

St. John's University

St. John's Scholar

Theses and Dissertations

2024

**KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT LITERACY
AND THE RELEVANCE OF ASSESSMENTS: IMPACT ON
STUDENTS' SUCCESS AND FIRST GRADE TRANSITION**

Claudia T. Watts

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.stjohns.edu/theses_dissertations



Part of the [Early Childhood Education Commons](#)

KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT LITERACY AND THE
RELEVANCE OF ASSESSMENTS: IMPACT ON STUDENTS' SUCCESS AND
FIRST GRADE TRANSITION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SPECIALTIES

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

CLAUDIA T. WATTS

Date Submitted November 10, 2023

Date Approved January 31, 2024

Claudia T. Watts

Michael R. Sampson, PhD

© Copyright by Claudia T. Watts 2024
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT LITERACY AND THE RELEVANCE OF ASSESSMENTS: IMPACT ON STUDENTS' SUCCESS AND FIRST GRADE TRANSITION

Claudia T. Watts

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to investigate kindergarten teachers' beliefs about literacy and the relevance of assessments at the kindergarten level, the literacy skills kindergarteners should possess, how these skills are acquired, to what extent their beliefs about literacy influenced their instructional methodology, and their perspectives on the role of parental involvement. This study was guided by six research questions. The participants consisted of twenty kindergarten teachers from various elementary public schools within a large and diverse school district in Virginia. The participants are from two ethnic backgrounds and had ranges of experience teaching kindergarten. Over a period of four months, data were collected and analyzed using the data analysis model proposed by Moustakas (1994). Data were obtained from the participants via one method. In-depth individual interviews provided detailed information on each teacher's knowledge and views about literacy, assessments, parental involvement, and best practices. Numerical data from Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 are from the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) assessment. With the exception of one public school district, all public schools in Virginia use the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) to screen kindergarten to third grade students. The

2023-2024 period is the final time that PALS will be used. It was upgraded and changed to Virginia Language and Literacy Screener (VALLS). The PALS visual data came from the participants' elementary schools. It added better understanding for the reasons for each teacher's beliefs about the assessment data results and their perceptions about its current and future impact. This investigation has the potential to inform school and district policies. The results could assist in understanding the phenomena within a real-world context. The findings revealed that the kindergarten teachers are in support of the use of literacy assessments and believe that their students' successful transition to first grade depends on strategic planning, an early start to instruction, and immediate, appropriate next steps after the analyses of assessments. The results also showed how the participants used assessments, involved parents, and engaged in best practice to enable better literacy success in kindergarten thereby facilitating a successful transition to the first grade.

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation first to Almighty God who enlightened, sustained, preserved, provided, comforted, and refreshed me from the beginning to the end of this journey. He continues to be my guide and compass. I cannot do without Him. A special thank you to my family who encouraged, prayed for, and supported me. To my husband Darius, you gave me the space to write, vent, and displayed patience throughout my frustrations. My mother Sonia, sister Stacy, and her family urged me to press on because they believed in me. Finally, hearty appreciation to my wonderful and exceptional children, nursing scholars and future doctors Alexander James and Geordann Bradley. Every day they encouraged me to keep going because I am their example, and they knew all along that I would be successful. Thank you all for loving me and cheering me along.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend sincere gratitude to the many people who have supported, encouraged, and enlightened me on this amazing journey. Thank you to Dr. Lilicea Hester for suggesting that I begin this journey forthwith and to do it at St. John's University. It was her persistent urging that enabled me to decide that St. John's was the right place to pursue this doctorate. Throughout the journey, she checked on me and gave me valuable suggestions. A special thank you to Drs. Lisa Bajor and Bonnie Johnson. They sharpened my writing and editing skills. I give them the credit they deserve for adding quality to my professional and personal journey. As my dissertation mentors, Dr. Michael Sampson and Dr. Bonnie Johnson provided valuable feedback, insight, correction, and guidance. Without them, this dissertation would not have been a true representation of the research topic. A special thank you to you both. Thank you to the school district for allowing me to conduct my research. From the beginning, the staff was willing, kind, patient, and supportive. Special acknowledgement goes to the teachers who responded and provided invaluable input that resulted in a reliable and valid research paper. Thank you to my batchmates Dr. Lena Cosme and the future Dr. Jea Lizz Basubas. We stayed connected throughout the program and encouraged each other to be persistent and consistent. I appreciate the times we vented and shared our experiences. We will be friends for life. Thank you again to all my heavenly and earthly family members, friends, coworkers, and well-wishers for their tangible support and prayers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose of the Study.....	10
Conceptual Framework.....	11
Significance of the Study.....	13
Research Questions.....	16
Definition of Terms.....	17
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	20
Organization of the Literature.....	21
Theoretical Framework.....	22
Kindergarten Teachers’ Beliefs about Literacy Success.....	26
Best Practices for Developing Literacy in Kindergarten	32
Socioeconomic Status.....	42
The Importance of the Context of the Classroom.....	46
The Role of Assessments	50
Kindergarten Controversy.....	58
Transition and Readiness for First Grade.....	62
Parental Involvement and the Influence of Socioeconomic Status on Learning	68
CHAPTER 3 METHODS AND PROCEDURES	74

Purpose Statement and Research Questions	74
Research Design and Data Analysis	75
The Purpose of Using a Qualitative Phenomenological Design	75
How the Design was Developed to Facilitate a Coherent Interpretation.....	77
What Is PALS?.....	78
Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness of the Research Design.....	80
Reliability and Validity.....	80
The Trustworthiness of the Study.....	81
The Sample, Population, and Participant Demographics.....	83
Sample.....	83
Population	84
Participant Demographics	84
Instruments.....	87
Procedures for Collecting Data.....	94
Permissions and Approvals.....	94
The Interview Process	95
The Purpose of PALS Data.....	95
Reflexivity/Bracketing	96
Confidentiality	96
Data Analysis	97
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS.....	102
Research Questions and Explanations of Each Related Theme.....	116
Research Question 1.....	116
Research Question 2.....	125
Research Question 3.....	128
Research Question 4.....	130
Teacher Efficacy	132
Research Question 5.....	133

Research Question 6.....	136
Summary of Findings.....	141
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	143
Implication of Findings.....	143
Relationship to Prior Research.....	146
Limitations of the Study.....	152
Recommendations For Future Research	154
Conclusion	154
APPENDIX A St. John’s University IRB Initial Approval	156
APPENDIX B St. John’s University IRB Modifications Approval	158
APPENDIX C Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study	159
APPENDIX D Welcome and Consent Form Verification.....	162
APPENDIX E Research Study Recruitment Email	164
APPENDIX F Interview Questions.....	165
APPENDIX G School District’s Notice of Approval For Research.....	170
APPENDIX H School District’s Email Notification to All Teachers in the District Including Kindergarten Teachers	172
APPENDIX I Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS).....	174
APPENDIX J PALS Kindergarten Assessment	175
REFERENCES	177

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Description of Participants.....	86
Table 2	Research Questions and Aligned Interview Questions.....	89
Table 3	Initial Data Analysis Coding of Categories	98
Table 4	Themes, Frequency, and Main Features Arising from the Data Analysis	105
Table 5	Fall 2022 – Spring 2023 PALS Percentages of Students Scoring Above Benchmark.....	113
Table 6	Kindergarten Teachers’ Summary of Beliefs About Kindergarten Class 2022 – 2023	115
Table 7	Participants’ Most Common Beliefs About Literacy Skills Kindergarten Students Should Acquire in Kindergarten and What They Need for First Grade.....	118
Table 8	Summary of Participants’ Responses About Their Belief That the Frequency of Assessments is Related to Literacy Success.....	131
Table 9	Participants’ Beliefs About When They Realized Their Students Were Ready for First Grade.....	139

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Steps for a Phenomenological Interview	88
Figure 2	The Steps of Data Analysis.....	101
Figure 3	The Most Shared Commonality Among All Participants About How Students Will Be Successfully Prepared for First Grade	104
Figure 4	Participants' Primary Beliefs About the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS)	114
Figure 5	Summary of Participants' Perspectives About Whether They Are Guided by a Framework.....	124
Figure 6	Participants' Most Common Beliefs About Which Skill Was Most Important to Enter Kindergarten	125
Figure 7	A Summary of the Participants' Beliefs About PALS.....	140

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Kindergarten is an important time in a child's early literacy development. A teacher's efforts to support and stimulate young children is a priority for assisting children with literacy development (Gallant & Moore, 2008; Oncu & Unluer, 2015). Teacher's perceptions have significant implications for their students' educational experiences and future social and economic opportunities. Decisions are influenced by their subjective understandings of each student's cognitive abilities (Burkam et al., 2007; Entwisle et al., 1997; Farkas, 2003; Smith & Shepard, 1988). Kindergarten teachers are among the first individuals who will introduce students to formal learning and familiarize them with literacy assessments. A plethora of research indicate that kindergarten readiness assessments provide unique opportunities to comprehend the emergence of literacy disparities among the students. Kindergarten literacy data documents the relationship between children's early literacy skills and their later reading proficiency (Herring et al., 2022). However, do kindergarten teachers believe that literacy assessments are necessary at this level? What do they believe the focus of kindergarten should be? Is it more important for kindergarteners to know the letters of the alphabet, how to count and have an enthusiastic and curious approach to learning or be subjects of ongoing assessments? Shepard (1994) states that if there are legitimate purposes for gathering assessment data from kindergarteners, then the content and form of assessment must be purposeful and aligned. This better explains why what young children know and can do is being measured. Is it possible that assessments can also raise serious equity concerns? Research shows that a disproportionate number of poverty stricken, minorities,

and English as a Second Language (ESL) children are identified as literacy deficient. Children without preschool experience and literacy rich home environments may be misidentified as struggling when their real problem is that they are not being effectively stimulated. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1986) asserted that "the trend toward early academics is antithetical to what we know about how young children learn" (p. 4).

In their 1993 study, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that only fifteen percent of kindergarten teachers believed that most children should learn to read in kindergarten. Forty-four percent believed that kindergarteners should not be given reading instruction unless they show an interest, and almost all teachers preferred that the students' social, emotional and physical readiness and well-being took precedence over academics. However, the overall consensus was that teachers believed that they can enhance readiness by providing children with skill-building experiences. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, NCES 1993) shows that 94% of students recognized the letters at the end of kindergarten. This study sought to discover whether kindergarten teachers believed that the literacy assessments being administered are necessary, appropriate, and that state assessments such as the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) were yielding the desired results, especially as their kindergarteners prepared to transition to the first grade.

Teachers' beliefs correlate with children's desire to learn. Teachers encourage children to value learning by the approaches they use to stimulate learning and interaction. Kindergarten teachers' beliefs are also important because they may yield

important information about instructing young children (Kagan, 1992). This study sought answers from the participants about the factors they believed are among the tools that propelled success in kindergarten and prepared their students for first grade. According to Bassok et al. (2016), a kindergarten teacher's training and experience is important to his students' success. It is not an exaggeration to argue that the kindergarten teachers' perceptions and beliefs about literacy acquisition, preparation, and sustenance, are of vital importance (McMahon et al., 1998).

Teachers' beliefs are inferred assumptions about students, learning, classrooms, teaching strategies, curriculum, pedagogy, and educational programs. These beliefs are formed because of direct experience or professional training (Kagan, 1992). The teachers' beliefs about educational practice then become foundational the more they use the knowledge gained from their training as they work with children in the classroom. Investigating these beliefs is necessary because research shows that teachers' beliefs influence classroom practice, inform decisions, and determine their general classroom behavioral style (Kowalski et al., 2001). Teachers' beliefs contribute to how they deliver instruction, add to students' knowledge, and provide a climate that is conducive to learning. Their beliefs also directly influence the students' behaviors toward peers since students usually model the behaviors of their teachers (Arbeau & Coplan, 2007).

Most research indicates that a successful transition to the next grade has positive impacts on young children's academic and social performance in the first year of school and later school years (Ahtola et al., 2011; Chan, 2010; Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2004a; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Einarsdottir, 2006). Students who experience a

smooth transition are more likely to experience early school success and maintain higher levels of social competence and academic achievement (Chan, 2010; Dockett & Perry, 2003, 2004b; Griebel & Niesel, 2003).

There were many gaps in the literature that were reviewed. Most of it placed great importance on literacy acquisition and the purpose of assessments. Only a few of the articles were focused on the teachers' perspectives. Very few researchers reported on the kindergarten educators' beliefs and perspectives on literacy, assessments, and transitioning to the first grade. Their focus was mostly on the kindergarten students, the skills that they should have at this stage, the reason for assessments, and how the teachers can help kindergarteners acquire the skills necessary for current and future success. These gaps are important to highlight because this study addressed them by focusing on the kindergarten teachers' beliefs and not on the students. The participants were asked to identify specific beliefs, commonalities, and experiences about the phenomena. The participants, based on their professional observations, indicated their beliefs about kindergarten students, readiness to start kindergarten, the purpose of assessment data, and preparation for first grade. The teachers reported their beliefs about whether the failure to successfully transition to the first grade was due to failure of kindergarten readiness and unsatisfactory assessment results. The findings can have implications for them, practice, policy, research, and leadership. The results from this study have begun to fill this gap.

The research plan experienced limitations due to the number of kindergarten teachers selected, the fact that they were from the same public-school district, and that the only instrument of data collection was individual interviews. However, the findings of

this study can contribute to the growing literature documenting important associations between kindergarten teachers' beliefs about literacy, assessments, and their students' successful transition to the first grade.

Statement of the Problem

In their mixed methods study, Bassok et al. (2016) reported that kindergarten teachers believed that their classrooms have become more academic and less focused on social skill development, play, and exploration. Prior research laments the fact that kindergarten classrooms were no longer a place for socialization and play. Kindergarten has become a preparation ground for first grade (Martin, 1985; Roberts, 1986). Santi et al. (2009) found that assessments were gradually shifting from screening and monitoring student development to instead assessing students' academic skills. Elkind (1987), International Reading Association (1986), Kamii (1985), NAEYC (1986) and Winn (1983) all report that formalized activities that occur too early are likely to deprive children of time they need to learn from play, manipulative learning, reading from normal language development, and natural exploration. Kindergarten is no longer the transitional, welcoming start to a formal education. It is becoming a place where kindergarteners are in a race to learn how to read (Alvarez, 2015; Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015; Gallant, 2009).

The literature reviewed indicates that some kindergarten teachers believed that kindergarten has become more focused on literacy data, assessments and their results, and the need for more effective instructional strategies and interventions. In these studies, a majority of the teachers reported that they preferred that kindergarteners learn at their

own pace, be introduced to reading if they show an interest, and for equal emphasis to be placed on kindergarteners' social, emotional and physical well-being as it is on their academics.

Ready and Wright (2011) reported that contemporary kindergarten classrooms were less focused on informal socialization and extended play. The pressure to be academically accountable is increasing and has led many to believe that the primary responsibility of kindergarten is the development of children's early academic skills. The demands of academic placement and tracking decisions required for higher grade levels are now commonplace at the kindergarten level. Ready and Wright concluded that what teachers believe about their kindergarteners' academic skills have significant implications for the children's educational, social, and eventually their economic opportunities.

Kindergarten readiness assessments are showing literacy disparities among students, especially poverty stricken, minorities, and English as a Second Language (ESL) children. They are being identified as literacy deficient (Herring et al., 2022; NAEYC, 1986). The research of Lee and Burkam (2002) found that substantial racial-ethnic disparities in cognitive skills are present even among young children. Outward manifestations of children's social status, including their cultural mannerisms and language patterns, are often interpreted by teachers to be indicators of academic ability (Bernstein, 1973; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Ready & Wright, 2011). Lower socioeconomic status (SES) children are more likely to be retained in kindergarten (Burkam et al., 2007). Ready and Wright (2011) state that kindergarteners begin formal schooling with a relatively "clean slate." Kindergarten teachers are not usually given extensive information

about incoming students' academic and behavioral backgrounds. This suggests that each teacher's initial perceptions of each student's ability are more likely based on prior experiences with kindergarteners who were sociodemographically similar (p. 340). It is possible then that these students' literacy skills are underdeveloped due to factors such as SES, language barriers, or lack of home stimulation and not that there is a learning deficiency thereby classifying them as struggling readers. In the interview questions, the participants were asked to state their beliefs about this theory.

In their 1993 statistical analysis report, the National Center for Education Statistics found that 88% of public-school kindergarten teachers believed that readiness for school comes as kindergarteners grow and mature: their cognitive development cannot be forced. Ninety-four percent of the teachers believed that they were responsible for providing experiences the children need to build important skills. Readiness for first grade is dependent on the foundation set at kindergarten. Since the above participants agreed that kindergarteners should be learning to build literacy skills at their own pace, when then should the students begin to receive literacy assessments? Do kindergarten students need to be assessed? If so, how should these assessments be interpreted and used? What should the real focus of kindergarten be? The participants in this study provided their perspectives on these questions.

Researchers such as Herring et al. (2022), Honeyford and Ntelioglou (2021), Koller et al. (2022), Williford et al. (2021) and Soland et al. (2022) who reported current data regarding early childhood education, concur with state mandates that kindergarteners should be assessed upon entry to kindergarten. Williford et al. (2021) stated that

Departments of Education (DOE) in the United States of America seek to understand the skills kindergarteners possess upon entering kindergarten. Kindergarten entry assessments (KEA) differ across the country. Due to Federal awards such as the Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge, approximately forty states have instituted or are piloting kindergarten readiness assessments. The DOE in Virginia uses the information from readiness assessments such as PALS as the first step toward understanding children's readiness on a larger scale (Virginia Department of Education, 2022). Williford et al. (2021) added that assessment results are intended to help policy makers, school divisions, and teachers make informed decisions. States use the information for accountability or to make comparisons across schools and divisions. PALS assessment results serve two main purposes: they identify students as ready or not ready, and influence classroom instruction at the start of and during the kindergarten experience. It is expected that kindergarten teachers will use the data to guide and differentiate instruction according to each student's strengths and weaknesses. School divisions may use the information to target appropriate interventions with the purpose of improving student outcomes. Williford et al. (2021) admitted that measuring young children's skills can be challenging. Herring et al. (2022) indicated that assessments enable stakeholders to tell whether a particular program or policy is meeting its goals. Student assessments will serve different purposes according to how they are interpreted and used.

Walsh et al. (2006) discuss the importance of first establishing the foundation that young children need. They discovered that many elementary school teachers were not incorporating all five components of reading (phonological awareness, phonics, fluency,

comprehension, and vocabulary) in their instruction. They added that teaching these components of reading must begin at the lowest level so that as the students progress through the grades, their assessments will show that they are mastering literacy. Burke et al. (2009) and Coyne and Harn (2006) concur with this statement. They agree that literacy is one of the essential skills that young children must master. Children who enter school with limited literacy experience need more attention and instruction than children who enter school with richer literacy experiences (Foorman et al., 1998). Scanlon and Vellutino (1996) concur. They also indicated that students with limited literacy experiences can experience positive literacy changes if they receive good and early literacy instruction. According to Foorman and Torgesen (2001), students who do not receive explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies, are at higher risk of being left behind.

White (2013) states that instruction in kindergarten should emphasize the skills the students need to become competent readers. This approach could lead to a decrease in enrollment in targeted intervention programs. Therefore, fewer students in the first grade should display signs of low phonological awareness and vocabulary knowledge. In their study, Christiani et al. (2022) state that literacy assessments are important at the kindergarten level. The results indicate students' abilities so that constructive decisions can be made about their literacy development.

According to some research studies, tracking students' progress is important. The results from several studies (Badian, 1982; Burke & Hagan-Burke, 2007; Solari, 2014) show that the reading skills children must master have a significant impact on their future

success rate. For example, children who cannot read well by the end of the first grade can become poor readers by the time they make it to the fourth grade. Kindergarteners who do not successfully transition to the first grade with reasonable literacy skills can experience immense and possibly irreversible academic setbacks (McGee & Ukrainetz, 2009). These children must receive effective instruction if they are to be successful in the first grade. Assessments reveal if the instruction was effective as well as checks for kindergarten readiness. Reading is one of a kindergartener's most critical skills. She/He must learn to read printed materials and be cognizant of how the sounds in words work (Sedita, 2001). Early experiences with reading and writing will shape a child's understanding of the purpose and power of literacy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study, guided by social constructivism and social learning theories, was to investigate and report on teachers' perspectives about literacy, relevance of assessments, and the impact on kindergarten students' success and transition to the first grade. Since there is limited literature about the kindergarten teachers' beliefs about these topics, this study investigated and reported on these educators' perceptions about such as well as instructional practices, expectations of students' competency, the effects of socioeconomic status, and how parental involvement is incorporated. This study is solely teacher focused and provides direct experiences and perspectives of kindergarten teachers. The research questions were designed to investigate the participants' beliefs and perspectives. Meaning was sought from their responses. The participants' perspectives are varied and multiple. The goal of this study,

as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018), relied on the participants' views of the phenomena. The study also investigated what the literature says about kindergarten teachers' beliefs, how those beliefs translated into effective instruction, and what role the theoretical frameworks social constructivism and social learning theories played. This study may also help to fill the gaps since it highlights the need for kindergarten teachers to address reading deficiencies as soon as they occur, so that first grade can build on previously taught skills instead of intensely focusing on remediation. Since a small number of the literature reviewed specifically stated what kindergarten teachers believe about literacy, the necessity of assessments and implications for first grade success, this research has responded to the existing gaps in the kindergarten educator expectation field by extending the research to include current data.

Conceptual Framework

According to Unrau et al. (2019), theories are only relevant to the context to which they have been applied. It is on this premise that this study identified most with social constructivism and social learning theories. Social constructivism emphasizes the learning a child accomplishes through interaction with others and outside experiences. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) posits that people learn from one another via observation, imitation, and modeling therefore grounding it in action and perspectives. The social aspect of each child's environment affects and impacts the way he learns. The social part of us must connect with our cognitive capabilities (Bandura, 1986). Based on Bandura's statements, we can conclude that learning cannot take place in isolation. Engaging and interactive activities are better able to help young children

make real and imagined connections from text to world (Gee, 2001). Children are considered active constructors of knowledge. The teacher facilitates their learning in the classroom by encouraging the students to actively explore, construct knowledge, and ask questions. This creates a positive social climate via individual support and encouragement (Lerkkanen et al., 2016). Therefore, based on observation, interaction, professional judgement, and tangible data, the kindergarten teachers were qualified to express their beliefs about literacy in kindergarten, assessments, and the students' impending transition to the first grade. Moustakas (1994) explains that the constructivist worldview manifests itself in phenomenological research wherein individuals, as in the case of the kindergarten teachers, describe their experiences.

The NCES (2013) report states that the main qualities public school kindergarten teachers believe are essential for school readiness are that the children be physically healthy, rested, well-nourished, can verbally communicate needs and wants, and be enthusiastic and curious about learning. According to the report, the teachers believe that it is more important that the children be socially adaptable than have excellent problem-solving skills. The framework also guides how assessments affect students. Assessments are ongoing formal and informal processes. During these periods, teachers and students interact with each other. Every interaction is a learning experience.

Gee (2001) noted that a teacher's knowledge of the theory of learning can influence the strategies used for instruction thereby making learning adaptable to children's strengths and needs. Learning will then occur in purposeful and meaningful social situations. Children, especially young children, replicate or model what they see

and experience. These social interactive habits are brought to the classroom. The teacher must be able to channel their experiences so that they benefit from instruction. The learning environment for the kindergarten teachers and their pupils then, is driven by the social constructivism and social learning theories.

Significance of the Study

Across the literature, the acquisition and application of literacy skills and the purpose of assessments at the kindergarten level emerge as core areas of importance to the field of early childhood education research. Kindergarten students should be able to transition to the first grade with reasonable literacy abilities and keep transferring that knowledge as they progress through succeeding grades. Finding out what current groups of kindergarten teachers believed was one of the first steps in discovering what their beliefs were and how those beliefs were influencing instruction and the interpretation of assessment results. This study is also significant because it contains current data and introduced new factors that were not fully utilized in previous research such as the teachers' specific beliefs about literacy, assessments, and how successful transitioning to the first grade can take place. The results of the study provide useful data that may help with the planning and implementation of kindergarten learning activities and experiences as well as the construction of more relevant professional development for kindergarten teachers.

Anderson (2019) stated that prior knowledge influences how information is processed, schema allows readers to make inferences, and that culture has strong and lasting effects on reading comprehension. Each kindergartener will approach content

from his perspective. This study explored whether each kindergarten teacher concurs with Anderson's statements and was accommodating enough to find ways to use this knowledge to each student's benefit. Therefore, it was imperative that the premise under which these teachers are operating be revealed. The findings should enable and equip stakeholders to provide the tools and resources needed so that there can be better transitional success among kindergarteners. One of the most significant research projects on kindergarten teachers' beliefs about school readiness was done by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 1993 and again in 2013. The present study now adds to this repertoire by providing current data on kindergarten teachers' beliefs and specifically addresses the kindergarten teachers' beliefs about students' readiness to transition to first grade.

Social learning theory, as proposed by Albert Bandura (1986), emphasizes the importance of observing, modeling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. Social learning theory considers how environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence human learning and behavior. Bandura (1986) concurs with behaviorist learning theories which state that behavior is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning. Kindergarten children are avid observers and will repeat behaviors, especially those modeled by their teachers (Lee & Bierman, 2015). The study's findings reported on whether the kindergarten teachers believed that their literacy instruction, methodologies, and the use of assessments, influenced how their kindergarteners received and perceived what they were currently learning thereby preparing them to transition to the first grade.

Studies have shown that readiness for kindergarten, positive parental influence, and the quality of instruction by kindergarten teachers can affect student outcomes (Harris-Motley, 2020; Lee & Bierman, 2015; NCES, 2013). The perspectives of kindergarten educators are not very widely researched and documented, especially as it relates to their beliefs about how the parents can contribute to their child's literacy readiness for first grade. Robins et al. (2012) and Treiman et al. (2015) indicate that there is insufficient data about how parents engage in code related literacy at home. The literature they reviewed that investigated parent-child code-related literacy activities in the home concluded that parents mostly engaged their children with the common letters in the English alphabet. This was because these letters are related to their child's name or when they were teaching the children the first few letters of the alphabet. Parents were more likely to stress alphabet letter instruction when the children were toddlers and gradually increase engagement as they started preschool years. The longitudinal study conducted by Treiman et al. (2015) found that children who received early stimulation became better readers by the end of their first year of school. The review of literature also points to this gap and so, accordingly, it was timely for this study to explore and report on kindergarten teachers' beliefs about their students' literacy skills and the factors that influence such.

According to the NCES (2013) report, the ratio of kindergarteners to teachers is reasonable. There were fifteen students for one teacher. Included in the classrooms were full-time and part-time volunteers as well as paid assistants. The report also states that kindergarten teachers averaged nine years of teaching kindergarten. Fifty-four percent of

all kindergarten teachers majored in early childhood education and twenty-nine percent were members of early childhood education professional organizations. This study has included only minimal data about its participants' qualifications. However, all participants are qualified to teach kindergarten. This data is important because teachers' beliefs about their students' successes in kindergarten and readiness to transition to first grade are also based on their professional as well as personal perspectives. The findings reported on the teachers' professional judgements on the use of assessments to make better informed decisions, adopt new practices, continuously involve parents, and experience increases in the number of kindergarten students showing progress on state assessments such as the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS). Teachers' experiences are important factors to kindergarten students' success and should continue to be studied. This research has provided future researchers with better and more current data that they can further investigate and improve upon.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do kindergarten teachers believe will help their students to be successful in literacy thereby ensuring a reasonable transition to the first grade?
2. To what extent does assessment data influence literacy development, planning, and instruction?
3. Are assessments relevant at the kindergarten level? Should kindergarten students be formally assessed for example, by state mandated standardized assessments such as PALS? If not, how should their entry and subsequent skills be measured?

4. Do kindergarten teachers believe that the frequency of assessments is related to literacy success?
5. What are kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the role parental involvement plays in kindergarten students' success?
6. Do kindergarten teachers believe that the mid-year state test scores are a clear indicator of a kindergartener's literacy skill level and predict readiness for first grade?

Definition of Terms

Assessments - the systematic basis for making inferences about the learning and development of students. It is the process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and using information to increase students' learning and development (Stassen et al., 2001).

Beliefs – a set of opinions or convictions a person has based on the evidence around him.

Early literacy - what children know about reading and writing before they actually learn to read and write.

Explicit instruction – the systematic teaching and modelling of specific strategies and skills.

First Grade – the next grade after students have completed kindergarten.

Kindergarten teachers – a set of early childhood educators who integrate young children into the world of learning by preparing them to have effective literacy and social skills.

Kindergarten teachers become a key element in children's literate progress, as their

choices determine the practices and the instruction taking place or being encouraged in the kindergarten environment (Saracho, 1990).

Kindergarteners - four to six-year-old children who are beginning formal schooling at an educational institution.

Kindergarten – A preschool learning environment where four to six-year-old children are introduced to formal schooling. However, children entering kindergarten in the United States in the 1990s are different from those who entered kindergarten in prior decades. They come from increasingly diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, social, economic and language backgrounds. Many kindergartners now come from single-parent families and from stepparent families. They also differ in the level and types of early care and educational experiences that they have had prior to kindergarten (Zill et al., 1995).

Kindergarten readiness - “a multidimensional, theoretical construct representing children’s preparedness for participation in formal schooling, which more often than not corresponds to kindergarten entrance in the twenty-first century” (Justice et al., 2017, p. 1).

Literacy - Literacy refers to all activities involved in speaking, listening, reading, writing, and appreciating oral and written language (Inbar-Lourie, 2017).

Literacy skills - the skills needed for reading and writing. They include such things as awareness of the sounds of language, awareness of print, and the relationship between letters and sounds. Other literacy skills include vocabulary, spelling, and comprehension. Literacy enables one to identify, understand, interpret, communicate, calculate, and use written and printed materials in numerous contexts (Pinto et al., 2012; Zygouris, 2001).

Socioeconomic status – a combination of social and economic factors determines a group or individual's rank on the socioeconomic scale. Income, occupation, education, and place of residence are among the primary determinants of one's status in society.

Parental involvement - the amount of participation shown by parents in the schooling of their children.

Perceptions - a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something; a mental impression.

Phenomenological study – a description of common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transition – the movement from one area to the next.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of kindergarten teachers' beliefs about what will help their students to be successful in literacy, the role of assessments, and how both concepts impact the transition to the first grade, needs more attention in the field of literacy education. Transition to first grade generally has not been a focus of research on early school transitions (Kagan & Neuman, 1998) neither have the practices associated with the transition to first grade been systematically investigated (La Paro & Pianta, 2000). The National Education Goals Panel (1998) placed emphasis on the need for continuity in curricula, home-school communication, and a welcoming environment for family and children. These concepts are mostly a focus of kindergarten transition practices (Pianta et al., 1999), however, they remain important as children move into first grade (Entwisle & Alexander, 1993).

Educational research emphasizes studying teachers' beliefs as predictors of their actual classroom behaviors and subsequently the outcomes of children. The interest generated is guided by the theory that teachers' beliefs determine decisions for planning, teaching, and assessing. Understanding what teachers believe can provide essential data (Charlesworth et al., 1993). However, a search of the literature revealed that there is more data about the collective body of early childhood educators and less about kindergarten teachers themselves and their specific perspectives about the factors that they believe enable literary success. A small amount of recent research has focused on kindergarten teachers' beliefs about kindergarten readiness (Hustedt et al., 2018). There is more data on what is expected of the teachers, student outcomes, the varying assessments used at

this level, what is going wrong, and what teachers and students should be doing, rather than on the teachers' perspectives and lived experiences (Al Otaiba, 2011; Allington, 2011; Pinto et al., 2016; Sedita, 2001; Stormont et al., 2019; White, 2013). The transition to first grade represents an important period of adjustment for children and their families. Continuity between early childhood and early elementary school programs is a necessity because usually educators and families experience a lack of it (O'Brien, 1991).

