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Teacher Perceptions of Head Start Preschool Programs in an Urban Public School

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Chicago State University, 2003

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Doctoral Research Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

An initiative to coordinate early learning programs across a major city in the Midwestern United States was undertaken in 2013. The opinions of teachers regarding effects on instruction and children were not included in the development and implementation of the program. This omission is important because multiple scholars have pointed to the benefits and need of including stakeholders' perspectives in program development. The purpose of this study was to explore preschool teachers' experiences and perspectives of this initiative using a qualitative bounded instrumental case study design. Fullan's theory of educational change served as the framework of this study. Nine preschool teachers, who worked full-time in the Head Start-RTL initiative, volunteered to participate in individual semistructured interviews. Data were analyzed using open coding and thematic analysis. The findings revealed 3 themes: programs and services, initiative administration and processes, and initiative resources. Within each theme, participants identified benefits, challenges, and ideas for improvement, including increased administrative and financial support, streamlined processes, and freedom to individualize curriculum to meet the needs of a diverse student body. It is recommended that teachers' perspectives and their experiences with this initiative be used in planning and implementing changes needed to improve the current program. These endeavors by school district personnel may contribute to positive social change by reducing duplicated administration demands on preschool teachers, who, in turn, could devote more time to instruction and interaction with young children, resulting in improved quality of preschool services and positive outcomes for preschool children and their families.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to all the young scholars that we serve with the hope of participating in the creation of a more child-centered, responsive, practice. It is also dedicated to the driving force in my life which is my family: my best half, Cristina; our princesses: Montserrat, Layeni and Hani; our boys Eros and Emanuel; my dad (who always had faith on me) my brother and sisters. Thanks for all your LOVE, support, and comprehension.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perspectives of this initiative with regard to its impact on their daily practice affected by their inclusion and experiences as Head Start preschool teachers in public schools of a large urban school district. In August of 2013, the school district and the local Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) launched the *[Redacted]: Ready to Learn (RTL)* initiative. The objectives of the initiative were to coordinate early learning programs across the city, increase access to preschool education, and improve the quality of early childhood programs by implementing modified preschool programs in various settings including public schools ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2014). All schools and community-based organizations in the city were invited to apply to a recompetition for early education funds. As a result of this new process various types of preschool programs such as Preschool for All (PFA), Head Start, Child-Parent Centers (CPC), and Tuition-Based (TB) programs were implemented or expanded in the city's public schools ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2012).

Since 2013, the school district, the local Office of Early Childhood Education (OECE), the State's Board of Education (SBE), the local Head Start office, and the city's DFSS have overseen cooperatively administering the initiative. City officials have reported positive effects of the initiative such as a coordinated application and review process, improved distribution of funds, and an increase in the quantity and quality of the programs (City of [Redacted] website, 2015). In April 2016, the district's chief officer sent a missive to the teachers stating, "As the eyes and ears in our classrooms, you are the

best resource we have to improve education for our children" ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2016). However, teachers in the RTL-Head Start initiative were never asked to contribute their insights to the evaluation of the system. This oversight is consistent with previous findings on similar programs (Barnett, 2013; Brown & Gasko, 2012; Lee, Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2014; Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Arteaga, & White, 2011a; Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, & Waldfogel, 2011; Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, & Waldfogel, 2014). However, multiple scholars and researchers have pointed to the positive benefits and the need to include teachers' perspectives in program evaluation and system building (Avargil, Herscovitz, & Dori 2012; Brooks & Gibson 2012; Davis, Eickelmann, & Zaka 2013; Fullan 2014; Kimonen & Nevalainen 2014; Moolenaar 2012). Teachers' experiences and perspectives with this initiative could be used to assist planning, implementing change, improving the status quo, or guiding future research.

