core elements of meaningful collaboration between DECEs and OCTs in the FDK program. This area of FDK program implementation requires additional attention since “… the FDK team relationship itself enables and constrains classroom instructional strategies, which will in turn have an impact on student outcomes” (Clark Tozer, 2012, p. 2).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research is to identify the core elements of meaningful collaboration between DECEs and OCTs in the FDK program with a specific focus on co-
planning of the classroom curriculum in order to enhance the program quality, and learn how to better establish mutual respect between educators in the hopes that this will in turn foster a positive learning environment for young learners. These findings will then be shared with FDK team members to establish and maintain stronger collaborative relationships. The main focus will be directed on co-planning element between the OCTs and DECEs. Without the adequate amount of trust, these relationships can neither be established nor maintained (Clark Tozer, 2012). Often, OCTs are hesitant of implementing the input of DECEs due to lack of trust (Clark Tozer, 2012); This not only can have an ultimate negative impact on the relationship between DECEs and OCTs, but also it encourages oppressing DECEs and their valued knowledge and experience. As a result, I will further investigate the co-planning element of co-teaching relationship.

1.3 Research Questions

The main question guiding this research study is: What are the core elements of meaningful collaboration between three pairs of Ontario Certified Teachers and Designated Early Childhood Educators in the Full-day Kindergarten program and how do these teams co-plan their curriculum as a component of collaboration?

1) How do the teams of educators describe the structure and rationale of their co-planning routine and procedures?

2) How do the teams of educators share the co-planning roles and responsibilities?

3) What benefits and the challenges of co-planning do these teams of educators observe?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

My experience as a Designated Early Childhood Educator in the FDK program proved to be a positive one. Although for the most part my professional relationship with my teaching
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partner was positive and included mutual respect, there were some instances where I felt a strong power differential between us. Often DECEs are not meaningfully included in the collaborative partnerships because they are often seen as being below teaching faculty. I often found, from my own personal experience as well as experiences faced by my DECE colleagues, that DECEs are seen as adjunct faculty that execute ideas as opposed to be included in the decision making and co-planning process. With this perspective and experience in mind, I have therefore developed a strong interest in investigating the key elements required for meaningful collaboration between OCTs and DECEs and how it can improve the learning environment for students. It is through cooperative efforts between teaching faculty members that a positive learning environment and outcome for students can be achieved. In my opinion, effective collaboration between DECEs and OCTs can also act as a working model for students showing them the beneficial outcome of working collaboratively to achieve a common goal. Furthermore, I believe it teaches students that hierarchies in a working relationship should not exist in order to work compatibly with one another - everyone is responsible in putting in the same effort and time when working with others. As a current teacher candidate, although not yet a practicing teacher, the research I have done for this research paper has given me a new perspective on how teachers interact and work with DECEs. I believe the challenges that teachers face with DECEs all comes down to time management, legality and different teaching philosophies and not that teachers feel or see themselves in a higher position than DECE counterparts. Often times due to lack of time teachers are faced with accomplishing tasks on their own as opposed to sharing the responsibility with DECEs. Moreover, teachers may come across situations where role of teacher and DECE is not clear cut and to avoid any legal issues they often think it would be safest for them to accomplish the task without seeking assistance from their DECE partners. And finally
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differences in teaching philosophies — just as there exists differences in teaching philosophies between teachers the same exists between teachers and other educators and this can cause tension and hostility between teachers and DECEs. I have also come to realize that is not only DECEs who may become victimized when there is inequality between educators but teachers can be victimized as well. Often times teachers may be seen as the perpetrators when difficulties arise between teachers and DECEs even though this may not be the case and this in turn can cause needless stress for teachers often making them feel victimized.

1.5 Preview of the Whole

I will be conducting a qualitative research study in order to answer the research problem posed using purposeful sampling to interview FDK teams that have exhibited meaningful collaboration in their professional environment. The purpose of these interviews is to learn about FDK team strategies in co-planning lessons and learning opportunities and how they collaboratively share responsibilities for this task. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature in the areas of defining collaboration, co-teaching structures, team development and stages, benefits of collaborative teaching structures, known challenges related to collaborative teaching, characteristics of a strong collaborative relationships in education, and co-planning. Moreover, I will further explain my research design in Chapter 3. It will be in Chapter 4 that I will report my research findings and discuss the importance of these findings in light of existing research literature. I will describe the implications of the research findings for current FDK members struggling with establishing meaningful collaboration in FDK settings as well as the education research community at large, in Chapter 5. I will conclude by formulating a series of questions raised by the research findings and point to areas of future research.
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Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The initiation of Full Day Kindergarten program in Ontario caused a provincial movement that moved Early Childhood Educators from a childcare setting into a more formal education setting. An integrated teaching approach is practiced in the FDK programs which contains OCTs and DECEs that collaborate together in order to establish a play-based learning environment by incorporating their professional knowledge and expertise from two different backgrounds. One member who is DECE is professionally trained and educated in the field of Early Childhood Education and another member who is an OCT brings her expertise in regards to assessment and teaching strategies into the classroom. The integration of these two expertise is called integrated teaching. According to the science of early childhood development, DECEs play an essential role in the learning process of young learners by providing and designing thought-provoking activities. In addition to that, DECEs play a nurturing role as well as monitory through observation child development (Barnett, 2008; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007; Shonkoff, 2009). One of the main goals of the FDK program is maximizing the co-teaching performance by incorporating the knowledge, experience, and skills of the DECEs into the FDK classrooms. Quality programs do not happen unless they are delivered by the staff who are diverse, skilled, well-experienced, and knowledgeable (Ackermann & Barnett, 2006). Therefore, investigating the co-teaching structure and its performance has a vital impact on the program quality that they are delivering.

In this chapter I review the literature pertaining to defining collaboration and co-teaching structures. More specifically, I explore the team development and the stages that entails. Next, I review the benefits and existing challenges related to collaborative teaching. Finally, I explain
the characteristics of strong collaborative relationships in the educational field and how they co-
plan lessons and learning opportunities.

2.1 Defining Collaboration

With the initiation of the Full Day Kindergarten classrooms, the teaching team must consider and respect the importance of developing collaborative relationships. Establishing and maintaining a strong, healthy, and positive collaborative relationships between the FDK team members is an essential element of a successful FDK program. Therefore, we have to dedicate an extensive amount of attention to this topic is warranted (Corter, et al., 2009). Friend (2000) explains that there exists myths about collaboration and it is often erroneously assumed that collaboration is practiced every time two or more individuals interact with one another. However, collaboration goes beyond the engagement that is occurring between individuals (Murawski, 2010). Collaboration is “a style for direct interaction between at least two equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal” (Friend & Cook, 2007, p.4). Schools often identify their programs as collaborative without practicing “the elements in place to guarantee that authentic partnerships exist” (Murawski, 2010, p.9). Collaboration as defined by Murawski (2010) is a “style for interaction, which includes dialogue, planning, shared and creative decision making, and follow-up between at least two coequal professionals with diverse expertise, in which the goal of the interaction is to provide appropriate services for students” (p. 9).

Collaboration is an active partnership between people who work together often from a diverse backgrounds to complete projects, solve problems, and provide services (Odegard, 2006) This definition can be applied to the collaboration that takes place in the FDK programs; teaching partners, such as OCTs and DECEs, come together from different educational
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backgrounds and work together in order to achieve common goals. Defining collaboration
effectively is an important element to consider since it could have different meanings in different
contexts. (Odergard, 2006). Odegard’s study focused on how professionals
define collaboration, which can be defined according to the person and his/her experiences and
expertise. Research has also found that collaboration is formed based on a
common interest, explicit understanding and deliberate effort and intent; therefore, it is beyond a
friendly interaction and it contains a more meaningful concept (Karyn Callaghan, 2002).