This literature review comprehensively synthesizes what prior and current research indicate about the factors that kindergarten teachers believe will enable success in kindergarten and enhance readiness for first grade.

Organization of the Literature

This literature review provides a synthesis of the findings of the relevant literature about kindergarten teachers' beliefs about what will help their students make a successful transition to first grade. It commences with an expansion of the theoretical framework, how the study fits with prior research on the framework, and also outlines how the framework guides the organization of the Literature Review.

The literature review presents the findings about kindergarten teachers' beliefs, the various research findings surrounding expectations of kindergarten and kindergarteners, the role and relevance of assessments, the importance of a kindergartener's readiness for first grade, the impact of parental involvement on kindergarten students' success, and presents the perspectives of kindergarten teachers regarding the instructional methodologies and engagement strategies that they believe

will enable or have enabled their students to attain proficiency in literacy thereby preparing them to successfully transition to the first grade.

There were many gaps in the literature that were reviewed. Few articles were focused on the teachers' perspectives about literacy, assessments, and transitioning from kindergarten to the first grade. These gaps are important to highlight because this paper addresses them by focusing on the kindergarten teachers' beliefs and not on the students. The present study is solely teacher focused and reported the direct experiences and perspectives of kindergarten teachers about what they believed would help their students to progress successfully through kindergarten and acquire the literacy skills necessary to facilitate a successful transition to the first grade.

Theoretical Framework

This study identifies most with social constructivism and social learning theories. Social constructivism emphasizes the learning a child accomplishes through interaction with others and from outside experiences. Interaction is actively taking place among the kindergarten teachers, students, parents, and other internal and external forces. Kindergarten teachers, through their interaction with the kindergarteners, recounted their experiences and observations as they related their perspectives about the factors that influenced students' success in literacy in kindergarten and first grade.

In their chapter, *A sociocognitive model of meaning-construction: The reader, the teacher, the text, and the classroom context*, Ruddell et al. (2013) discuss the role of the social context of the classroom, the influence teachers have on a reader's meaning negotiation, and understanding how said reader constructs meaning via language

knowledge. The model they designed demonstrates how meaning is constructed when the reader, the text, the teacher, and classroom contexts function within the social environment. The learning environment significantly impacts the reader's decision to engage with a text and enhances the ways in which the text is engaged. It is crucial then, that kindergarten teachers believe that the learning environment must be socially stimulating, literacy rich, engaging, participatory and that assessments are purposeful.

The discourse of theorists such as Vygotsky, Bruner, and Gee, as presented by Unrau and Alvermann (2019), outline the role that social interaction plays in one's cognitive development. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a hallmark of Vygotsky's theory, emphasizes social interaction as a foundation for learning. He believed that one's cognitive abilities were socially guided and constructed and that although adults and peers influence individual learning, cultural beliefs and attitudes affect how learning takes place. Vygotsky believed that a child must first experience the use of higher mental functioning in social situations before he or she can internalize such functioning and use it independently. The child's experiences in social situations includes the acquisition of social language. The earlier a child is immersed and guided in the use of social language, the better prepared he is to read and interact. Kindergarten teachers, via their interactive methods, can help to develop students' executive functioning (EF) skills. Kindergarteners need to master foundational behaviors that enable them to successfully engage in classroom learning (Cameron et al., 2012). Children's success in school is reliant on their coordination of multiple skill sets. These will occur as children learn, play and interact (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). The correlation between early EF

and achievement outcomes are well documented (Duncan et al., 2007; Mazzocco & Kover, 2007). Children who interact reasonably well, pay attention to their tasks, remember directives, retain information, and attempt to control their impulses as they interact with peers and teachers, and display adaptive behaviors, have greater success in school (McClelland et al., 2006; Morrison et al., 2010). Strong executive functioning and related skills have been shown to correlate with multiple measures of adaptive well-being in adolescence and beyond (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Entwisle et al., 2005).

Kindergarten students need a variety of skills sets to experience success in kindergarten especially as they develop literacy skills and attempt to take assessments. One of the questions that this study answered is whether kindergarten teachers believe, like Vygotsky, that the success of a kindergartener is dependent on his ability to socially interact, and if this in turn provides the foundation for learning thereby strengthening his literacy skills as he progresses through kindergarten and prepares to matriculate to the first grade.

The research of Gee (2001) focuses on the sociocultural and social learning framework. Learning in the social context was explored. The study indicated that the earlier a child is immersed and guided in the use of social language, the better prepared he is to read and interact. The learning environment significantly impacts the reader's decision to engage with a text and enhances the ways in which the text is engaged. According to the sociocognitive model, reading is defined as a meaning-construction process in the instructional context of the classroom. The reader is at the center of meaning construction. According to Schunk (2000), developmentally appropriate

instruction is based on cognitive learning theories. These theories are guided by the premise that development refers to cognitive patterned changes over time. Schunk (2000) also added that the work of Vygotsky helped to form the concept of constructivism, which assumes that a learner constructs his own knowledge based on interactions with his environment that challenge his thinking.

Fayez et al. (2016) reported that students use language as a foundation when acquiring or displaying literacy skills. They gave examples of how interacting with others shapes a student's literacy responses. The authors added that without a knowledge of classroom and social interaction patterns, using text is futile. Their reasoning is that because literacy is a social activity, burying students' heads in text does not help them to construct meaning. They must engage in appropriate classroom dialogue and have meaningful interaction with their classmates and teacher. They will then learn to read as they read to learn. Fayez et al. (2016) concluded by reiterating that text, setting, classroom structure and the source of authority in the classroom, who in this case are the kindergarten teachers, must incorporate sociocultural meanings into classroom activities. The kindergarten teachers elaborated on this viewpoint and explained whether they believed a kindergartener's use of language could help him to acquire the literacy skills needed to successfully transition to first grade. These responses helped to inform and achieve the purpose of the study because their perspectives compared to the findings of prior research, and most importantly offered current data that are solely teacher focused.

Kindergarten Teachers' Beliefs about Literacy Success

Over the years, researchers have stated their findings about what kindergarten teachers believe influence their students' success. Researchers such as Charlesworth et al. (1991) investigated kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices. Their research indicated that unless teachers are equipped to teach within a strong theoretical framework correlated with specific classroom practices, it is highly likely that their beliefs will not be in tandem with best practices that enable student success in literacy. Of special note is that Charlesworth et al. (1991) included preschool teachers in their discussion and sporadically categorized the teachers as early childhood educators albeit their research, as per their topic, should have focused solely on kindergarten teachers. Their research highlights the need for the present study because the focus was expressly on kindergarten teachers and their beliefs about the stated research questions.

In 1993, the National Center for Education Statistics documented that 97% of kindergarten teachers, the participants in their study, overwhelmingly believed that reading to children was one of the best ways to help them learn to read. A teacher's instructional methodology is instrumental to a child's ability to understand what he is learning. Further examination of previous research shows that a teacher's practices are associated with his beliefs (Charlesworth et al., 1993; Smith & Shepard, 1988; Stipek et al., 1992), and that his beliefs affect his instructional practices (Kagan, 1992). It can be concluded from their findings that the beliefs of educators, especially early childhood educators, should be used to inform practices and policies. This is because what they believe, and the curriculum can sometimes conflict: teachers are constantly adjusting the

curriculum via scaffolding, differentiation, or other means to meet the needs of their students. Important in the researchers' combined findings are the beliefs expressed by kindergarten teachers about the readiness of early childhood students to meet the demands of the curriculum. Many kindergarten teachers did not believe that the students possessed the necessary social and readiness skills to begin kindergarten. It can be decided from these findings that since the kindergarten teachers did not believe that the students were ready for kindergarten, it would take time to help the students to be socially and academically adjusted before literacy skills can be developed. Absent from the researchers' conclusions is whether the kindergarten teachers indicated that they modelled the social and academic behavior that they wanted to see. Bandura (1977) wrote about the four stages of observational learning. He suggested that observers are reinforced as they repeat modeled behavior. In this case, kindergarten teachers, the models, would be observed by the kindergarteners. Kindergarteners then, would be more likely to display the behaviors necessary that lead to literacy skill development. Vygotsky (1978) stated that children's learning is affected by their mastery of language. It is through this use and manipulation (that the teachers would model) that children learn to function independently.

Stipek and Byler (1997) conducted research about the practices of early education teachers. Only twenty-six of the sixty participants were kindergarten teachers. These researchers wanted to know if there were associations between teachers' beliefs about appropriate practices, their actual practices, and sources of tension between their beliefs and practice. Although most of their research assessed associations between teachers'

beliefs about appropriate and effective education for young children and their classroom practices, their findings about some of the beliefs expressed by the teachers are applicable to this study. Two of their research questions were concerned with: (a) the associations between the teachers' beliefs about appropriate practices and their beliefs about whether some children should be delayed in entering school for a year after they are eligible to begin kindergarten and (b) whether children should ever be retained in kindergarten and for what reason. The sample consisted of 60 preschool, kindergarten and first grade teachers. The preschool and kindergarten teachers had a coherent set of beliefs that concurs with theoretical frameworks in this study. They believed that children learn social and academic skills best both by exploratory and child-centered approaches and should be retained if they are not socially or academically ready to enter first grade. This was a goal that the teachers set for their students. In contrast, the first-grade teachers believed that students entering first grade should already be socially mature and prepared. They did not believe that the students should be retained in first grade if they are still showing signs of social and academic unpreparedness. However, Stipek and Byler (1997) stated that because the sample of first grade teachers was small, the results should be interpreted cautiously and should be verified in future research. The participants in the present study shared their perspectives about first grade teachers' expectations based on the reported interactions between the two groups of teachers. Based on these interactions, the participants expressed what they believed first grade teachers believed about social maturity and preparedness for first grade.

From the aforementioned findings, we can speculate about why first grade teachers feel differently from preschool and kindergarten teachers. Stipek and Byler (1997) added that there was not enough research to conclude if basic social and academic skills are a legitimate part of the first-grade instructional practices as there is for kindergarten and preschool. Stipek and Byler (1997) concluded by stating that researchers need to be aware that the goals of early childhood teachers vary because of their beliefs: a teacher's goals influence his practice. With regard to retention, the general consensus among the participants was that they believed that retention for socially immature students was more useful than retention for children who had not mastered the curriculum. Forty-four of the 60 teachers believed that "retention was "sort of" or "very" useful for social immaturity (p. 321). Only the kindergarten teachers' views on the value of retaining children were significantly associated with their beliefs about effective instructional practices. The findings revealed that the more they favored highly structured teacher-directed approaches, the less they favored child-centered approaches. The teachers believed that conducting instruction from a teacher directed approach first will provide the social and academic guidance needed for the students to develop basic skills. The child-centered approach would then be appropriate after the students are cognizant of how to conduct themselves in the kindergarten classroom environment. Stipek and Byler (1997) referred to the research of Graue (1992). They stated that the findings of their research were consistent with observations made by Graue (1992) in her ethnographic study. Graue (1992) concluded that early education teachers were more concerned about students' social-emotional readiness for school than their academic skills.

Other qualitative studies from researchers such as Mantzicopoulos et al. (1998), Favez et al. (2016), and Pinto et al. (2016), revealed that their study participants, the kindergarten teachers, agreed that readiness for kindergarten was a determining factor in student performance and this affected a kindergartener's ability to successfully transition to first grade. Ortiz et al. (2012) in their research, indicated that numerous kindergarten teachers revealed that many of their students were not prepared for the rigors of kindergarten. The teachers complained that the children did not have important social skills, lacked basic knowledge of language, and appeared to have not had any academic stimulation prior to entering kindergarten. So, instead of building on what preschool should have started, the teachers reported that they were tasked with trying to teach preschool and kindergarten literacy skills at the same time. This retroactive teaching, Ortiz et al. (2012) continued, is a predictor of what can possibly happen at the first-grade level: many of these students will fall behind. These researchers also surmised that kindergarten teachers should understand the psychological, physical, and cultural dimensions of child development and have expectations for their students at this stage. However, their findings did not reveal that the kindergarten teachers indicated that they believed that knowing these varying dimensions would help them apply this knowledge so that the students could experience success in first grade.

Hatcher et al. (2012) investigated kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the definition of kindergarten success. All participants believed that social and emotional factors affect readiness and influence a kindergartener's literacy skills. According to Hatcher et al. (2012), this finding has implications for both preschools and kindergartens.

It reiterates the teachers' beliefs and justifies that priority should be given to social skills in early education programs. The participants in that study all agreed that social interaction opportunities for young children must occur daily and are essential to meeting the social and readiness goals that parents and teachers expect to see. Hatcher et al. (2012) concluded that developing young children's social skills better prepares them to receive direct instruction of specific academic-based skills.

Bassok et al. (2016), comprehensively discussed kindergarten teachers' beliefs and reported the teachers' responses about what they believed would help with a successful transition to the first grade. These researchers conducted a mixed methods study in which they interviewed and documented data from both kindergarten and first grade teachers. These researchers documented "systematic changes across five key dimensions of the kindergarten experience: (a) teachers' beliefs about school readiness, (b) time allocated to academic and nonacademic subjects, (c) classroom organization, (d) pedagogical approach, and (e) assessment practices" (p. 1). Two of their main descriptive research questions sought to discover the extent and along what dimensions public-school kindergarten experience changed between 1998 and 2010, and whether kindergarten was the new first grade. The kindergarten teachers believed that their classrooms had become more academic and less focused on social skill development, play, and exploration. The teachers also believed that for their students to transition successfully, they must first enter kindergarten having higher readiness and social skills. They also indicated how strongly they agreed with the questions pertaining to school readiness and their expectations for new kindergarteners. Most teachers agreed that those who entered

kindergarten ready to learn stood a greater chance of transitioning successfully through first grade and beyond. Overall, Bassok et al. (2016) concluded that the teachers believed that if students entered kindergarten ready to learn, they were also more than twice as likely to expect that most children would leave their classrooms with reasonable literacy skills. Kindergarten is a critical time to screen children and support them as they develop the skills necessary to build essential early academic and social behavior skills.

Best Practices for Developing Literacy in Kindergarten

Several factors and practices enable kindergarteners to be successful in literacy. In conjunction with the social learning theory and constructivism, another practical and establishing factor is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Early reading success is achieved when students are mentally and physically prepared to learn. Students who lack the basic hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) do not have the tools necessary for effective stimulation of their intellectual abilities to take place. Children enter kindergarten with varying literacy skills. Early literacy has a significant impact on long term academic and social outcomes (Soland et al., 2022). The NCES (1993) report revealed that 97% of teachers believed that regularly reading to kindergarteners was one of the best ways to help them learn to read. With regard to activities in kindergarten classrooms, the report stated that the most frequent activity was listening to stories every day. Two-thirds of the classes did daily activities such as dramatic and free playing. Fifty-eight percent of the classes engaged in daily gross motor activities such as running and jumping whilst 49% of the classes were using manipulatives every day during math and science periods. Worksheets were the least used activity. The amount of time students spent engaged in

creative activities such as dramatic play and arts and crafts depended on the teaching experience of the class teacher. Prior research indicated that kindergarten should not consist of too many highly formalized activities. It was discovered that formalized activities that occur too early are likely to deprive children of time they need to learn from play, manipulative learning, reading from normal language development, and natural exploration (Elkind, 1987; International Reading Association, 1986; Kamii, 1985; NAEYC, 1986; Winn, 1983).

National data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), state that Black, Hispanic and children from families with lower incomes enter kindergarten with substantially lower reading skills when compared to their White and higher-income peers (Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Quinn, 2015; Reardon & Portilla, 2016; von Hippel & Hamrock, 2019). Reardon and Portilla (2016) reported that the reading readiness gap between Black and White students are nearly one-third of a standard deviation. The Hispanic to White reading readiness gap is larger. However, according to Reardon and Galindo (2009), this may be due to a lack of English-language proficiency. Reardon and Portilla (2016) estimate the kindergarten children whose parents are in higher income brackets display an increased knowledge of literacy than students of parents who are in low income brackets. These early disparities are important to mention because research is showing that children's skills at kindergarten predicts their future outcomes. More than 30 studies have documented strong correlations between academic skills in kindergarten and their skills in first and second grade (La Paro & Pianta, 2000). Justice et al. (2017) found a remarkably similar relationship between children's early skills and their later

standardized test results. Other studies such as that of Chetty et al. (2011) have also shown that early literacy skills have implications as far as adulthood. They found a correlation between children's kindergarten test scores and their earning power at the age of 27. The state of Virginia provides intervention funding for children who enter kindergarten scoring below twenty-eight on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) assessment (Virginia Department of Education, 2022). Torgesen (2009) encourages stakeholders to use the data from Kindergarten Readiness Assessments (KRA) to inform decision making via intervention policy. The results from these assessments should, therefore, drive instruction and help to close the gaps.

Effective teacher training enables kindergarteners to be successful in literacy. Research shows that teacher training is important to the success of kindergarteners. Teachers should receive training in transition practices (Lenski & Nierstheimer, 2002). Hatcher et al. (2012) found that teacher training is related to successful kindergarten readiness and transition. Prior research from Early et al. (2001) shows that 8 of the 13 kindergarten teachers who participated in their study described receiving readiness training, professional development, or relevant information related to their area. They believed that the training enabled them to make informed decisions about instruction.

Reading failure, both present and future, can be prevented by performing screening, monitoring, and providing early intervention to the children at risk. Assessments make teachers cognizant of the skills that are lacking so that deficiencies can be addressed as soon as possible (Carta et al., 2015; Coyne & Ham, 2006). Teachers should implement the prevention-oriented approach by performing valid early literacy

assessments (Invernizzi et al., 2004; Lonigan et al., 2011). Several researchers (Blachman, 1997; McGill-Franzen, 1992; Morris, 2003; Vellutino & Scanlon, 2001) have argued that intervention should begin as early as in kindergarten. According to these researchers, this is a preventative measure to reduce reading failure so that fewer children in first grade will show signs of literacy deficits. Morris et al. (2003) conducted a study in which they sought to find out if a set of prereading skills they administered in kindergarten could effectively predict reading outcomes in first and second grade. They reported that their participants, the kindergarten teachers, expressed what they believed to be best practices for facilitating success in kindergarten and beyond. Eight teachers stated that they incorporated literacy instruction into every subject. Their lessons were a comprehensive, whole day curriculum that included literacy and oral language development in math, science, social studies, art, music, and play instruction. Reading to their students was a daily habit. They also said that they intentionally and systematically taught the alphabet letters and sounds. However, the teachers did not emphasize guided reading. Instead, they engaged in tactile activities such as finger-point reading of big books and discussing pictures. As soon as students had learned most of the alphabet, the teachers encouraged them to match pictures and write using invented or sound-it-out spelling. The teachers believed that writing was an important skill and should be included as students develop their skill sets.

Based on their findings, Morris et al. (2003) concluded that the set of prereading skills used in the study effectively predicted that a conclusion about students first-grade reading success can be determined by the time students are halfway into their

kindergarten experience. The researchers surmised that since one of the implications is that teachers would be aware of the children's trajectory by the time the students are halfway through kindergarten, they can plan accordingly and ensure that the children at risk for reading failure are immediately placed in instructional interventions. This adjustment to instruction, whether children will be seen individually or via a small group, should improve their literacy skills and their later chances for success in first grade.

Christianti et al. (2022), in their phenomenological study, wanted to know what efforts were being made by kindergarten teachers to measure early literacy. The researchers examined the efforts made by teachers to assess children's early literacy and the obstacles and expectations that teachers had in assessing literacy and providing for children's success. The study found the following:

(a) the efforts of the teachers in supporting and stimulating the children, have been the principal method in assisting with the kindergarteners' literacy development.

(b) the teachers provided literacy activities and tried to improve learning for the children in various forms.

(c) The teachers' efforts were supported by their understanding of the importance of literacy for the future development of their students.

(d) the teachers measured the children's literacy skills as per the activities the students performed. Observation was the primary method that teachers used to check children's literacy skills through the activities that the teachers intentionally designed to develop their literacy. McMillan (2017) is also of the opinion that observation is one of

the best tools to be used to assess children's literacy development. The feedback from formative assessments improves learning and the quality of teaching.

(e) The assessment results were used to measure the children's literacy and inform instruction. The teachers correlated the assessment results to the developmental achievement indicators which were in the early childhood education curriculum.

Christianti et al. (2022) concluded that literacy assessment tools which measure children's early literacy skills whether formative or summative, should provide purposeful information about students' literacy skills and knowledge so that appropriate feedback can be given. Kindergarteners who are identified as showing signs of literacy problems must have those needs addressed as early as possible. Formal literacy assessments must complement the informal assessments the teachers are using. The researchers recommended that further investigation be carried out to determine whether the assessments used by the teachers can be benchmarks to check the progress of children's literacy skills. Christianti et al. (2022) added that the most important thing that needs attention is whether the assessments being used lead to improvement of teaching methods, learning goals, and enhance the learning process so that children experience academic progress. Cummings et al. (2011) and Piasta and Wagner (2010) state that kindergarteners are more likely to be successful if they start acquiring literacy skills from preschool. Cummings, Piasta, and their colleagues describe early literacy skills as emerging skills, precursor skills, fundamental skills, or predictive skills. They added that at preschool, students should have started to develop skills such as alphabetical insight, phonological awareness, letter writing, written language knowledge, and oral language.

All these are transferrable skills that prepare children for kindergarten life and future literacy success.

The research of Nyman (2013) found that oral language exposure and the subsequent increase in usage of that language are among the important factors that determine a young child's reading readiness skills. Nyman (2013) also indicated that oral language ability, varied learning opportunities, and social behaviors enable young children to experience reading success. Oral language development includes obtaining full phonological awareness and is the foundation for phonemic awareness. Young children must have sufficient vocabulary and rich literacy experiences. If they do not, they will have limited reading fluency and comprehension. Bratsch-Hines et al. (2020) concur with Nyman (2013) with regard to the importance of oral language ability. Bratch et al. (2020) discuss how oral language skills and habits are factors that contribute to success in school related tasks, especially reading. They added that young children who experience delays and difficulty developing reading readiness skills are likely to have difficulties as they transition to future elementary grades. They stated that teachers should watch for signs of insufficient school vocabulary, lack of academic thriving and difficulty understanding the lessons. It is expected that preschool children will enter kindergarten having some familiarity with print, letter, and sound recognition, and beginning writing skills (Bryant et al.,1991).

Stipek and Byler (1997) surmised that basic skills orientation is connected to learning theory and that cognitive competencies appear to be transmitted via the principles of repetition and reinforcement. Learning occurs when these kindergarteners

model and repeat the appropriate responses to teacher-led stimuli. Previous research which examined early childhood teachers' beliefs about appropriate practices reported differing beliefs about assessments and practice. However, the teachers drew similar conclusions about child-centered and teacher-directed instruction and learning (Coppie & Bredekamp, 2009). The decisions that are made about the implementation of a basic skills versus child centered instruction are positively rooted in teachers' beliefs about the goals of early childhood education, student achievement, and their experiences and perspectives about how children learn (Sahin et al., 2013).

Hustedt et al. (2018) studied kindergarten teachers' beliefs about readiness. One of the research questions aimed to discover what the skills were that kindergarten teachers prioritized as most important for children entering kindergarten. A significant number of kindergarten teachers placed importance on the students' social and physical skills. Similarly, the findings of Charlesworth et al. (1993) also indicate that their participants, the kindergarten teachers, believed that social, emotional, and physical development were the primary skills that kindergarteners needed so that they would be more developmentally ready to engage in classroom instructional experiences. According to Early et al. (2001), early childhood educators develop theories that shape the strategies they use to prepare children for success in school. They found that teachers at the kindergarten level believe that, in conjunction with academics, the children must develop good work habits and attitudes. They should display self-control and follow directions. Great emphasis was placed on the children being healthy and well-nourished. This is consistent with earlier stated research findings: teachers stressed that social-emotional

development enabled kindergarteners to better perform their literacy tasks. Early et al. (2001) discussed their limitations. Although their study highlighted important trends in kindergarten teacher beliefs, they admitted that there were limitations to their approach. The responses to teacher beliefs were limited by the topics and questions investigated. Early and colleagues' conclusion was that kindergarten teachers' beliefs about what will make kindergarteners successful has a recurring theme: social and emotional readiness. They added that follow-up research is needed to better examine how kindergarten teachers' beliefs regarding important readiness skills are reflected in their actual classroom practices.

The findings from Hatcher et al. (2012) revealed that 25 of 29 participants associated kindergarten readiness with social emotional maturity and the ability to interact successfully with peers and teachers. The teachers' beliefs included descriptions of social skills, social problem solving, and emotional expression. Eleven of 12 teachers described the acquisition of literacy skills as essential to kindergarten readiness but secondary to the kindergarteners' social emotional state. The teachers believed that specific skills such as recognizing sight words and names, writing, letter recognition and sound/letter association would be better grasped when students were cognitively and developmentally ready.

Hooper (2018) and Vartuli (1999) provided statistics, made comparisons with other researchers, and elaborated on procedures and strategies that could be used to help kindergarteners become more literate. There was less focus and reporting on what the teachers believed and what their perspectives were about the students' literacy skills.

Allington (2011) discussed the literacy skills of kindergarten and first graders. Allington (2011) focused on the students rather than the kindergarten teachers. He explored the effectiveness of instructional strategies. He stated that too many schools had at-risk kindergartners and first graders who were not receiving expert additional instruction. This was not due to a shortage of funds. It was that schools were already spending enormous amounts of money on a variety of unsuccessful approaches.

Some researchers indicated that if early education teachers completed a more comprehensive teacher preparation program, kindergarten students would receive better instruction. Moats (2005) is of the belief that early education teachers must be the first line of defense to improve literacy in schools. Moats recommended that it be mandatory for elementary school teachers to learn and teach orthography and morphology, and to make reading research and early literacy acquisition a part of course elementary school teachers must take before they are approved for licensure. These are immediate steps that the relevant stakeholders can adopt to effect change. Kindergarten teachers who believe that their students are not displaying signs of kindergarten readiness, should address these learning deficits as soon as they occur. Kindergarten students and their teachers then should be more frequently monitored to see if instruction and academics are in accordance with the school's goals and district timelines.

Overall, the literature on best practices showed that kindergarten teachers placed more emphasis on the social and emotional development of their students. They believed in developmentally appropriate practices: kindergartners need to be mentally ready to engage in literacy tasks. Kindergarten teachers' beliefs about effective practices and the

role social learning plays can have effects on early childhood policies as well as have important implications for early childhood teacher training and professional development.

Socioeconomic Status

Aikens and Barbarin (2008) used the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort of 1998 –1999 to conduct a study which investigated the extent to which family, school, and neighborhood factors account for the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on children’s early reading. One of the research questions sought to discover the relationship between SES and children’s reading development from the fall of kindergarten to the spring of the third-grade school year. In their attempt to obtain accurate data, Aikens and Barbarin (2008) did two important things: they used assessments that were modified by specialists so that the assessments would be suitable for kindergarten and first grade students. Also, they ensured that the Oral Language Development Scale (Duncan & DeAvila, 1986) was administered to students whose school records showed that English was not their primary language. The Oral Language Development Scale is a screening test that determined whether a child was able to understand and respond to the cognitive assessment items in English. Students who did not pass did not receive the standard reading assessment. The findings and adjustments made by Aikens and Barbarin (2008) have implications for the question about the deficits seen on assessments such as PALS. It is possible therefore, that some deficits are the result of administering assessments to kindergarteners whose primary language is not English and therefore the data about their skill sets may not be accurate. However, further and current research is needed to draw these conclusions. This study will fill this gap

because the participants would have expressed their beliefs and professional opinions about this theory.

Aikens and Barbarin (2008) found that among the multiple factors that affect socioeconomic status, school and neighborhood conditions contributed the most to students' family's socioeconomic status (SES). They also discovered that a kindergartener's SES affected his reading outcome. Kindergarteners who lived in low socioeconomic environments had lower reading outcomes. According to Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998), children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds experience phonological sensitivity, acquire language skills more slowly, and exhibit delayed letter recognition. Therefore, children who are economically disadvantaged learn at a slower pace and are more likely to face reading difficulties. The work of Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) may also have implications regarding the deficits seen by kindergarteners on assessments such as PALS. It is appearing more likely that not all deficits are a direct result of academic inability but are possibly the result of factors such as SES that contribute to the unavailability of resources needed to strengthen a kindergartener's academic skills. Aikens and Barbarin (2008) reported an increase of 16.1 points in the reading score gap between the poorest and the wealthiest children from kindergarten to third grade. Most of the increase occurred when students were in the first grade. It can be concluded then, based on this study, that kindergarten and first grade are particularly important foundational years. The availability of resources is crucial because a lack thereof can show disparity in academic output between children of low and high socioeconomic status. Aikens and Barbarin (2008) showed that children from homes that

had literacy rich environments experienced faster early reading success even prior to entering kindergarten. The results of their study encouraged the strengthening of the family literacy environment and urged more parental involvement in school. These researchers stated that their study provides evidence that apart from family factors, the school and neighborhood environment affect children's reading performance. The interactions that children have with home, school and their wider surroundings are consistent with the theoretical framework guiding the present study: children learn from their surroundings. They copy, adapt, and change. According to Lee and Burkam (2002) and Phillips and Chin (2004), contexts provide unique and cumulative influences on reading outcomes and disparities. Low quality environments, whether the school or home, negatively affect reading outcomes. Students from these environments are usually the ones who will enter schools that have a higher proportion of economically poor children and encounter classmates with low reading skills.

Aikens and Barbarin (2008) discussed the need for teachers to pay attention to the composition of their classrooms. Their research showed that there is an association between initial achievement and growth rates when low SES students were in classes with other low SES students. Therefore, "Peers were a critical component of school context associated with children's reading outcomes" (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008, p. 249). Aikens and Barbarin (2008) concluded that because socioeconomic status includes multiple aspects of young children's lives, things such as resources, interactions, and experiences contribute to how children perceive and receive literacy instruction. They admitted that the reading gap will not be closed solely by improving experiences,

resources, and interactions in any single context. Low SES children face disadvantages across many other contexts not mentioned in their study. However, these researchers believe that their findings suggest that families and characteristics associated with the home environment are most strongly associated with SES gaps in children's reading achievement. Efforts to improve children's home and family experiences, especially before they arrive at kindergarten, may provide the most important intervention in addressing early disparities in reading achievement. Policymakers and intervention methods must consider the factors that contribute to a child's development and functioning. "Children's development is multidetermined and embedded in dynamic, interconnected systems" (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008, p. 250).

Consistent with these prior studies that indicate that economic disadvantages have negative impacts on students' literacy skills, Herring et al. (2022) provided new and current evidence about the disparities in children's early literacy trajectories. They found that on average, Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged children enter kindergarten with fewer literacy skills than their peers. Their research showed that a strong literacy foundation at the kindergarten level positively impacts the students reading scores as far as the third grade. By their own admittance, the research of Herring et al. (2022) is possibly the first study that shows that race and an economically disadvantaged status are correlated to statewide kindergarten readiness assessments (KRA) and third-grade literacy skills. Assessments such as PALS will identify children who are behind in their acquisition of literacy fundamentals and may need academic intervention. These researchers concluded that assessments are an important tool to

measure literacy skills and are early predictors of kindergarten skills. The data is crucial for teachers to be cognizant of so that intervention or remediation methods can begin as soon as students are identified.