Background

The background of the RTL initiative can be traced back as far as the late 1960s and the early 1970s. This was a time when well-known programs like the High/Scope Perry Preschool in 1962 (Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, & Belfield, 2011), the Chicago Child Parent Centers in 1967 (Greenberg, 2013; Promising Practice Network (PPN), 2014), and the Carolina Abecedarian Project in 1972 (Barnet, 2011a) revealed that quality programs for preschoolers can make a significant difference in learning and development. Several studies (Barnet, 2011b; Greenberg, 2013; PPN, 2014; Schweinhart et al., 2011) elaborated extensively on the positive effects of these programs, setting the foundation for an expansion of these programs.

The RTL initiative grew out of other initiatives after 2000. In 2001, the Kellogg Foundation launched the SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids) initiative (SPARK, 2015). The foundation used the terms *Ready Kids* and *Ready Schools* as slogans for its initiative and, similarly to the RTL initiative, the foundation's objective was to "help children transition to school ready to learn and to help schools get ready for children" (SPARK, 2015. p.1). From the early 2000s, there has been a substantial expansion in early childhood education programs (Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). In 2001, Texas implemented a state-wide initiative, the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM), designed to provide preschool children with purposeful and playful cognitive instruction (Landry, Swank, Smith, Assel, & Gunnewig, 2006). The current Texas School Ready! (TSR) initiative began in 2003 as the Texas Early Education Model (TSR, 2015). Brown and Gasko (2012) wrote a comprehensive case study about the TEEM reform project. In their study, these authors reported that the state's legislature created TEEM with the objective of making partnerships with their community-based care providers (Brown & Gasko, 2012). In 2003, other states, such as Oregon, launched their own Ready for School initiatives (Allen & Smith, 2009).

The number of state-funded preschool programs has grown in recent years, their number doubling from 2002 to 2012 (Hill, Gormley, & Adelstein, 2015). As part of this expansion, other effective large-scale, state-funded programs such as the Tulsa public schools and Boston public schools emerged (Brooks-Gunn, Burchinal, Espinosa, Gormley, & Ludwig, 2013; Phillips, Gormley, & Lowenstein, 2009; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). Coincidentally, Allen and Smith (2009) reported that in 2004 the

Head Start program reached an agreement with the state of Oregon to implement blended-funding programs in Oregon's schools. These authors went further to claim that Oregon provides a collaborative model, state prekindergarten and federal Head Start programs, for developing a universal prekindergarten system in each state.

The above described model of blended-funding programs seems to be similar to, and may be a precursor of, the blended-funding Head Start-RTL program which is the subject of this research study. The Head Start program appears to be evolving into a blended-funding program across the nation. Duncan and Magnuson (2013) reported that in 2005, most Head Start programs were based in community centers. According to these authors, in 2010 $7.2 billion dollars from the Head Start fund was redistributed to private and public nonprofit grantees, which may indicate a change in Head Start's provision of services.

The above-mentioned initiatives and programs were precursors of a much larger reform in the provision of early childhood educational services. In February 2009, the President of the United States, Barack Obama, signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. The authors of the ARRA report stated that this new law set the foundation for educational reform by promoting investments in innovative strategies (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In 2009, ARRA provided $4.35 billion for the Race to The Top (RTT) education reform (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). A crucial component of the RTT program, in relation to ECE initiatives, was the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC). The authors described it as a grant

designed to motivate states to develop statewide systems (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

In 2012, the state in which the RTL initiative was implemented received more than 50 million dollars from RTT-ELC to increase the quantity and quality of ECE programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). As a result of this reform, and through a collaboration with the DFSS, the RTL initiative which is the subject of this study started in 2013 ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2014).

A literature search revealed a gap regarding the inclusion of the experiences of participant teachers in this or similar initiatives. Recent literature confirms a tendency to discount teacher impacts in planning educational change (Barnett, 2013; Brown & Gasko, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2011a). Teachers' experiences with programs undergoing changes like this can provide essential information in an improvement effort to maximize the effectiveness of the initiative and lead to benefits to instruction and interaction for children and their families. I conducted a qualitative research study with participating Head Start-RTL teachers to gain insight into their experiences with the addition of Head Start programs in this public school district and the impact these experiences might have on their daily practice with children.