Little (1990) introduces the four stages of collaboration beginning with storytelling. In
this stage educators exchange information in an informal method of storytelling and educators
learn about their partner’s teaching philosophy and perspectives. The second stage revolves
around collaborative encounters which focuses on availability of mutual support. During this
phase educators are expected to provide immediate assistance and advice when required. This
stage is about sharing strategies and ideas; however it does not extend to commenting on the
curriculum, learning and instruction. The fourth stage is joint partnership; “encounters among
teachers that rest on shared responsibility for the work of teaching” (Little, 1990, p. 515).

2.2 Co-teaching Structures

Co-teaching refers to a situation where two or more educators “working together to plan,
conduct and evaluate the learning activities of the same group of learners.” (Goetz, 2000, p. 2).
Educational psychologist, Maroney (1995, 1997) describes five different methods of team
teaching:

- **Traditional Team Teaching**: In this method, both educators actively instruct
  simultaneously and equally share responsibilities for children’s learning goals.
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- Complimentary or Supportive Team Teaching: In this case, one educator takes responsibility of delivering curriculum requirement and implementing lessons while the second educator prepares follow-up intentional play-based activities to enhance and support the learning objectives.

- Parallel Instruction: in this teaching style, the educators divide the students into two groups without concerning the needs, strengths and special instructions. Both educators teach the same content with the same use of instructional style, strategies and skills.

- Differentiated Split-class: in this co-teaching model, educators divide the students into two groups based on the needs, specific instructions, and the learning style of their students. This style is mostly applicable in the classrooms which entails a diverse group of students who exhibit varied abilities and needs. As a result, one educator will be in charge of fostering the learning of those who require less assistance with providing follow-up enriching activities. On the other hand, the second educator provides reviewing the newly taught subject to those students who require additional support.

- Monitoring Teacher: In this co-teaching approach, one educator mainly instructs and delivers the lesson plan while the second educator circulates around the classroom to provide additional support and clarification.

Teaching partners may use a variety of these methods or only use one or two mainly in their teaching partnership depending on the learner’s needs, teaching philosophies, time and other financial constraints. According to Maroney (1995, 1997), complimentary and supportive teaching practices are the most common and best suited approaches to teaching in a FDK setting.

The research shows that, “the day to day work in the field [of FDK program] is still viewed as parallel interactions with ‘expertise’ in one area in order to get the work done”
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(Walton, 2014, p. 20). As a result, in the FDK model, both educators interact with one another through *Parallel Instruction* model. However, they do not necessarily teach the same group of students with the same topic simultaneously; they might have different teaching responsibilities due to other factors such as time and financial constraints (Goetz, 2000). For example, when OCT is responsible for teaching the literacy, the DECE undertakes creating hands-on activities for mathematics. Therefore, based on Maroney’s model what is currently practiced in the FDK classrooms is the combination of *Traditional Team Teaching, Complimentary or Supportive Team Teaching*, and *Parallel Instruction model*.

2.3 Team Development and Stages

The development of partnership has been examined in the business industry over the last decades. Teaching partnerships develop in the same style as business partnerships (Seery, Galentine, & Prelock, 2002; Cheng & Ko, 2009; Main, 2007; Shipley, 2009); therefore, we can use the existing findings on team development in business and industry and apply this knowledge in developing teaching partnerships in education (Clark Tozer, 2012). The literature on business team development suggests that there are four stages in team development which includes *Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing* stages. Therefore, team members develop their relationship in a predictable manner involving these stages (Tuckman, 1965). Upon establishing a team, team members require some time to get to know one another. At this stage, members are evidently polite towards one another and as a result of this behaviour, lack of communication and discomfort between members may arise which leads to undefined roles and responsibilities of members and increased amount of confusion. Hence, there will be hidden feelings and members might have different uncommunicated goals and perspectives. However, if the forming stage
progresses without moving to the next step, team members will face challenges such as low self-esteem and lack of communication (Tuckman, 1965).

During the Norming stage, the relationship between members becomes more volatile due the start of communication and possible formation of debates. In this stage, members will start debating and expressing their oppositions and ideas which may lead to resentment; however, having open discussions and resolving the problem rather than covering it up will advance the relationship and in fact it will be a positive challenge for members to face. Sometimes team members can remain in this stage for a while especially when they take the discussions and debates personally. On the other hand, if members create the opportunity to discuss their issues openly without personal attacks, they can resolve their conflicts with more empathy and care. When they start to openly communicate about their feelings, wants, and needs, team trust is being established and improved gradually (Tuckman, 1965).

During Norming stage, members learn about strengths and areas of improvement, they identify common goals, roles and responsibilities. Questioning, exploring and testing new ground is an essential part of Norming stage. The members will eventually reach a high level of comfort if they reach this stage and they work towards moving to the Performing stage.

By reaching to the Performing stage, members will exhibit higher level of confidence and self-esteem. Consequently, they take pride in their accomplishment, take initiative, become creative and learn from one another more effectively (Tuckman, 1965). This increased collaboration between teaching partners will result into a greater program quality (Corter et al., 2007) and ultimately a greater sense of collegiality lead into more positive attitudes towards teaching (McGinty, Justice, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008).

2.4 Benefits of Collaborative Teaching Structures
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There are many advantages to teacher collaboration as it helps “… achieve more complex goals, improve social interactions and increase creativity” (Callaghan, 2012, p.13). In addition, teachers reported “fewer parents to communicate with and only one set of report cards to complete” (Clark Tozer, 2012, p. 56). FDK teachers also mentioned that they are satisfied with preparing single set of lesson plans and materials (Clark Tozer, 2012). “Having another teacher in the classroom may provide pedagogical support and camaraderie that single teacher classrooms do not offer” (McGinty, Justice & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008, p. 361). Moreover, students with special needs gain higher achievement and success in classrooms that co-teaching applies since partnership between educators with special need expertise leads to an inclusive planning and learning environment for marginalized students (Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Weiss, & Lloyd, 2002).

Another significant benefit that co-teaching offers is bringing two individuals who have diverse educational and professional backgrounds, talent, capabilities, and strength to teach students and deliver their knowledge and experience to the learning environment to maximize student’s learning (Thousand, Villa & Nevin, 2006). This definition of partnership aligns with how FDK team members collaborate with one another, for example, how they share various perspectives and responsibilities within the classroom (Chiasson, Yearwood, & Olsen, 2006). Furthermore, co-teaching provides an opportunity to enhance teacher-student interaction and increased individualized attention (Boudah, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1997; Murawski, 2006). Benefits to the students include exhibiting a higher degree of engagement, enhanced cooperation with their peers, and higher tolerance towards the elements of inclusive classrooms (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffle, 2007; Austin, 2001).
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Classrooms that were based on co-teaching structure benefit from the highest student care quality, enhanced learning opportunities and materials, increased student achievement, and positive behaviour in both teachers and students (Scruggs et al., 2007). These positive outcomes are the result of lower teacher-student ratio which ultimately leads to proving immediate attention to students and higher level of responsiveness (Scruggs et al., 2007; Austin, 2001). As a result, teachers reported to experience less work pressure due to sharing roles and responsibilities (Shim, Hestenes, & Cassidy, 2004; Scruggs et al., 2007; Austin, 2001). There may be multiple challenges within the co-teaching structure; however, research also has identified many advantages and positive outcome to both educators and students.

2.5 Known Challenges Related to Collaborative Teaching

Some of the known challenges of collaborative teaching can be summarized to willingness to collaboration, recognizing the benefits of co-teaching, positive attitude towards collaboration, effective communication skills, previous experience in partnership, flexibility, conflicts in teaching perspectives and personalities, inefficient conflict management skills, inadequate training, administrative role and support, lack of knowledge of team-building process, and lack of power in choosing partner (Main, 2007).