The Importance of the Context of the Classroom

Hatcher et al. (2012) stated that teacher beliefs are a crucial factor in determining best practice. Teachers should be unbiased and not make assumptions about their kindergarteners' skills especially based on factors such socioeconomic status, demographics or language status. Lucas and Berends (2007), Papageorge et al. (2019), and Grissom and Redding (2016) also concur that differences in teachers' expectations, teacher assumptions, inequities in ability grouping and gifted-program placement, can affect best practices in kindergarten. It is best that teachers are knowledgeable about students' abilities so that instruction caters to each student's needs.

Ready and Wright (2011) indicated that teachers should view their classrooms as such that support a community of learners who are capable of success. Their research employed a large and nationally representative sample from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort of 1998 – 1999. Ready and Wright (2011) analytically and conceptually extended the literature regarding teacher perceptual accuracy. Their study also added to the growing body of research that investigated the relationship between educational contexts and educational equity. Ready and Wright discovered that a teacher's perception influences his/her interactions with and expectations of his/her students, drives important decisions, especially those related to student placements into academic programs, and has meaningful consequences for

children's immediate and long-term academic future. These researchers comprehensively investigated kindergarten teacher perceptions about the sociodemographic status of their students. Two of their research questions queried whether teachers were more or less accurate in predicting the cognitive skills of students with particular sociodemographic backgrounds and if experienced teachers make better judgements about these skills. Ready and Wright (2011) noted that in the Fall, teachers made judgements based on each student's sociodemographic status. However, by Spring, the teachers recognized that although some students were sociodemographically similar, academically they were quite different. As the school year progressed, teachers tied their perceptions to the standardized assessments that measured the students' abilities.

Ready and Wright's (2011) study revealed that the teachers underestimated the abilities of ethnic groups and situations. The within-classroom models showed that at the start of kindergarten, the teachers tended to underestimate the literacy skills of Black children, of boys, and lower-SES children throughout kindergarten. The study revealed that a kindergartener's socioeconomic (SES) status influences teacher perceptions to a lesser degree in high-SES and high-ability classrooms and SES matters more to teacher perceptions in low-SES and lower-ability classrooms. Ready and Wright (2011) also found that the relationship between teacher perceptions and children's language status vary by children's racial-ethnic background. In the Fall, teachers underestimated the English abilities of Hispanic language-minority children, but those perceptions changed by the Spring. Teachers underestimated the literacy abilities of Asian language-minority children in both Fall and Spring. In the Fall, the teachers also underestimated the literacy

skills of Black children (compared to White children) but changed their perceptions by Spring.

Ready and Wright (2011) determined that teacher perceptions are important to student learning. The context under which teachers operate is strongly associated with perceptual accuracy. They concluded, however, that teachers' perceptions change as they become better acquainted with their students over the course of the academic year and use assessments as indicators of student ability. They also discovered that "The social and academic composition of classrooms influence the accuracy of teacher judgments" (Ready & Wright, 2011, p. 356). According to Ready and Wright (2011), it is important that efforts to create socially and academically diverse school contexts and limit practices that isolate traditionally disadvantaged students continue to occur.

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), when teachers reflect on their own pedagogical weaknesses, resist the urge to focus on their students' cognitive deficiencies, and evaluate their students' abilities via varied assessment methods, they may be better prepared to meet the needs of their diverse learners. It can be concluded then, that teachers should believe that, regardless of SES, language or ethnic status, a kindergartner's cognitive skills can be developed and enable him to be academically sound. These students can then be immersed in meaningful learning, experience success at their tasks, and transition to succeeding grades with sound literacy skills.

Recent studies have highlighted important connections between kindergarten teachers' perspectives on play-based learning and classroom implementations. However, research has yet to examine how teachers' approaches to play may inform their classroom

assessment practices and whether the approaches to assessment are different based on how the teacher feels about play-based learning (Pyle et al., 2022). Play-based learning can be used as a pedagogy to promote children's development and learning (Myck-Wayne, 2010; Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012). However, research has discovered differing beliefs among teachers about the correlation between play and learning in classrooms (Vong, 2012; Wu, 2014). These differing beliefs have meaningful implications for teacher practice. Some teachers believe that play is important for young children's physical, social, and emotional development but is separate from academic learning. They believe that academics is associated solely with teacher-directed instruction (Aras, 2016; Hegde et al., 2014; Howard, 2010; Lynch, 2015; Wu & Rao, 2011). These teachers primarily implemented child-directed free play with teacher-directed instruction. They believed that this approach promoted early learning (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Wu & Rao, 2011).

The research of Bryant et al. (1994), Dickinson (2001) and NICHD Early Childcare Research Network (2004) concur that classroom quality, as early as preschool, is linked to early reading-related outcomes. Several studies (NICHD 2004; Snow et al., 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Xue & Meisels, 2004) have investigated the relationship between preschool and elementary programs, reading instruction, and reading competence. These research findings suggest that when classroom environments contain relevant and literacy rich materials, teachers have high expectations of themselves and the students, and are prepared to teach to fidelity with best practices, early language and literacy skills can be significantly enhanced.

The Role of Assessments

Research shows that a strong foundation in early literacy will support children's academic pursuits and impact their personal, social, and adult life. Effective early literacy assessment practices are critical to supporting the accurate classification of students at risk of reading difficulties. Examining the relevance of early literacy assessments as predictors of future performance on important outcomes is critical for identifying students at risk of reading problems (Koller et al., 2022). The objectives of assessments are to ensure that students in need of early academic support are identified. The opportunity to prevent reading challenges through early intervention will not be missed. Reading deficits can then be addressed through strategic instruction (Koller et al., 2022). Hanna and Dettmer (2004) state that assessments measure if and how students are learning and if the teaching methods are effectively relaying the intended messages. Hanna and Dettmer (2004) suggest that teachers should use assessments throughout the year to match students' instructional experiences. Since summative assessments check for understanding at the end of a unit, teachers should use formative assessments to purposefully monitor student learning and provide ongoing feedback. Doing this helps students as well as instructors to improve their skills.

Some prior research laments the fact that kindergarten classrooms were no longer a place for socialization and play. Kindergarten has become a preparation ground for first grade (Martin, 1985; Roberts, 1986). Although life in kindergarten still familiarizes children with essential skills, many kindergarten teachers now believe their job is to prepare the students for the academic rigors to come (Shepard & Smith, 1988). In 1991

the National Association of for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published *Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children Ages 3 Through 8*. The document stated that assessments should bring about benefits for children, otherwise collecting data serves no purpose. It also stated that assessments should not be used to recommend that children be dismissed from programs, face retention or be placed in segregated groups based on ability or developmental maturity. Instead, NAEYC outlined the intentions for assessment. The NAEYC (2009) recommended that assessments should lead to effective planning and instruction, identify children with special needs, evaluate a program's effectiveness, and the results should be communicated to parents. The NAEYC (2009) also stated that screening should never be used to identify second language learners as struggling students solely on the basis of their level of English knowledge.

According to Herring et al. (2022) the Obama administration's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (Administration for Children and Families, 2019) gave priority to schools applying for federal aid if they were implementing kindergarten readiness assessments (KRA). The majority of states have now established KRA. Several states are using some of the same assessments (Education Commission of the States, 2018). Earl (2003) believes that kindergarten teachers should use assessments to monitor key academic and developmental learning, report on their student learning goals and inform their instructional practices. Larson (2021) believes that national and state-based assessments influence curricular and instructional decisions and often come with high-stake consequences for students and schools. Teachers are mostly preparing students

to be successful on the assessments. The findings revealed that instructional decisions were being made based on standardization. The study included implications and recommendations for creating a balance within the learning ecology.

Regenstein et al. (2018) believe that KRAs are essential. They reported that KRAs inform stakeholders in multiple ways. Practitioners can use them to screen children for specific supports and to inform teaching strategies. Researchers and policymakers can use the data to expand their comprehension of literacy development. KRA data can also be used to track trends over time. Many elementary schools are expected to increase learning standards and accountability. Assessments help schools to determine and plan for the levels of skills students possess. Greater focus is being placed on children's academic success (Minicozzi, 2016; Santi et al., 2009). Regenstein et al. (2018) added that KRAs allow educators, state and local policymakers to see data in their own local context. KRAs are not meant to hold schools, teachers, or children accountable for their performance but instead provide important data that informs instruction and equitable allocation of resources. For example, because of KRA data, lawmakers in the state of Maryland increased state investment in early childhood programming.

Academic expectations are being integrated into the kindergarten curriculum. This is to ensure that students acquire foundational knowledge and skills in preparation for subsequent grades (Russell, 2011; Stipek, 2006). The research of Duncan et al. (2007) and fellow researchers indicate that the earlier academic skills are acquired, the more predictive future academic performance will be. Gaps in performance are likely to widen over time. Therefore, promoting and assessing academic learning in early education is

crucial (Duncan et al., 2007; Foster & Miller, 2007). Since kindergarten has become increasingly academic, assessments are gradually shifting from screening and monitoring student development to instead assessing students' academic skills (Santi et al., 2009).

In the Center on Standards and Assessments Implementation (CSAI) Update (2017), 1,447 kindergarten teachers across the state of New Mexico were surveyed. The survey sought to gather information about the Kindergarten Observation Tool (KOT). New Mexico uses the KOT as its kindergarten entry assessment (KEA). The KOT is an observation-based assessment that is used during the first thirty instructional days of kindergarten. The researchers aimed to understand how New Mexico kindergarten teachers were (a) using data collected from the KOT (b) perceiving the impact of concurrent assessment initiatives on KOT administration and (c) communicating about KOT results with families. The New Mexico Department of Education states that the purpose of the KOT is to gather information about what children know and can do at the time of kindergarten entry and will serve as a bridge between preschool and first grade. The CSAI report (2017) indicated that 95% of responding teachers agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to use data to inform instructional practice. Fifty-one percent of the kindergarten teachers had six or more years teaching kindergarten. The majority of the teachers indicated that the KOT provided useful data about the students' skills, knowledge, and behavior at the beginning of school. The assessment data helped them to (a) identify students' strengths and challenges (b) plan for small groups and one-on-one instruction and (c) plan with a focus on literacy. The report concludes that teachers overwhelmingly agreed that assessment data was a heavy influence on classroom

planning, preparation, and instruction. One implication of the CSAI report was that the results of the survey could be used to inform states' decisions about how best to provide support and professional development opportunities for kindergarten teachers.

The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) states that kindergarten readiness assessments (KRA) can help teachers to identify the skills that are lacking and therefore effectively plan for the students. There is evidence that shows that the scores on beginning-of-kindergarten assessments correlate moderately to highly with students' later academic outcomes (Claessens et al., 2009; Duncan et al., 2007; Pianta et al., 2009). The goal of the KRA is to help teachers purposely plan for their students as they begin formal schooling. The data from the beginning of the year assessments should target the whole class as well as individual students' learning needs, thus preparing both students and teachers to successfully undertake what needs to be covered for the school year. By the end of kindergarten, teachers should know their students' capabilities. (Meisels, 1998; National Association for the Education of Young Children 2009). Supporting students' individual learning needs is especially important given that students vary widely in their early learning experiences prior to kindergarten entry.

In contrast, researchers Schachter et al. (2019), in their embedded mixed method design which examined kindergarten teachers' experiences with a beginning of the school year state-mandated kindergarten readiness assessment (KRA), found that in general, participants did not perceive the KRA as beneficial to instruction. Equally central in their findings were participants' explanations as to why the KRA did not inform instruction. The participants did not seem to be averse to assessments; they were averse to the KRA.

According to Schachter et al. (2019), 44% of participants were concerned that the KRA took away from important start-of-the-year activities such as acclimating children to school, establishing routines, and building community. Teachers reported that the KRA minimally improved instruction and was not beneficial for teachers and students. The assessments take approximately two hours to administer to each student. Teachers reported losing at least a month's worth of instruction time. They noted that this loss of instructional time was not good for kindergarteners. Kindergarteners need all the instruction time they can receive so that they are amply prepared to transition to the next phases of learning as they progress through kindergarten. Although the teachers indicated that the assessment took time away from instruction, they agreed that when the KRA was used in conjunction with other assessments, the information garnered was most informative for language, literacy instruction, and planning.

The kindergarten teachers varied in beliefs regarding what the KRA assessed. They indicated that stakeholders needed to provide more clarity regarding the content and purpose of assessments. The participants stated that they were confused as to how the content assessed via the KRA fit into the context of the kindergarten learning standards. Many participants believed that the KRA measured preschool skills or instruction at the preschool level and as such was not relevant. In contrast, participants from the focus group from the highest-need district reported that the KRA assessed material that would not be covered until the end of kindergarten and was missing valuable assessment information.

Schachter et al. (2019) concluded that in order to achieve the benefits of data-use, teachers must find the data from assessments relevant, impactful, and related to overall learning goals. They added that policymakers should balance the purpose of state-level data collection with the needs of teachers, consider ways to create assessments that provide teachers with data that helps them plan instruction, and ensure that assessments are aligned with state-level learning standards. The teachers in the present study discussed what they believed about assessments and whether the results provided them with immediate, actionable data. Children are continually developing academic related skills. When to administer assessments so that the desired results are achieved should be an important factor (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

Hodges (1992) conducted a longitudinal study that compared alternative evaluation techniques to student assessments based on standardized tests. Teachers in seven kindergarten classrooms evaluated their students for three successive years according to how well they had mastered a set of criteria to be successful readers and writers at the end of kindergarten. Results indicated that a significant relationship existed between teachers' assessments of students and the students' performance on the standardized test. The interviews indicated that teachers felt more confident about the results of their formulated assessments and their ability to make decisions about students' abilities based on the results. Parents and teachers felt that teachers' evaluations provided more useful information than the standardized tests did. Hodges's (1992) findings suggested that teacher judgments, based on knowledge of their students' development and knowledge of the processes involved in reading and writing, may be a more valid means

of obtaining information for instructional decisions. Additionally, the participants stated that they used the informal measures not only for summative evaluations, but also for the formative evaluations that guided their everyday instructional decisions. Parents and first grade teachers believed that the kindergarten teachers' decisions, due to the varying assessment measures used, provided more useful information than the standardized test data did. Hodges (1992) added that future studies could use valid criterion measure of reading/writing to establish validity so that evidence that would prove that teacher judgments can be valid measures of reading/writing achievement. However, Hodges's (1992) research is limited because only one school district participated in the study. According to the study, there were relatively high correlations of teacher judgment with standardized tests. This means that teachers were not opposed to standardized tests but believed that their assessment results were equally important and should be considered when making instructional or institutional decisions.

Morrow (2014) believes that literacy assessment for children include running notes, informal inventory, formal reading inventory, and standardized tests. To make informed decisions, teachers need to use the data from both formal and informal assessments. Morrow (2014) added that informal assessments have many shortcomings. The teachers' opinions on the standards might differ from one teacher to another. These differences can result in the different standards for each teacher's students that later define the different qualities of kindergarten graduates. At the national level, standardized assessments create a better picture of the achievement of the literacy development that the children have mastered.

Research which investigated teachers' approaches to assessment in early education found that many teachers are committed to assessing the whole child, continuously engaging in student observation, and catering assessments to the individual characteristics and needs of each student (DeLuca & Hughes, 2014; Navarrete, 2015). However, other studies such as those from Hargreaves et al. (2002), Kanjee & Mthembu, (2015), Koh (2011), and Schachter et al. (2019), raised concerns about how teachers assessed literacy and questioned their understanding of summative and formative assessment practices. Over the years, studies such as those from Hargreaves et al. (2002) have reported that teachers continue to have challenges with designing and implementing meaningful classroom assessment strategies. This is due to external accountability pressures, inadequate training and support during pre-service programs, and hindrances such as insufficient planning time and resources.

Kindergarten Controversy

In previous times, readiness referred to a student's ability to meet the demands of first grade. Elkind (2008) wrote that since there is a great push for academic achievement, readiness meant a child must display preparedness for kindergarten. According to Elkind (2008), readiness meant that students entering kindergarten must be ready, emotionally and intellectually, to pursue the kindergarten program. Elkind (2008) did not provide specific definitions for what readiness for kindergarten as literacy should be. However, the implication is that a child should display certain skills such as the ability to communicate, follow instructions, and successfully interact with his teacher and classmates. According to Repko-Erwin (2017), because of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

in 2001, public schools in the United States have experienced immense reforms intended to elevate students' academic abilities. Since the federal government is involved in education matters, the result of the passage of NCLB has sparked a nationwide drive to standardize instruction, raise achievement levels, and hold schools accountable for improved student outcomes. The kindergarten classroom has not been immune to these efforts.

In 1992, Bryant and Clifford reported on their research about kindergarten. They stated that various methods and theories have been suggested or implemented. However, they have concluded that the best methodology for kindergarteners has not yet been found. Bryant and Clifford (1992) questioned the purpose of the kindergarten experience. They queried whether it was because young children needed to socialize, learn to read and write, get ready for first grade, or for stimulating creativity and independence to occur. Bryant and Clifford added that kindergarten performs all of these tasks and is still doing so. These researchers were concerned that the kindergarten movement has undergone different phases and trends because of the influence of diverse educational, social, and psychological theories. Their concerns, similar to Repko-Erwin (2017), were about what was developmentally appropriate for kindergarteners. Like Repko-Erwin (2017), they expressed concerns over the push for academics, changes in kindergarten literacy instruction, and the increased emphasis on standards and accountability. Repko-Erwin (2017) and Bryant and Clifford (1992) although years apart in their research, questioned what role play and creativity would have in kindergarten classrooms. In their research, Bassok et al. (2016) and Bowdon and Desimone, (2014) concluded that there is

a significant decrease in time allotted for engaging, play-based activities. This time for play was once at the heart of the kindergarten experience. These days, the majority of the kindergarten experience is spent receiving formal math and literacy instruction.

Various researchers (Brown & Lan, 2015; Deming & Dynarski, 2008; Huang & Invernizzi, 2012) who investigated kindergarten readiness, found that since the inception of NCLB, teachers' and parents' beliefs about readiness in kindergarten have changed. They reported that in the past, kindergarten teachers implemented more play-based early learning opportunities than formal academic experiences. Rigor was not introduced until students began first grade. Currently, most kindergarten teachers expect students to engage in direct academic instruction at the very beginning of their kindergarten year. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) found that the decrease in time spent playing is attributed to the increased emphasis placed on preparing young children to do well on standardized tests thereby meeting academic standards. Elkind (2007) explained his views on play. He stated that play is not a luxury but an important dynamic of healthy physical, intellectual, and social-emotional development. The findings of Bassok et al. (2016) and Miller and Almon (2009) concur. These researchers concluded that it appears that before the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act, kindergarteners were expected to leave kindergarten ready to read. Since NCLB, kindergarteners are expected to leave kindergarten already reading.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1990) conducted a nationwide survey of 7,141 teachers. The findings revealed that teachers preferred that kindergarteners entering kindergarten possess language related readiness skills. The

survey found that 35% of kindergarteners were not ready to participate in kindergarten. The teachers reported that language proficiency was the biggest barrier to readiness. The study was replicated with 44 rural teachers in Missouri (Espinosa et al., 1997). In the Carnegie study, 88% of teachers believed language competence was a moderate to serious readiness problem. The results from the replicated study in Missouri showed that 15% of teachers have the same beliefs about language competence. The conclusion from both studies is that kindergarten students are less prepared to enter kindergarten than they were five years ago. The teachers believed that lack of parental involvement contributed to the decrease in student readiness (Espinosa et al., 1997).

Clay (1991) stated that it was not necessary to place importance on reading readiness for kindergartners. She posited that children would eventually improve their literacy skills and would do so at their own pace. Clay defined reading as “a message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practiced” (1991, p. 6). Bassok et al. (2016) stated that in 2010, kindergarten classes were similar to first grade classes from the 1990s. This was partially due to challenging literacy topics. Numerous teacher perception studies revealed that kindergarten teachers were somewhat dissatisfied with the curricular goals for kindergarteners. At times the programs could be rigid and decreased time for play. The researchers believed learning to read requires a strong oral language base that is best developed through play and activity centers. Several studies have shown that time spent in play and activity centers have been reduced (Alvarez, 2015; Bassok et al., 2016; Brown, 2018; Costantino-Lane, 2019;

Gallant, 2009). Kindergarten curriculums appear to be the former first grade curriculums (Alvarez, 2015; Costantino-Lane, 2019; Gallant, 2009).

Clay (1991) coined and described this action as “emergent literacy.” The child must be allowed time to experience and increase his literacy development. She stated that if the concept of emergent literacy was accepted, schools would be more prepared to meet each child needs when they began school and thereby propel them forward. As observers of student reading behavior, teachers would know how to plan for reading instruction. Clay (1991) believed that oral language activities, visual perception practice, fostering knowledge of the relationship between language and print, creating meaning, self-management, and self-confidence, equated success for children in literacy instruction. She stated children needed an unpressured transition to formal schooling so that they would be more functional in their new learning environment. She added that this ease of transition also enables parents to be comfortable interacting with the school.

Transition and Readiness for First Grade

The research of Connor et al. (2013) revealed that first grade has greater demands than kindergarten. Instruction in first grade has a greater impact on students reading skills than instruction in other grade levels. The goal of entry-level formal schooling is to set a strong foundation for students’ literacy skills. It is important for kindergarten and first grade teachers to be aware of the most effective teaching practices in the classroom. At the entry-level stage of formal reading instruction, students will display a variety of skills and habits. This will challenge the classroom teacher to adapt to instruction that corresponds to each student’s various skill level (Connor et al., 2004). Students should be

prepared for a successful transition as they make a shift to face increasing academic-focused tasks. In their early years, students need sufficient support and exposure to literacy content and instruction (Entwisle & Alexander, 1993). The structure of first grade usually requires more responsibility and autonomy for children (Alexander et al., 1993). Entwisle and Alexander (1989) believe that the transition to first grade is a critical period for children.

In the study conducted by Shepard and Smith (1985), 40 kindergarten teachers at the Boulder Valley school district in Colorado, expressed concern about the day-to-day pressures to raise expectations. The majority of the participants had established kindergarten goals which exceeded district guidelines. This was because first-grade teachers were expecting that students would begin first grade already equipped with prerequisite skills. First grade teachers believed that they would not be able to foster continuity because it would be necessary to first teach readiness skills before embarking on first grade material. According to the participants, first grade teachers defended their demands on kindergarten teachers because they themselves were expected to accomplish first grade goals within their specified time periods. First grade teachers did not believe that it was their task to teach what they believed should have been accomplished in kindergarten.

Based on their participants' responses and observations made, Shepard and Smith (1985) added that there was an accountability culture in the schools. If first-grade teachers were cautioned about students in their groups who were performing below standards as per the national norms on standardized tests, the teachers would inform

kindergarten teachers about their reluctance to accept future children for first grade who were not ready to read. Children were being sent back to the preceding grade. If after three weeks the first-grade teacher did not notice signs of readiness, the child/children would be returned to kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher would be cautioned to be more careful when selecting and scrutinizing students for promotion to first grade.

The NCES (1993) report provided valuable statistics about teachers' beliefs. The report showed that approximately 27% of all kindergarten teachers presume that all children will be ready for first grade by the end of the kindergarten year. Minority teachers have higher expectations than non-minority teachers that all their kindergartners will be ready to move on to first grade. Seventy percent of all public-school kindergarten teachers stated that they would recommend retention in kindergarten if they believed that the children were not ready for the rigors of first grade. Eighty-five percent of the kindergarten teachers indicated that they communicated with the first-grade teachers to ensure continuity.

La Paro and Pianta (2000) conducted a study in which they investigated kindergarten teachers' practices related to the transition of children into first grade. These researchers indicated their investigation was an initial, large-scale effort to discuss the role of schools which transition from kindergarten to first grade. La Paro and Pianta indicated that their research provided a foundation on which other investigations of transition processes and the consequences can be built. They added that since research on first grade transition is limited, kindergarten transition practices can provide a useful perspective for understanding first-grade transitions. The sample consisted of 3,595

public school kindergarten teachers in addition to 176 kindergarten teachers in private schools. More than half of public and private school teachers engaged in first-grade transition practices. More teachers in private schools reported using first-grade transition practices than teachers in public schools. The most frequently used first-grade transition practice by the kindergarten teachers was to confer with first-grade teachers regarding the curriculum and expectations for first grade.

La Paro and Pianta (2000) also discovered that socioeconomic status affected transition practices. One of their research questions queried whether public school teachers' use of kindergarten transition practices varied with respect to three demographic indices: metropolitan status, poverty level, and minority composition. Kindergarten teachers in school districts in poverty-stricken areas, as well as districts with increased minority representation, reported using fewer transition practices. The researchers noted that children from racial and ethnic minorities may have greater challenges because of discontinuity between home and school settings. The researchers found that continuity between kindergarten and first grade is important.

Most teachers in both public and private schools reported using a variety of kindergarten to first-grade transition techniques. The two most frequently reported techniques were (a) conferring continuity in the curricula and (b) discussing individual children's progress. The least frequently reported transition practices were (a) meeting to discuss general transition practices and (b) sending parents information about first-grade process and placement. More than 75% of the participants in public and private schools reported that they did not inform parents about first-grade placements. Also, over 60% of

these teachers reported that they do not send parents any information about expectations for first grade.

La Paro and Pianta (2000) concluded that transition practices are important, and teachers need to strike a balance between the demographics of the student population by providing all students and families with high intensity transition practices. While they gathered information on teachers' beliefs, they did not, however, investigate or indicate how transition practices specifically correlate with literacy or assessments. They did not discuss what specific tasks, skills, or abilities the students need to enable a successful transition to the first grade. This study will fill this gap by providing specific and current data about these phenomena.

Research shows that some first-grade teachers are concerned that the social and literacy skills of kindergarteners are insufficient to meet the rigors of first grade. Harris-Motley (2020), in her qualitative study, discovered that readiness from kindergarten to meet the standards of first grade is a common concern among first grade teachers. Her participants, first grade teachers, voiced their expectations that these students should display reasonable levels of mastery so that they can begin first grade tasks right away. The consensus among the participants was that the kindergarteners were not ready, socially, or academically. Harris-Motley (2020) conducted 10 in person, semi-structured interviews. She retrieved, reviewed, and assessed documents from the standardized assessment of Grade One Individual Learning Profile. Her data was coded and analyzed for themes. Harris-Motley's findings revealed two causes of failure of kindergarten readiness: teacher to student ratio and insufficient contact time for literacy and

mathematics. Missing from her report, however, is how these teachers believe these two factors could be addressed. The current study would seek definite answers from the kindergarten teachers as to what they believe the solutions are to conundrums such as these.

Children should develop literacy skills that progress from learning to read to reading to learn as they move from kindergarten through elementary grades (Fischer, Syverson, & Education Commission of the States, 2020). According to their *Policy Brief*, literacy skills support reading proficiency and build knowledge. Students who struggle with literacy skills in kindergarten are likely to read below grade level in first grade. High-quality instruction and assessment in kindergarten are necessary to achieve reading proficiency.

Stormont et al. (2019) explored the relationships between kindergarten academic and behavior readiness and the outcome for first grade. Nineteen kindergarten teachers and 350 of their students participated in the study. The researchers used the universal screener Kindergarten Academic and Behavior Readiness Screener (K-ABRS). It assesses both academic and social behavior domains. Kindergarten teachers completed the K-ABRS at the beginning of the academic year. The findings concurred with prior and current research about the importance of kindergarten readiness and teacher influence: kindergarten is an important developmental transition period with a major implication for first grade and beyond. The teachers reported that they believed that students who had readiness skills in kindergarten were expected to be successful in first grade and beyond. The researchers own prior research (Stormont et al., 2011) and

(Stormont et al., 2015) stated that the academic and social behavior readiness items predicted outcomes within corresponding academic and social constructs and arrived at similar conclusions each time. Stormont et al. (2019) acknowledged their limitations. The study included a high percentage of African American students from a large, urban school district. They are unsure how well the results generalize to other students in other school settings.

Parental Involvement and the Influence of Socioeconomic Status on Learning

A report from Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) states that in the last 20 years, there has been a 40% decrease in parent and child interactions. They attributed this decline to the fact that the number of mothers in the workforce has increased by 18%. In light of these statistics, parents should be more involved in their young child's reading success. According to Hill and Taylor (2004), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), and Jeynes (2005), literacy activities at home need to be increased because families play an essential role in building literacy in children. Parents influence their child's academic motivation and success. Several studies have demonstrated that parental involvement has positive effects on children's learning and academic success. Research related to the impact of parental involvement on students' literacy success have shown consistent correlation between the two (Jeynes, 2005). Parental involvement during a child's first years of school has been found to have positive effects on their literacy development through the third and fourth grades (Senechal, 2006; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002).

According to the NCES report (1993), 99% of the study's public-school kindergarten teachers believed that parents can make their home a stimulating

environment. The survey results indicated that parents can contribute to their young children's preparation for school and learning by reading to them and regularly playing counting games. Approximately half or 49% of kindergarten teachers believed that parents should dedicate special times every day to help their kindergarten children to practice their schoolwork. Support for this measure is welcomed by teachers in large schools, city schools, and schools with elevated poverty levels, high minority enrollments, and minority teachers. The greatest consensus, 64%, came from participants in schools with high poverty levels.

According to Baker (2003), Leseman and De Jong (1998), and Senechal and LeFevre (2002), parents of struggling readers play a crucial role in their child's literacy development. Their combined research establishes a correlation between literacy-enriched home environments and children's acquisition of literacy skills. In their five-year longitudinal study, Senechal and LeFevre (2002) found parent involvement in teaching reading was directly correlated to emergent literacy. Livingston and Wirt (2003) discovered that children with richer home literacy environments show higher levels of reading skills and knowledge when they begin kindergarten than children with less literacy-rich stimuli. Family literacy activities, which include read alouds, have been found to have significant effects on children's literacy learning (Huang & Doleis, 2007). Baker (2003) concluded that supportive home environments which included rich literacy experiences, were found to be strongly associated with the child's improvement in reading. Sonnenschein and Munsterman (2002) found that parents who spent time with

their children were more likely to provide opportunities for their children to engage in literacy activities. Those children showed higher scores in reading.

Researchers have tried to explain whether low achievement is correlated to lack of parental involvement. Musti-Rao and Cartledge (2004), Al Otaiba and Fuchs (2006) as well as Wigfield and Asher (1984), all conclude that home literacy is a significant contributor to the children's early literacy success. Children are more likely to have reading problems at school if parents are not involved in their literacy development (Resetar et al., 2006). According to Christiani et al. (2022) the kindergarten teachers in their study believed that parental involvement is crucial to help boost children's literacy. Gilkerson et al. (2017), Harlaar et al. (2008), Morrow (2014), and Weigel et al. (2017) also agree that parental involvement is essential to a child's literacy development, especially in the early years. They concur that the original roots of literacy are in the family.

Research from Kim et al. (2005) from the National Household Education Survey indicated that in general, parents felt that academic and social skills were important for readiness. Parents with the highest levels of education placed the lowest importance on academic preparation and the highest priority on social behaviors. Many parents relied on the teachers' input about how best their child learns and tried to be cooperative. In a qualitative study with parents and preschool teachers, Hatcher et al. (2012) found that parents felt that social skills and literacy and language skills were necessary elements of kindergarten readiness. The parents emphasized that it was important for their children to

cooperate with the teachers. This, they felt, would enable their children to be more successful since less time would be spent on corrective measures.