Problem Statement

In 2013, the city that is the focus of this study began the implementation of the RTL*,* a $36 million dollar venture in ECE programs in the district. Its objective was to increase and advance early learning opportunities citywide by bringing the public school district, OECE and the DFSS together to administer resources through a single system

([Redacted] Public Schools, 2014). The initiative distributed funds through a competitive process designed to target an ample range of entities: profit, non-profit, private, parochial, and charter schools ([Redacted] Public Schools, 2014). As a result of this streamlining process, and in order to continue providing preschool services, local public schools applied for this program as PFA, CPC, TB or Head Start delegates ([Redacted] Public Schools, 2015).

Head Start is a large bureaucratic system that includes subsystems from various diverse areas such as health, nutrition, and social work (Head Start, 2015). The school district is another system that also has a large administrative apparatus ([Redacted] Public Schools: Career Opportunities website, 2015). The district hired all the teachers for the entire school system and these teachers were required to follow all school system directives, procedures, and policies. When the RTL initiative was launched in 2013, scores of these district-hired teachers were assigned to work in the RTL-Head Start preschool classrooms. Head Start pays the school-system-hired RTL teachers' salaries and administers in collaboration with the district the school-based Head Start preschool programs. The RTL teachers also must follow all Head Start directives, procedures, and policies. OECE, DFSS, and the State Board of Education (SBE) are in charge of overseeing and managing the inclusion of Head Start in the school system and also have their own administrative apparatuses and systems. Teachers in the RTL programs must also follow all the directives, procedures, and policies of OECE and DFSS in addition to following school district and Head Start requirements. There was no integration of the three systems for teachers and no handbook of procedures was distributed ahead of the

initiative's implementation. Teachers in the RTL program must complete reports and forms unrelated to their teaching duties for these different entities; for example, daily attendance and meal counts must be recorded on three different forms, one for each entity ([Redacted] Public Schools (2015). Brown and Gasko (2012) reported comparable claims by teachers of doing "twice the work" in a similar preschool reform in Texas (p. 282). This report by Brown and Gasko in 2012 provides precedent information about a similar initiative in another state.

These clerical requirements may have had an impact on the lived experience of teachers in the RTL initiative that might manifest in multiple ways, such as impinging on time needed for instructional planning that affects outcomes for children and families. Kagan and Kauerz (2012) explained that system-building efforts should be accountable for demonstrating child and family impacts and that evaluation of those impacts is fundamental in system building. However, teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the initiative have not been included in evaluations of the combined systems. In fact, the literature review did not reveal any documents naming an entity charged with evaluating the effects of the inclusion of these programs in the public school system. The effects of the initiative on RTL teachers and, subsequently, on children and families, have been overlooked.

Various researchers have pointed to the benefits and the necessity to include teachers' perspectives in program evaluation and systemic enhancement (Avargil, Herscovitz, & Dori 2012; Brooks & Gibson 2012; Davis, Eickelmann, & Zaka 2013; Fullan 2011b; Kimonen & Nevalainen 2014; and Moolenaar 2012). Furthermore, some

researchers (Ho, 2010; Honingh & Hooge, 2014; Lai & Cheung, 2014; Webb, 2005) pointed to the absence of teachers' perspectives in educational and administrative processes. Even Head Start mandated data collection and analysis of the programs' efficiency to improve program quality (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).

However, even system-wide administrative adjustments such as these may do little to change the multiple requirements made of Head Start-RTL teachers without an understanding of the reform's impact in the classrooms. The teachers' experiences and perspectives on this initiative may provide vital data that could be used to assist planning, implementing change, improving the status quo, or guiding future research. Additionally, the inclusion of teacher input could contribute to positive teacher motivation and may result in a significant growth of instructional and interaction time with children and their families.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perspectives of the RTL initiative regarding its impact on their daily practice affected by the inclusion and expansion of Head Start preschool programs in the public schools of a large urban school district. The study was based on the experiences and perspectives of Head Start-RTL teachers who are part of a public school system-Head Start collaboration. This study could be vital in understanding program effectiveness and in planning future improvements. It also has the potential to significantly increase the quality of instruction and interaction with preschool children and their families.