Other findings on existing challenges of collaboration has been consistent with Main’s research in sharing the physical space of classroom and resources (Desimone, Payne, Fedoravicius, Henrich, & Finn-Stevenson, 2004) and the importance of dedicating co-planning time for teachers and DECEs (Gibson & Pelletier, 2011; Corter et al., 2007). Exhibiting lack of trust, incapability of being a team-player, setting unrealistic expectations, and presenting power struggles have become barriers to co-teaching structure (Shipley, 2009).
Another source of tension between teaching members could arise from differences in salary, educational background, working condition, and prestige between DECEs and OCTs (Johnson & Mathien, 1998). In a collaborative setting with professionals from different backgrounds, the one who holds a higher level of prestige tends to exhibit dominance over the other member that holds what may be perceived as a lower professional status (Calander, 2000). As a result, there is high potential for building a learning environment which is managed by hierarchal relationship (Corter et al., 2007). Although ranks within the workforce are required for the management of an organization, but at times it can also result in discrimination and exploitation of lower ranks (Ingram, n.d.). Exploitation of people in positions of lower rank in the workplace can lead to lower levels of commitment and loyalty to the organization (Ingram, n.d.). In a school environment especially there is no room to create a work environment where colleagues are not committed to their jobs as this will then effect the learning outcomes and environment for students.

2.6 Characteristics of Strong Collaborative Relationships in Education

Strong collaboration does not occur unless the members communicate frequently and effectively with one another (Clark Tozer, 2012). “[T]he hallmark of all successful partnerships is an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and open communications” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 1). Both DECEs and OCTs are encouraged to contribute to assessment process in order to enhance their professional relationship while sharing ideas, comments and perspectives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). Activities such as co-planning and co-constructing lesson plans for DECEs and OCTs makes their professional relationship more meaningful and productive (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012).

2.6.1 Co-planning
According to OCTs, DECEs and administrative team, teachers are primarily in charge of designing the lesson plans and class schedule (Clark Tozer, 2012). On the other hand, there was some recognition form the Ministry of Education that the meaningful collaboration is not practiced between the FDK members, unless their collaboration involves co-planning and decision making together. (Clark Tozer, 2012). However, this co-planning idea is not feasible for both members as only teachers are dedicated paid planning time, whereas DECEs are only paid hourly for the duration that students are in school. Therefore, DECEs are not granted paid planning time and they are not legally obligated to dedicate their personal time towards curriculum planning. The DECEs union directed them to avoid arriving early or staying after hours to participate in planning since they are not paid, nor required to work during those times (Clark Tozer, 2012). Due to these factors, DECEs have felt excluded from the planning process and have also felt that their teaching partner tend to dominate the classroom curriculum planning (Clark Tozer, 2012).

The FDK team members describe the challenges of not having formal time together with their teaching partners to benefit from joint planning and this concern was addressed by the Ministry of Education attention from School Districts (Clark Tozer, 2012). Currently, each school is struggling with finding creative methods to establish a time for both teachers and DECEs to plan together. Without much time invested in co-planning for members, the degree of their collaboration of co-teaching is severely restricted (Clark Tozer, 2012; Pelletier, 2014).

2.6.2 The role of administrative in collaboration

School administrative support of the FDK team members has a highly positive impact on the collaborative relationship between members (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). For example, school administrators have to be very sensitive towards including both FDK members
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in all meetings and inviting them to share their experiences and findings with the school community about the new FDK program. School administrators also can ensure the FDK members engage in formal or informal discussion including both members yet avoiding any preference of one member over another (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). Moreover, inviting DECEs in all after-school events such as parent’s conference nights and open house while recognizing that their participation is not mandatory (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). With implementing all these strategies school administrators value the important roles of FDK members and ultimately strengthen their professional bond in an effective manner.

FDK members work in close proximity of one another and facing conflicts is a natural part of their profession, however, having the right tool to resolve these conflicts is the key. Successful administrators have a fundamental role in reducing tension with creating an inclusive environment where conflicts are not perceived as a negative event but are seen as valuable learning opportunities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). The goal in situations as such should be communicating with all parties involved and giving them an opportunity to resolve their problems in an open, honest, and respectful manner and environment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012).

2.7 Conclusion

In this literature review I collected and examined research on educator collaboration in order to answer the research question posed: what are the core elements of the meaningful collaboration between three pairs of Ontario Certified Teachers and Designated Early Childhood Educators in the FDK program and how they co-plan the classroom curriculum together? The core elements identified for a meaningful collaboration between OCTs and DECEs includes honest and open dialogue, trust, support from administrative team, inclusion of DECEs in
decision making processes and events, and promoting conflict resolution skills through formal
and informal discussions. Co-planning within the classroom requires a formal planning time
granted to both educators in order to plan jointly and effectively.

The research shows a positive outcome to meaningful collaboration and co-planning
resulting in a better learning environment for both students and educators thereby promoting
academic and social success within the classroom. A further topic of research could determine
whether or not giving DECEs preparation time can promote a more organized and more effective
cooplanning strategies while simultaneously relieving stress related to time constraints that can
burden a co-planning partnership. Other areas of research interest include looking at the
correlation between student academic achievement in the form of good assessments and the
amount of co-planning each student is exposed and determining whether or not educators who
use co-planning report more positive feelings towards their profession as compared to educators
who do not implement co-planning in their classrooms. This literature review has complied the
challenges faced in collaboration between teachers and DECEs as well as the makeup of the
FDK classroom. However, no study to date has investigated the elements that make-up a
meaningful relationship between teachers and DECEs. By uncovering these elements, this will
promote a teaching environment that provides the best opportunity for students to learn and
thrive. Moreover, by discovering these elements, a conceptual framework can be developed and
used as a resource by teachers and DECEs to follow in order to implement a meaningful
collaboration between one another.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I begin with describing the research methodology, identifying the various methodological decisions that I have made, and my rational for all these decisions, considering the research purpose and questions. I explain a discussion of the research approach and procedure before identifying the main instrument of data collection. Then, I describe the participants of the study, identifying the sampling criteria, explaining the sampling procedure, and providing information about the participants. I continue to describe how I have completed the data analysis, before describing relevant ethical issues that may arise during this research project that need to be addressed. Finally, I conduct the chapter by explaining some of the methodological limitations of the study, while also highlighting and acknowledging its implementations.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews with three pairs of Ontario Certified Teachers (OCTs) and Designated Early Childhood Educators (DECEs) teams. The reason that I chose the qualitative research methodology for this topic is because it allows me to explore my topic in further detail; as Creswell (2013) describes, “There are all good reasons to explore the problem rather than to use predetermined information from the literature or rely on results from other research studies” (p.48).

Moreover, the qualitative research method provides a complex, detailed understanding of the research topic (Creswell, 2013). The focus “is not statistical representativeness, but instead the chance to look in detail at how selected people experience the world” (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 59). Furthermore, qualitative research assists the researching in developing a complex picture of
the research question “this involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges” (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). Therefore, this approach encourages researchers to not only focus on the cause-and-effect relationships amongst other factors, but it also enables them to identify the complex interactions of the factors in any situations. This detail can only be gained through talking to people directly which will empower individuals to share their stories, conducting face-to-face interviews, going to people’s home or places, and encouraging them to tell their stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature. Establishing this type of relationship with participants also minimizes the power relationship that often occurs between the researcher and the participant (Creswell, 2013).