The home environment is a crucial place for reading reinforcement and stimulation. Stipek and Byler (1997) found that parents are concerned about the readiness for kindergarten and are willing to help at home. These parents relied on the teachers for guidance for home activities. However, some parents preferred that academics be the main focus and be done at school. All of the teachers who stated that parents were not satisfied with their methodologies explained that the parents wanted more emphasis on academics rather than social behaviors. Although most teachers (N = 53) believed that parents were generally pleased with the classroom structure, many listed changes they believed parents would like. Based on feedback from the parents, the teachers concluded that parents would like to see more acquisition of basic skills, emphasis on academics, a quieter classroom, and less playing. In contrast, parents who were cognizant of the benefits of the child-centered approach to learning, contributed to the teacher's efforts to do what was best for their child.

According to Puccioni (2018), kindergarten teachers' beliefs influenced the ways in which they communicated with parents. Teachers can support children's transition to school by reaching out to parents to encourage parent involvement. The research indicated that many parents regularly request information about academic expectations. An important finding was that the teachers who believed parents play a vital role in their child's educational success and actively encouraged parental involvement were more likely to increase home and school engagement with those parents.

Hatcher et al. (2012) discussed parental involvement and its importance on readiness for kindergarten. In one of the interviews, a parent stated that she believed kindergarten readiness meant that her child was ready to interact with his peers socially and emotionally. She reiterated that her biggest concern was the social aspect. In total, 12 parents described literacy skills as a precursor to kindergarten readiness.

More research studies suggest that teachers' beliefs about parent involvement influence their attitudes and efforts to encourage parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Sverdlov and Aram (2016) indicated that the perspectives of parents are relevant to the national education goals, priorities, and policies that affect what is expected and required of children entering school. They added that parents should continue to be an essential part of the discourse about kindergarten readiness.

In the earlier mentioned CSAI Update (2017), 53% of the kindergarten teachers indicated that it was important to communicate assessment results with families. One of the survey questions had enquired about teachers' communication with families about the Kindergarten Observation Tool (KOT) results. The more families were aware of their children's progress, the more involved they became. Responsive parents were eager to assist with and asked questions about their child's literacy development. Of the teachers who communicated with families, three-quarters of them agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the KOT report(s) enhanced their communication with families. The majority of responding teachers (61%), indicated that families asked about KOT results during in-person meetings/conferences.

La Paro and Pianta (2000) reported that transition practices need to graduate from just communication between teachers and should involve parents. Prior studies (Dauber et al., 1993; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Simner & Barnes, 1991; Stipek & Ryan, 1997) also concur with the findings of La Paro and Pianta (2000). La Paro and Pianta (2000) believe that involving parents in this process develops connections between home and school especially for families in poverty and from diverse environments. La Paro and Pianta (2000) stated that data shows that (a) children from families in poverty and as well as from diverse ethnic backgrounds are retained the most, (b) experience more academic problems later in school, and (c) are more likely to drop out of school. La Paro and Pianta reported that few teachers in schools that serve these children are using transition practices. The researchers believed that this practice warranted further investigation.

Still missing from many of these studies are the particular beliefs of solely kindergarten teachers. Throughout much of the literature reviewed, early educators are classified as one group. This study fills this gap by providing data solely from the perspectives of kindergarten teachers and specifically answering how their beliefs about literacy, assessments, and parental involvement translates into current and future success as well as enabling kindergarteners to successfully transition to the first grade.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate kindergarten teachers' perspectives about literacy, the relevance and role of assessments, and the impact of both concepts on kindergarten students' success and first grade transition.

Phenomenological methodology was used to understand and describe the phenomena and to arrive at the essence of the kindergarten teachers' experience with them. According to Creswell "basic phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (2007, p. 58).

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do kindergarten teachers believe will help their students to be successful in literacy thereby ensuring a reasonable transition to the first grade?
2. To what extent does assessment data influence literacy development, planning, and instruction?
3. Are assessments relevant at the kindergarten level? Should kindergarten students be formally assessed for example, by state mandated standardized assessments such as PALS? If not, how should their entry and subsequent skills be measured?
4. Do kindergarten teachers believe that the frequency of assessments is related to literacy success?
5. What are kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the role parental involvement plays in kindergarten students' success?

6. Do kindergarten teachers believe that the mid-year state test scores are a clear indicator of a kindergartener's literacy skill level and predict readiness for first grade?

Research Design and Data Analysis

The Purpose of Using a Qualitative Phenomenological Design

The objective of this study was to explore the beliefs, perspectives, and professional opinions of the kindergarten teachers. A descriptive account was needed to highlight the teachers' personal understanding of the phenomena. Therefore, a phenomenological study was chosen as the best research method to report the teachers' experiences. This design enabled the researcher to learn about the phenomena being investigated from the participants, obtain rich descriptions, and address the research questions via the obtained data. Phenomenological research is focused on an individual's perspectives about his experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A participant's beliefs are the researcher's primary source of information and should not be doubted (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) concur with the use of qualitative research to describe an individual's perspectives. They stated that "qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in people's lived experiences" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 30).

In this design, the principles of phenomenological research were used to collect the data. The focus was on the description of the experiences of participants, the kindergarten teachers. This approach was appropriate because a phenomenological approach is consistent with the idea of shared experiences of the same phenomenon

among multiple participants. The lived experiences of this study's participants were solely theirs. Van Manen (1990) encourages researchers to focus on the participants' experiences, reflect on the important themes that emerge, then compose a description that shows a relationship with the phenomena under investigation. Investigating *what* participants have experienced and *how* they have experienced it will reveal multiple realities (Moustakas, 1994).

The theoretical frameworks that guided this study are social constructivism and social learning theories. Bandura's theory (1977) states that people learn from one another through imitation, modeling and observation. The social environment influences the way a child learns. Bandura's theory suggests that learning cannot take place in isolation. The collaborative nature of learning is also associated with social constructivism. Knowledge develops because of cultural and societal interactions among people. Psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978) believed that individuals are active participants in the creation of their own knowledge. He posited that learning takes place primarily in social and cultural settings rather than solely within the individual. He suggested that successful teaching and learning is heavily dependent on interpersonal interaction and discussion. Within the context of education, students rely on others in their environment to help them create and continue to build their knowledge base. Learning from others, especially in small group settings, helps these students construct their own knowledge and reality. Teachers, and in this case the kindergarten teachers, knowingly or unknowingly apply constructivism in their classrooms because their goal as instructors should be to create unique, stimulating, and interactive learning environments

for their students. In such classrooms, a collaborative environment ensures that the students are actively involved in their own learning. The teacher as a facilitator of learning, can then increase his understanding of the students' learning styles and therefore adjust teaching methods to match each learner's level of comprehension.

How the Design was Developed to Facilitate a Coherent Interpretation

Interaction with the kindergarten teachers occurred virtually. Confidentiality was reiterated and they were encouraged to feel comfortable as they related their unique experiences and perspectives. The similarities among the participants and significant statements and themes that came from the data helped to identify the essence of their shared experiences. These statements and themes provided a plausible description of the phenomena; commonalities in the participants' responses were evident. Reflexivity in this study was consistent with the description of Creswell and Poth (2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) state that the researcher must remain cognizant of the biases, values, and experiences that she/he brings to a qualitative research study. Creswell and Poth (2018) encourage the researcher to focus on the experiences of the participants with the phenomena being explored and not to allow the interpretation of the phenomena to be shaped by his/her (the researcher) past or personal experiences. Silverman (2013) encourages researchers to always ask themselves if the research questions are the driving force behind the data collection and analysis. The data in this study were checked for inconsistencies so that accurate information was reported. Readers of this research should better understand what the participants have experienced because of the rich, descriptive, and direct account.

Data were collected and analyzed over a period of four months. The research site stipulated that data can only be obtained via one method. Individual interviews were selected as the best option because of the type of data that was needed to satisfy the goals of this study: detailed descriptions were needed from the participants. Demographic information was limited because publishing some of that information would have led to possible identifiers for the participants and the school district. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, arranged according to themes, coded, and analyzed. Independently identified emergent themes from interview transcripts followed a multistep analysis that included three readings of each interview. This scrutiny helped to finalize the analysis of commonalities, overall understanding, general impressions, data coding and identification of data units, and relating themes while comparing beliefs. For example, the similarity of responses for developmental areas that the teachers considered important to readiness such as social and emotional development were evident. Two peer reviewers assisted with analyzing the themes and compared them with samples of the participants' responses so that verification of the themes reflected the content of interviews.

What Is PALS?

The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) is a screening tool used in the state of Virginia as part of the Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI). School divisions identify children who need additional instruction and provide early intervention services to them. It is mandatory that school divisions screen students in kindergarten through third grade either with an assessment approved by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) or with PALS. All school districts except one school division in the

state administer PALS (Virginia Literacy Partnership, University of Virginia, 2023). (See Appendices I & J for further explanations of PALS and PALS – K).

PALS has been used in Virginia since 2000 through a contract with the University of Virginia (UVA). PALS is provided at no charge to school divisions. PALS identifies students who need reading intervention and specifies the deficiencies that need to be addressed (Virginia Department of Education, 2022). PALS checks a kindergartener's knowledge of the fundamentals of literacy. These include phonological awareness, letter sounds knowledge, alphabet recognition, and spelling. Classroom teachers administer the assessment individually to each child. Some subtasks can be conducted in small groups. If a K – 3 student's summed score is below the Summed Score Benchmark, the student must receive reading intervention (VDOE, 2022). Some schools conduct this assessment during the Fall and Winter or the Fall and Spring of each school year. Some schools administer this assessment in Fall, Winter and Spring. It is not mandatory to extend testing to three times per school year and to third graders. However, students who are new to Virginia or who attended summer school must be assessed. Some third-grade teachers administer it to their incoming third graders who were identified by PALS when they were in second grade. The results help them to plan for these new to third grade students.

The 2023-2024 period is the final time that the current PALS assessment will be used. The assessment has been upgraded and renamed the Virginia Language and Literacy Screener (VALLS) and has been extended to Pre-K students. The participants were not required to discuss the upgrade to the PALS assessment. This study is

concerned with the use of the current PALS assessment. PALS was validated with Cronbach's alpha coefficients (Invernizzi et al., 2017). PALS data for Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 for six of the participating schools will be represented only as visual data. The participants elaborated on whether the results from the spring assessment helped them to anticipate their kindergarteners' impending skills for first grade. The results were used to support and answer the research questions.

Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness of the Research Design

Reliability and Validity

It is important that the research design does as is intended and stated. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), validity is the "trustworthiness of the study" (p. 300). Reduction and free imaginative variation were used to help ensure reliability and validity. According to Beck (1994) and Giorgi (1988), validity and reliability in phenomenological studies are best addressed through reduction and free imaginative variation. Applying these two concepts helps the researcher to accurately report about the phenomena. The use of free imaginative variation allows the researcher to retain the essence of the phenomena regardless of the multiple ways the data can be described. Through reduction, the research is not influenced by the researcher's knowledge or opinions. The essence of the phenomena should be so captured that the reader finds clarity in it and can decide if the findings are relatable to his experiences with the same phenomena. Pollio et al. (1997) state that findings of phenomenological research should be illuminating and plausible. The reader must clearly see the connection between the data and its interpretation.

The reliability and validity of this study were determined using the following factors.

- accurate triangulation of the data - Each teacher's transcript was analyzed individually, line by line, and comparisons made to determine their perspectives (Patton, 2002).
- evidence that breeds credibility (Eisner, 1991, p. 110).
- the persuasive nature of the thick description.
- critical analysis of the subject matter.
- accurately and confidentially representing the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 assessment results from each of the six participant's schools.
- peer debriefing – weekly meetings to review codes, check the accuracy of the data in the tables and figures, resolve questions, and strengthen trustworthiness.
- asking applicable and relevant in-depth interview questions.

Since this study is based on valid qualitative questions, the findings have indicated that the data answered the research questions.

The Trustworthiness of the Study

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) discussed what makes data trustworthy. They indicated that trustworthiness is dependent on the detailed description of the processes involved in the study. This explanation must include how the data were analyzed.

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that many perspectives and threats exist because data in phenomenological research can be an evolving construct. Wolcott (1990) posited that when the researcher looks for “critical elements” and writes “plausible interpretations from them” trustworthiness is added to the study (p. 146). The participants were allowed

to freely relate their experiences and feelings. No assumptions were made about them, nor were their responses compared to this researcher's opinions and experiences. The similarities among the responses were checked for significant statements and themes. This analysis helped to identify the essence of their shared experiences, thereby providing a plausible description of the phenomena. The collected data were also checked and rechecked for the following.

- Consistent awareness of researcher bias.
- examination of the researcher's role regarding reflexivity, substantive validation, and self-reflection.
- application of the principles of rigor, which is the strength of the research design and the appropriateness of the method used to answer the questions.
- accurate organization of themes and coding of the data.
- examination of the strategies used for validation, especially regarding "generating rich thick descriptions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263).
- accurate and representative graphic and tabulated data.

The stated research questions were an effective way to explore how kindergarten teachers can offer insight toward a shared understanding of how best to help kindergarten children obtain the literacy skills necessary for success in kindergarten and a reasonable transition to the first grade.

The Sample, Population, and Participant Demographics

Sample

The sample consisted of twenty kindergarten teachers. All kindergarten teachers from the participating school district's elementary public schools were invited to participate in the study. Sending an invitation via each school's email ensured that at least twenty kindergarten teachers would respond. It was the intent of this researcher to use purposeful sampling to select the twenty participants. Purposeful sampling would have ensured the diversity of the participants. The participants would have been chosen from a wider range of the socioeconomic and demographic regions of the participating school district. This selection would also have ensured that the participants had diverse ethnic backgrounds, gender, kindergarten populations, as well as varying levels of kindergarten teaching experiences.

Purposeful sampling would have also ensured that the participants selected could provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomena under investigation. Purposeful sampling is very subjective and would have generated the qualifying criteria each kindergarten educator must meet to be considered for the research study. In the initial stages, only six kindergarten teachers responded to the invitation. Snowball sampling was then used to obtain the remaining fourteen participants. Based on their individual school's location, purposeful sampling could not be used. Convenience and snowball sampling were substituted. Snowball sampling extends the sample by asking participants to recommend the study to others (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Miles &

Huberman, 1994). The use of these two sampling methods caused the demographic information to be limited.

Population

There are multiple elementary schools with multiple kindergarten classes in the participating school's division. The participating school district is one of the largest school districts in Virginia. The district serves a diverse population. This district was chosen because of its magnitude. The diversity of this study's participants, their kindergarteners, and other kindergarten teachers at their schools, are relatable to other kindergarten students and their kindergarten teachers in urban and suburban settings and high poverty to high income areas. All kindergarten teachers in all of the participating district's elementary schools received an email invitation to participate in the study. The specific number of kindergarten teachers who were invited to participate in the study cannot be reported due to confidentiality. It was expected that sending an invitation to all teachers in a district of this size would have ensured that at least twenty teachers would have responded. The sample size is representative of the number of kindergarten teachers in that school district. Therefore, the results would be used to represent the beliefs of the population of kindergarten teachers from all elementary schools in that county. The findings from this study are based on the data received from the kindergarten teachers.

Participant Demographics

A phenomenological framework requires a homogenous group of participants (Creswell, 2007). Individuals' selection to participate in the phenomenological study should have significant and meaningful experiences of the phenomenon being

investigated (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The demographic data allowed the researcher to gain background information on the participants. The demographic questions, albeit limited to what could be specifically reported, provided context for the collected data and allowed for a reasonable description of the participants. The participants in this study are all kindergarten teachers who are currently the primary instructors in their kindergarten classrooms. The participants all identified themselves as female, Caucasian or African American, had a wide range of experience teaching kindergarten, possessed a bachelor's or master's degree, and were fully licensed. Two participants reported that their demographic region is considered to be affluent. Thirteen participants believed that their school was in the lower to middle class areas. The remaining five teachers believed that their schools were in lower class neighborhoods based on their observations of the schools' surroundings. The types of licenses the teachers held, the true classification of the areas their schools are located in (lower, middle, or upper-class neighborhoods), their specific years of experience, and their education specialty (for example Early Childhood education, General education etc.) were not reported due to possible identifiers (See Table 1). All participants were given pseudonyms that began with the letter P.

Table 1*Description of Participants*

Participant	Grade	Gender	Ethnicity	Range of Teaching Experience 1-10/1-20	Licensed Yes/No	Education Degree
Parker	K	F	African American	1-10	Yes	Master's
Penelope	K	F	Caucasian	1-20	Yes	Master's
Pansita	K	F	Caucasian	1-10	Yes	Bachelor's
Paige	K	F	Caucasian	1-20	Yes	Bachelor's
Paris	K	F	African American	1-10	Yes	Bachelor's
Precious	K	F	African American	1-20	Yes	Master's
Pamela	K	F	Caucasian	1-20	Yes	Master's
Patrice	K	F	Caucasian	1-10	Yes	Bachelor's
Payton	K	F	Caucasian	1-10	Yes	Master's
Paisley	K	F	African American	1-10	Yes	Bachelor's
Patricia	K	F	African American	1-20	Yes	Bachelor's
Patsy	K	F	Caucasian	1-20	Yes	Master's
Piper	K	F	African American	1-10	Yes	Master's
Phoebe	K	F	Caucasian	1-10	Yes	Master's
Pressley	K	F	African American	1-10	Yes	Master's
Phila	K	F	Caucasian	1-10	Yes	Bachelor's
Petra	K	F	Caucasian	1-10	Yes	Master's
Pearl	K	F	African American	1-20	Yes	Master's
Pixie	K	F	African American	1-10	Yes	Bachelor's
Posey	K	F	African American	1-20	Yes	Bachelor's

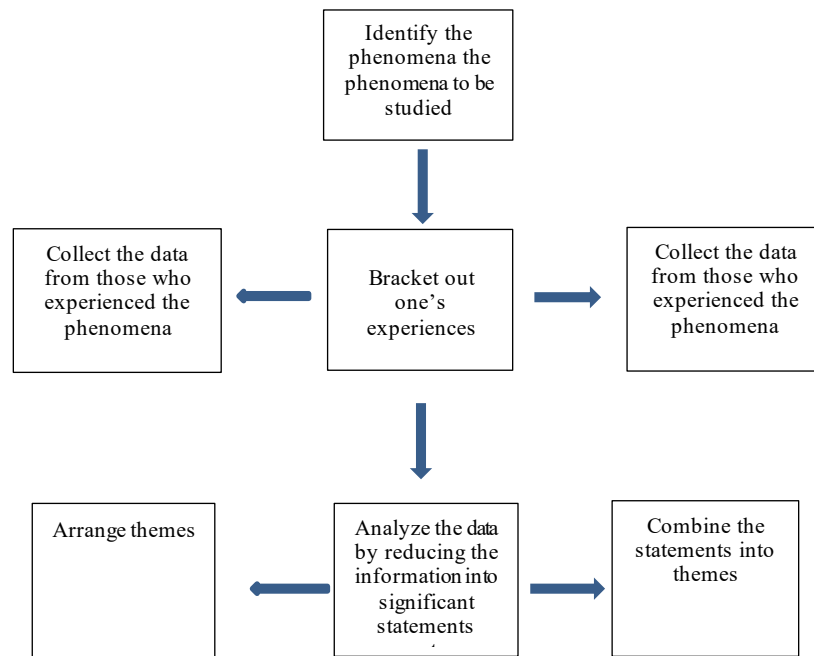
Instruments

In-depth interviews was the only instrument used to collect the data. The participating site stipulated that only one method could be used to collect data. This researcher decided that since this study is concerned with beliefs and perspectives, in-depth interviews was the best method to garner the data needed to answer the research questions. Englander (2012) and Kvale (1983) discuss the use of interviews in phenomenological research. They indicated that interviews work in tandem with qualitative human scientific research and are an excellent method to capture data about a participant's lived experiences since they relate such in their own words. Moustakas (1994) stated that a phenomenological interview is an interactive process between researcher and participant. The opportunity exists for the researcher to obtain a comprehensive account of the participant's experiences.

The phenomenological interview model (see Figure 1) was used as a guide to collect and process data from the in-depth interviews. Yuksel-Arslan et al. (2016) encourage the use of these steps so that the researcher remains mindful of the type and purpose of data to be collected. The in-depth interviews were conducted virtually and individually. The dialogue generated provided answers to the research questions. Stewart et al. (2007) state that research questions should be probing thereby allowing participants to express beliefs that go beyond surface level answers or explanations.

Figure 1

Steps for Phenomenological Interview



The interview questions were designed by this researcher and perused by two distinguished, accomplished, and experienced professors of literacy at St. John's University. Since interviews were the only instrument used to acquire data, the questions were constructed and edited twice to ensure that they were comprehensive. The purpose of rechecking the questions more than twice was to ensure relevance to each research question (see Appendix F). This researcher was satisfied that the final questions were sufficient and applicable thereby proving the instrument effective to solicit responses that would be intentional to the purpose of the study (see Table 2).

Table 2

Research Questions and Aligned Interview Questions

Research Questions	Aligned Interview Questions
<p>Question 1 What do kindergarten teachers believe will help their students to be successful in literacy thereby ensuring a reasonable transition to the first grade?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What do you believe will help your students to be successful in literacy thereby facilitating a reasonable transition to the first grade?2. How do you develop your students' literacy skills and how do you make the learning environment socially stimulating, literacy rich, engaging, and participatory?3. Do you believe that formalized activities are occurring too early and are depriving your children of time they need to learn from play, manipulative learning, reading from normal language development, and natural exploration? Please elaborate.4. How many years of experience do you have teaching at the kindergarten level? How do you believe your experience relates to your students' success?5. Do your beliefs contribute to how you deliver instruction, add to students' knowledge, and provide a climate that is conducive to learning?6. Do you believe that kindergarten is a preparation ground for first grade? Why?7. Are you more concerned about students' social-emotional readiness for school than their academic skills? Please elaborate.8. Does a theoretical framework drive your instructional practices?

Research Questions	Aligned Interview Questions
	<p>If yes, with which framework do you identify?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Do you believe that the social aspect of each child’s environment affects and impacts the way he learns? 10. Explain what your beliefs are about play in relation to young children's physical, social, and emotional development. Is play separate from academic learning? What is the most frequent activity in your classroom? 11. Do you believe that for students to transition successfully to the first grade, they should enter kindergarten having higher readiness and social skills? Explain why you agree or disagree. 12. What are the skills kindergarteners should possess as they progress through kindergarten and prepare to transition to first grade? What do you do for your students if they are showing signs of ill preparedness for first grade?
<p>Question 2 To what extent does assessment data influence literacy development, planning, and instruction?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you think that obtaining literacy data is important in discovering children’s early literacy skills and can predict later reading proficiency? 2. Do you adjust your instructional practices to fit the needs of your students? Identify one thing that you adjust. 3. Do you believe that kindergarteners should be able to read reasonably well by the end of the school year?

Research Questions	Aligned Interview Questions
<p>Question 3 Are assessments relevant at the kindergarten level? Should kindergarten students be formally assessed for example, by state mandated standardized assessments such as PALS? If not, how should their entry and subsequent skills be measured?</p>	<p>4. Should reading intervention begin as early as in kindergarten?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When do you believe that kindergarteners should begin to receive literacy assessments? 2. Do you think that the PALS assessment is necessary at the kindergarten level? If not, how do you believe their beginning and subsequent skills should be measured? 3. Do you believe that PALS scores indicate your kindergarteners' literacy skill levels? Please elaborate. 4. What are some reasons that students show deficits on PALS results? 5. Do you believe that kindergarten readiness assessments can show literacy disparities among students, especially poverty stricken, minorities, and English as a Second Language (ESL) children?
<p>Question 4 Do kindergarten teachers believe that the frequency of assessments is related to literacy success?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How is frequency of assessments related to literacy success? 2. How much time does it take you to administer PALS and interpret the results? 3. Do you believe that assessment is a preventative measure to reduce reading failure so that less children in first grade will show signs of literacy deficits? 4. Is it possible that students who have low scores on PALS assessments have underdeveloped literacy skills due to factors such as language barriers or lack of home stimulation and not that there is a deficiency thereby

Research Questions	Aligned Interview Questions
	<p>classifying them as struggling readers? Please elaborate.</p> <p>5. Should there be continuity as students get ready to start first grade? What are your continuity procedures? For example, do you engage in transition practices? If not, please explain why. If yes, how and when do you communicate with the first-grade teachers about your kindergarteners' prospects? Do you and the first-grade team discuss the kindergarten PALS Fall and Spring results? What are some (a) issues raised? (b) conclusions drawn?</p>
<p>Question 5 What are kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the role parental involvement plays in kindergarten students' success?</p>	<p>1. What role does parental involvement play in kindergarten students' success? How often do you communicate with parents?</p>
<p>Question 6 Do kindergarten teachers believe that the mid-year state test scores are a clear indicator of a kindergartener's literacy skill level and predicts readiness for first grade?</p>	<p>1. Before or by the end of the second term, based on PALS scores and/or your professional judgements, can you tell which kindergarteners will successfully transition to the first grade?</p> <p>2. Are the assessments being used in your classroom resulting in improvement of teaching methods, learning goals, and are enhancing the learning process so that children are experiencing academic progress? What else could you do to enhance learning?</p> <p>3. How does the PALS assessment data help you prepare students for first grade?</p> <p>4. Explain why you believe or do not believe your current group of kindergarteners are ready/not</p>

Research Questions	Aligned Interview Questions
	<p>ready for first grade. Please indicate if the PALS results influence your response.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. What were your expectations about literacy when school began? How much did your expectations change before PALS, after Fall PALS and then after Spring PALS? 6. Could you have gauged your students' abilities without PALS assessments? If yes, what measures would you have used? 7. Should kindergarten teachers be a part of the process that creates the kindergarten literacy program including choice of assessments? What would your input be? 8. Should kindergarteners who are unable to read by the end of the school year be retained? Why?

Creswell (2005) stated that a researcher can create his own instrument if it is deemed that existing instruments would not satisfy the purpose of his study. This study is the first of its kind due to the information it seeks. Therefore, it was necessary to construct questions that were specifically targeted to gaining the information that the study sought to answer. The questions were a mixture of yes and no and open-ended questions. The participants were informed that elaboration on yes or no questions were under their control. The participants in this study provided candid, complete, and in-depth responses to the questions. The participants expounded on each question they chose to respond to and thoroughly provided detailed perspectives. Their responses fully enabled this researcher to arrange themes that represented the conversations had about literacy,

assessments, readiness, parental involvement, successful transitioning to first grade, and best practices. The thick rich description needed to report on the participants' beliefs was captured.

The recorded interviews were automatically transcribed. Transcription was matched against the recorded audios. This researcher ensured that the recorded audio matched the transcription. When the transcription appeared not to follow normal conversation, the recorded audio was used to fill that gap. Field notes were checked against the recordings and transcriptions, noting especially the pauses in the participants' voices. Based on recommendations given by Saldana (2008), NVIVO coding software was used to analyze the data and arrange it into themes. The patterns were turned into categories. Saldana (2008) suggests that this initial round of coding can make it easier to sort common themes. NVIVO coding enabled this researcher to better understand the commonality among the participants' beliefs.

Procedures for Collecting Data

Permissions and Approvals

Permission was received from the participating school district to conduct the study among its kindergarten teachers (see Appendix G). Prior to this, modifications were made to the initially approved study details and a second approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board of St. John's University (see Appendices A & B). All kindergarten teachers in the participating school district received an email with an invitation to participate in the study (see Appendices E & H). Twenty kindergarten teachers consented to participate. All of the participants were informed about the goals of

the study and the purpose of the IRB waivers. They received copies of their consent forms (see Appendices C & D). After the participants signed and returned the consent forms, an interview schedule was created and fulfilled.

The Interview Process

Individual interviews were slated for 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. This allowed for better elaboration of the findings (Patton, 2002). An interview guide was created so that notes could be taken throughout the sessions. Double-barreled questions were avoided (Lichtman, 2013). Although all data was collected by this researcher, member checking and peer debriefing were two of the strategies used to check the data and format of the study to ensure reliability and validity. The collected data was constantly revisited to ensure that the themes aligned with the participants' responses and that the research questions were answered.

The Purpose of PALS Data

The Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 PALS data that is visually represented is representative of kindergarten students from various elementary schools across the participating school district. Due to confidentiality, this study will not publish the exact scores or identify the participants' individual elementary schools. The Spring PALS data is relevant because one of the research questions seeks to discover whether the teachers' beliefs about that data influences their anticipation and expectations of their kindergarteners' transition to the first grade. Information about PALS data was retrieved from the Virginia Literacy Partnership and Virginia Department of Education websites. Displaying the PALS data makes children's needs or successes more visible. Readers of

this research study will see the data and form conclusions about the impact that PALS has on kindergarten students and the implications for the transition to first grade.

Reflexivity/Bracketing

Bracketing mitigates the possibility of preconceptions that may tarnish the research process. It is important that the researcher suspends his beliefs about the world (Van Manen, 1990). Johnson (1997) discusses the self-awareness researchers must have so that they can control any biases they may have. This self-awareness is referred to as reflexivity. Reflexivity allows a researcher to be subjective. The researcher must approach the investigation from a blank perspective: he must conduct the investigation as if he has no knowledge of the phenomena. Finlay (2002) states that transparency in research is crucial. The researcher should identify any factors that may affect data collection and analysis. The trustworthiness of the study depends on his/her transparency. This researcher reflected factors that could cause bias. This researcher decided that cultural and socioeconomic factors, assumptions, and especially her experience as a kindergarten teacher, K – 5 reading specialist, and district elementary intervention specialist will not influence how the data is collected, viewed, and interpreted. Practicing reflexivity enabled this researcher to suspend judgement and knowledge of the subject matter. The focus was on analyzing the data and reporting the experiences and perspectives as related by the kindergarten teachers.

Confidentiality

Glesne (1999) outlines the importance of confidentiality in research. He stated that participants have the right to expect that the strictest confidence will be maintained

especially via anonymity. The participants and participating school in this study were informed and assured of how confidentiality would be maintained. A stipulation of the participating site was that this study's report must not contain any identifiers for its teachers, individual schools, school district, and region of Virginia. Punch (1994) states that participants are partners in the research process. Maintaining confidentiality is as important as the phenomena under investigation. All participants were given pseudonyms. After this researcher was certain that all data was captured and ready to be reported, all recordings, transcriptions, and field notes were immediately and permanently destroyed. Although third parties were used to assist with analyzing the data, none of the participants' or school district's actual information was released. This researcher ensured that all identifiers were removed prior to the engagement of outside forces.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using two methods. In the first method, a two-level analysis of the data was conducted. Firstly, the interviews were coded using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the second step, data were examined within each initial coding category to see what themes or topics emerged across interviews (see Table 3).