Research Question

Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) reported that when teachers are drivers of system change, achievement gains can be made. Furthermore, Fullan and Langworthy (2013) suggested that determining participants' positive and negative perceptions, and requesting their suggestions, are essential steps in system building and developing any new initiative (p. 9). Therefore, based on the work of Michael Fullan and the need to solicit participant opinions in evaluating educational change, one research question formed the basis for this study. The research question was *What are teachers' perspectives of the RTL initiative?*

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is Fullan's (2011) theory of educational change. He proposed a comprehensive action plan for achieving system reform that includes guidelines on systemic change for educators and leaders (Fullan, 2011a). Among his major theoretical propositions in relation to this study, Fullan proposed that system change must include the participation of all members. In the case of education reform, he emphasized that system change must include the active participation of teachers in the reform. He further stated that, "the key to system-wide success is to situate educators and students as the central driving force" (Fullan, 2013. p. 7). Another fundamental notion in Fullan's theory of change related to this study is motivation. Fullan (2006) stated that "if one's theory of change does not motivate people to put the effort – individually and collectively – improvement is not possible" (p. 8). As Fullan suggested, teachers can be motivated and empowered by including their experiences and perspectives in the process of change. Fullan and Langworthy (2013) affirmed that determining participants' positive

and negative perceptions, and requesting their suggestions, are essential steps in system building. The authors recommend examining the learning conditions and the impact of those conditions related to the change process. They affirmed that this information will provide evidence based data to inform system-level policies (Fullan & Langworthy, 2013). These concepts are directly related to this study and its research question. These and other basic tenets of Fullan's theory of change will be further analyzed and explained in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

In 2013, a large public school district in the Midwestern United States launched an initiative to coordinate early learning programs across the city. Although city officials reported positive effects of the initiative, the opinions of teachers with regard to effects on instruction and children were not included in the evaluation of this program. However, various scholars and researchers have pointed to the positive benefits and the need to include teachers' perspectives in program evaluation and system building. Teachers' perspectives with this initiative could be used to assist planning, implementing change, improving the status quo, or guiding future research. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perspectives of the RTL initiative regarding its impact on their daily practice affected by the inclusion of Head Start preschool programs in the public schools of a large urban school district.

To answer the research question posed above, I used a qualitative case study approach. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described case study as the study of a bounded system such as a person or a program. Similarly, Creswell (2012) described a case study

as comprehensive explication of a bounded system based on rich, thick data. Furthermore, this study represents an instrumental case study in that its purpose is the exploration of a well-defined issue. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explained that in these types of studies interviews are used to gather data in the subjects' own words to develop insights on how subjects perceive a situation. Kolb (2012) also proposed that the process of interviewing allows the researcher the opportunity to gain the perspectives of others.

Data collection was completed through individual interviews with nine preschool teachers who had worked in the preschool program since before the implementation of the Head Start-RTL initiative in 2013. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and open and thematic coding. The methodology of the study is fully described in Chapter 3.

Operational Definitions

Head Start: Head Start is a federal program that aims to increase school readiness in preschool children from disadvantaged families through a program offered by local community agencies (Head Start, 2015). The program supports comprehensive development of children ages birth to 5, in child care centers and in their homes (Head Start, 2015). Head Start services are designed to positively affect early learning, child health, and the well-being of the family (Head Start, 2015).

Preschool for All: A state-funded preschool program provided in the state in which the RTL program is implemented([Redacted] State Board of Education, 2011). The Preschool for All programs in this state are charged with providing education of the highest quality possible for children who may be at-risk of academic struggle ([Redacted] State Board of Education, 2011).

Preschool for All (PFA) Initiative: PFA is an initiative created by President Obama as a federal-state partnership aimed at providing high-quality preschool for 4-year-old children of low- and moderate-income households (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). According to a report by the U.S. Department of Education (2015), the mandatory PFA initiative is intended to invest $75 billion over the next 10 years through expansion of funded preschool access to include children of middle-class families and establishment of full-day kindergarten where only half-day programs exist.