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The three most common data collection methods for qualitative research include documentation, observation and interviews (Merriam, 2002). The primary instrument in this study is a semi-structured interview protocol. Interviews allows participants to share their views in their own terms and also provides reliable and comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

According to DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006), in-depth interviews are conducted when studying the shared understanding of a certain group. As I am studying the core elements of the meaningful collaboration between the DECEs and OCTs, interviews with a sample of DECCs and OCTs will result in the most relevant information. Utilizing open-ended interviews allows for more flexibility and responsiveness from both subjects and researcher (Jackson II et. al., 2007) allowing the subjects to be seen as more than just an instrument for data retrieval (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are also the best method of data
collection when there is only one chance provided to interview someone (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In addition to these interviews, Semi-structured interviews are often followed by observation, informal and unstructured interviewing “in order to allow the researchers to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Thus, for this study, the semi-structured interview protocol was the primary instrument of data collection. The time, location, and the questions for these interviews was arranged in advance; however during the interview process I have asked additional questions to gain a deeper understanding of the interviewee responses and point of view (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). One of the benefits of the semi-structured interviews are that they allow the researcher to design and plan an interview that focuses on to their research topic and questions, while leaving room for participants to elaborate and even re-direct attention to areas previously unforeseen by the interviewer (Creswell, 2013). Lastly, these interviews were conducted in a face-to-face manner between myself and the participants. This did not only allow me to delve deeper into more personal matter, but it also gave them the security to share their actual feelings and thoughts without another partner being present (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). I organized my protocol (located in Appendix B) into 4 sections, beginning with the participant’s background information, followed by questions about defining their roles and responsibilities within the FDK classrooms, having access to resources for professional development, and concluding with the role of the administration in establishing FDK team collaboration. Examples of questions include:

- How do you define your roles and responsibilities within the FDK classroom?
- How do you think having two educators in the FDK program can effect children’s overall development?
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- How do you define the role of the principal in building a positive team collaboration?

3.3 Participants

Here I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment, and I review a range of possible avenues for OCTs and DECEs recruitment. I have also included a section where I provide a brief introduction to the participants. Determining a study sample is an essential step in any research project as it often is unpractical, inefficient, and unethical to study whole populations (Marshall, 1996). Therefore, I designed the sampling criteria in a way that participants share the most critical commonalities in relation to the research question (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), below I address all methodological decisions related to the research participants.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The following criteria was applied to teacher participants:

- Two pairs of FDK team members that have established and maintained a positive relationship. Having members that have had a positive relationship will uncover more pertinent information about the elements that bring about meaningful collaboration.
- Both educators have to agree and self-identify that they are a part of a positive and collaborative FDK Team that involves co-planning. Being able to identify as a partner in a positive collaboration is important in that if the collaboration is not perceived as being positive, then no research on this collaborative team will be undertaken.
- Both FDK team members must have worked together for at least two consecutive years. This gives enough time for an authentic relationship to develop and elements of a relationship to become apparent.
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- The FDK team members should be employed by one of the public school boards across Ontario. The collaboration must be undertaken within public schools because of the accessibility and there are more public schools that can be included in this research project.

- They should have past relevant experiences outside the FDK classrooms. Having experience outside of the FDK classroom will provide an excellent opportunity to compare and contrast experiences and can provide for other information that can be used for secondary analysis or to provide information to be used in future research endeavors. For example, elements of meaningful collaboration outside the FDK classroom can be identified and they may contract with those required in the FDK setting.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

In order to recruit participants I decided to approach FDK teams whom I had previous affiliations with. Therefore, I employed convenience sampling, defined as recruitment of participants based on practical criteria (Etikan, Musa, Alkassim, 2015). This practical criteria turned to be accessible as I approached an FDK teams which I had previous affiliation with and they showed a high level of positive collaboration (Creswell, 2013). This team also referred me to other FDK team members within the same school that exhibit an existing positive collaboration.

3.3.3 Participant bios

The first participant was Sarah who is an Ontario Certified Teacher and has been employed with the public school board for eleven years. She has four years of experience as a supply teacher. Prior to her teaching experience in the FDK program, she was teaching alternate FDK program. Sarah also described her relationship with her partner as a positive collaboration.
She has more than ten years of teaching experience including teaching in the private school system which mainly focused on the early years.

The second participant was Anna who is a Registered Early Childhood Educator. Anna has eight years of teaching experience and a former supervisor of a before and after school program. She has worked with her teaching partner (Sarah) for more than two years and also describes her collaboration with her as meaningful one. Anna has been employed with the school board for five years now.

The third participant was Sabrina and she has five years teaching experience in the FDK program. Sabrina has shown and described her collaboration with her partner as a positive one. She also explained that she has a great passion for teaching kindergarten as she has been working with children since she was seventeen years old.

The last participant was Mary who has been employed as a DECE with the public education system. Mary described that she truly enjoys her partnership with her teaching partner (Sabrina) as they were able to communicate effectively and co-plan based on their free time. She had been teaching with her teaching partner over three years and described her collaboration with her as a meaningful one.

3.4 Data Analysis

Prior to my qualitative data analysis I outlined the steps I would be taking in order to accomplish this task. However, during the process there was a possibility of modifying data analysis strategies since, “data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process – they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project” (Creswell, 2013 p. 182). As a result, I entered this step with more flexibility, often going back and forth between steps to figure out what method works best.
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I began this process by audio-recording and transcribing all interviews upon receiving consent from the participants. Creswell (2013) specifies that dependability or reliability is enhanced by the researcher transcribing audiotapes themselves, so they can recall “trivial but crucial” (p. 45) pauses and overlaps. Therefore, I preferred transcribing the interviews myself rather than hiring someone to complete this task. I used an online transcription software called *Transcribe*. I transcribed directly following the interview, when the non-verbal cues would still be highly present in the interviewer’s mind. I provided all participants with the opportunity to validate their transcripts via email before the final data is used for analysis.

Due to the nature of the semi-structured interviews, I chose not to use “prefigured” coding because I could not anticipate what information my participants would have presented to me. Therefore, I used “emergent” coding to identify common concepts within my participants’ responses (Creswell, 2013, p. 185).

I began exploring the data by reading the transcripts several times while writing notes and memos in the margins. I went through each transcript line by line to identify the reoccurring concepts. Lastly, I came up with some categories and assigned a colour to each of them.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

According to Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000), no research process is free of ethical issues. However, the awareness of the ethical issues and use of appropriate ethical guideline is crucial in minimizing the potential risks that the research process may inflict on the participants (Orb et. al., 2000).

In order to eliminate any potential harm to my participants I proceeded with reassuring them that their participation is completely voluntary and their identity in the interview will remain confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Before conducting the interview, I provided
the participants with an opportunity to review the transcripts and to clarify or retract any
statements before conducting the data analysis. I further informed them that all data (audio
recordings) will be stored on my password protected computer and will be destroyed after five
years. Participants were asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) giving their consent to be
interviewed as well as audio-recorded. This consent letter provided an overview of the study,
addresses ethical implications, and specifies expectations of participation. The interview lasted
approximately 45-60 minutes.

Due to the semi-structured format of our interviews, my participants had an opportunity
to provide me with in-depth responses, and as researcher I was able to use follow-up questions
for clarification or more information. I reassured participants throughout the interview and in the
consent letter that they have the right to refrain from answering any question that they do not feel
comfortable with, as well as re-stating their right to withdraw from participation. Participants
were reassured that there are no known risks involved with participation.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The most significant shortcoming of this study is that data could not be generalized to the
population due to the limited number of participants (Jackson II et. al., 2007). On the other hand,
the strength of this methodology was that it allowed for a much deeper understanding of
identifying core elements of meaningful collaboration between DECEs and OCTs, as compared
to more rigid approaches such as surveys and structured interviews (Carr, 1994). Specifically,
the nature of this study allowed me to interview teachers and DECEs to obtain first-hand
experience and thoughts. These interviews could validate teacher’s voice and experience,
providing them with a platform to address what matters most to them, and make meaning from their own lived experiences.