Table 3*Initial Data Analysis Coding of Categories*

Code	Description of Code
Literacy	Teachers' perceptions of literacy, their role, and what literacy looks like in their classrooms
Assessments	Teachers' description of how they interpret and use assessments
Parental Involvement	Teachers' description of how they communicate with parents and involve them in their child's literacy plan
Instructional Strategies	A description of teachers' literacy instructional goals for their classrooms and framework they are guided by
First Grade Transition	Teachers' perceptions of what impacts a successful transition to first grade
Academic Skills	Teachers' perceptions and descriptions of students' performance and when intervention becomes appropriate
Social Skills	Teachers' perceptions on the importance social skills and impact on academics
PALS Assessments	Teachers' perceptions of strengths and purpose of PALS
Play	Teachers' perceptions about how they incorporate play with learning

Analysis began by bracketing the researcher's subjectivity (Hycner, 1985). This is in keeping with the Epoch process as was described by Husserl (1931). The researcher must set aside prejudgments and predispositions about the phenomena. This researcher listened to the recordings and matched them to the transcripts. All the relevant expressions and statements were tabled. Statements and/or expressions that were overlapping, irrelevant, and repetitive, were filtered out. Data that remained consisted of horizons (Husserl, 1970). Horizons were arranged into themes and categorized so that

each horizon had one meaning. The horizons, also called invariant constituents, were clustered and decided to be the main themes emanating from the participants' experiences.

Lichtman's (2013) view of the researcher is that he is the "instrument through which all meaning comes and that he or she shapes the research and is shaped by it" (p. 165). Field notes were checked against the transcription reports and the recordings. All utterances in the notes or in the recordings were automatically transcribed by the online platform used to conduct the virtual interviews. This is important because these expressions and how the participants speak carry meaning or emphasis when interpreted through the context of the interviews (Tilley, 2003). The kindergarten teachers' words helped this researcher to find patterns that turned into categories. After all these coding procedures were completed by the researcher, a description of the meanings and essences of the participants' experiences began to be formulated. This researcher is satisfied that the description represented all participants and the targeted population (Moustakas, 1994). Every attempt was made to ensure that the interviewees' beliefs and perspectives came together as a coherent report.

The final step in the manual data analysis process was to involve the peer debriefing team. The two-person peer debriefing team examined this researcher's findings to ensure that coding, interpretation, and therefore the essence of the participants' experiences was accurate. Prior to peer debriefing, this researcher was still immersed in rechecking, reading, cross referencing, interpreting, and analyzing the results. Data were constantly compared to justify the themes and essence. After

collaborating with the debriefing team to match and confirm emerging themes and the evidence that supported the themes, an extensive matrix of emerging themes was compiled. To comprehend the common themes in the participants' responses, the percentage of participants whose comments reflected the same theme was discussed, calculated and tabulated. This process helped to further eliminate overlapping themes across responses to each question. NVIVO coding software was then used to confirm and further categorize and code the data into better identifiable themes.

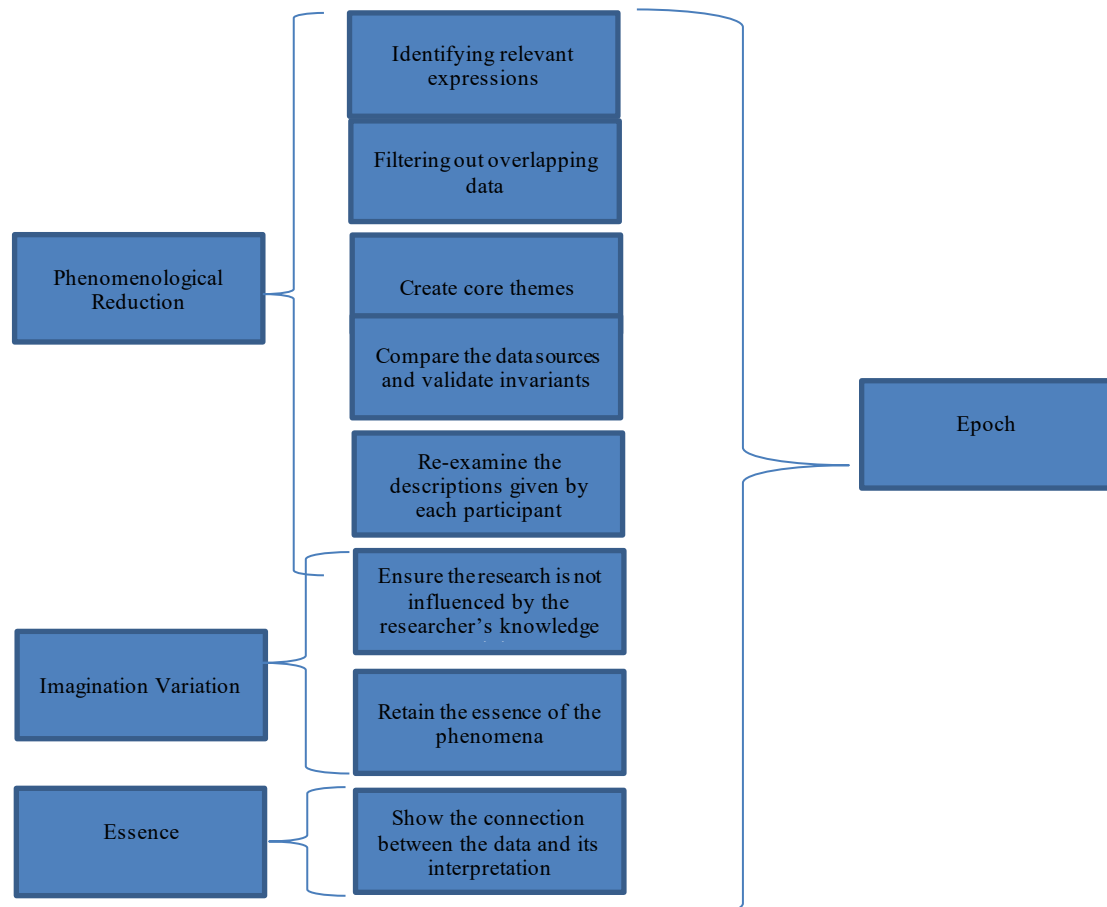
Saldana (2008) recommends NVIVO coding for phenomenological research. NVIVO coding increases the rigor of the study due to data analysis software. The software assisted the researcher to more efficiently and accurately record, store, sort, index, and code the data. The researcher was looking for similarities in beliefs. For example, developmental areas considered crucial to readiness, such as social and emotional development, and commonality in language and phrases. Frequent revisiting of the data ensured that the questions and responses were answering the research questions (Lapadat & Lindsey, 1999).

As a precaution, Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis procedure was also used to ensure that the findings from the two-level analyses were accurate. Yuksel-Arslan et al. (2016) also used this model to analyze the data in their phenomenological study when they investigated teachers' experiences using digital storytelling in early childhood education. This researcher followed the eight steps as presented in Figure 2. PALS data for Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 for six of the elementary schools within the participating school district is visually represented. The PALS data

reflects student performance and is a testament to the teachers' beliefs about the relevance of the assessments such as PALS.

Figure 2

The Steps of Data Analysis



Note. Paraphrased and reprinted from “A phenomenological study: Teachers' experiences of using digital storytelling in early childhood education by P. Yuksel-Arslan, S. Yildirim and B. R. Robin, 2016. *Educational Studies*, 42(5), 432.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

The present study found that kindergarten teachers believe that kindergarteners should acquire and develop literacy skills, assessments are relevant, parental involvement is important, and social skills and play should be integrated in the learning experience. They believe that these are among the main factors that impact the students' success as they progress through kindergarten and prepare to transition to first grade. The participants believed that the PALS assessment provides accurate data about their students' abilities as well as determines what extra supports students need so that placement can occur as soon as possible. PALS data helps the participants to determine instructional practices that lead to more effective and strategic planning.

The participants concurred that kindergarten is a preparation ground for first grade. Since the kindergarten classroom is academically focused and teachers and students must meet state and school standards of learning, the teachers concluded that it is crucial that they provide the balanced academic stimulation needed that will enhance students' literacy skills and prepare them to meet the rigors of first grade. The kindergarten teachers believed that students need to engage with direct academic instruction at the beginning of the school year. Engaging in direct academic instruction as soon as possible helps to prepare students to be reasonably proficient at their tasks in the shortest time possible. The participants believed that an early start to instruction gives kindergarteners the time they need to adjust to academic routines.

All participants believed that kindergarteners should not be retained. The common perspective was that teachers should work with students at their own pace. This correlates

to the findings of the National Center for Education Statistics (1993) and Bassok et al. (2016). The kindergarten teachers in those studies felt that cognitive development should not be forced. The teachers in the present study felt the same. The participants believed that play and the development of social skills should be incorporated into daily activities.

According to the participants, students have different learning styles and will grasp concepts at different times. The students are young and are still developing. They need time to adjust to the expectations of being in school. The home and school environment are influences that help to fuel students' experience with readiness. A disparity such as socioeconomic status is not a conclusive contributor to literacy deficiencies. Students are young and impressionable: several factors can influence their literacy development. The two most common examples that were given as possible reasons for literacy deficiencies were lack of readiness and not having attended preschool.

Multiple themes emerged from the data analysis. The themes captured the essence of the participants' experiences and perspectives. For example, the most frequent commonalities regarding overall preparedness for first grade are displayed in Figure 3. Table 4 identifies all themes, the frequency with which the themes appeared in the transcripts, and the main features associated with each theme. All the participants declined to elaborate on whether they believed that kindergarten students should be retained. They did not believe that students should be retained but did not provide the reasons for their beliefs. Each research question will be presented and associated with the

respective theme/s. How the research questions relate to the emanating theme/s will be explained. The implications of the results will be explained in the discussion.

Figure 3

The Most Shared Commonality Among All Participants About How Students Will Be Successfully Prepared for First Grade

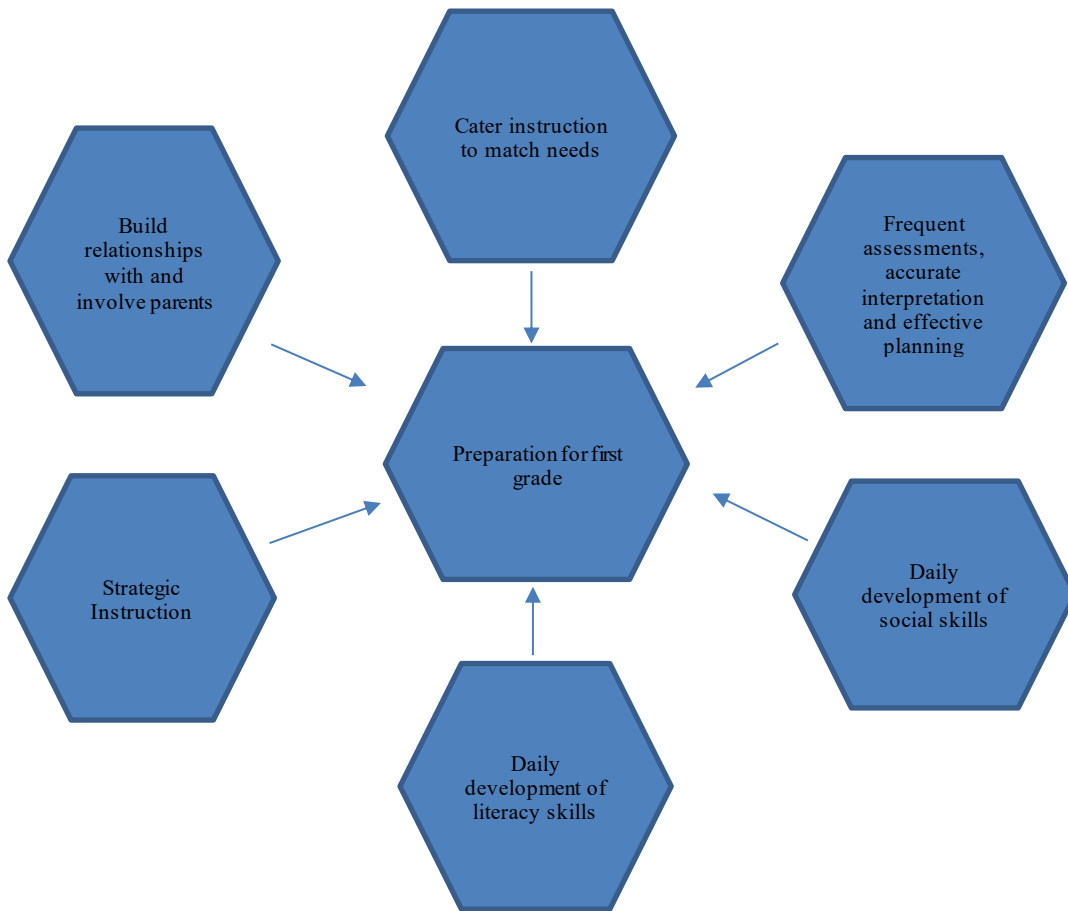


Table 4*Themes, Frequency, and Main Features Arising from the Data Analysis*

Themes	Frequency of Use by the Participants	Main Features
PALS is a beneficial assessment	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers will have a starting point for delivering instruction• Teachers can track the data• PALS measures kindergarten performance across the state
Teacher Efficacy	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An effective teacher will have effective outcomes
PALS is a targeted assessment	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PALS is research based• The components are specific• The results are trustworthy• The results help to identify students who need intervention
Play	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structure learning with play• Foster creative play• Give time for free play• Play helps to build relationships among the students• Teach social interactions through play especially for kindergarteners who did not attend preschool.

Themes	Frequency of Use by the Participants	Main Features
Increased knowledge	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All activities whether social or academic should increase student knowledge • Teacher knows more about students and can plan for them • Teacher's aim should be for students to perform better at each PALS assessment
Learning styles	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cater to the various learning styles • Find out from parents how the child learns at home and check for disparities
Build relationships	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build positive relationships with parents and students
Flexibility	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers should be flexible with instructional practices and content • Practice flexibility with student abilities and attitudes • Practice flexibility with parents
Stimulation	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peak student interest in literacy with relatable and engaging activities

Themes	Frequency of Use by the Participants	Main Features
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide many opportunities for manipulation and visual stimulation
Environment	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most important environment is the home. This is where concepts should be reinforced and the teacher and his efforts to help the child acquire literacy be fully supported.
Engagement	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant and relevant activities will lead to productive engagement
Scaffolding	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities must be scaffolded so that students become independent explorative learners
Differentiation	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction should be modified
Effective strategies	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective strategies ensure that students have equal opportunities to fulfill their potential in the classroom
Literacy skills	27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonological awareness • Reading • Phonemic Awareness • Fluency • Vocabulary

Themes	Frequency of Use by the Participants	Main Features
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehension • Phonics • Letter sound relationships • Recognizing words versus letters • Printing names • Recognize the words for and be able to say the days of the week/months of the year • Begin to read • Picture discussions • Relate experiences • Accurate verbal counting from 1-20.
Continuity	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about student abilities should be discussed with the first-grade teacher so that preparations can be made
Academic skills	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because of accountability and funding, emphasis has been placed on developing students' academic skills. • Assessment results should show that students' academic skills are increasing
Social skills	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social skills will develop over time. The students are young and immature and need guidance.

Themes	Frequency of Use by the Participants	Main Features
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some kindergartners did not attend preschool or are the only child in their home. They must be given time to develop social skills. • The teacher models behavior and encourages parents to help their child adjust to school life.
Readiness	23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider children's developmental levels. • Some students did not go to preschool therefore kindergarten is an adjustment period • Deficits on PALS may not be signs of failure. Some students are late bloomers • Readiness comes as the teacher patterns expected behavior
Accuracy	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PALS data is accurate • Accuracy is seen more in the second assessment results
Parental involvement	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavily involve parents • A kindergartener's success is heavily dependent on how

Themes	Frequency of Use by the Participants	Main Features
		<p>well his parent is involved in his learning.</p>
Social Interaction	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher should provide carrying opportunities for students to interact • Teacher should model the behavior • Teacher should incorporate learning into social interactions
Fidelity	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PALS will be accurate if it is administered as outlined. • Teachers should administer PALS when it appears the student is awake and alert • Too many components should not be given on the same day or at the same time
Intervention/Reading Intervention	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PALS helps to identify students in need of more support • PALS is an avenue for early detection of possible reading failure • Kindergarteners should receive intervention if academic skills are less than expected

Themes	Frequency of Use by the Participants	Main Features
Planning: Effective/Strategic	23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare students to function in the present and for the next grade • Perform PALS in slated window of time • Use PALS results effectively. Provide intense instruction for areas that showed weaknesses. • provide more challenging tasks for those who did very well on the assessments or do very well in class • A smooth transition to first grade is influenced by kindergarten social and academic behavior • Plan to involve parents by communicating regularly
Disparities	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socioeconomic factors are not a primary disparity.

All participants liked the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) assessment, were confident in its value, completed assessments within the mandated period, and believed the assessment gives an accurate account of students' abilities. Eight participants reported that they tried to complete the assessment before it was due so that

they could analyze what they noticed and return to regular activities with the necessary adjustments. All participants reported that they adjusted instruction to match the students' needs before the official report was published. This adjustment was based on the observations made during the assessment. The five participants who reported that the PALS assessment was time consuming believed so because they experienced a few factors that extended their anticipated completion times. These participants stated that some students could not finish the assessment on succeeding days because of factors such as absences or non-compliant behavior. Early completion also depended on the number of students in the class and the ability to do each section in one sitting. None of the participants reported dissatisfaction with student performance on the Fall 2022 or Spring 2023 assessments. Figure 4 shows the participant's overall perceptions about the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS). PALS data were provided for the schools of six of the participants. Growth is evident for all schools for fall 2022. School #4 has the largest increase from Fall to Spring. School #1 did not show an increase in the number of students scoring above benchmark from Fall to Spring (see Table 5).

Table 5

Fall 2022 – Spring 2023 PALS Percentages of Students Scoring Above Benchmark

School	Teacher	Fall 2022 Percentage of Students Scoring Above Benchmark	Spring 2023 Percentage of Students Scoring Above Benchmark
School 1	Penelope	62%	62%
School 2	Paige	68%	71%
School 3	Patrice	73%	78%
School 4	Phoebe	80%	88%
School 5	Parker	66%	69%
School 6	Pearl	90%	93%

Note: To maintain confidentiality, table five represents data from only six of the schools the participants are from. All numerical values have been rounded off to the nearest ten.

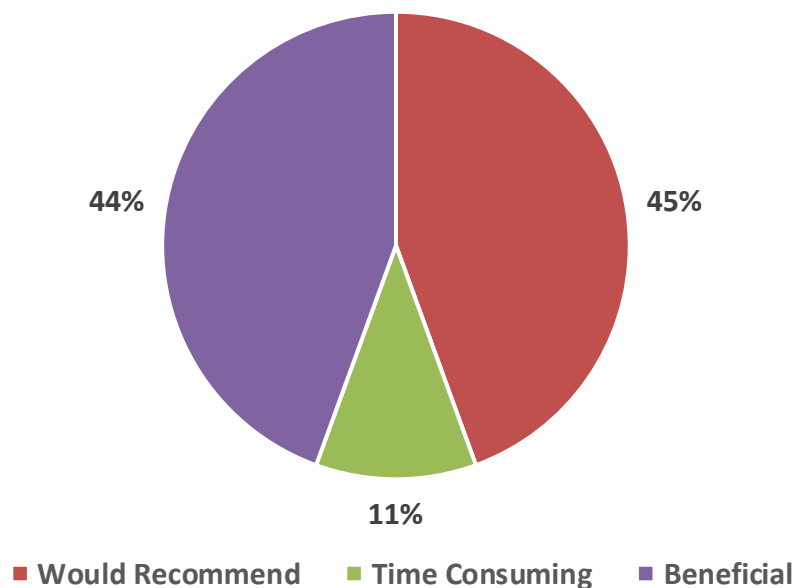
Each participant stated that the kindergarten classroom contains a mixed group of abilities. One participant, Penelope stated,

Kindergarten contains a mixed group of students. Some of them have not attended preschool, are the only child in their household, or English is not the primary language spoken in their home. It will take time for many of them to get adjusted to school life. I am teaching skills that they should have learned in preschool. As teachers, we must be patient with their academic behavior and keep working on helping to develop their social skills so that they feel comfortable interacting with their teacher, other members of staff, and their peers. Many of them take a long time to settle down because they need to get used to the structure in the school environment. Other students, even though they might get settled quickly, are late bloomers and will not catch on until their brain turns that switch on. I always hope that the students do well on PALS, but I don't despair if they end up getting

identified. I continue to strategize, differentiate, scaffold, observe their behavior, and prepare them academically the best way I know how. I believe that these five to six-year old kiddos should develop literacy skills at their own pace. I think I get better results on PALS because of this belief. I observe them closely and know from very early which students to propel and which ones needs more time to adjust. PALS results give me tangible data about the students so I can decide how to move forward.

Figure 4

Participants' Primary Beliefs About the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS)



The six schools represented in Table 5 have more than two kindergarten classes. Each participant spoke about their school's data but mostly spoke about her beliefs for her kindergarten class of 2022 – 2023 (see Table 6). The participants were not asked to reveal

the number of students in their class who were identified by the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) assessment for the 2022 – 2023 period. The exact number of students in the participants’ classes is not relevant to this study. At the time of this study, PALS data for Fall 2023 was not yet available so that a comparison to Fall 2022 could be made.

Table 6

Kindergarten Teachers’ Summary of Beliefs About Kindergarten Class 2022 – 2023

Teacher	Beliefs
Penelope	Students did reasonably well for the year but there was much room for improvement. She believes that the students will do better in first grade. They were given foundational literacy skills. However, she believes that if parents were more involved, the students would have done better.
Paige	Students did better than expected. She believes her instructional practices and effective planning helped the students to excel. She believes that all of her students will do well in first grade.
Patrice	She believes that team collaboration led to the increase in growth in her students. Kindergarten teachers at her school have regular planning sessions where they strategize how to propel the students forward. All students are expected to do well in first grade.
Phoebe	Phoebe believes that strong parental involvement in conjunction with effective practices and school management led to less students in her class being identified by PALS. She stated that she relayed information about the students to the first-grade teacher so that the first-grade teacher would be better prepared.

Teacher	Beliefs
Parker	She believed that better planning for this period led to the increase in output. Parker believes that stronger first grade practices are needed to increase her students' abilities.
Pearl	Pearl believes that one of the reasons for her class's great success is that her school is an affluent neighborhood. Many of her kindergarteners partake in extracurricular activities outside of school. Her kindergarteners had extensive exposure to literacy materials and had developed vocabularies. Many students in her class were advanced readers so the test was not too much of a challenge for them. She believes that if the students continue along this academic trajectory, none of them will need reading intervention for school year 2023 – 2024.

Research Questions and Explanations of Each Related Theme

The following themes emerged from the analyses of the transcripts. They have been classified under each related research question and explained. Some themes recur according to the research question but are used in the context of the particular question. All themes are in italics.

Research Question 1 What do kindergarten teachers believe will help their students to be successful in literacy thereby ensuring a reasonable transition to the first grade?

The analyses revealed that all participants believed that several factors enable students to be successful in literacy thereby ensuring a reasonable transition to the first grade. All participants mentioned *literacy skills*, *readiness*, *effective strategies*, *stimulation*, and *social skills* as critical factors for kindergarten and first grade success.

All participants spoke of the importance of *stimulation*. The consensus was that children must be *stimulated*. Petra stated that she piques student interest in literacy by *stimulating* them with relatable and *engaging activities*.

One participant emphasized the importance of her personal beliefs. Table 7 outlines the list of *literacy skills* that the kindergarten teachers believed their kindergarteners should possess as they progress through kindergarten and prepare to transition to first grade. The participants believed that kindergarteners should have reasonable *literacy skills* by the end of the year and that kindergarteners should be able to read simple sentences after the first term. Pearl's analysis stood out because of what she stated she believed.

Table 7

Participants' Most Common Beliefs About Literacy Skills Kindergarten Students Should Acquire in Kindergarten and What They Need for First Grade

Skills Needed in Kindergarten	Skills Needed for First Grade
Phonological awareness	Phonological awareness
Phonemic Awareness	Phonemic Awareness
Phonics	Phonics
Sight word recognition	Increased sight word recognition
Begin Reading	Reading Simple to Complex passages
Simple to complex sentence reading fluency 1. I am Sam and he is Pat. 2. We see the man with his cat. 3. You can see the woman and the man.	Simple to Complex Sentence Reading Fluency 1. Did you come to school that day? 2. Where is the book? I don't have it. 3. I can run fast and so can they.
Vocabulary	Increased Vocabulary
Comprehension	Increased Comprehension skills
Letter sound relationships	
Recognizing words versus letters	
Printing names Writing simple sentences Simple sentence construction	Writing both names Writing simple to complex sentences Simple to complex sentence construction
Picture discussions	Picture discussions with more details
Describe, explain and retell	Describe, explain, recall, and retell, infer, conclude
Decoding	Decoding

Pearl discussed the reasons she believes her kindergarteners are successful, prepared for first grade, and why her school performs well on state assessments. She believes that teachers' beliefs about their roles heavily influence their approach to their

craft: specifically, content knowledge, preparedness, methodology, and delivery of instruction. Pearl stated that her beliefs influence the way she plans and teaches. She stated that her approach to instruction, progress monitoring, and the interpretation of data is based on what she believes the students need to succeed. Pearl added that she has personal goals for her kindergarteners. These goals are higher than what the curriculum has outlined. Regular monitoring occurs via in-class checks, assessments, and one to one sessions. She frequently consults with her teammates. Pearl adjusts her classroom practices by using methods such as *scaffolding* or *differentiation* so that *academics* in conjunction with *social skills* are developed. Pearl stated that one of the reasons for her school's success, is that the kindergarten teachers meet regularly to discuss progress, share ideas and *strategically plan* how they can keep moving students in the right direction within the shortest amount of time possible.

Pearl also involves parents by frequently soliciting their support. She also provides them with regular updates (whether or not the parents asked for such). Pearl believes that each kindergarten teacher must use initiative in conjunction to the curriculum if students are to succeed in kindergarten and more so be prepared for first grade. Pearl said, "when you walk into my classroom, you should tell that learning is taking place. I believe that the classroom *environment* sets the standard for whether students will succeed." Pearl continued by adding,

My colleagues and I have an understanding. We are all on the same page and that is to make learning concrete. In my experience as a teacher, I can tell what a teacher believes about instruction based on my observation of their classroom

environment. Teachers who believe in creating an *environment* conducive to learning will have kindergarteners who are functional and do well in class and on their assessments.

Pearl believes that all activities whether *social* or *academic* should *increase student knowledge*. Pearl's school has one of the highest above benchmark scores for both Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 for the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) assessment.

Some participants highlighted what they believed prevents literacy success in kindergarten and first grade. Five participants expressed their perspectives about *disparities* that can prevent kindergarteners from being successful and hinder their preparation for first grade. They believed that *disparities* such as socioeconomic status contribute to a kindergartener's school experience. However, all five did not believe that socioeconomic factors were primary inhibitors. They believed that kindergarteners are young, and it is too soon to form definite conclusions about their abilities especially if they are not performing as expected. According to these five participants, many factors, for example, a student's home *environment*, are influencers. These five participants believe that the fewer *disparities* there are, the more successful kindergarteners will be.

Penelope is the only participant who believed that student absences were a major factor that hinders kindergarten success and *readiness* for first grade. She stated that students who do not attend school regularly miss many opportunities for learning critical *literacy skills*. She admitted that, according to her experience, it is usually the economically disadvantaged students who are absent more frequently. Penelope places

great importance on attendance. She believes that attendance plays a part in a student's success. Incidentally, according to her, Penelope's school is in a low-income area and has the lowest percentage of students scoring above benchmark for both Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 PALS (see Table 5). There was no increase between fall and spring results.

However, Penelope's school is still doing well since 62% of the kindergarten population at her school scored above benchmark for fall and spring. This means that 62% of her kindergarten population is displaying *readiness* for first grade.

All 20 participants believed that young children learn at their own pace and will comprehend their tasks in their own time. Seven participants believed that *academic* expectations are sometimes too high because (a) the schools receive state funding and must show how funds are being used to improve student output and (b) the state wants to see tangible results because the results compare kindergarten performance across the state. Posey, who has been teaching only kindergarten students for more than three years, believes that success in kindergarten comes when children are allowed to *play* and learn in a natural *environment*. Posey believes that *play* can be structured and meaningful. Her perspective is that teachers should also do the following:

- foster creative *play*
- give time for free *play*
- use *play* to *build relationships* among the students
- teach *social interaction* skills through *play* especially for kindergarteners who did not attend preschool and/or are the only child in their household

- use *play* to build manipulation skills. Show students through *play* how to manipulate equipment in the class

Posey is the only participant who stated her teaching practices are guided by the social learning theory. The other 19 participants provided their perspectives about frameworks (see Figure 5). Posey believes that kindergarteners who are not showing signs of *readiness* should be given *stimulating*, *engaging* and meaningful tasks that will pique their interest in learning. Posey added,

I use activities such as the alphabet, rhymes, and number songs from the internet. The children love dancing and singing and are totally engrossed in what they are seeing and hearing. They become active participants by modeling what they see and hear. I also participate and have fun with them. I slowly increase the complexity of the learning activity as soon as I believe that they have become more capable.

Pamela declined to identify a framework but her perspectives on *social interaction* are aligned with the social learning theory. She believes that teachers should provide multiple opportunities for students to interact. She stated that she models the behaviors she wants the students to learn and incorporate learning into *social interactions* as often as she can.

The participants provided their perspectives about *readiness*. All participants indicated that children's developmental levels should be considered when *readiness* is being discussed. All participants stated that they have always had a few kindergarteners who have never been to preschool and/or are the only child in their household. The

participants believed that kindergarteners must be allowed an adjustment period and then their true capabilities will be discovered. *Readiness* comes as the teacher patterns expected behavior. None of the participants believed that kindergarteners should enter kindergarten having higher *readiness* skills although it helps if they are ready. However, all participants believed that they should enter kindergarten with at least one skill. Each participant named the skill they believed was the most important (see Figure 6).

All participants believed that deficits on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) may not be signs of failure. These participants indicated that they are not overly concerned if their kindergarteners are identified by Fall PALS. Fall PALS occurs a few weeks into the new school term. Therefore, negative results could be caused by the kindergartener's "adjustment to school" period and the child is not used to being assessed or is focused enough. According to Copple and Bredekamp (2009), Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is described as "teaching decisions that vary with and adapt to the age, experience, interests, and abilities of individual children within a given age range" (p. 7). Proponents of DAP such as Bredekamp and Copple (1997) and Miller and Almon (2009) state that developmentally appropriate instruction is dependent on what the teacher knows about the student's ability, not the standards. All participants supported this belief. They stated that they structure instruction to match each student's need. All participants acknowledged that some students are late bloomers. However, all participants stated that they used the results of Fall PALS to drive instruction, monitor literacy behavior, and help the child to develop his *literacy skills*. The common belief among the participants was that if the next assessment results (Spring

PALS) are negative, then the child’s ability is in question and therefore remediation measures must be implemented immediately.