School-based programs: Head Start programs traditionally have been located in existing preschool centers, schools, or family child care homes (Head Start, 2016). Those based in schools are called school-based programs (Head Start, 2016).

Assumptions

I assumed that teachers I interviewed answered honestly and that their answers on the day of the interview represented their true opinions. I assumed that the experiences provided by the teachers I interviewed are representative of the experiences of teachers in general across the system, so that the findings of this study can be useful in understanding the impact of the initiative system-wide.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study is the perspectives of RTL preschool teachers working in one city's school system-Head Start collaborative initiative, including the advantages and disadvantages they experienced and their suggestions for the initiative's future direction. This focus was chosen because teachers' perspectives have not been solicited by the school district and these perspectives might provide important insights. Fullan's (2006)

work in educational change forms the conceptual framework for the study and supports the input of stakeholders, such as teachers, in decision making and evaluation of new initiatives.

The study was delimited to preschool teachers working in the Head Start-RTL initiative in the district. Nine Head Start preschool teachers who volunteered to participate in the study and who had worked in this role in the district were included. All the other teachers working in the district were excluded from the study. Although my intention in this study was to develop a detailed understanding of teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding a school district collaboration with Head Start, the transferability of the findings may be limited due to the small number of participants and to the specific context of the region and school district.

Limitations

A limitation of the study is its small sample size. This may limit the transferability of the findings. In addition, the focus of this study on a single school system may also limit transferability. An instrumental case study such as this has the potential to deliver rich detail and nuanced insights that might be lacking in a quantitative survey of a larger population, however, as noted previously, this case study depends on the veracity of participants, on their ability to reflect and comment on their practice, and on their fitness as representatives of RTL teachers as a whole. A further limitation is that, as a teacher in the Head Start-RTL program, I have formed my own ideas about the impact of the initiative in my teaching practice. Reasonable measures to address these limitations included invitations to the participants to review and preliminary findings to avoid bias,

misrepresentations, or omissions. In validating the accuracy of the findings in qualitative research, Creswell (2012) asserted that researchers check their findings with participant members to enhance accuracy of the study. Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) reported that a common strategy for internal validity or credibility is respondent validation in which the researcher solicits feedback from the participants. None of the participants in this study requested any changes to a draft review of the findings. Other measures to address the limitations listed above included reflexivity which involved reviewing the interview transcripts and checking for any biased interactions (biased segments were excluded from data analysis); and controlling for bias and potential problems due to previous or actual relationships with teachers by excluding teachers with whom I talked about this research project.

Significance

The significance of this study is that the experiences and perspectives with this initiative that teachers provided may present vital data and information for this and future program enhancement efforts that may help to maximize the quantity and quality of instruction for children and interaction with the families. The initiative is expanding rapidly in the district and, in 2017, there were 368 public schools offering RTL school-based programs ([Redacted] Public Schools, 2015). Out of these 368 schools there are 120 schools offering Head Start school-based preschool programs ([Redacted] Early Learning website, 2016). This study may provide vital information about the impact and effectiveness, as well as suggestions for improvement, of the new initiative.

Systemic discrepancies can consume valuable resources that may be used to improve planning, instruction and interaction with students and families. As Kagan and Kauerz (2012) explained it, school districts run the risk of investing limited resources but having little effectiveness because inclusion-specific constrains and demands divert essential teaching and interaction time away from children, and may lead to teacher frustration.

Barnet (2011a) demonstrated through a comprehensive review of the literature that preschool education can produce school success and greatly improve behavior. This study's experiential data from teachers may contribute to positive teacher motivation and may result in a significant growth of instructional and interaction time with children and their families.

Summary

A school district in a major city in the Midwestern United States and the local Department of Family and Support Services launched the *[Redacted]: Ready to Learn Initiative*. The objectives of this initiative were to coordinate early learning programs across the city, expand access to pre-K education, and improve the quality of early childhood programs by implementing modified preschool programs in various sites including public schools ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2014). Although city officials reported positive effects of the initiative, the teachers' experiences were not included in the evaluative process of the RTL initiative. However, various researchers have pointed to the benefits and the need to include teachers' perspectives in program evaluation and system building. Recent literature confirms a tendency to discount teacher

impacts in planning educational change. The teachers' experiences can provide vital information about the initiative by looking at issues that contribute to teacher effectiveness. Accordingly, I conducted a qualitative case study research with participating Head Start-RTL teachers in the district to obtain data about their experiences with and perspectives of the initiative.