One of the drawbacks of this method was the researcher’s analysis which may be involved with some biases and shortcomings within the data (Merriam, 2002). As a result, researchers have a tendency to interpret data; consequently, the assessment of the reliability becomes problematic (Carr, 1994). Another imitation of a qualitative methodology was the relationship between the participants and the researcher; this relationship could potentially distort findings. However according to Carr (1994) it was still reasonable to use qualitative methodology due to the high levels of validity considering that the risks that may be involved during the process.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I explained the research methodology; I began with a discussion of the research approach and procedure, delving into the meaning and significance of qualitative research and highlighting some of its major differences from quantitative research. I then described the instruments of data collection, identifying interviews as the primary data collection instrument. I then mentioned some of the advantages of semi-structured interviews. Following that, I identified the participants of the study, listing some of the criteria used to determine the eligibility of the participants which are summarized as follows: 1) teaching partners that consist of a DECE and OCT, 2) a collaboration of at least two years, 3) they identify their teaching partnership as positive, and 4) have taught within Ontario public school boards. Moreover, I described the recruitment process which entailed convenient sampling in order to maximize my opportunity to find participants. I proceeded to describe how I have analyzed the data, examining individual interviews before looking for common patterns and themes across the data. Ethical
issues such as consent, risks of participation, right to withdraw, and data storage were also mentioned, and ways to address these potential issues were recognized. Lastly, I discussed the methodological limitations of the study, such as the interpretive abilities and biases of the researcher, while also highlighting some of the strengths, such as first-hand accounts with teachers and DECEs. In the next chapter, I will report on the findings of the research.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter discusses and analyzes the findings that emerged through the data analysis of the research interviews. Throughout this analysis, I referred back to my research questions: How do teams of full-day Kindergarten educators describe the structure and rationale of their co-planning routine and procedures? And what are some benefits and challenges of the co-planning structure? In the discussion, I will analyze the connections between participants’ experiences and the findings from the literature review. Findings are organized into four main themes:

- Participants described co-planning as a method of shared planning responsibilities that results in a strong learning environment.
- Participants described that they share the co-planning responsibilities equally.
- Co-planning was seen to have a positive impact on collaboration and understanding between teaching teams.
- Timing and conflicting approaches can be barriers to co-planning between teaching teams.

Each theme also includes sub-themes that further explains in more detail about the findings in a classroom setting. I will begin each theme by describing it, then reporting on the data, and finally discussing the significance of each theme within the context of the existing literature. Finally, I will summarize my findings and make recommendations for next steps and future areas of research.

Participants consist of two teams of FDK. Each team includes a Designated Early Childhood Educator (DECE) and an Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT). Both DECEs and teachers offer individual strengths and perspectives as well as a set of professional capabilities,
knowledge, skills and abilities while they are assigned different roles and responsibilities. As an example, DECEs are mainly responsible for incorporating the knowledge of early childhood development into the classroom by designing age-appropriate learning opportunities which promotes each child’s physical, cognitive, language, emotional, social and creative development and well-being. On the other hand, teachers are more responsible for implementing their knowledge of Ontario curriculum into their co-planning process. In addition, they have a higher level of responsibility for assessment, evaluation, and reporting the child’s development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012).

4.1 Participants Described Co-planning as a Method of Shared Planning Responsibilities that Results in a Strong Learning Environment.

All participants spoke of similar co-planning experiences and disclosed that shared roles and responsibilities make their collaborations more meaningful. Exploring the co-planning methods and strategies provide detailed information which enhances the reader’s understanding of the structure of co-planning. And it provides context for the upcoming discussion on this particular learning environment. As a result, students could benefit from such an enriched learning environment. Specifically, participants emphasized that their co-planning strategies does not involve defined roles and responsibilities and they equally share the tasks based on their level of expertise.

4.1.1 Participants describe the structure of their co-planning as that of shared responsibility without defined teaching roles.

All participants mentioned that their roles in the classroom are not defined and they complete the tasks based on their availability and expertise. Anna said, “to be honest there’s no ‘You do this and I do that’ We both do it all and jump in to help the other as needed”. This
participant believes that this method of collaboration allows for them to focus more on the students and spend more time with students rather than being focused on who did what. The participant further explained that the Kindergarten room setting is busy and a teacher must remain more focused on the students and their learning as opposed to defining roles. Similarly, Mary also mentioned that they complete the tasks based on their expertise. For example, she mentioned,

we share all the responsibilities and no one has defined roles. I think the teacher can teach the educational stuff better than me and there are other things I can do like transition songs, morning circle, and afternoon circle; we share based on what we can do the best. Sabrina also added that the “program becomes something that you are both working on together so, it’s not that the teacher decides that this is what we’re gonna do or the DECE decides this is what we should do.

Based on the findings from my interview process, teachers and DECEs share roles and responsibilities based on their expertise. In the literature review, Chiasson, Yearwood, and Oslen (2006) claimed that in the co-teaching contexts both educators have the advantage of incorporating varied perspective while sharing responsibilities. Therefore, the findings from the interview process supported the literature review. In addition to this, however, existing research did not highlight that FDK members share responsibilities based on their expertise and availability. My research demonstrates that teachers may gravitate towards their areas of expertise based on their professional experience. Literature also suggested that educators who make decisions as a team can strengthen their collaborative structure and ultimately enhance teacher-child engagement (Malaguzzi, 1998; McNairy, 1988). My research findings also support
this conclusion, as Anna also mentioned that collaboration between members that are based on their expertise can enhance teacher-child interaction quality and time.

4.1.2 Participants claim that co-planning results in a stronger learning environment for students.

Co-planning creates a stronger learning environment for the students was a common finding belief between all participants. Sabrina states,

I think it’s definitely positive. And I mean like whenever one of us is out of the classroom and there is too much going on, you feel you are missing so much without the second pair of ears so I think it definitely increases the opportunities and what you can engage with the students when there are two people. And I also think when you sit down to talk with your partner and you discuss the things that you have noticed during the day, you realize oh I didn’t see it that way or oh I didn’t hear that. So when you have a partner it’s really helpful to learn about the children.

Sabrina emphasized the importance of having two educators in the classroom. She mentioned some of the benefits of co-planning which included, but were not limited to, enhancing teacher-student interaction and incorporating different teaching methods and perspectives. Mary, a DECE, also mentioned, “I think the teacher can teach the educational stuff better than me, and there are other things I can do, like transition songs, morning circle, and afternoon circle; so we share based on what we can do the best”. Consequently, when two experts share responsibilities based on their experience and professional knowledge, they can create a strong learning environment for the students.

This finding coincided with studies included in the literature review. According to Scruggs et al., (2007) and Austin (2001), classrooms that were based on a co-teaching structure
benefit from the highest student care quality, enhanced learning opportunities and materials, increased student achievement, and positive behaviour in both teachers and students. These benefits are seen as resulting from a lower student-teacher ratio. Furthermore, Boudah, Schumaker, & Deshler (1997) also believe that co-teaching provides an opportunity to enhance teacher-child interaction and increased individualized attention. By highlighting the additional opportunities for observation and student interaction that co-planning allows, participants are observing the same benefits pointed out by research.

The main goals of the FDK program is maximizing the co-teaching performance by incorporating the knowledge, experience, and skills of the DECEs into the FDK classrooms (Barnett & Ackermann, 2006). Quality programs cannot come to fruition unless they are delivered by the staff who are diverse, skilled, well-experienced, and knowledgeable (Barnett & Ackermann, 2006). In a similar way, participants’ experiences sharing responsibilities with flexibility demonstrate one way to maximize co-teaching performance.

4.2 Participants Described that They Share the Co-planning Responsibilities Equally in and out of School, Despite the Burden of Assessment Falling More Heavily on the Teacher.

I found that co-planning roles and responsibilities are shared equally between teachers and DECEs. However, I discovered that teachers believe that they carry more responsibilities as they need to fulfill some defined roles from the Ministry of Education. First, I will discuss how teaching teams share planning while considering the fact that teacher carry more responsibility in regards to assessment. Then, I will explain that all participants have indicated that they use their personal time to co-plan. Finally, I will introduce the different methods of communication that all members use to co-plan during their personal time.
4.2.1 Planning is shared equally between teaching teams, but teachers carry more assessment responsibility.