Figure 5

Summary of Participants’ Perspectives About Whether They Are Guided by a Framework

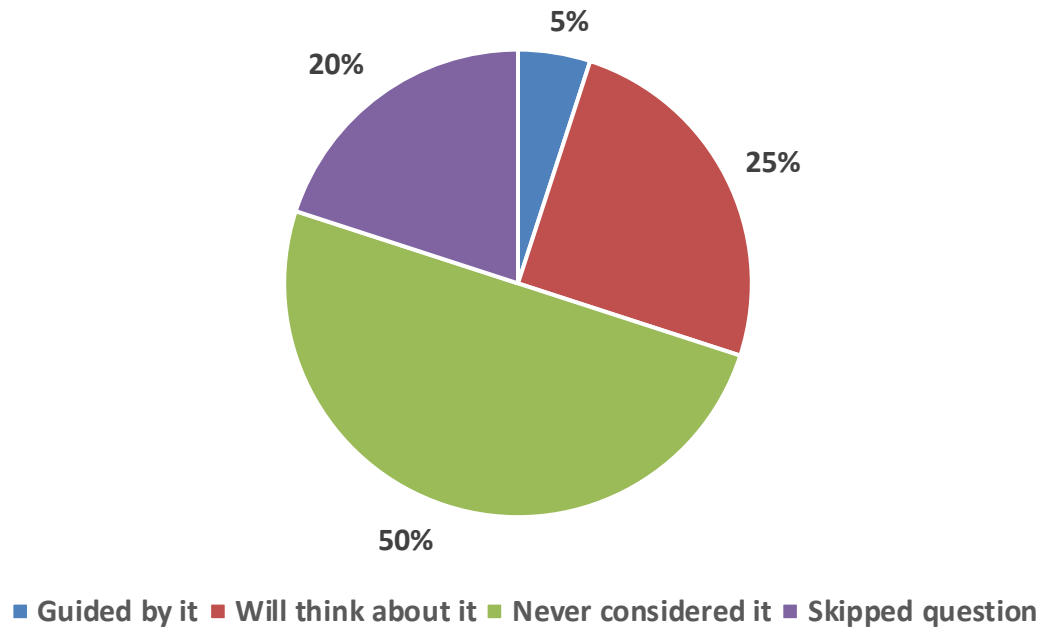
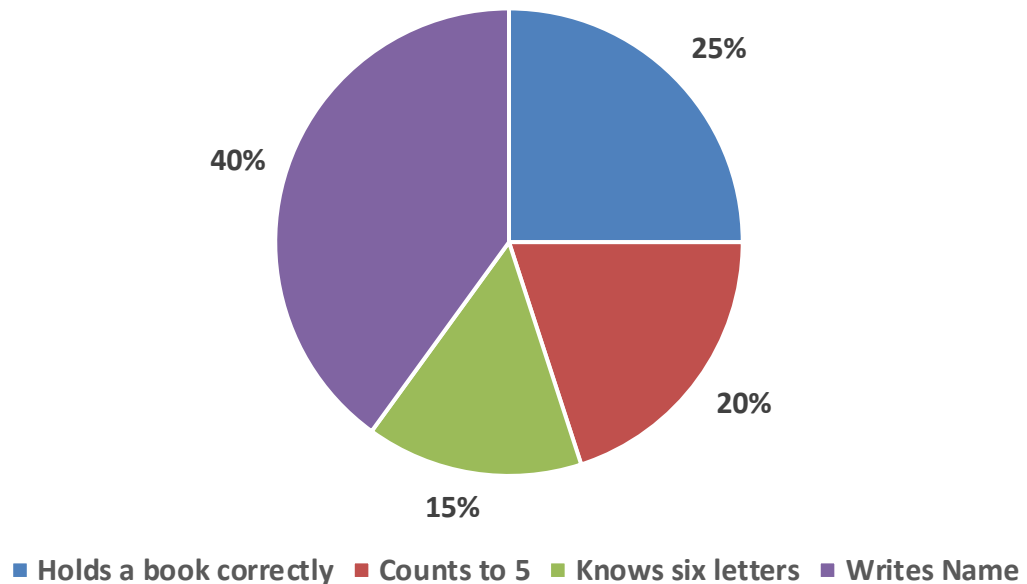


Figure 6

Participants' Most Common Beliefs About Which Skill Was Most Important to Enter Kindergarten



Research Question 2 To what extent does assessment data influence literacy development, planning, and instruction?

All participants reported that assessment data determines *planning* and *instruction* at their school. This data also determines which students need extra support such as *reading intervention*. According to Participant Paris, “assessment data reveals whether the school is achieving its goal in properly educating and equipping kindergarteners to succeed, especially as they prepare to go on to first grade.” Paris added that “because assessment data drives *instruction*, teachers in first grade are depending on us to be constantly examining the data so that we know which children are underperforming.” Paris continued to state that,

First grade teachers do not want to teach kindergarten skills. They are expecting that we are keeping abreast of the data, *planning effectively*, and making sure that students get the *intervention* they need if they are falling behind.” Paris stated that she does not blame the first-grade teachers for their beliefs. She added that “if I were a first-grade teacher, I would want students who can handle first grade tasks or if some students are behind, they should not be too far off from comprehending first-grade content.

All participants believed that their kindergarten classroom has become more *academically* focused because it is data driven. Phila, Petra, Pansita, and Posey had more to say about this belief. From their perspective, kindergarten classrooms have departed from being more *social* and *play* oriented to focused on instruction, assessments, and assessments results. Phila, Petra, Pansita, and Posey stated that they believe because schools receive government funding especially for intervention programs, schools are more accountable and are expected to produce frequent numerical results. Phila said, “Schools must show that learning is taking place via numerical data so that they can continue to receive funding.” Petra stated that there are no standards that measure social learning but standards such as the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) measures various tangible abilities such as *literacy skills*.

Piper believes that assessment data gives her pertinent information about her kindergartener’s abilities so that her *planning* is purposeful and *increases student knowledge*. She believes that assessment data *accurately* reflects the children’s abilities. She stated that quite often, the assessment results match what she believes about each

student's skills. This *knowledge* helps her to *plan* more *effectively*. Piper reiterated the belief of other participants when she shared that PALS helps to identify students in need of more support. Piper believes that PALS is not a determiner but one of many avenues for early detection of possible reading failure. She believes that in the first term, kindergarteners should receive *intervention* if their *academic skills* are less than expected. Piper concluded this part of the discussion by adding that "assessment data influences *literacy development, planning, and instruction* by creating tangible awareness of student skills so that the teacher can adjust instruction and make learning *beneficial*."

Eight participants believed that the Virginia Literacy Act (VLA) solidifies the fact that assessment data influences *literacy development, planning, and instruction*. With the passing of the act, comes greater accountability for the *literacy skills* of young learners. Payton explained that the state of Virginia mandates two and a half hours of *reading intervention* for any student in kindergarten to third grade who is identified by PALS. All participants indicated that even if the mandate did not exist, their belief is that kindergarteners who were below benchmark should receive *reading intervention*. Seven participants believed that passage of the VLA ensures more accountability for teachers, parents and students. The data must drive *effective planning and instruction*. The act was passed in 2022 and takes effect in 2024. Among the mandates of the VLA are the following:

- all students in kindergarten must receive evidence-based core literacy instruction.

- students who do not meet literacy benchmarks will receive evidence-based instruction and intervention as stipulated in their individualized student reading plan.
- all students' families must have access to online resources that support literacy development at home. Families will be able to participate in the development of their child's reading plan (Virginia Department of Education, 2022).

All participants felt that the Virginia Literacy Act is *beneficial* and anticipate that their district's literacy plan will be even more driven by assessment data. Payton anticipates that she will be doing more *planning, scaffolding, differentiation* and rearranging her groups more frequently so that the needs of her students are met.

Research Question 3 Are assessments relevant at the kindergarten level? Should kindergarten students be formally assessed for example, by state mandated standardized assessments such as the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS)? If not, how should their entry and subsequent skills be measured?

All participants agreed that assessments are relevant at the kindergarten level and that kindergarten students should be formally assessed. None of the participants shared perspectives about how kindergarten *literacy skills* would be assessed if standardized tests were not used. Pearl stated that formal assessments show how kindergarten students are performing based on literacy standards. She also stated that results allow the reader to compare data across kindergarten groups by categories: i.e., school, district, state, nation. Pearl said, “the data allows me to restructure my groups provide *intervention* where it is

needed the most.” Eleven participants expressed more in-depth beliefs about assessments and how *beneficial* the results are for kindergarteners. These participants believed that assessments guided their methodology and allowed for *strategic planning* and implementation. All participants believed that students who need extra support such as *reading intervention* can be identified sooner than later. Patricia said,

Learning about students’ abilities from early helps me to understand why a child might not understand the lessons. Assessment results such as results from PALS, identifies areas where students have strengths and weaknesses. It allows me to plan to spend more time developing the areas where the child needs the most help. Where a child shows strength, I provide activities that further strengthens those areas.

All participants believed that state mandated standardized assessments such as PALS are *beneficial* and that PALS is a *targeted assessment*. None of the participants objected to standardized testing for kindergarteners. However, all participants mentioned the importance of *fidelity*. The participants believe that when PALS is administered to *fidelity*, the results are an *accurate* representation of a kindergartener’s ability. Pressley added that in her opinion, *fidelity* includes assessing students when they appear capable of testing. Testing a child who is not in a receptive mood can skew the results. Pressley also said,

I do not believe that the child should have his first experience with assessments when it is time for the PALS assessment. The teacher should have had regular sit downs with each student, so they get used to being asked questions about their

work. This to me makes PALS assessment easier and quicker because the PALS checks appear like a regular classroom checkup. I believe that following this method makes results more reliable.

Seven participants shared their beliefs about the components of standardized assessments. Usually, standardized assessments such as the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) have several components because they measure students' abilities in different areas. For example, spelling, phonemic awareness, and letter sounds. Their combined belief is that too many components should not be administered on the same day or within the same period. They reiterated what their colleagues believed: that PALS or other state mandated assessments will show accurate results when administered as outlined.

Research Question 4 Do kindergarten teachers believe that the frequency of assessments is related to literacy success?

All participants believed that the frequency of assessments is related to literacy success. Only six participants fully elaborated on this question. Table 8 shows a summary of their perspectives.

Table 8

Summary of Participants' Responses About Their Belief That the Frequency of Assessments Is Related to Literacy Success

Kindergarten Teachers	Reasons for Beliefs
Precious	Frequent assessments equal frequent data for comparison and tracking.
Patsy	Frequent assessments lead to <i>strategic planning</i> . Patsy explained that the data allows her to see if the students are improving or regressing based on each assessment they take. She can then put appropriate measures in place.
Paisley	Frequent assessments equal early detection of literacy deficiencies.
Petra	Frequent assessments equal accurate selection of personnel for remediation. Petra explained that based on the data, it can be decided if the student needs additional support such as <i>reading intervention</i> from the reading specialist instead of only receiving remediation from the class teacher.
Payton	Frequency of assessments equals accountability. Payton stated that parents can see visible data about their child's performance and recognize that their input is needed. They can start by developing or increasing home literacy.
Posey	Frequency of assessments equals <i>teacher efficacy</i> . Posey explained that the assessment results speaks to her capabilities as a teacher. The results help her to self-reflect and reexamine her methodology. She revisits how she delivers <i>instruction</i> and adjusts it to ensure that the students experience greater success with each assessment.

All participants spoke about their role in using assessments to help ensure their kindergarteners' literacy success. A recurring theme from the discussions was *teacher efficacy*.

Teacher Efficacy

The collective belief of the participants is that assessments help them to improve their craft so that the students experience *literacy success*. They spoke about the frequency with which they examine their teaching methods to see if their methods of delivery are negatively or positively affecting how students understand content. Pamela stated that the frequency of assessments helps her to understand her students' *learning styles*. She said that,

Assessment results help me to determine each child's *learning style* and cater to it. The more assessments I do, the more I realize how my students' *learning styles* are changing. I must then adjust *instruction* via methods such as *differentiation* or *scaffolding*. The way my kiddos grasped literacy information at the beginning of kindergarten changes as they become more *socially adapted* and become more *academically* inclined.

Five participants believed that teachers must be diligent about scrutinizing the data from assessments results and keep current and *accurate* progress monitors. The patterns in literacy behavior from each assessment should be highlighted so that a clear picture of what each student needs to succeed is provided. Payton stated, "an effective teacher who uses *effective strategies* can expect to have effective outcomes."

When asked if they would be a part of the committee that designs assessments and determines frequency and interpretation, the participants had varying beliefs. Pixie believes in teacher input. She believes that kindergarten teachers should be a part of the team that designs assessments for kindergarteners. All other 19 participants did not agree because although they work with kindergarteners, they believed that the creation of assessments must be done by individuals with backgrounds in research and development. Also, three participants believed that the current group of teachers leaving colleges are not all trained in foundational literacy or about the science of reading. These three participants believed that the teachers are more equipped to teach, not to design standardized instruments that measure *literacy skills*.

Research Question 5 What are kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the role parental involvement plays in kindergarten students' success?

All participants believed in involving parents in their child's learning. All participants stated that they frequently communicated with parents, and it is important to *build positive relationships* with them. Eighteen participants said that they spoke to parents every day. They stated that they spoke to parents when students were picked up, dropped off, or communicated with them via the school's parent communication channels. Six participants expressly stated that they spoke to parents about their child's progress whenever they saw them or communicated with them via other means. These participants reported that they encouraged parents to provide *stimulation* at home, build home libraries, and inquired about home literacy. Payton said, "I always ask them if they need help to create a home library. I have many materials that I can give them or

recommend. I also encourage them to provide many opportunities for manipulation and visual *stimulation*.” Paige believes that the home is a child’s first place of learning. She too believes in *stimulating* children especially with things they are interested in. Paige said that she talks to parents about nightly reading. She said,

I ask parents to read to their kindergartener. Read every day. Use colorful books.

Discuss the pictures and what the book is about. I told parents that reading to children and talking to them builds oral vocabulary. It also helps parents to *build* a stronger literacy *relationship* with the child.

Parker believes that children model their parents’ behavior. She believes that if the children do not see their parents reading or parents do not read to their children, the kindergartener’s *literacy skills* may take a longer time to develop. Parker said, “The home is the perfect place where concepts learnt at school should be reinforced.” Parker said that the development of vocabulary is heavily influenced by the speech heard in the home. She stated, “It can be extremely hard to correct incorrect vocabulary if it is the norm in the home.” She stated that she lets the parents know, in the gentlest way possible, what the student’s school vocabulary is like and asks them kindly to be mindful of what they say around the children. Parker stated her students’ parents are very responsive. She believes that it is because she frequently praises their child and reminds the parents of the goals the kindergarteners are to accomplish.

Patrice shared specific thoughts about *parental involvement*. She said, “research shows that *parental involvement* is important in a child’s success. I agree and believe that a kindergartener’s success is heavily dependent on how well his parent is involved in his

learning.” Like Parker, Patrice believes that the home is an important learning *environment*. Parker also said, “Parents should support the teacher and the efforts made to help the child acquire literacy.” All participants believed that parents have a role to play in the development of their child’s *social skills*. Nine participants believed that parents should make more effort to develop these skills now that the child has begun kindergarten: especially if the child did not attend preschool. All participants acknowledged that *social skills* will develop over time. Paisley said,

Students are young, immature and need guidance. I am not surprised at some of the behaviors I see. I can tell without looking at students’ records, which kindergarteners went to preschool, and which did not. Their *social skills* speak volumes.

Four participants elaborated on displaying *flexibility* with parents. These participants believed that *building relationships* with parents equates to *flexibility*. They spoke of the importance of being flexible with the expectations that teachers set for parents. The consensus among the four participants was that many parents do not help their child as much as they should for a variety of reasons. For example, Pansita believes, based on the parents’ actions and reactions, that some of them may feel that they are not educated enough to help the child and so they heavily depend on the school to fulfill the child’s literacy needs. Precious said that many of her students’ parents work long hours and it is evident that they do not always keep up with homework or check on the child’s progress. Phila and Penelope both expressed that some parents admitted that they are not cognizant of what their child should be mastering at the kindergarten level. Therefore,

academic and *social behaviors* that may be of concern to the teachers do not appear to be unusual to the parents. Phila and Penelope indicated that this is one of the reasons why it is important to *build relationships* with parents. These two teachers emphasized that discussing the goals of kindergarten with parents should be done at the beginning of the school year, constant reminders given throughout the year, and frequent verbal and tangible updates given to them. All participants stated that they informed parents about the importance of reviewing materials that the children took home and that they should provide them (the kindergarten teachers) with feedback about the tasks.

The participants mentioned and gave their perspectives on *learning styles*. The general belief was that parents need explanations about their kindergartener's *learning style*. Pearl said,

Helping parents to understand *learning styles* is important because in their effort to help at home, they tell me about peculiarities they see as they are trying to read with their kiddo. I talk about what I observe in class and then the parent and I compare notes. I also tell parents that *learning styles* differ among children, so they are not to compare them with other children especially children in the home.

I encourage them to discuss what they notice especially as time progresses and we can address the issues together if they believe I can help them.

Research Question 6 Do kindergarten teachers believe that the mid-year state test scores are a clear indicator of a kindergartener's literacy skill level and predict readiness for first grade?

All participants answered in the affirmative to this question. All participants indicated that by the middle of the year, they can confirm which kindergarteners are ready for first grade. Parker said,

The results from mid-year assessments are spot on. I have never had a situation where the results did not match what I know the student can do. I make sure conditions are right for testing because I know what the results will show if I am not *flexible* when administering the test. *Fidelity* is also crucial if *accurate* results are to be had.

When asked about whether they thought kindergarten is a preparation ground for first grade, the participants also answered in the affirmative. The word *continuity* was used the most as these individuals shared their perspectives on this question. Petra said,

It is obvious that the kindergarten curriculum is preparing students for the first grade. *Continuity* is important. I know that first grade teachers are expecting that the kindergarteners can read when they enter first grade. From time to time a few first-grade teachers will ask about my students' progress. I am always willing to share information with them so that they are in the loop with what's happening in my class.

Pamela shared that the *literacy skills* the curriculum wants them (kindergarteners) to acquire are skills they will need to read and understand first grade content. She said,

The kindergarten curriculum is extremely focused on *academics* and aims to have students be readers by the time they leave kindergarten. However, I am cognizant of their ages, characteristics, and abilities so I know the importance of working

with them at their own pace. I increase the complexity of tasks when the time is right. These are little kiddos, they like to play and have fun. Hitting them with a lot of *academics* wears them out. I incorporate time for *play* and the development of *social skills* into my teaching. This makes them more receptive, and I see better and faster positive output.

Pamela's views are aligned to those of Costantino (2019). This researcher stated that the value of conversation, play, and social interaction in kindergarten must be recognized.

Pearl stated that mid-year assessment results confirm what she already knows about her students' *readiness* for first grade. She stated that she is cognizant of the goals she set for the students and *continuously* monitors them to see if they are developing *literacy skills* within satisfactory windows of time. Pearl as well as the other participants stated that the kindergarteners in their classes who were not identified by Fall 2022 PALS results as needing reading intervention were given tasks that enhanced their *literacy skills* thereby *increasing* their *knowledge*. According to Pearl, these students are now in first grade and so far, are doing well. Although this study is not investigating the status of the kindergarteners who transitioned from the participants' kindergarten groups to first grade for the 2023 – 2024 period, all participants reported that they are satisfied with the initial reports they have received from the first-grade teachers. Three participants stated that in view of *continuity*, the first-grade teachers should give the kindergarteners time to adjust to new learning standards, expectations, and first grade classroom *environment*. Table 9

displays when the participants believed their students were displaying readiness for first grade.

Table 9

Participants' Beliefs About When They Realized Their Students Were Ready for First Grade

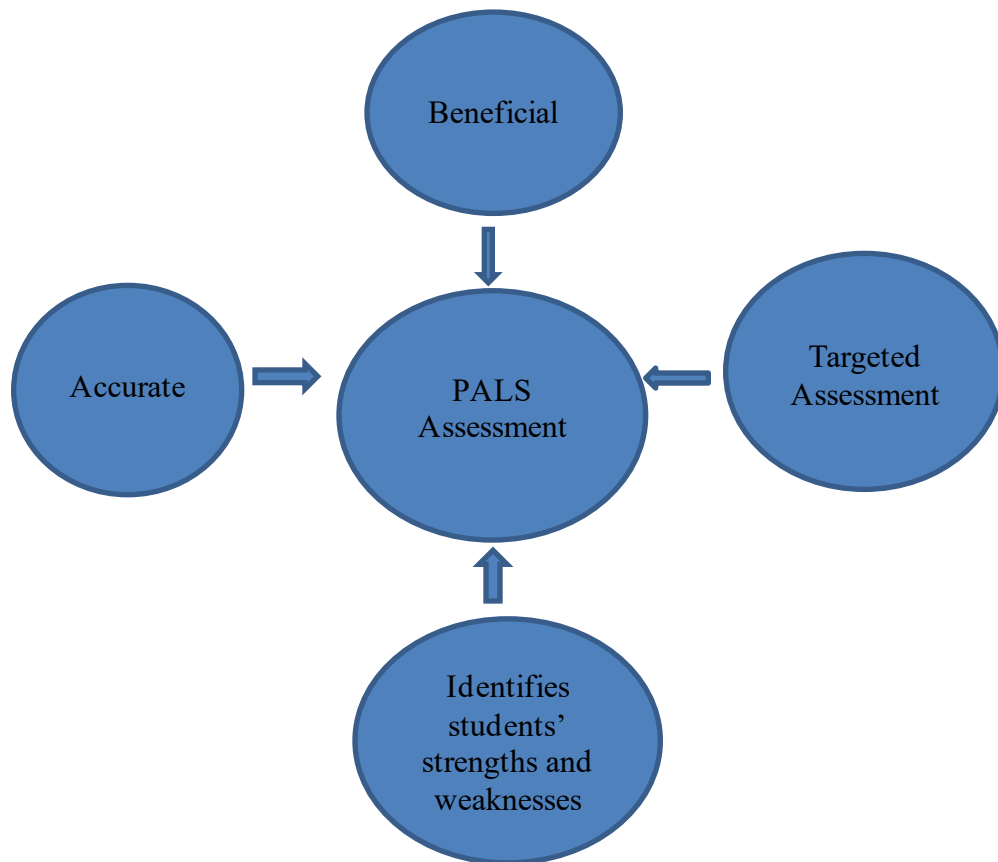
Participant	Fall PALS Results	Spring PALS Results
Parker	✓	
Penelope		✓
Pansita		✓
Paige	✓	
Paris	✓	
Precious		✓
Pamela	✓	
Patrice	✓	
Payton		✓
Paisley		✓
Patricia	✓	
Patsy		✓
Piper	✓	
Phoebe	✓	
Pressley		✓
Phila		✓
Petra		✓
Pearl	✓	
Pixie	✓	
Posey		✓

It can be concluded from the findings for this research question that all participants believed that PALS results are a clear indicator of kindergarteners' *literacy skills* levels and predict *readiness* for first grade. They believed that Spring PALS results showed additional strengths and weaknesses. Table 9 shows that half of the participants solidified their beliefs about *readiness* for first grade from Fall PALS results while the

other participants confirmed their beliefs after Spring PALS results. None of the participants reported that their particular kindergarten group experienced a decrease in students being below the PALS benchmark for Spring PALS. They stated that their students continued on upward trajectories as they believed they would. This study was only provided with data for the participants' individual schools and not for each participants' kindergarten class. Figure 7 shows a summary of the teachers' beliefs about the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) assessment.

Figure 7

A Summary of the Participants' Beliefs About PALS



Summary of Findings

This chapter outlined the themes that emerged from the detailed analyses of the transcripts and explained them as they related to each research question. The findings revealed the participants believed that a kindergartener's success in literacy and preparedness to transition to first grade is dependent on several factors such as the acquisition of literacy skills, parental involvement, effective practices, the use of assessment data to drive instruction, and engaging in strategic planning. The participants believed that in conjunction to academics, play and social skills need to be developed. Play should be used as an engagement tool to enhance learning and make it fun and concrete. The participants acknowledged that even though not all kindergarteners need to enter kindergarten having higher readiness skills, they should possess at least one skill. However, as they progress through kindergarten and become adjusted to academics, they should eventually develop the abilities that they need to perform their tasks. The findings also revealed that is important for kindergarten teachers to themselves be prepared to make their classroom environment a creative, intentional one that fosters the development of literacy skills and habits because they are in essence, preparing their kindergarteners for first grade.

The participants were in full support of the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) assessment tool. The participants described it as a beneficial and targeted assessment. The consensus among the participants was that the assessment revealed the students' areas of strengths and weaknesses. After reviewing the assessment results, the participants reported that they engaged in strategic planning and

implementation. These plans included accessing extra support such as the services of the reading interventionist. The participants' overarching goal was for the next round of PALS assessments to reveal an improvement in student output: the results should show that the students were maintaining their above benchmark statuses. The assessment results also informed the participants of their kindergartener's preparedness to transition reasonably well to the first grade. Many participants saw value in continuity. They kept their first-grade colleagues abreast of kindergarten progress so that the teachers could prepare themselves for the varying abilities they would encounter in first grade.

From the findings, it can be concluded that the participants' combined belief is that literacy in kindergarten should be created in such a way that it provides the students with stimulating, targeted, engaging, and meaningful activities that are geared towards building and strengthening foundational literacy skills. The participants' perspectives revealed that the acquisition of literacy skills in kindergarten does impact success in kindergarten and students' transition to the first grade.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Implication of Findings

The present study investigated kindergarten teachers' perspectives about literacy and assessments and the impact both have on kindergarten success and transition to the first grade. The participants shared their perspectives about the factors that impacted literacy success in kindergarten and readiness to transition to first grade. According to the analyses, literacy skills, strategic planning, parental involvement, readiness, social and academic development, fidelity of assessments, and accurate use of assessment data are among the primary contributors to student success. The participants highlighted play as an important part of learning. Brown (2018) wrote that kindergarten classrooms have seen a reduction in play and an increase in academics. He recommended a re-establishment of play, sufficient time for recess, and engaging in conversation. Brown (2018) believes that children's creativity and interests are developed mostly during this period. It is evident from the findings that the Phonological Awareness literacy Screener (PALS) is an important screener that provides timely and vital information about students' strengths and weaknesses. The participants believed that the assessment was targeted and beneficial and used the results to adjust instruction to cater to students' needs.

Based on the results of the Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 PALS results, it is apparent that students at the six participants' schools made progress. In addition, none of the six schools (see Table 5) showed a decrease in the number of students who were above benchmark. This study was not concerned with identifying the particular areas that the

PALS assessment assesses. Although readiness was not a significant factor at the beginning of the school year, all participants believed that their kindergarteners would eventually display signs of readiness. The teachers were also ready to provide them with what they needed to succeed so that the assessment results would reflect that the students were understanding the literacy content. All participants were pleased that their students showed improvement in the Fall and Spring assessments. The participants' beliefs then about their students were accurate.

There are implications for the importance of home literacy. Establishing home literacy for early reading is essential since, according to the participants, some children who began kindergarten did not have any or had little experience with schooling by the first PALS assessment. Specifically, the results suggest that the participants believed that children's reading competence is mediated by a home literacy environment. The results of this study highlight the need for programs that direct or provide resources to enhance family literacy environments and encourage more parental involvement in schools. The Virginia Literacy Act (VLA) makes provision for home literacy. The Act states that "every family will have access to online resources to support literacy development at home and will be able to participate in the development of their child's student reading plan, if their child does not meet literacy benchmarks" (Virginia Department of Education, 2022). Kindergarten teachers should build relationships and collaborate with parents because of their shared interest in the child's literacy development. Students may have different learning styles at school and at home. Teachers may not know that students' lack of literacy development may be caused by their home environment. Open

communication between parents and teachers helps to identify children's areas of strengths and weaknesses. According to the findings of this study, the kindergarten teachers welcomed feedback from parents concerning their child's literacy behaviors. The teacher provided regular progress updates so that parents were abreast of their child's literacy progress.

According to Costantino-Lane (2019) the perceptions of kindergarten teachers are not usually included in research articles. The findings of this study show that the beliefs of kindergarten teachers are valid and that their beliefs in their methodology and use of assessment data to drive their instruction is worthy of being included in research articles. Costantino-Lane (2019) recommends that policy makers confer with kindergarten teachers and find value in their suggestions. The participants in this study followed their beliefs and reaped great successes. The teachers are apparently excellent strategic planners because their efforts at instruction are shown in student output as in the PALS results (see Table 5). All teachers in the study had over 62% of their respective kindergarten population scoring above benchmark in Fall 2022 and Spring 2023.

The current findings provided implications for policy. The input and expertise of this study's kindergarten teachers may provide effective solutions to help other school districts to reduce the number of kindergarteners identified as needing literacy support. Emphasis can be placed on the strategies suggested and used by the participants that improved learning experiences for students. The success of these schools, especially School #5 and School #6 (see Table 5) show that the kindergarten teachers were strategic in planning, adjusting instruction, and implementation. The PALS assessment occurs

from October to November each school year. Since these schools have a large percentage of students above benchmark for the first assessment in Fall, it means that all stakeholders worked together assiduously for the first weeks of school to ensure that the students received targeted instruction. The assessment results also suggest that it is important for kindergarten teachers to address literacy deficiencies very early as this may be a measure that may prevent low reading achievement.

The study has implications for assessments used to test kindergarten students. Assessments keep changing and are getting more rigorous. For example, PALS is now renamed, improved, and has additional testing components. There are also implications for the kindergarteners, their teachers, and the time that will be spent completing and interpreting these assessments. Instruction has the potential to be more data driven than it is student-centered. This in turn may affect how intervention is managed. Kindergarteners who have not successfully completed their assessments may be unnecessarily placed in remediation. The deficits on their literacy assessments may be the result of the lack of readiness and not the lack of academic ability. Future research can build on this study's findings and provide more conclusive results.

Relationship to Prior Research

From their research, Christiani et al. (2022) concluded that literacy assessments are important at the kindergarten level. They stated that assessment results highlight students' abilities so that constructive decisions can be made about their literacy development. The participants in the present study were also advocates of assessments

and indicated that they used the results to make instructional adjustments to further improve student outcomes.

Kindergarten teachers in this study mentioned readiness multiple times (see Table 4). They believed that readiness was one of the primary factors that determined the impact literacy skills had on student performance. The participants believed that students do well when they are ready to learn. The teachers reported that they can determine readiness through their observation of student behavior. The study conducted by Bassok et al. (2016) found that 92% of kindergarten teachers rated verbal communication essential to readiness. The participants in the current study did not specifically identify verbal communication as essential to readiness but based on their perspectives regarding the regular operations of their classroom and discovering what their students needed, it can be concluded that active communication took place between teachers and students. Pearl, a participant, stated that she conducts individual sessions with her students. The participants clearly identified that communicating with parents about their child's progress was a regular habit and a priority.

The National Reading Panel in a report written for the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000), identified both phonics and phonemic awareness as important components in learning to read. Three informants in the study conducted by the National Reading Panel said that they observed growth in their students' abilities to identify letters and sound relationships. The participants in the present study also identified phonics and phonemic awareness as important skills to have in kindergarten and for first grade (see Table 7).

It is important to note that these findings are consistent with the theoretical framework guiding the study. Bandura's (1986) social learning theory suggests that observation and modeling play a primary role in how and why people learn. Bandura's theory posits that learning can occur simply by observing others' behavior. The participants modeled and observed student behavior. The students did the same to their kindergarten teachers. Throughout these processes, the children's attitudes to learning apparently changed for the better over time. Vygotsky (1978) stated that literacy is constructed in holistic activities. According to the theory, students must be involved in the entire activity. Students must be active participants in their learning. Teachers can increase students' engagement and motivation via learning activities. The participants in this study changed literacy from abstract knowledge to concrete knowledge.