In the next chapters I will further elaborate on this study. Chapter 2 includes my literature research strategies, a review of the conceptual foundation proposed for this study, and the literature review. In Chapter 3 I describe my research design, including my role, the methodology, the data collection procedure, the data analysis plan, and the rationale for using this design. Chapter 4 includes a detailed description of the study, including the setting, demographics, data collection and analysis and the results. Chapter 5 concludes with an interpretation of the findings, a description of the limitations, implications, recommendations, and a conclusion of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review focuses on the origins, implementation, development and present status of the large-scale inclusion of Head Start preschool programs in an urban public school district. In 2013, a school district in a major city in the Midwestern United States and the local office of DFSS launched the RTL initiative. The objectives of the initiative were to coordinate early learning programs across the city, expand access to pre-K education, and improve the quality of ECE programs by implementing modified preschool programs in various sites including public schools. District's officials reported that there have been positive effects of the initiative comparable to the benefits reported by scholars on similar programs. However, teachers in the initiative have reported an excessive number of redundant clerical tasks that take time away from planning, instruction, and interaction with children and families. Addressing these systemic discrepancies may save the school system significant resources that may be used to improve the delivery of services for children and families.

The next sections of this chapter describe the literature search strategy, the conceptual framework, and the literature itself. The literature review revealed various subtopics related to the RTL initiative that will be presented in a developmental, evolving manner in the following paragraphs, after the conceptual framework. These evolving subtopics are (a) predecessors of the RTL initiative; (b) evidence of effectiveness of ECE programs motivating expansion; (c) legislations, policies, and funding related to the RTL initiative; (d) creation and implementation of RTL and similar programs; (e) reports of the RTL initiative by local sources; (f) analysis of the Head Start program in relation to

the initiative; and (g) teacher participation in system change and literature related to the research design.

Literature Search Strategy

I used Walden's library database as my initial search strategy and mode. Later, using ERIC, EBSCOhost, and GOOGLE Scholar search services, I reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and government reports. Google Scholar gave me access to multiple databases including the Walden library and became the main search engine in this search. As part of the strategy I divided the search into various key components related to the topic: The Ready to Learn initiative; Head Start; early childhood education; Race to the Top; teachers in system evaluation; and Fullan's theory of change. These components and their search terms will be described in the next paragraph.

The RTL search terms included *Ready to Learn, Ready to Learn initiative, Ready to Learn program, and Ready to Learn news*. The Head Start search terms included *Head Start, Head Start* and *Ready to Learn, Head Start* and *public schools, Head Start in public schools, Head Start preschool* and *public schools, Head Start preschool initiatives, Head Start effectiveness,* and *Head Start initiatives.* The early childhood education search terms included *early childhood education origins, early childhood education history, early childhood education effectiveness, early childhood education reform,* and *early childhood education initiatives.* The Race to the Top search terms included *Race to the Top, Race to the Top definition, Race to the Top initiative,* and *Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge.* The teachers in system evaluation search terms included *role of teachers in system evaluation, role of teachers in program evaluation, participatory*

evaluation in education, qualitative research teachers' inclusion system evaluation, and *qualitative literature related to teacher participation on school reform.* The Fullan search terms included *Michael Fullan, Michael Fullan theory of change, Michael Fullan change theory, Michael Fullan* and *teachers, Michael Fullan* and *teachers' inclusion,* and *Michael Fullan* and *teachers' participation.*

Another essential part of the research strategy was the analysis and further search of the cited references of seminal works on the topic. Allen and Smith (2014), Barnett (2011b, 2013), Brooks-Gunn et al. (2013), and Honingh and Hooge (2014) are some of the researchers who included extensive references in their works and that I used to expand my research. The work, in relation to my study, of these and other researchers will be analyzed and presented in the literature review section.