Based on the information that all participants have provided, planning is equally shared between members; however, teachers have higher level of responsibilities compered to DECEs when planning roles are shared and defined. As an example, teachers have some defined roles from the Ontario College of Teachers such as preparing report cards and conducting assessments. Sabrina reported, “We plan together however I have more responsibilities from the ministry like report cards and conducting assessments”. Anna had also mentioned that educators share responsibilities based on their level of expertise and experiences. The model of co-teaching that participants shared was also in line with the literature review. According to both the literature review and my finding, what is currently being practiced in the FDK classrooms is the combination of Traditional Team Teaching, Complimentary or Supportive Team Teaching (Walton, 2014, & Goetz, 2000). Based on participants’ experience and perceptions, they are performing traditional team-teaching and complimentary or supportive team teaching in the FDK classrooms. For example, the teacher is more responsible for teaching the educational materials whereas the DECE takes charge in hands-on lessons and activities. Therefore, my findings were in line with the literature review with respect to Traditional Team Teaching and Complimentary and Supportive Team Teaching.

4.2.2 Teachers and DECEs indicated that they equally use their personal time to plan.

According to all participants, lack of time was the most common barrier for the co-planning process and they dedicate most of their personal time to co-planning. As an example, Sarah indicated that, “sometimes we do it after school or even during the weekend”. Moreover, Mary disclosed, “if we arrive early or have an extra time at the end of the day we spend that time...
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on planning together”. Sabrina and Anna both declared that they use their personal time during lunch hour to communicate their ideas with their teaching partner. Anna reported, “We do it [co-planning] before school, at lunch, and after school sometimes”. Similarly Mary mentioned, “We usually use the minutes which we have inside our outside school. Like during lunch”.

Finding time as a barrier through my research was consistent with the research study by Clark Tozer (2012), who found that, in Ontario, the co-planning idea is not feasible for both members as only teachers receive dedicated paid planning time and DECEs are only paid hourly for the duration that students are in school. Clark Tozer (2012) found that DECEs are not granted paid planning time and they are not legally obligated to dedicate their personal time towards curriculum planning. Further, the DECEs union directed them to avoid arriving early or staying after hours to participate in planning since they are not paid, nor required to work during those times. In contrast with this research, I learned from my participants that some DECEs do not follow such union direction, as they are arriving early and staying after school hours to co-plan.

In the literature review, Clark Tozer (2012) also emphasized that lack of co-planning time may result in increasing the feeling of exclusion for DECEs as they felt that their teaching partner tended to dominate the classroom curriculum planning. This information contradicted with my finding as none of the participants reported feelings of exclusion due to lack of co-planning time.

4.2.3 Teachers and DECEs use a variety of digital communication tools to facilitate co-planning.

Participants expressed different ideas about lack of time as an existing challenge in co-planning process. Only one participant claimed that lack of time is not an issue; yet, they have to be creative with their time in hand. According to both Sarah and Mary, co-planning is observed
in some classrooms only. Sarah had mentioned, “you see co-planning in some classrooms; again, it goes back to lack of time”. On the other hand, Sabrina believes that “co-planning can be done in many creative ways. You have to be creative with your time. Time is not an issue in my opinion, but we have to find creative ways to manage our time well”.

Participants have indicated that they use a variety of different methods to communicate their planning ideas and suggestions. Some of the methods that they use are social media, email, phone conversations and text messaging. Anna indicated, “we email and text each other to discuss the day as well as future plans for the week. And this is honestly every day”.

According to the current research, as outlined in the literature review, each school is struggling with finding creative methods to establish a time for both teachers and DECEs to plan together (Clark Tozer, 2012). This was in consistent with my finding as Sabrina declared that time is not an issue; yet, figuring out how to creatively use the time is a talent which we all have to develop. As a result, future research can focus further on different strategies on how using the time more creatively.

4.3 Co-planning Has a Positive Impact on Collaboration and Understanding between Teaching Teams

Throughout my research I learned that co-planning promotes many advantages for both team members. First, co-planning helps improve educators’ organization and collaboration skills. Working together in this way then helps them build their understanding of each other at a deeper level in addition to creating and maintaining the sense of unity between FDK members which makes them stronger as a team.

4.3.1 Co-planning enhances organization and collaboration skills
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Based on the information that I retrieved from my participants, co-planning process can assist members to become more organized and also to enhance their collaboration skills with one another. Sabrina expressed, “when co-planning we both know what we are going to do next and it helps us to be more organized and prepared for the lesson”. Similarly, Sarah noted, “If you don’t talk about what’s gonna happen and if you don’t know about it, the other person won’t feel organized and comfortable”. Therefore, both participants believed that co-planning enhances organization and collaboration skills amongst team members. For example, Anna and Sabrina who are a teaching team mentioned that they have a Google doc which they share their ideas and teaching materials collaboratively. As a result, they both have equal access to co-planning and the changes that might happen during this process. They also mentioned that accessing the Google Doc allows them to be more organized and efficient.

In the literature review it was also mentioned that co-planning could result in a higher collaboration skills and it brings team members closer to one another (McGinty, Justice & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). A novel finding that emerged from this theme was that when members have the opportunity to co-plan they become more organized as a team and they are both aware of the plan in advance thereby preparing them for the lessons as needed. For example, member discussed that try to organize informal weekly meetings to discuss their lesson plans and the materials which they need. This sub-theme was not something that I came across when conducting the literature review and therefore is a new finding that I came across from my research. Instead the literature was focused on the challenges to co-planning without a focus on how these challenges can be rectified. As a result, this new finding provides an opportunity to illustrate how co-planning brings about a positive outcome and how it is an asset to their teaching performance.
4.3.2 Co-planning allows the educators to understand and comprehend each other’s perspectives and enhances unity between members

Co-planning provides an opportunity for the members to learn more about each other’s teaching philosophies and perspectives at a deeper level. For example, Anna declared, “co-planning allows partners to get to know one another in a more professional way”. Sarah also supported that idea by indicating “co-planning lets me to get into my teaching partner’s head. She explains her vision to me and I do my best to understand her ideas and see where she’s coming from and vice versa”. Therefore, based on my finding, co-planning allows the teaching partners to understand one another on a deeper scale and comprehended the reasons behind their partner’s actions. This finding was in line with the literature review as Challagan (2012) also mentioned that co-planning allows educators to communicate more openly about their intent behind the planning process. As a result, team members could enhance their understanding of their partner’s goal and objectives and also learn from one another during co-planning.

Participants also expressed that co-planning creates unity between members. Anna reported, “co-planning enhances the level of respect and unity in that partnership”. Mary also said, “when we co-plan we become closer as a team. We develop not just a professional relationship but also a personal one”. As a result, participants claimed that co-planning creates a sense of unity between them and it enhances their relationship to a more personal level. This finding supports with the literature by Shim, Hestenes, and Cassidy (2004) that teachers and DECEs report less work pressure, and feeling more respected and included when co-planning. As mentioned above, teachers mentioned that co-planning provides them with an opportunity to become more unified with their partner. It is during this process that they become more familiar with one another teaching philosophies, perspectives and also they can get to know each other in
a more personal level. Therefore, based on my finding, co-planning is an asset to the FDK setting.

4.4 Timing and Conflicting Approaches Can be Barriers to Co-planning between Teaching Teams.

All participants agreed that lack of time and possessing different teaching approaches could be the most considerable barriers teaching members experience while co-planning. Having different teaching perspectives can result in challenges between teaching partners during co-planning. Co-planning can also be hindered by lack of time. Finally, I the sense of competition between teaching members can be a source of tension.