When Charlesworth et al. (1991) investigated kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices, their research showed that it is best that teachers are equipped to teach within a strong theoretical framework. Otherwise, it is highly likely that their beliefs will not be in tandem with best practices that enable student success in literacy. Charlesworth et al. (1991) included preschool teachers in their discussion and sporadically categorized the teachers as early childhood educators albeit their research, as per their topic, should have focused solely on kindergarten teachers. The present study has provided current data on teachers' beliefs with regard to teaching within a strong framework. Firstly, kindergarten teachers are the only participants. Secondly, the participants had various beliefs about frameworks (Figure 5) and thirdly, the participants explained the best practices that enabled their students to experience success in literacy and can prove that said students

have shown improvement (Table 5). It is likely that as educators, the participants are operating within a framework. However, this study is limited to the perspectives of each kindergarten teacher and their beliefs about what they are guided by.

The study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (1993) documented that their participants, kindergarten teachers, overwhelmingly believed that reading to children was one of the best ways to help them learn to read. The study found that teachers' instructional methodology is instrumental to a child's ability to understand what he is learning. The research of Charlesworth et al. (1993), Kagan (1992), Smith and Shepard (1988), and Stipek, et al. (1992) also show that a teacher's practices are associated with his beliefs and that his beliefs affect his instructional practices. The participants in this study did not share specific perspectives on whether reading to children was one of the best ways to help them learn to read. The participants responded to questions which asked about their beliefs on the impact of literacy skills on kindergarten success and first grade transition. However, the participants discussed reading as a part of the set of skills that kindergarteners should develop if they are to be successful in kindergarten and first grade (see Table 7). The findings in the present study concur with the work of the above-mentioned researchers. The participants believed that a teacher's practices are associated with his beliefs and that his beliefs affect his instructional practices.

Stipek and Byler (1997) also conducted research about the practices of early education teachers. Twenty-six of the 60 participants were kindergarten teachers. The present study is focused solely on kindergarten teachers. Stipek and Byler (1997)

investigated whether there were associations between teachers' beliefs about appropriate practices, their actual practices, and sources of tension between their beliefs and practice. Two of their research questions were concerned with the associations between the teachers' beliefs about appropriate practices and their beliefs about whether some children should be delayed in entering school for a year after they are eligible to begin kindergarten and whether children should ever be retained in kindergarten and for what reason.

The participants in the present study all declined to share perspectives on whether they believed that students in kindergarten should be retained. They did not believe that the students were to be retained but did not provide their reasons. Stipek and Byler (1997) reported that the preschool and kindergarten teachers in their study had a coherent set of beliefs that concurs with theoretical frameworks in the present study. Their participants believed that children learn social and academic skills best both by exploratory and child-centered approaches and should be retained if they are not socially or academically ready to enter first grade. This was a goal that their participants set for their students. In contrast, the first-grade teachers believed that students entering first grade should already be socially mature and prepared. The first-grade teachers in that study did not believe that the students should be retained in first grade if they are still showing signs of social and academic unpreparedness. However, Stipek and Byler (1997) stated that because the sample of first grade teachers was small, the results should be interpreted cautiously and should be verified in future research.

The present study's participants expressed the same beliefs about social and academic skills as the participants in the research of Stipek and Byler (1997). This study's participants also set goals for their students. These kindergarten teachers reported that the first-grade teachers at their schools also desired that the incoming group of kindergarten students be socially and academically sound to take on the tasks in first grade. The studies differed wherein the current study's participants were not asked to share their beliefs about the first-grade teachers' views on retention.

Brown and Lan (2015), Deming and Dynarski (2008), and Huang and Invernizzi (2012) who investigated kindergarten readiness, discussed how changes in teachers' and parents' beliefs about readiness were occurring since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Previously, kindergarten teachers used to engage in more play-based early learning opportunities than formal academic experiences. Rigor was not introduced until students began first grade. In recent times, most kindergarten teachers expect students to engage in direct academic instruction at the very beginning of their kindergarten year.

The findings of the present study confirm that kindergarten teachers believe that students need to engage with direct academic instruction at the very beginning of the year. They believed that this should be the approach because engaging in direct academic instruction as soon as possible helps to prepare students to be reasonably proficient at their tasks in the shortest time possible. The participants also believed that an early start to instruction gives kindergarteners the time they need to adjust to academic routines thereby equipping them with the skills needed to score reasonably well on their first state

assessment, the PALS assessment. The participants in this study believed that play was important to the learning experience and regularly incorporated play into their learning activities. There is evidence to support the fact that engaging and advanced academic content in kindergarten can be beneficial for student learning (Magnuson et al., 2007). An early start in kindergarten, as exemplified by this study's participants, can help children who did not attend preschool catch up with their peers and show progress on literacy assessments and on in-class assignments.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations mark the present study. The perspectives of other kindergarten teachers about literacy, the relevance of assessments and the impact on students' success and first grade transition may differ. There may be other themes and factors that could emerge from another investigation of this kind that were not explored in the analyses presented here.

The second limitation was that only public-school teachers from one district in the state of Virginia participated in the study. The sample of kindergarten teachers was also small compared to the number of kindergarten teachers in the district. The data may not be a true representation of the feeling of the multiple kindergarten teachers so further research is needed, with a larger sample, and with a different sampling method. Due to confidentiality and possible identifying information, some data could not be reported. Detailed demographic information such as the participants' specific years of experience, school location, type of teaching license (early childhood, general education) and specific gender identification was excluded. This study had intended to also report on the

socioeconomic background of the locations of each school and make comparisons in the data, but this could not be accomplished.

Although there is a state mandated assessment that measures phonological skills, teachers also based their beliefs about students' literacy success in kindergarten and preparedness to transition to first grade on observed student behaviors. The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) data was obtained from only six schools. The data represents each school's kindergarten results and not results from each teacher's individual class. Individual class data could not be identified without breaching confidentiality.

Thirdly, the time of the year that this research was conducted adds to the limitations of the study. Data were collected at the start of the school year. It can be assumed that kindergarten teachers in the school district were engaged in planning and preparations to receive their students. This is a plausible explanation for the delay in obtaining participants. This delay also resulted in the study's sampling method being changed from purposeful sampling to convenience and snowball sampling. It was hoped that kindergarten teachers from a wider cross section of the district would have responded to the study. Lastly, the time of year that the study was conducted did not align with Fall 2023 PALS assessments. This study was completed before the results were available. Therefore, this study could not make a comparison between the kindergarten class from Fall 2022 and Fall 2023.

Recommendations For Future Research

Further research is needed about kindergarten teachers' beliefs about literacy and assessments and the impact they have on kindergarten success and transition to first grade. Future study should consider the time of year that would best garner data. Future study should include several school districts, a much larger sample and sampling method, and examine the role of socioeconomic status. The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) has been restructured and undergone a name change. Additional components have been added and this time, PreK has been included. Future research can examine whether the adjustment to the assessment has noticeable changes in student output and caused teachers to change their perspectives.

Conclusion

The current study provided analyses of kindergarten teachers' beliefs about literacy and assessments and their impact on kindergarten success and readiness for first grade. The findings revealed that what the teachers believed influenced instructional methodology thereby impacting students' success in kindergarten and preparedness for first grade. The teachers discussed these factors and outlined the strategies they employed to achieve success. They also highlighted how their beliefs affect instruction, the importance of parental involvement, the role of social skills, when remediation should occur, and concluded that PALS is a beneficial and targeted assessment that gives accurate representations of students' abilities. They stated that although their planning and instruction is data driven, their classroom activities are student centered and include time for play, creativity, and engagement. The kindergarten teachers believed that their

beliefs helped them to meet the demands of academic standards while developing children's social skills and catering to their emotional needs. The teachers did not place focus on whether students should arrive in kindergarten with higher learning skills. Instead, the teachers reported that they provided the students with immediate, meaningful content that would stimulate them to acquire literacy skills and develop what skills they already possessed. The teachers believed that their kindergarteners would become well-adjusted to their tasks because of how they, the teachers, provided guidance. The results of the PALS assessments showed that when these kindergarten teachers acted on their beliefs, they saw improvement in the number of kindergartners who were above benchmark for both Fall and Spring of the school year. All participants expressed their belief that kindergarten is academically fueled and is indeed a preparation ground for first grade.

APPENDIX A ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY IRB INITIAL APPROVAL



Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

May 22, 2023 7:36:53 AM EDT

PI: Claudia T. Watts

CO-PI: Michael Sampson

Dept: The School of Education, Education Specialties

Re: Initial - IRB-FY2023-298 *KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT LITERACY AND THE RELEVANCE OF ASSESSMENTS: IMPACT ON STUDENTS' SUCCESS AND FIRST GRADE TRANSITION*

Dear Claudia T. Watts:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT LITERACY AND THE RELEVANCE OF ASSESSMENTS: IMPACT ON STUDENTS' SUCCESS AND FIRST GRADE TRANSITION*.

Decision: Exempt

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures,

interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP

Chair, Institutional Review Board

Professor of Psychology

APPENDIX B ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY IRB MODIFICATIONS APPROVAL



Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Aug 2, 2023 5:47:44 PM EDT

PI: Claudia T. Watts

Dept: The School of Education, Education Specialties

Re: Modification - IRB-FY2023-298 *KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT LITERACY AND THE RELEVANCE OF ASSESSMENTS: IMPACT ON STUDENTS' SUCCESS AND FIRST GRADE TRANSITION*

Dear Claudia T. Watts:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT LITERACY AND THE RELEVANCE OF ASSESSMENTS: IMPACT ON STUDENTS' SUCCESS AND FIRST GRADE TRANSITION*.

Decision: Approved

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP

Chair, Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY



Consent Form for Adults

Dear Participant:

You have been selected to participate in a study that is investigating kindergarten teachers' perspectives about literacy, the relevance of assessments and their impact on student success and transition to first grade. This study will be conducted by Claudia T. Watts, School of Education, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation work. Her faculty sponsor is Dr. Michael Sampson, Professor of Literacy, School of Education, St. John's University, 101 Astor Place, Room 246. New York, NY 10003. Tel 917-268-1515.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in interviews concerning the following research questions:

1. What do kindergarten teachers believe will help their students to be successful in literacy thereby facilitating a reasonable transition to the first grade?
2. To what extent does assessment data influence literacy development, planning, and instruction?
3. Are assessments relevant at the kindergarten level? Should kindergarten students be formally assessed for example, by state mandated standardized assessments such as PALS? If not, how should their entry and subsequent skills be measured?
4. Do kindergarten teachers believe that the frequency of assessments is related to literacy success?
5. What are kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the role parental involvement plays in kindergarten students' success?
6. Do kindergarten teachers believe that the mid-year state test scores are true indicators of a kindergartener's literacy skill level and predict readiness for first grade?

The study is anticipated to be a minimum of two sessions lasting a maximum of forty-five to sixty minutes. The first session is for individual interviews and the second is for the researcher to interview the participant a second time if deemed necessary and agreed upon by the participant. All sessions are confidential and will be audio taped. The audiotapes will be kept in a locked file and destroyed after the study is complete. There are no known risks associated with your site participating in this research beyond those of everyday life.

This research may help the investigator understand how you feel about being a kindergarten teacher and add valuable data to the field.

Confidentiality of your records will be strictly maintained by removing your name, school district's name, and individual school name. Any identifiers will be replaced with pseudonyms. Your name, school name, school district, and identity will not become known or linked to/with any information you have provided. Consent forms will be stored in a separate location from the interview documentation and will be stored in a locked file. Your responses will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, colleagues, or to others.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect you in any way.

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Claudia T. Watts, claudia.watts20@my.stjohns.edu, St. John's University 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439 or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Sampson, sampsonm@stjohns.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

Agreement to Participate

Yes, I agree to participate in the study described above.

Participant's Signature

Date

Yes, I agree to give the researcher permission to have **audiotaped** sessions with me.

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D WELCOME AND CONSENT FORM VERIFICATION



Hello, my name is Claudia T. Watts. Welcome and thank you for volunteering your time to take part in this interview. The intent of this study is to examine kindergarten teachers' perspectives about literacy, the relevance of assessments and their impact on student success and transition to first grade. I will be asking you questions about your perspectives on literacy, the relevance of assessments and their impact on student success and transition to first grade. I will also be asking you also to describe how you incorporate parental involvement, what are your experiences teaching literacy, administering assessment and how you use the data to achieve student success and prepare the kindergarteners to transition to the first grade. Your points of view are important. Our conversation, your name, school district's name, and your individual school name are completely confidential. Everything you say to me during this time is completely confidential. While I will incorporate your responses into my findings, I will never identify you, your school district, or your individual school by name in the final report. You have the right to withdraw your consent to participate at any time. Please feel comfortable sharing your thoughts and expressing how you feel about your experience. This interview will be just one session and will take about 45 - 60 minutes. You may be asked to participate in a second interview if deemed necessary but only if you agree. You are free to stop participation at any point and do not need to answer all questions. There

are no right or wrong answers to the questions. Before we begin, I want to let you know that I understand you are using your personal time and may have other responsibilities; it is okay if we get interrupted. I also want to remind you that I am recording our conversation so that I can remember all the details that you shared with me today. Before we start, do you have any questions about the consent form which you received, signed, and returned via email? You indicated that you agreed to participate and with the interview being recorded. I just want to double check, are you okay with everything? Do you have any questions? Do I have your permission to begin the interview? Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

APPENDIX E RESEARCH STUDY RECRUITMENT EMAIL



Dear Kindergarten teachers:

My name is Claudia T. Watts, a PhD candidate at St. John's University. I am a Reading Specialist whose caseload includes kindergarten students. I am emailing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about the beliefs of kindergarten teachers in your school district. I am conducting a study about kindergarten teachers' perspectives on literacy, the relevance of assessments and their impact on student success and transition to first grade. Participation will take 45 - 60 minutes. If you are interested please respond to this email. Should you choose to participate, further information and instructions will follow in a separate individual email. Thank you and have a good day.

APPENDIX F INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



1. Would you like to share information about your ethnicity, gender, education level, what socioeconomic area you believe your school is in and whether you are licensed? Specifics about your license is not required.
2. How many years of experience do you have teaching at the kindergarten level? How do you believe your experience relates to your students' success?
3. What do you believe will help your students to be successful in literacy thereby facilitating a reasonable transition to the first grade?
4. How do you develop your students' literacy skills and how do you make the learning environment socially stimulating, literacy rich, engaging, and participatory?
5. Do you believe that formalized activities are occurring too early and are depriving your children of time they need to learn from play, manipulative learning, reading from normal language development, and natural exploration? Please elaborate.
6. Do your beliefs contribute to how you deliver instruction, add to students' knowledge, and provide a climate that is conducive to learning?
7. Do you believe that kindergarten is a preparation ground for first grade? Why?
8. Are you more concerned about students' social-emotional readiness for school than their academic skills? Please elaborate.

9. Do you think that obtaining literacy data is important in discovering children's early literacy skills and can predict later reading proficiency?
10. Do you adjust your instructional practices to fit the needs of your students?
Identify one thing that you adjust.
11. Do you believe that kindergarteners should be able to read reasonably well by the end of the school year?
12. Should there be continuity as students get ready to start first grade? What are your continuity procedures? For example, do you engage in transition practices? If not, please explain why. If yes, how and when do you communicate with the first-grade teachers about your kindergarteners' prospects? Do you and the first-grade team discuss the kindergarten PALS Fall and Spring results? What are some (a) issues raised? (b) conclusions drawn?
13. Should kindergarteners who are unable to read by the end of the school year be retained? Why?
14. Does a theoretical framework drive your instructional practices? If yes, with which framework do you identify?
15. Do you believe that the social aspect of each child's environment affects and impacts the way he learns?
16. Explain what your beliefs are about play in relation to young children's physical, social, and emotional development. Is play separate from academic learning?
What is the most frequent activity in your classroom?

17. Do you believe that for students to transition successfully to the first grade, they should enter kindergarten having higher readiness and social skills? Explain why you agree or disagree.
18. What are the skills kindergarteners should possess as they progress through kindergarten and prepare to transition to first grade? What do you do for your students if they are showing signs of ill preparedness for first grade?
19. Should reading intervention begin as early as in kindergarten?
20. When do you believe that kindergarteners should begin to receive literacy assessments?
21. Do you think that the PALS assessment is necessary at the kindergarten level? If not, how do you believe their beginning and subsequent skills should be measured?
22. How is frequency of assessments related to literacy success?
23. Do you believe that PALS scores indicate your kindergarteners' literacy skill levels? Please elaborate.
24. What are some reasons that students show deficits on PALS results?
25. Is it possible that students who have low scores on PALS assessments have underdeveloped literacy skills due to factors such as language barriers or lack of home stimulation and not that there is a deficiency thereby classifying them as struggling readers? Please elaborate

26. Do you believe that kindergarten readiness assessments can show literacy disparities among students, especially poverty stricken, minorities, and English as a Second Language (ESL) children?
27. How much time does it take you to administer PALS and interpret the results?
28. Do you believe that assessment is a preventative measure to reduce reading failure so that less children in first grade will show signs of literacy deficits?
29. Before or by the end of the second term, based on PALS scores and/or your professional judgements, can you tell which kindergarteners will successfully transition to the first grade?
30. Are the assessments being used in your classroom resulting in improvement of teaching methods, learning goals, and are enhancing the learning process so that children are experiencing academic progress? What else could you do to enhance learning?
31. How does the PALS assessment data help you prepare students for first grade?
32. Explain why you believe or do not believe your current group of kindergarteners are ready/not ready for first grade. Please indicate if the PALS results influence your response.
33. What were your expectations about literacy when school began? How much did your expectations change before PALS, after Fall PALS and then after Spring PALS?
34. Could you have gauged your students' abilities without PALS assessments? If yes, what measures would you have used?

35. Should kindergarten teachers be a part of the process that creates the kindergarten literacy program including choice of assessments? What would your input be?
36. What role does parental involvement play in kindergarten students' success? How often do you communicate with parents?
37. Have we missed anything? Is there anything I didn't ask but you would like to mention it? Of all the things we discussed, what is most important to you?

**APPENDIX G SCHOOL DISTRICT'S NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR
RESEARCH**



July 5th, 2023

Claudia T. Watts

The Department of Research has reviewed and approved your research study entitled “Kindergarten teachers’ perspectives about literacy, the relevance of assessments and their impact on student success and transition to first grade.” Your study was approved by the review committee with revisions. Please see page 2 of this document for the revisions. Once the revisions are completed and approved and IRB is on file, you can start your research.

Approval to conduct the study is limited to one year from the time of proposal submission. If the research timeline or any other aspect of your study changes during the period, please contact Mrs. X and submit the changes for review prior to proceeding. If you are affiliated with an organization with an Institutional Review Board (IRB), the IRB approval letter must be on file in our office prior to beginning the study. Although your study has been approved, participation by individuals and schools is completely voluntary. Reports and publications generated from this study should not identify the individuals, schools, or the division and all research materials should accurately represent

the party conducting the study. It is our expectation that you will submit a final report upon completion of the study to the Department of Research.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Mrs. X

School District X

**APPENDIX H SCHOOL DISTRICT'S EMAIL NOTIFICATION TO ALL
TEACHERS IN THE DISTRICT INCLUDING KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS**



The research study, *Kindergarten teachers' perspectives about literacy, the relevance of assessments and their impact on student success and transition to first grade*, has been approved by the Department of Research. Participation is voluntary. Please contact the researcher Claudia T. Watts at claudia.watts20@my.stjohns.edu if you are interested in participating.

Dear Participant:

You have been selected to participate in a study that is investigating kindergarten teachers' perspectives about literacy, the relevance of assessments and their impact on student success and transition to first grade. This study will be conducted by Claudia T. Watts, School of Education, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation work. Her faculty sponsor is Dr. Michael Sampson, Professor of Literacy, School of Education, St. John's University, 101 Astor Place, Room 246. New York, NY 10003. Tel 917-268-1515.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in interviews concerning the following research questions:

1. What do kindergarten teachers believe will help their students to be successful in literacy thereby facilitating a reasonable transition to the first grade?
2. To what extent does assessment data influence literacy development, planning, and instruction?
3. Are assessments relevant at the kindergarten level? Should kindergarten students be formally assessed for example, by state mandated standardized assessments such as PALS? If not, how should their entry and subsequent skills be measured?
4. Do kindergarten teachers believe that the frequency of assessments is related to literacy success?
5. What are kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the role parental involvement plays in kindergarten students' success?

6. Do kindergarten teachers believe that the mid-year state test scores are true indicators of a kindergartener's literacy skill level and predict readiness for first grade?

The study is anticipated to be a minimum of two sessions lasting a maximum of forty-five to sixty minutes. The first session is for individual interviews and the second is for the researcher to interview the participant a second time if deemed necessary and agreed upon by the participant.

APPENDIX I PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS LITERACY SCREENER (PALS)



PALS 1-3 in Virginia is part of the Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI, 1997, Virginia Acts of Assembly, Chapter 924, Item 140). PALS is the brainchild of the Virginia Literacy Partnerships from the University of Virginia. According to their website, PALS is used to identify students in kindergarten to third grade who are at risk of reading difficulties. The components of the assessment measures students' knowledge of important literacy fundamentals and provides teachers with information that helps to drive instruction. The intent of the EIRI is to reduce the number of children displaying reading difficulty via early diagnosis and immediate intervention. The screening of kindergarten to third grade students enables participating school divisions to identify struggling readers and receive incentive funds for intervention. Any student who does not meet the Entry Level benchmark for their grade level must receive intervention services in addition to their regular classroom instruction.

APPENDIX J PALS KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT



The Virginia Literacy Partnerships (VLP) from the University of Virginia designed the PALS kindergarten assessment (PALS-K) to measure students' knowledge of several important literacy fundamentals:

- phonological awareness
- alphabet recognition
- concept of word
- knowledge of letter sounds and spelling.

The VLP states that PALS-K provides data that enables teachers to match literacy instruction to specific literacy needs.

Components of PALS-K

Rhyme Awareness

From a set of three pictures, students must identify which one rhymes with the target picture.

Beginning Sound Awareness

From a set of three pictures, students must identify which one has the same beginning sound as the picture.

Alphabet Knowledge

Students identify the 26 lower-case letters of the alphabet.

Letter Sounds

Students must sound out 23 upper-case letters of the alphabet and three digraphs.

Spelling

Students must spell five consonant vowel consonant (CVC) words.

Word Recognition in Isolation

Word Recognition in Isolation is optional. However, it can be administered to pupils who reading difficulty.

Scores and Expectations

All scores on specific tasks are added together to create the summed score. The score is compared against a benchmark which represents minimum expectations for Fand for Spring. If the score is below the benchmark, the student is considered identified by the assessment and must receive reading intervention in addition to regular classroom literacy instruction.

REFERENCES

- Administration for Children and Families. (2019). *Race to the top—Early learning challenge*. Early Childhood Development. ACF.
- Ahtola, A., Silinskas, G., Poikonen, P. L., Krantonniemi, M., Niemi, P., & Nurmi, J. E. (2011). Transition to formal schooling: Do transition practices matter for academic practice? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 26*, 295–302.
- Aikens, N. L., & Barbarin, O. (2008). Socioeconomic differences in reading trajectories: The contribution of family, neighborhood, and school contexts. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 100*(2), 235–251.
- Al Otaiba, S., Folsom, J. S., Schatschneider, C., Wanzek, J., Greulich, L., Meadows, J., Zhi Li, & Connor, C. M. (2011). Predicting first-grade reading performance from kindergarten response to Tier 1 instruction. *Exceptional Children, 77*(4), 453–470.
- Al Otaiba, S., & Fuchs, D. (2006). Who are the young children for whom best practices in reading are ineffective? An experimental and longitudinal study. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 39*(5), 414-431.
- Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Dauber, S. L. (1993). First-grade classroom behavior: Its short and long term consequences for school performance. *Child Development 64*, 801-814.
- Allington, R. L. (2011). What At-Risk Readers Need. *Educational Leadership, 68*(6), 40–45.

- Alvarez, B. (2015). *The reading rush: What educators say about kindergarten reading expectations*. <https://www.neatoday.org/2015/06/19/the-reading-what-educators-say-about-kindergarten-reading-expectation>.
- Anderson, R. C. (2019). Role of the reader's schema in comprehension, learning, and memory. In D. E. Alvermann, N. J. Unrau, M. Sailors, & R. B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of literacy* (7th ed.), 136-145.
- Aras, S. (2016). Free play in early childhood education: A phenomenological study. *Early Child Development and Care, 186*(7), 1173-1184.
- Arbeau, K. A., & Coplan, R. J. (2007). Kindergarten teachers' beliefs and responses to hypothetical prosocial, asocial, and antisocial children. *Merrill—Palmer Quarterly*. Wayne State University.
- Badian, N. A. (1982). The prediction of good and poor reading before kindergarten entry: A 4 year follow up. *Journal of Special Education, 16*(3), 309–318.
- Baker, L. (2003). The role of parents in motivating struggling readers. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 19*(1), 87-106.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. General Learning Press.
- Bandura, A. (1986). Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory. *Academy of Management Review, 12*(1), 169–171.
- Bassok, D., Latham, S., & Rorem, A. (2016). Is kindergarten the new first grade? *AERA Open, 2*(1).
- Beck, C. T. (1994). Reliability and validity issues in phenomenology research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research, 16*(3), 254-267.

- Bernstein, B. (1973). Social class, language, and socialization. In J. Karabel & A. H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and Ideology in Education*, pp. 137-153.
- Blachman, B. (1997). *Early intervention and phonological awareness: A cautionary tale*. In B. Blachman (Ed.), *Foundations of reading acquisition and dyslexia* (pp. 409-43).
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2012). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Bowdon, J., & Desimone, L. (2014). More work, less play: Kindergarten, post-NCLB. *Teachers College Record*. ID Number: 17742.
- Bratsch-Hines, M., Vernon-Feagans, L., Pedonti, S., & Varghese, C. (2020). Differential effects of the targeted reading intervention for students with low phonological awareness and/or vocabulary. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 43(4), 214–226.
- Bredenkamp, S., & Copple, S. (Eds.). (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8* (Revised edition.). National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Brown, C. (2018). *We need to make kindergarten engaging again*.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/thefundamentals/201811/we-need-make-kindergarten-engaging-again>.
- Brown, C. P., & Lan, Y. C. (2015). A qualitative metasynthesis comparing US teachers' conceptions of school readiness prior to and after the implementation of NCLB. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 45, 1-13.

- Bryant, D. M., Burchinal, M., Lau, L. B., & Sparling, J. J. (1994). Family and classroom correlates of Head Start children's developmental outcomes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 9*, 289–309.
- Bryant, D., Clifford, R., & Peisner, E. (1991). Best practices for beginners: Developmental appropriateness in kindergarten. *American Educational Research Journal, 28*, 783-803.
- Bryant, D. M., & Clifford, R. M. (1992). 150 years of kindergarten: How far have we come? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7*(2), 147-154.
- Burkam, D. T, LoGerfo, L. F., Ready, D. D., & Lee, V. E. (2007). The differential effects of repeating kindergarten. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 12*(2), 103-136.
- Burke, M. D., & Hagan-Burke, S. (2007). Concurrent criterion-related validity of early literacy indicators for middle of first grade. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 32*(2), 66–77.
- Burke, M. D., Hagan-Burke, S., Kwok, O., & Parker, R. (2009). Predictive validity of early literacy indicators from the middle of kindergarten to second grade. *Journal of Special Education, 42*(4), 209–226.
- Cameron, C. E., Brock, L. L., Murrah, W. M., Bell, L. H., Worzalla, S. L., Grissmer, D., & Morrison, F. J. (2012). Fine motor skills and executive function both contribute to kindergarten achievement. *Child Development, 83*(4), 1229–1244.

- Carlsson-Paige, N., McLaughlin, G., & Almon, J. (2015). *Reading instruction in kindergarten: Little to gain much to lose*. Retrieved from www.allianceforchildhood.org and www.DEYproject.org.
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (1990). *Ready to learn: A mandate for the nation*. Princeton University Press.
- Carta, J. J., Greenwood, C. R., Atwater, J., McConnell, S. R., Goldstein, H., & Kaminski, R. A. (2015). Identifying preschool children for higher tiers of language and early literacy instruction within a response to intervention framework. *Journal of Early Intervention, 36*(4), 281–291.
- Chan, W. L. (2010). The transition from kindergarten to primary school, as experienced by teachers, parents, and children in Hong Kong. *Early Child Development and Care, 180*(7), 973–993.
- Charlesworth, R., Hart, C., Butts, D., & Hernandez, S. (1991). Kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices. *Early Development and Care, 70*, 17-35.
- Charlesworth, R., Hart, C., Burts, D., Thomasson, R., Mosley, J., & Fleege, P. (1993). Measuring the developmental appropriateness of kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 8*, 255-276.
- Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., Hilger, N., Saez, E., Whitmore Schanzenbach, D., & Yagan, Y. (2011). How does your kindergarten classroom affect your earnings? Evidence from project star. *Quarterly Journal of Economics 126*(4), 1593-1660.

- Christianti, M., Retnowati, T. H., Wening, S., Hasan, A., & Ratnawati, H. (2022). Early literacy assessment among kindergarten teachers in Indonesia: A phenomenological study. *European Journal of Educational Research, 11*(4), 2400–2411.
- Claessens, A., Duncan, G., & Engel, M. (2009). Kindergarten skills and fifth-grade achievement: Evidence from the ECLS-K. *Economics of Education Review 28*, 415–427.
- Clarke, C. P., & Sharpe, P. (2003). Transition from preschool to primary school: An overview of the personal experiences of children and their parents in Singapore. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 11*, 15-23.
- Clay, M. (1991). *Becoming literate: The construction of inner control*. Heinemann.
- Connor, C. M., Morrison, F. J., Fishman, B. E., Crowe, E. C., Al Otaiba, S., & Schatschneider, C. (2013). A longitudinal cluster-randomized controlled study on the accumulating effects of individualized literacy instruction on students reading from first through third grade. *Psychological Science 24*, 1408–1419.
- Connor, C. M., Morrison, F. J., & Katch, L. E. (2004). Beyond the reading wars: Exploring the effect of child–instruction interactions on growth in early reading. *Scientific Studies in Reading 8*, 305–336.
- Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (Eds.) (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8* (3rd ed.). National Association for the Education of Young Children.

- Costantino-Lane, T. (2019). Kindergarten then and now: Perceptions of ten long term teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 47(5), 585–595.
- Coyne, M. D., & Ham, B. A. (2006). Promoting beginning reading success through meaningful assessment of early literacy skills. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43(1), 33–44.
- Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Cummings, K. D., Kaminski, R. A., Good, R. H., & O'Neil, M. (2011). Assessing phonemic awareness in preschool and kindergarten: Development and initial validation of first sound fluency. *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, 36(2), 94–106.
- Dauber, S. L., Alexander, K. L., & Entwisle, D. R. (1993). Characteristics of retainees and early precursors of retention in grade: Who is held back? *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 39(3), 326-343.

- DeLuca, C., & Hughes, C. (2014). Assessment in early primary education: An empirical study of five school contexts. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 28(4), 441-460.
- DeLuca, C., Pyle, A., Roy, S., Chalas, A., & Danniels, E. (2019). Perspectives on kindergarten assessment: Towards a common understanding. *Teachers College Record*, 121(3), 1-58.
- Deming, D., & Dynarski, S. (2008). The lengthening of childhood. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 22(3), 71–92.
- Dickinson, D. K. (2001). Book reading in preschool classrooms: Is recommended practice common? In D. K. Dickinson & P. O. Tabors (Eds.), *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school* (pp. 175–204).
- Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2003). The transition to school: What’s important? *Educational Leadership*, 60(7), 30–33.
- Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2004a). Starting school. Perspectives of Australian children, parents, and educators. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 2(2), 171–189.
- Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2004b). What makes a successful transition to school: Views of Australian parents and teachers. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 12(3), 217–230.
- Duckworth, A. L., & Seligman, M. E. (2005). Self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting academic performance of adolescents. *Psychological Science*, 16, 939-944.
- Duncan, S. E., & DeAvila, E. (1986). *Preschool Language Assessment Survey 2000 examiner’s manual*. McGraw-Hill.