Conceptual Framework

Fullan's (2006) theory of educational change forms the conceptual framework for this study. For over 30 years, Fullan has concentrated his work on educational reform and in proposing a theory of change. He affirmed that "only in the hands, minds, and hearts of people who have a deep knowledge of the dynamics of how the factors in question operate we can get particular results" (Fullan, 2006, p. 27). Fullan further claimed that this theory of change can be vital in informing educational reform strategies and in obtaining positive results.

Through his extensive work on system change, Fullan (2006) laid out a comprehensive action plan for achieving system reform. His work on educational change and reform included action guidelines on systemic change for teachers, schools, districts,

state and federal leaders as well (Fullan, 2006). Fullan emphasized that effectiveness of the school communities depends radically on whether they involve their teachers or not to make advances in learning or whether these communities emphasize methods that do not attain results. He wrote that efforts to find solutions to current problems must include those people who are most closely involved in the problem and whose efforts will be needed to affect the solution (Fullan 2014). It is this focus on active involvement of all the participants taking part in the change process that motivated me to take his theory of change as a framework for my proposed research.

Other researchers echoed Fullan's (2006) ideas for systemic change. For instance, Moolenaar explained that educational change is a difficult task especially in top-down efforts. He further affirmed that "our understanding of policy implementation may be enhanced by examining efforts at implementation from the inside out" (Moolenaar, 2012. p. 25). In their compendium of studies analyzing the role of teachers in the process of educational change, Kimonen and Nevalainen (2014) expanded on Fullan's ideas by declaring that teachers are generally acknowledged to be essential for effective change in schools. Brooks and Gibson (2012) asserted that the system must permit educators to share their work and reflections. Avargil, Herscovitz, and Dori (2012) concluded that teachers play a key role in any educational reform. Davis, Eickelmann, and Zaka (2013), in a study about adoption of digital learning into traditional pedagogies, explained that "in a global educational biosphere a teacher is placed at the center because the teacher is the keystone species in education, where the species is defined as the entity with the most influence on the ecosystem" (p. 440). In the same study, these authors further

acknowledged professional capital of teachers as the central condition for successful systemic change. Kwok (2014) added that teachers, as the agents of reform, may play a crucial role in the implementation process. Multiple researchers on educational reform have pointed to the benefits of including teachers' participation on systemic change.

Another fundamental notion in Fullan's theory of system change is motivation. Fullan (2006) stated that if a theory of systemic change does not motivate individuals to participate improvement is not probable. Vähäsantanen (2015) suggested that teachers should transform along with systemic changes or they will be likely to suffer in their motivation and well-being. Ketelhut and Schifter (2011) declared that "if a teacher does not see the need for the innovation or change because it is unclear, too complex or seems impractical for classroom use, the teacher will not embrace the innovation or change" (p. 540). Including the teachers in the process has the potential to motivate them to become active and positive participants in systemic change and program improvement. Teachers in this initiative that is the focus of this study can be motivated by including their experiences and perspectives in the process of change.

The research question is in direct relation with Fullan's theory of educational change by emphasizing the need to solicit teachers' experiences and perspectives as fundamental parts of systemic change. Topics presented in this chapter include the predecessors of the Head Start-RTL initiative; evidence of effectiveness of the ECE programs that motivated the expansion of the initiative; legislation, policies and funding related to the initiative; creation and implementation of RTL and similar programs; local

reports concerning the initiative; and analysis of the Head Start program in relation to the initiative.

Six key concepts arising from the purpose of this study were pursued in the current literature. These concepts include (a) predecessors of the RTL initiative; (b) evidence of effectiveness of ECE programs motivating expansion, (c) legislation, policies, and funding related to the RTL initiative; (d) creation and implementation of RTL and similar programs; (e) reports of the initiative by local sources; and (f) analysis of the Head Start program in relation to the initiative. Each of these concepts is explored in the following review.