4.4.1 Different teaching philosophies can interfere with co-planning

Based on the information that participants revealed, different teaching philosophies could hinder the co-planning process. According to Mary, “Sometimes teachers come with a traditional way of looking at kindergarten and they have difficulty adjusting to the new curriculum. And at the same time ECEs are coming from a play-based ideas. This sometimes can be a problem”. Furthermore, Sarah also recognized the different teaching approaches as a barrier and shared the following idea, “I think both educators should be involved in co-planning, but what makes it difficult sometimes is that they don’t come from the same background and they have different teaching methods”. Therefore, Sarah considered co-planning as a positive aspect of the FDK setting; however, she mentioned educators’ different teaching philosophies and experiences as an obstacle. This finding was also supported in the literature review; according to Johnson & Mathien (1998), a source of tension between teaching members could arise from differences in educational backgrounds and working conditions and this tension can impact the co-planning process.
4.4.2 Co-planning can be hindered by time and different lifestyles

Another element that could be perceived as a barrier in the co-planning process was identified as lack of time. All participants reported that lack of time is their main barrier for co-planning. They all agreed that DECEs should also be given dedicated planning time along with teachers. Sarah mentioned, “I think time and different life styles are the biggest barriers. You know like someone has a family, kids to pick up at the end of the day. And you gotta have to find a happy medium”. Similarly, Mary responded by saying “we have lots of resources to use, but I think lack of time is our biggest challenge”. Therefore, lack of shared planning time was recognized as the most considerable barrier by all participants. This was also supported in the literature review (Shipley, 2009); however there was no indication of different life-styles as an identified barrier. Based on participants’ perspective different life-styles is an important barrier that hinders the co-planning and communication process.

4.4.3 Co-planning is affected by members’ sense of competitiveness

A sense of competiveness was recognized as a barrier for co-planning by two of the participants. Mary indicated, “Sometimes there is a power struggle between teachers and DECEs. And you can see them getting competitive over planning and designing activities”. Sarah also mentioned, “Sometimes teachers want to take over and they feel they know more because they have higher educations. As if it’s a competition”. This finding was also supported by the literature review; Calender (2000) noted that in a collaborative setting with professionals from different backgrounds, the one who holds a higher level of prestige tends to exhibit dominance over the other member that holds what may be perceived as a lower. Based on my finding, none of my participants experienced this sense of competiveness themselves but they witness how sometimes teachers tend to be more dominant in program planning and running the
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classroom due to the higher level of education which they hold. This indeed was identified as a detrimental factor towards enhancing collaboration between FDK members.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, from the research undertaken, it was demonstrated that teachers and DECEs share the roles and responsibilities equally in the classroom and ultimately this equality in participation creates a stronger bond between members. In addition, teachers are expected to accept and perform more responsibilities due to their ethical and legal obligation as outlined by Ontario College of Teachers. Some of these added responsibilities include but are not limited to preparing students’ report cards, designing age-appropriate lesson plans, and conducting assessments. Moreover, from this research project identified some of the benefits and challenges that exist with the co-planning process, the biggest challenge being lack of time for co-planning and conflicting approaches. Both members recognized lack of designated planning time for DECEs as a overtly recognizable challenge of the co-planning process. Furthermore, research conducted it became apparent that DECEs exhibited a greater level of interest in co-planning even though they were not being paid to do so. These findings make a significant contribution to the existing literature by focusing on how enhancing co-planning time and paying DECEs for co-planning period. As it was discussed earlier, this research builds on previous research findings and further solidifies the importance of strong co-teaching as a beneficial aspect to the quality of FDK program. From a policy standpoint, the rules, regulations and responsibilities of DECEs should be updated, with co-lesson planning being incorporated as a recognized responsibility of DECEs. By including this as a recognized responsibility of DECEs, it will then become a requirement of employers to pay DECEs for this time commitment.
Next in Chapter 5, the broad and narrow implications for these findings, give recommendations and note potential areas of further research will be outlined and discussed.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the overall implications and significance of this research study. I begin by reviewing my key findings on how teams of full-day Kindergarten educators describe the structure and rationale of their co-planning routine and procedures and the benefits and challenges of the co-planning structure. With this in mind, I make recommendations which may be utilized by FDK team members across Ontario. Finally, I pose questions and suggest further areas of research and discussion.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Key Significance

As mentioned in the previous chapter of this study, I studied the co-teaching structure and its benefits and challenges between teachers and DECEs in the FDK programs. Participants disclosed that co-planning is an equally shared responsibility that promotes an environment of stronger collaboration between team members. Additionally, they mentioned that co-planning has a positive influence on their collaboration and team-teaching. On the other hand, they discussed the various barriers in the co-planning process such as timing and conflicting approaches.

According to the information that participants revealed, co-planning roles and responsibilities are not defined and tasks are completed based on their availability and expertise. Even though they share responsibilities, teachers have the higher level of responsibilities as compared to DECEs when planning roles are shared.

Based on the findings, having two educators in the classroom results in positive outcome such as an increase in teacher-student interaction, different teaching styles and varied perspectives to teaching. The main challenge which was introduced in the previous chapter was lack of time and having different teaching perspectives and experiences. According to all
participants, lack of time was the most common barrier for the co-planning process and they dedicate most of their personal time to co-planning. Co-planning is a topic in itself and is very subjective; how different teaching units co-plan varies when compared to other teaching partners. Nonetheless, the re-occurring theme between teaching partners as it relates to co-planning is lack of time and differences in the distribution of responsibilities.

5.2 Implications

In this section, I outline the implications of my research for both those in the educational research community including school boards, schools, and educational professionals and my own practice and development as a new teacher.

5.2.1 The educational research community

Based on the results, the positive and meaningful relationship between the FDK members has been recognized as one of the most important factors in building a stronger learning environment. According to the existing literature, strong collaboration does not occur unless the members communicate frequently and effectively with one another (Tozer, 2012). Moreover, “the hallmark of all successful partnerships is an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and open communications” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 1). This notion was in line with my finding as well, however, there is not much research conducted on how to foster this relationship and how to dedicate planning time to both educators; In other words what steps or protocols need to be followed or implemented to promote mutual respect, trust and open communication between teaching partners. To fill this research gap, based on my participants’ input I discovered that the mutual respect, trust and communication is brought about, not by defining roles and responsibilities, but by contributing based on each team member’s availability and area of expertise. Furthermore, they work as a team in order to support and complement each other
rather than working in isolation. Communication is fostered by welcoming open dialogue and not withholding feelings but instead sharing them with one another so that no resentment occurs thus creating a relationship founded on trust and respect.

A cohesive, happy and healthy co-teaching relationship is not only beneficial to the teachers involved but also has an impact on the students as well. Research has shown there is positive correlation between positive teacher-student interaction and students’ learning (Hattie, 2008). Moreover, I also found that educators show a higher level of happiness and satisfaction when establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with their teaching partners. As a result, when educators are content in their work environment, this security projects onto students. Consequently, students perceive themselves as valued and respected member of the learning community; they feel competent and capable since the positive teacher-student interaction impacts students’ sense of self and belonging. This will ultimately enable them to be more engaged in their learning process and to feel more comfortable in expressing their thoughts and ideas.

From these findings, advocacy in formulating strategies that promote the above mentioned characteristics within co-teaching relationships should be made and then implemented in classroom settings. These strategies will not only create greater work environment morale but will also create a positive learning environment conducive to students’ learning and development.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice

As a former DECE I was already aware of the challenges co-teaching relationships faced. Seeing that these same issues plagued other co-teaching relationships was very eye opening and made me realize that these issues are real and must be addressed. Due to my own personal
experience with these challenges, as a future educator I will be more attuned to these issues and therefore will be able to recognize them and thus prevent them from harming or polluting my co-teaching relationship with early childhood educators. Based on my previous experience as a DECE, having the opportunity to study co-teaching relationships, and being given the opportunity to further analyze and discuss this topic in my research paper has allowed me to identify challenges faced by co-teachers. Furthermore, it has also transformed me into an advocate for developing and sustaining positive co-teaching relationships. To implement strategies to remedy the challenges faced by DECE and teachers requires recognition that a problem exists, open dialogue and finally providing a solution. For example, I hope to be able to create preparation time that involves my teaching partners to make sure that we can express our ideas, expertise and most importantly to make sure we are working toward common goals. I will create a welcoming environment that will allow DECEs to express how they feel and be comfortable in approaching me if they feel any issues have arisen within our co-teaching relationship.