- Duncan, G. J., Dowsett, C. J., Claessens, A., Magnuson, K., Huston, A. C., Klebanov, P., Pagani, L. S. (2007). School readiness and later achievement. *Developmental Psychology* 43, 1428–1446.
- Dunlop, A. W., & Fabian, H. (Eds.). (2007). Informing transitions in the early years. *Research, policy, and practice*. Open University Press.
- Earl, L. (2003). *Assessment as learning: Using classroom assessment to maximize student learning*. Corwin Press.
- Early, D. M., Pianta, R. C., Taylor, L. C., & Cox, M. J. (2001). Transition practices: Findings from a national survey of kindergarten teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 28, 199–206.
- Education Commission of the States. (2018). *50-state comparison: State kindergarten through third-grade policies*. Education Commission of the States.
- Einarsdottir, J. (2006). From preschool to primary school: When different contexts meet. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 50(2), 165–184.
- Eisner, E. W. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of the educational practice*. Macmillan.
- Elkind, D. (1987). *Miseducation: Preschoolers at risk*. Knopf.
- Elkind, D. (2007). *The power of play: How spontaneous, imaginative activities lead to happier, healthier children*. Da Capo Press.
- Elkind, D. (2008, March/April). Some misunderstanding on school readiness. *School Readiness*, pp. 49–52.

- Englander, M. (2012). The interview: Data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 43*(1), 13-35.
- Entwisle, D. R., & Alexander, K. L. (1989). Early schooling as a critical period phenomenon. In K. Namboodiri & R. Corwin (Eds.), *Sociology of Education and Socialization*. Vol. 8. (pp. 27- 55).
- Entwisle, D. R., & Alexander, K. L. (1993). Entry into school: The beginning school transition and educational stratification in the United States. In *Annual Review of Sociology 9*, 401-423.
- Entwisle, D. R., Alexander, K. L., & Olson, L. S. (1997). *Children, schools and inequalities*. Westview Press.
- Entwisle, D. R., Alexander, K. L., & Olson, L. S. (2005). First grade and educational attainment by age 22: A new story. *American Journal of Sociology, 110*, 1458-1502.
- Espinosa, L., Thornburg, K., & Matthews, M. (1997). Rural kindergarten teachers of school readiness: A comparison to the Carnegie study. *Early Childhood Education, 25*(2), 119–125.
- Fayez, M., Ahmad, J. F., & Oliemat, E. (2016). Jordanian kindergarten and first grade teachers' beliefs about child-based dimensions of school readiness. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 30*(3), 293–305.

- Farkas, G. (2003). Racial disparities and discrimination in education: What do we know, how do we know it, and what do we need to know? *Teachers College Record*, 105(6), 1119-1146.
- Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: the opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 209-230.
- Fischer, A., Syverson, E., & Education Commission of the States. (2020). Building a better k-3 literacy system. Policy Brief. In *Education Commission of the States*. Education Commission of the States.
- Foorman, B. R., Francis, D. J., Fletcher, J. M., Schatschneider, C., & Mehta, P. (1998). The role of instruction in learning to read: Preventing reading failure in at-risk children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90, 37–55.
- Foorman, B. R., & Torgesen, J. (2001). Critical elements of classroom and small group instruction promote reading success in all children. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 16, 203–212.
- Foster, W. A., & Miller, M. (2007). Development of the literacy achievement gap: A longitudinal study of kindergarten through third grade. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 38, 173-181.
- Fryer, R. G., & Levitt, S. D. (2004). Understanding the Black-White test score gap in the first two years of school. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 86(2), 18.
- Gallant, P. A. (2009). Kindergarten teachers speak out: “Too much, too soon, too fast!” *Reading Horizons*, 49(3).

- Gallant, D. J., & Moore, J. L. (2008). Ethnic-based equity in teacher judgment of student achievement on a language and literacy curriculum embedded performance assessment for children in grade one. *Educational Foundations, 22*(1/2), 63–77.
- Gee, J. P. (2001). Reading as situated language. A sociocognitive perspective. In D. E. Alvermann, N. J. Unrau, M. Sailors, & R. B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of literacy* (7th ed., pp. 233-251).
- Gilkerson, J., Richards, J. A., & Topping, K. J. (2017). The impact of book reading in the early years on parent–child language interaction. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 17*(1), 92–110.
- Giorgi, A. (1988). Validity and reliability from a phenomenological perspective. In W. J. Baker, L. P. Moss, H. V. Rappard & H. J. Stam (Eds.), *Recent trends in theoretical psychology* (pp. 167-176).
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine Publishing.
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming a qualitative researcher: An introduction*. (2nd ed.) Longman.
- Graue, M. E. (1992). Social interpretations of readiness for kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 7*(2), 225–243.
- Griebel, W., & Niesel, R. (2003). Successful transitions: Social competencies help pave the way into kindergarten and school. *European Early Childhood Education Research Monograph, 1*, 25–33.

- Grissom, J. A., & Redding, C. (2016). Discretion and disproportionality: Explaining the underrepresentation of high-achieving students of color in gifted programs. *AERA Open*, 2(1).
- Guidelines for appropriate curriculum content and assessment in programs serving children ages 3 through 8. (1991). *Young Children*, 46, 21-38.
- Hanna, G. S., & Dettmer, P. A. (2004). Assessment for effective teaching: Using context-adaptive planning. Pearson A&B.
- Hargreaves, A., Earl, L., & Schmidt, M. (2002). Perspectives on alternative assessment reform. *American Educational Research Journal*, 39(1), 69-95.
- Harlaar, N., Hayiou-Thomas, M. E., Dale, P. S., & Plomin, R. (2008). Why do preschool language abilities correlate with later reading? A twin study. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 51(3), 688–705.
- Harris-Motley, S. (2020). Jamaican kindergarten and first grade teachers' expectations for readiness skills [ProQuest Information & Learning]. In *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences* (Vol. 81, Issue 9–A).
- Hatcher, B., Nuner, J., & Paulsel, J. (2012). Kindergarten readiness and preschools: Teachers' and parents' beliefs within and across programs. *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, 14(2).
- Hart, C. H., Burts, D. C., & Charlesworth, Rosalind. (1997). *Integrated curriculum and developmentally appropriate practice birth to age eight*. State University of New York Press.

- Hegde, A. V., Sugita, C., Crane-Mitchell, L., & Averett, P. (2014). Japanese nursery and kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices regarding developmentally appropriate practices. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 22(3), 301-314.
- Herring, W. A., Bassok, D., McGinty, A. S., Miller, L. C., & Wyckoff, J. H. (2022). Racial and socioeconomic disparities in the relationship between children's early literacy skills and third-grade outcomes: Lessons from a kindergarten readiness assessment. *Educational Researcher*, 51(7), 441-450.
- Hill, N., & Taylor, L. (2004). Parental school involvement and children's academic achievement: Pragmatics and issues. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13(4), 161-164.
- Hodges, C. A. (1992). *Literacy assessment in kindergarten: A longitudinal study of teachers' use of alternative forms of assessment*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, San Antonio, TX. (ED 353 560).
- Honeyford, M., & Ntelioglou, B. Y. (2021). Beyond "Trying to find a number": Proposing a relational ontology for reconceptualizing assessment in K-12 language and literacy classrooms. *The Canadian Modern Language Review* 77(4), 427-446.
- Hooper, A. (2018). The influence of early childhood teacher certification on kindergarten and first grade students' academic outcomes. *Early Child Development and Care*, 188(10), 1419-1430.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K., & Sandler, H. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of Educational Research*, 67(1), 3-42.

- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J. M., Sandler, H. M., Whetsel, D., Green, C. L., Wilkins, A. S., & Closson, K. E. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *Elementary School Journal, 106*(2), 105–130.
- Howard, J. (2010). Early years practitioners' perceptions of play: An exploration of theoretical understanding, planning and involvement, confidence, and barriers to practice. *Educational and Child Psychology, 27*(4), 91-102.
- Huag, G., & Doleis, B. M. (2007). Reading theatre, parents as actors: Movie production in a family literacy workshop. *Reading Improvement, 44*(2), 87-98.
- Huang, F. L. & Invernizzi, M. A. (2012). The association of kindergarten entry age with early literacy outcomes. *The Journal of Educational Research, 105*(6), 431-441.
- Husserl, E. (1931). *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson. George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- Husserl, E. (1970). *Logical Investigation*. Volume 1 & 2. Translated by J. N. Fildlay. Humanities Press.
- Hustedt, J. T., Buell, M. J., Hallam, R. A., & Pinder, W. M. (2018). While kindergarten has changed, some beliefs stay the same: Kindergarten teachers' beliefs about readiness. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 32*(1), 52–66.
- Hycner, R. H. (1985). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. *Human Studies 8*(3), 279–303.
- Inbar-Lourie, O. (2017). Language assessment literacy. In E. Shohamy (Eds.), *Language testing and assessment, encyclopedia of language and education* (pp. 257-270). Springer.

- International Reading Association. (1986). Literacy development and pre-first grade: A joint statement of concerns about present practices in pre-first grade reading instruction and recommendations for improvement. *Childhood Education, 63*, 100-111.
- Invernizzi, M., Justice, L., Landrum, T. J., & Booker, K. (2004). Early literacy screening in Kindergarten: Widespread implementation in Virginia. *Journal of Literacy Research, 36*(4), 479–500.
- Invernizzi, M., Juel C., Swank L., Meier J. (2017). *PALS-K administration and scoring guide*. University of Virginia.
- Jeynes, W.H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education, 40*(3), 237-269.
- Johnson, R. B. (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education, 118*(2), 282-292.
- Justice, L., Jiang, H., Khan, K., & Dynia, J. (2017). Kindergarten readiness profiles of rural Appalachian children from low-income households. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 50*, 1–14.
- Kagan, D. (1992). Implications of research on teacher belief. *Educational Psychologist, 27*, 65-90.
- Kagan, S. L., & Neuman, M. J. (1998). Less from three decades of transition research. *Elementary School Journal, 98*(4), 365-379.

- Kamii, C. (1985). Leading primary education toward excellence: Beyond worksheets and drill. *Young Children*, 40(6), 3-9.
- Kanjee, A., & Mthembu, J. (2015). Assessment literacy of foundation phase teachers: An exploratory study. *South African Journal of Chemical Engineering*, 5(1), 142-168.
- Kim, J., Murdock, T., & Choi, D. (2005). Investigation of parents' beliefs about readiness for kindergarten: An examination of National Household Education Survey. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 29(2), 3–17.
- Koh, K. H. (2011). Improving teachers' assessment literacy through professional development. *Teaching Education*, 22(3), 255-276.
- Koller, K. A., Hojnoski, R. L., & Van Norman, E. R. (2022). Classification accuracy of early literacy assessments: Linking preschool and kindergarten performance. *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, 48(1), 13–22.
- Kowalski, K., Pretti-Frontczak, K., & Johnson, L. (2001). *Preschool teachers' beliefs concerning the importance of various developmental skills and abilities*. High Beam Research.
- Kvale, S. (1983). The qualitative research interview: A phenomenological and hermeneutical mode of understanding. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 14(2), 171-196.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal* 32(3), 465-491.

- Lapadat, J., & Lindsey, A. (1999). Transcription in research and practice: From standardization of technique to interpretive positionings. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5, 64-86.
- La Paro, K. M., & Pianta, R. (2000). Kindergarten teachers' reported use of kindergarten to first grade transition practices. *Elementary School Journal*, 101(1), 63.
- Lareau, A., & Horvat, E. M. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion: Race, class, and cultural capital in family-school relationships. *Sociology of Education*, 72(1), 37-53.
- Larson, T. R. (2021). Influences of external literacy assessment on curricular decisions: a systems-based study of a local school district [ProQuest LLC]. In *ProQuest LLC*.
- Lee, P., & Bierman, K. L. (2015). Classroom and teacher support in kindergarten: Associations with the behavioral and academic adjustment of low-income students. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly: Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 61(3), 383–411.
- Lee, V. E., & Burkham, D. T. (2002). *Inequality at the starting gate: Social background differences in achievement as children begin school*. Economic Policy Institute.
- Lenski, S. D., & Nierstheimer, S. L. (2002). Strategy instruction from a sociocognitive perspective. *Reading Psychology*, 23(2), 127–143.
- Lerkkanen, M. K., Kiuru, N., Pakarinen, E., Poikkeus, A. M., Rasku-Puttonen, H., Siekkinen, M., & Nurmi, J. E. (2016). Child-centered versus teacher-directed teaching practices: Associations with the development of academic skills in the first grade at school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 36, 145–156.

- Leseman, P. P., & de Jong, P. F. (1998). Home literacy: opportunity, instruction, cooperation, and social-emotional quality predicting early reading achievement. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 33(3), 294-318.
- Lichtman, M. (2013). Learning about others through interviewing. In *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide*, (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. SAGE.
- Livingston, A., & Wirt, J. (2003). *The condition of education in brief (NCES 2003-068)*. U.S. Department of Education.
- Lonigan, C. J., Allan, N. P., & Lerner, M. D. (2011). Assessment of preschool early literacy skills: Linking children's educational needs with empirically supported instructional activities. *Psychology in the Schools*, 48(5), 488–501.
- Lucas, S. R., & Berends, M. (2007). Race and track location in U.S. public schools. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 25(3), 169–187.
- Lynch, M. (2015). More play, please: The perspective of kindergarten teachers on play in the classroom. *American Journal of Play*, 7(3), 347-370.
- Magnuson, K. A., Ruhm, C., & Waldfogel, J. (2007). The persistence of preschool effects: Do subsequent classroom experiences matter? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22(1), 18-38.
- Mantzicopoulos, P. Y., & Neuharth-Pritchett, S. (1998). Transitional first-grade referrals: An analysis of school-related factors and children's characteristics. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(1), 122–133.

- Martin, A. (1985). About teaching and teachers. *Harvard Educational Review*, 55, 318-320.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing Qualitative Research*, (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396.
- Mazzocco, M. I., & Kover, S. T. (2007). A longitudinal assessment of executive function skills and their association with math performance. *Child Neuropsychology*, 13, 18-45.
- McClelland, M. M., Acock, A. C., & Morrison, F. J. (2006). The impact of kindergarten learning-related skills on academic trajectories at the end of elementary school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21, 471-490.
- McGee, L. M., & Ukrainetz, T. A. (2009). Using scaffolding to teach phonemic awareness in preschool and kindergarten. *The Reading Teacher*, 62(7), 599-603.
- McGill-Franzen, A. (1992). Early literacy: What does "developmentally appropriate" mean? *Reading Teacher*, 46, 56-58.
- McMahon, R., Richmond, M. G., & Reeves-Kazelskis, C. (1998). Relationships between kindergarten teachers' perceptions of literacy acquisition and children's literacy involvement and classroom materials. *Journal of Educational Research* 91(3), 173-182.
- McMillan, J. H. (2017). *Classroom assessment: Principles and practice that enhance student learning and motivation*. Pearson Education.

- Meisels, S. J. (1998). *Assessing Readiness (ED Report No. CIERA-R-3-002)*. Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement. University of Michigan.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Miller, E., & Almon, J. (2009). Crisis in kindergarten: Why children need to play in school. *Alliance for Childhood* (NJ3a).
- Minicozzi, L. L. (2016). The garden is thorny: Teaching kindergarten in the age of accountability. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 6(3), 299-310.
- Moats, L. (2005). *Language essentials for teachers of reading and spelling: The challenge of learning to read*. Sopris West Educational Services.
- Morris, D. (2003). Reading instruction in kindergarten. In D. Morris & R. Slavin (Eds.), *Every child reading* (pp. 8-32). Allyn & Bacon.
- Morris, D., Bloodgood, J., & Perney, J. (2003). Kindergarten predictors of first and second grade reading achievement. *The Elementary School Journal*, 104(2), 93–109.
- Morrison, F. J., Cameron Ponitz, C., & McClelland, M. M. (2010). Self-regulation and academic achievement in the transition to school. In S. D. Calkins & M. A. Bell (Eds.), *Child development at the intersection of emotion and cognition* (pp. 203-224). American Psychological Association.
- Morrow, L. (2014). *Literacy development in the early years: Helping children read and write* (7th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Musti-Rao, S., & Cartledge, G. (2004). Making home an advantage in the prevention of reading failure: Strategies for collaborating with parents in urban schools.

Preventing School Failure, 48(4), 15-21.

Myck-Wayne, J. (2010). In defense of play: Beginning the dialog about the power of play. *Young Exceptional Children, 13(4), 14-23.*

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1986). NAEYC position statement on developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8. *Young Children, 41(6), 4-2.*

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009). *NAEYC Position Statement: Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8.*

National Center for Education Statistics (1993).

National Center for Education Statistics (2013).

National Early Literacy Panel. 2008. *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel.* National Institute for Literacy.

National Education Goals Panel. (1998). *Ready schools.* National Education Goals Panel.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel. *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: Reports of the subgroups (NIH Publication No. 00-4754).*

U.S. Government Printing Office.

<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/report.htm>.

- Navarrete, A. M. (2015). *Assessment in the early years: The perspectives and practices of early childhood educators*. Technological University Dublin Library Services.
- NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. (2004). Multiple pathways to early academic achievement. *Harvard Educational Review, 74*, 1–29.
- New Mexico kindergarten teachers' use of kindergarten entry assessment data. CSAI Update. (2017). In *Center on Standards and Assessments Implementation*. Center on Standards and Assessments Implementation.
- Nyman, M. C. (2013). A quantitative comparison study: Oral language development and high stakes testing [ProQuest LLC]. In ProQuest LLC.
- O'Brien, M. (1991). *Promoting successful transition into school: A review of current intervention practices*. Paper presented at the Kansas Early Childhood Research Institute. Kansas Early Childhood Institute.
- Oncu, E. C., & Unluer, E. (2015). Examination of preschool teachers' approaches to early literacy. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 191*, 1043–1047.
- Ornstein A. C., & Hunkins, F. P. (2009). *Curriculum foundations, principles and issues*. (5th ed). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Ortiz, M., Folsom, J. S., Al Otaiba, S., Greulich, L., Thomas-Tate, S., & Connor, C. M. (2012). The componential model of reading: Predicting first grade reading performance of culturally diverse students from ecological, psychological, and cognitive factors assessed at kindergarten entry. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 45*(5), 406–417.

- Papageorge, N. W., Gershenson S., & Kang, K. M. (2019). Teacher expectations matter. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 1–46.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage Publications.
- Phillips, M., & Chin, T. (2004). *School inequality: What do we know?* In K. Neckerman (Ed.), *Social inequality*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Pianta, R. C., Barnett, W. S., Burchinal, M., & Thornburg, K. R. (2009). The effects of preschool education: What we know, how public policy is or is not aligned with the evidence base, and what we need to know. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 10, 49–88.
- Pianta, R. C., Cox, M. J., Taylor, L., & Early, D. (1999). Kindergarten teachers' practices related to the transition into school: Results of a national survey. *Elementary School Journal*, 100, 71-86.
- Piasta, S. B., & Wagner, R. K. (2010). Developing early literacy skills: A meta-analysis of alphabet learning and instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 45(1), 8–38.
- Pinto, G., Bicozzi, L., Gamannossi, B. A., & Vezzani, C. (2012). Emergent literacy and early writing skills. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 173(3), 330–354.
- Pinto, G., Bigozzi, L., Tarchi, C., Vezzani, C., & Gamannossi, B. A. (2016). Predicting reading, spelling, and mathematical skills: A longitudinal study from kindergarten through first grade. *Psychological Reports*, 118(2), 413–440.
- Pollio, H. R., Henley, T. B., & Thompson, C. B. (1997). *The phenomenology of everyday life: Empirical investigations of human experience*. Cambridge University Press.

- Puccioni, J. (2018). Understanding how kindergarten teachers' beliefs shape their transition practices. *School Community Journal*, 28(1), 249–272.
- Punch, M. (1994). Politics and ethics in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 83-97). Sage Publications.
- Pyle, A., & Daniels, E. (2017). A continuum of play-based learning: The role of the teacher in play-based pedagogy and the fear of hijacking play. *Early Education & Development*, 28(3), 274-289.
- Pyle, A., DeLuca, C., Wickstrom, H., & Daniels, E. (2022). Connecting kindergarten teachers' play-based learning profiles and their classroom assessment practices. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 119, N.PAG.
- Quinn, D. M. (2015). Kindergarten Black–White test score gaps: Re-examining the roles of socioeconomic status and school quality with new data. *Sociology of Education*, 88(2), 120–139.
- Ready, D. D., & Wright, D. L. (2011). Accuracy and inaccuracy in teachers' perceptions of young children's cognitive abilities: the role of child background and classroom context. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(2), 335–360.
- Reardon, S. F., & Galindo, C. (2009). The Hispanic-White achievement gap in math and reading in the elementary grades. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(3), 853–891.
- Reardon, S. F., & Portilla, X. A. (2016). Recent trends in income, racial, and ethnic school readiness gaps at kindergarten entry. *AERA Open*, 2(3).

- Regenstein, E., Connors, M. C., Romero-Jurado, R., & Weiner, J. (2018). Effective kindergarten readiness assessments: Influencing policy, informing instruction, and creating joyful classrooms. *YC Young Children*, 73(1), 36–43.
- Repko-Erwin, M. E. (2017). Was kindergarten left behind? Examining US kindergarten as the new first grade in the wake of “No Child Left Behind.” *Global Education Review*, 4(2), 58–74.
- Resetar, J. L., Noel, G. H., & Pellegrin, A. L. (2006). Teaching parents to use research-supported systematic strategies to tutor their children in reading. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 21(3), 241-261.
- Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. (2000). Teachers' judgments of problems in the transition to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15, 147-166.
- Roberts, C. M. (1986). Whatever happened to kindergarten? *Educational Leadership*, 44, 34.
- Robins, S., Treiman, R., Rosales, N., & Otake, S. (2012). Parent-child conversations about letters and pictures. *Reading and Writing*, 25(8), 2039–2059.
- Ruddell, R. B., Unrau, N. J., & McCormick, S. (2013). In D. E. Alvermann, N. J. Unrau, M. Sailors, & R. B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of literacy* (6th ed., pp. 233-251). International Reading Association.

- Ruotsalainen, J., Soodla, P., Räikkönen, E., Poikkeus, A. M., Kikas, E., & Lerkkanen, M. K. (2022). Literacy instruction activities and their associations with first graders' reading performance in two transparent orthographies. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative & International Education*, 52(1), 92–109.
- Russell, J. L. (2011). From child's garden to academic press: The role of shifting institutional logics in redefining kindergarten education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48, 236-267.
- Sahin, I. T., Sak, R., & Tuncer, N. (2013). Comparison of preschool and first grade teachers' views about school readiness. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 13(3), 1708–1713.
- Saldana, J. (2008) An introduction to codes and coding. In *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. SAGE.
- Santi, K. L., Foorman, B. R., York, M., & Francis, D. J. (2009). The timing of early reading assessment in kindergarten. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 32(4), 217-227.
- Saracho, O. (1990). Teaching young children: the teacher's function in the early childhood curriculum. *Early Child Development and Care*, 61, 57–63.
- Scanlon, D. M. & Vellutino, F. R. (1996). Prerequisite skills, early instruction, and success in first-grade reading: Selected results from a longitudinal study. *Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Research Review*, 2, 54–63.

- Schachter, R. E., Strang, T. M., & Piasta, S. B. (2019). Teachers' experiences with a state-mandated kindergarten readiness assessment. *Early Years: Journal of International Research & Development*, 39(1), 80–96.
- Schunk, D. H. (2000). *Learning theories an educational perspective* (3rd ed.). Prentice-Hall.
- Sedita, J. (2001). What every educator and parent should know about reading instruction. *The Journal*, 11(4), 1-7.
- Senechal, M. (2006). Testing the home literacy model. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 10(1), 59-87.
- Senechal, M., & LeFevre, J. (2002). Parental involvement in the development of children's reading skill: A five-year longitudinal study. *Child Development*, 73(2), 445-460.
- Shepard, L. A. (1994). The challenges of assessing young children appropriately. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(3), 206–212.
- Shepard, L. A., & Smith, M. L. (1985). *Boulder Valley kindergarten study: Retention practices and retention effects*. Boulder Valley Public Schools.
- Shepard, L. A., & Smith, M. L. (1988). Escalating academic demand in kindergarten: counterproductive policies. *Elementary School Journal*, 89(2), 135–145.
- Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Simner, M. L., & Barnes, M. J. (1991). Relationship between first-grade marks and the high school dropout problem. *Journal of School Psychology*, 29, 331-335.

- Smith, M. L., & Shepard, L. A. (1988). Kindergarten readiness and retention: A qualitative study of teachers' beliefs and practices. *American Educational Research Journal* 25, 303-333.
- Snow, C. E., Burns, S. M., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. National Academy Press.
- Soland, J., McGinty, A., Gray, A., Solari, E. J., Herring, W., & Xu, R. (2022). Early literacy, equity, and test score comparability during the pandemic. *Educational Assessment*, 27(2), 98–114.
- Solari, E. (2014). Longitudinal prediction of first and second grade English oral reading fluency in ELL. *Journal of Adolescence*, 74(4), 274–283.
- Sonnenschein, S., & Munsterman, K. (2002). The influence of home-based reading interactions on 5-year-olds' reading motivations and early literacy development. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 17(3), 318-337.
- Stassen, M. L., Doherty, K., & Poe, M. (2001). *Course-based review and assessment. Methods for understanding student learning*. Office of academic planning and assessment. University of Massachusetts Amherst.
- Stewart, D. W., Shamdasani, P.N., & Rook, D.W. (2007). *Focus groups: Theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Stipek, D. (2006). Relationships matter. *Educational Leadership*, 64(1), 46-49.
- Stipek, D. J., & Byler, P. (1997). Early childhood education teachers: Do they practice what they preach? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12(3), 305–325.

- Stipek, D., Daniels, D., Galluzzo, D., & Milbum, S. (1992). Characterizing early childhood education programs for poor and middle-class children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 7, 1-19.
- Stipek, D. J., & Ryan, R. H. (1997). Economically disadvantaged preschoolers ready to learn but further to go. *Developmental Psychology*, 33, 711-723.
- Stormont, M., Herman, K. E., & Reinke, W. M. (2011). *The kindergarten academic and behavior readiness screener*. Columbia: University of Missouri.
- Stormont, M., Herman, K. E., Reinke, W. M., King, K., & Owens, S. (2015). The kindergarten academic and behavior readiness screener: The utility of single item teacher ratings of kindergarten readiness. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 30, 212–228.
- Stormont, M., Cohen, D. R., Herman, K. C., & Reinke, W. M. (2019). Teacher-rated school readiness items in a kindergarten sample: Outcomes in first grade. *School Psychology*, 34(6), 612–621.
- Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. SAGE Publications.
- Sverdlov, A., & Aram, D. (2016). What are the goals of kindergarten? Teachers' beliefs and their perceptions of the beliefs of parents and of agents of the education system. *Early Education and Development*, 27(3), 352–371.
- Tilley, S. A. (2003). Challenging research practices: Turning a critical lens on the work of transcription. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(5), 750–773.

- Torgesen, J. (2009). *Preventing early reading failure and its devastating downward spiral* (p. 15). National Center for Learning Disabilities.
- Treiman, R., Schmidt, J., Decker, K., & Robins, S. (2015). Parents' talk about letters with their young children. *Child Development, 86*(5), 1406–1418.
- University of Virginia. (2023). *Virginia Literacy Partnerships*. University of Virginia.
- Unrau, N. J. & Alvermann, D. E. (2019). Literacies and their investigation through theories and models. In Alvermann, D. E., Unrau, N. J., Sailors, M., & Ruddell, R. B. (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of literacy* (7th ed., pp. 47-90). Routledge.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99, Fall 1998.
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experiences: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Vartuli, S. (1999). How early childhood teacher beliefs vary across grade level. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 14*(4), 489–514.
- Vellutino, E., & Scanlon, D. (2001). Emergent literacy skills, early instruction, and individual differences as determinants of difficulties in learning to read: The case for early intervention. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of Early Literacy Research* (pp. 295- 321).
- Virginia Department of Education. (2022). An Agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Retrieved on September 10, 2023, from <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/about-vdoe/search?q=PALS>.

- von Hippel P., & Hamrock, C. (2019). Do test score gaps grow before, during, or between the school years? Measurement artifacts and what we can know in spite of them. *Sociological Science*, 6, 43–80.
- Vong, K. (2012). Play - a multi-modal manifestation in kindergarten education in China. *Early Years*, 32(1), 35-48.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wallerstedt, C., & Pramling, N. (2012). Learning to play in a goal-directed practice. *Early Years*, 32(1), 5-15.
- Walsh, K., Glaser, D., & Wilcox, D. (2006). What education schools are not teaching about reading, and what elementary teachers are not learning. *National Council on Teacher Quality*.
- Weigel, D. J., Martin, S. S., & Lowman, J. L. (2017). Assessing the early literacy skills of toddlers: The development of four foundational measures. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(3–4), 744–755.
- White, K. M. (2013). Associations between teacher-child relationships and children's writing in kindergarten and first grade. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 28(1), 166–176.
- Whitehurst, G. J., & Lonigan, C. J. (1998). Child development and emergent literacy. *Child Development*, 69, 848–872.
- Wigfield, A., & Asher, S. (1984). *Handbook of reading research*. Routledge.

- Williford, A., Downer, J., Miller-Bains, K., Conway, J., & Howard, L. (2021).
Developing decision-making tools through partnerships. *Future of Children, 31*(1), 39–56.
- Winn, M. (1983). *Children without childhood*. Pantheon.
- Wolcott, H. F. (1990). On seeking-and rejecting-validity in qualitative research. In E. W. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 121-152). Teachers College Press.
- Wu, S. (2014). Practical and conceptual aspects of children's play in Hong Kong and German kindergartens. *Early Years, 34*(1), 49-66.
- Wu, S., & Rao, N. (2011). Chinese and German teachers' conceptions of play and learning and children's play behavior. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 19*(4), 469-481.
- Xue, Y., & Meisels, S. J. (2004). Early literacy instruction and learning to read in kindergarten. *American Educational Research Journal, 41*, 191-229.
- Yuksel-Arslan, P., Yildirim, S., & Robin, B. R. (2016). A phenomenological study: Teachers' experiences of using digital storytelling in early childhood education. *Educational Studies, 42*(5), 427–445.
- Zill, N., Collins, M., West, J., and Germino-Hausken, E. (1995). *Approaching kindergarten: A look at preschoolers in the United States*. NCES 95–280. National Center for Education Statistics.
- Zygouris, V. (2001). *Emergent literacy*. University of Central Florida.

Vita

Name	<i>Claudia T. Watts</i>
Baccalaureate Degree	<i>Bachelor of Science, Grand Canyon University, Phoenix, Major: English</i>
Date Graduated	<i>May 2016</i>
Other Degrees and Certificates	<i>Master of Arts, Grand Canyon University, Phoenix, Major: Reading</i>
Date Graduated	<i>May 2018</i>