5.3 Recommendations

One of the main barriers of a meaningful collaboration between FDK members was the lack time for co-planning. DECEs indicated that they had to spend their personal time in order to be able to co-plan with their teaching partner. They emphasized that during co-planning process they learn more about one another and it makes them more unified as a team. Therefore, I highly recommend the Ministry of Education to provide DECEs with paid planning time in order to overcome this barrier. Another recommendation is the Ministry of Education to provide professional development workshops that allows both DECEs and teachers to learn to work alongside one another to develop a healthy partnership. These workshops will provide teachers
and DECEs the tools to overcome differences that may arise and to also promote unity and mutual respect between one another. At a more specific level, co-planning should be fostered at level of both the teachers and DECEs; both need to feel that planning together is something that needs to be achieved willfully and with mutual respect. Educators and principles need to possess the same mind set and ideologies when it comes to the shared responsibility of co-planning between teachers and DECEs. For example, full-day workshops can be organized by principles of schools focused on co-planning to promote increased morale between teachers and DECEs and for them to come to value the positive outcomes shared co-planning can bring to a classroom.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Areas of further research include devising strategies that works for teachers and DECEs that can be utilized by teaching partners to overcome the barriers identified in this research project. Other areas to which research can be expanded on is identifying the core elements of meaningful collaboration between teaching partners with the hopes of having them published within the Ministry of Education mandates. Just as there exists core elements required by educators to provide students, these elements would apply to employees of the board specifically targeting DECE and teacher partnerships. Furthermore, in depth analysis of what co-planning entails would be a study on its own; by knowing the building blocks of co-planning these elements can then be taught to teaching partners so that they can be equipped with the tools and knowledge to employ them successfully. The ultimate goal of these future research endeavours is to make changes at the level of both the ministry and teaching partners so that we can know what works for teaching partners and then at the broader level have the ministry apply them within all district school boards. Overall, educational research should focus more attention on
strengthening relationship of educators between one another since these relationships ultimately influence how educators teach and thus affects the learning outcomes of students.

5.5 Concluding Comments

After conducting this qualitative research, I identified four significant themes that contribute to the meaningful collaboration:

- Participants described co-planning as a method of shared planning responsibilities that results in a strong learning environment.
- Participants described that they share the co-planning responsibilities equally.
- Co-planning was seen to have a positive impact on collaboration and understanding between teaching teams.

4) Timing and conflicting approaches can be barriers to co-planning between teaching teams.

Identifying the dynamics of the relationship between educators and DECEs is of significant importance in that their relationship with one another is directly related to students’ learning outcomes. When educators feel that their contributions are significant, respected, and bear value, this promotes unity and most importantly provides positive reinforcement which in turn allows educators to teach and work to the highest of their abilities. When educators are working at the highest capacity this then is reflected onto their students, thus creating an environment of learning and positive development. Therefore, this research is not only important for educators themselves but is also important to all other stakeholders including students, auxiliary staff and parents since they are all connect to one another and share a mutual goal of providing students the best learning opportunities. When educators cooperate and work well with one another, students learn better and thus parents are reassured that their children are receiving
the best education and care. When educators work in unity and are content with their working partners, then policy makers can invest their time, money and efforts in others areas that may be lacking. Such a small investment at the level of teaching partners creates a multitude of positive outcomes such as boosting employee morale, making teaching partners feel important and respected. Thus, although studying and improving partnerships between educators may seem only pertinent to improving the working life of educators in reality it effects all aspect of the education spectrum.
References


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Date: April 09, 2016

Dear __________________________,

My Name is Shima Ghasemi and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on identifying core elements of meaningful collaboration between Designated Early Childhood Educators and Ontario Certified Teachers in the Full-Day Kindergarten program. Specifically, I am interested in learning how these teams engage in co-planning. I am interested in interviewing teachers and DECEs who self-describe as having a positive collaborative relationship, and who have been working together for two consecutive years. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for 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. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.
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Sincerely,

Name: Shima Ghasemi
Email: shima.ghasemi@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic
Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

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 from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Shima Ghasemi and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: __________________________________________

Name: (printed) _________________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to identify the core elements of meaningful collaboration and co-planning between Designated Early Childhood Educators and Ontario Certified Teachers in the Full-Day Kindergarten program for the purpose of enhancing the team collaboration quality within the Full-Day Kindergarten programs. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on identifying the core elements of a positive collaboration between team members. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information

1. How long have you worked with children and in what capacities?
2. What is your current position and role within the FDK program?
3. What is your level of education? (e.g. Diploma, Degree, ….)
4. What specific training, certifications and/or qualifications do you currently hold?
5. For how many years have you been working with your current teaching partner?
6. How would you describe your collaborative relationship with your teaching partner?
   - What factors do you think made your collaboration with your partner a positive one?
7. What has your experience been learning to team-teach? Did you have any formal training in this area? If yes, what was it?
8. How would you describe your role and responsibility with the FDK classroom?
9. How would you describe your teaching partner’s role and responsibilities?
10. Does your school board have any policies or guidelines that outline your responsibilities in the FDK classroom?

Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

11. What does meaningful collaboration mean to you?
   - How do you understand this term?
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- What key characteristics do you associate with meaningful collaboration?
- What distinguishes collaboration from meaningful collaboration?
- How do you think having two educators in the FDK program can affect children’s overall development?

12. What do you feel are the most important ingredients of meaningful collaboration within a team-teaching framework and why?

13. More specifically, what do you believe is the role of co-planning in establishing meaningful collaboration and why?

- What are the benefits of co-planning, in your experience?
  - For you?
  - For your collaborative partnership?
  - For your students?

14. In your view, what does it mean to co-plan? What needs to be involved in this process?

15. In your experience, are you under the impression that co-planning commonly takes place in FDK classrooms in Ontario? What gives you that impression?

16. In your view, what are some of the key barriers that get in the way of co-planning between teachers and DECEs?

**Teacher Practices**

17. How do you and your teaching partner work together, if at all, to define your roles and responsibilities within the FDK classroom?

18. What does meaningful collaboration look like in your teaching practice? In what various ways do you collaborate? *listen, and then probe further as necessary

- Do you attend staff meetings as a team?
- Do you collaborate when it comes to assessment and evaluation? If yes, what does this look like in practice?
- Do you attend parent meetings as a team? If yes, do you consult about your comments for each child first? What do you do if your assessments differ?

19. How do you and your teaching partner work together to co-plan your curriculum? What does this process typically look like?
• Long-range planning?
• Daily planning?

20. How does decision-making factor into your co-planning? How do you make decisions together about the curriculum?

21. What are some strategies that you use to plan together considering that you are not provided with the preparation time together?

22. When does co-planning typically take place and how?
   • Before or after school?
   • During the school day?
   • On the weekends?
   • In person, by phone, or email?
   • Same time each day/week/month?

23. Why do you structure your co-planning the way that you do? How, if at all, do you assess and evaluate student’s learning that results from your planning in collaboration?

Supports and Challenges

24. What are the challenges that you experience working as a collaborative team, generally speaking, and how do you respond to these challenges?

25. What challenges do you experience when it comes to co-planning your curriculum? How do you respond to these challenges?

26. What range of factors and resources support you in the practice of collaborative teaching and planning? (e.g. material resources, school climate, leadership, shared planning time, physical space)

Next Steps

27. What advice, if any, do you have for teams of FDK educators who struggle in their collaboration? What about those that have a strong collaboration, but struggle to co-plan the curriculum specifically?

28. What advice do you have for beginning teachers who anticipate working in FDK classrooms?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.