Predecessors of the RTL Initiative

The origin of the RTL initiative, like many other early childhood education initiatives, can be traced back as far as the late 1960s and the early 1970s. This was a time when well-known programs such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool in 1962 (Schweinhart et al., 2011), the Chicago Child Parent Centers in 1967 (Greenberg, 2013; PPN, 2014), and the Carolina Abecedarian Project in 1972 (Barnet, 2011) demonstrated that quality preschool programs were effective in improving early learning and development. Various authors (Barnet, 2011; Greenberg, 2013; PPN, 2014; Schweinhart et al., 2011) concluded that, based on the positive results of these studies, quality preschool programs can have a significant impact in early childhood education and child development. Weiland and Yoshikawa (2013) in their comprehensive review of the impact of prekindergarten programs reported that "several studies showed that intensive, high quality, preschool interventions can be highly cost effective and have positive

impacts even into adulthood" (p. 2112). Many other authors have reached similar conclusions about the impact of quality early interventions (Barnett, 2013; Lee et al., 2014; Reynolds, Temple, White, Ou, & Robertson, 2011b; Zhai et al., 2011; and Zhai, Raver, & Jones, 2012). The success of these early experiments inspired an expansion of early learning initiatives and programs. Schweinhart et al. (2011) reported that findings from their study encouraged policymakers to invest more in preschool programs. Add summary to fully conclude the paragraph and connect back to your study.

Although these early efforts motivated an expansion of investments in ECE programs and initiatives during the 1980s and 1990s, evidence suggests that the precursors of the RTL initiative began flourishing at the beginning of the new millennium (SPARK, 2015). The RTL initiative seems to have grown out of initiatives with similar objectives created after 2000. Preceding the RTL initiative, in 2001 the Kellogg Foundation launched the Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids initiative (SPARK, 2015). The initiative's authors used the terms Ready Kids and Ready Schools as slogans for their initiative similarly to the Ready to Learn initiative. Allen and Smith (2009) reported that "in 2003, a group of Oregon business and community leaders launched the Ready for School public awareness campaign to ensure that all children will eventually have access to high-quality preschool" (p. 3). The authors commented that "while this campaign espoused the idea that investing in high-quality preschool was the moral thing to do, it also championed the notion that investing in high-quality preschool is cost-effective and can yield multiple benefits" (Allen & Smith, 2009, p. 3). Moreover, the current TSR initiative began in 2003 with the name TEEM and posteriorly changed

its name (TSR, 2015). Brown and Gasko (2012) wrote a comprehensive case study about this project which was also known as the TEEM reform project. These authors reported "the state's legislature created TEEM a research based, field-tested pre-K collaboration program aimed to reduce spending on pre-K by encouraging school-based pre-K programs and to seek out partnerships with their community-based care providers" (Brown & Gasko, 2012, p. 269). These objectives are similar to the objectives delineated above for the RTL initiative which pursue to coordinate early learning programs across the city, increase access to pre-K education, and improve the quality of early childhood programs ([Redacted] Public Schools, 2012).

In 2008, other states such as Oregon and Ohio also launched their own Ready for School initiatives (Allen & Smith, 2009). As preschool programs continued to expand terms like ready for school, school ready, and ready to learn became popular. Several of the programs presented above used these terms to refer to their programs and became alternative expressions of preschool reform and expansion of the early education programs in various states. The success and effectiveness of various seminal ECE programs in improving early learning and development motivated the expansion of these programs across the nation. The following section describes research related to these effective programs and initiatives motivating expansion.

Evidence of Effectiveness of ECE Programs Motivating Expansion

Brown and Gasko (2012) stated that "across the United States, prekindergarten became one of the fastest growing state-supported education initiatives" (p. 264). These authors declared that the rise of preschool education was connected to policymakers and

advocates presenting it as a program with the potential to prepare students to attain high levels of academic progress. Allen and Smith (2009) suggested that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 influenced policymakers to incentivize the creation and expansion of state-funded prekindergarten programs across the country. According to these authors, this is the time in which many policymakers, practitioners, and researchers began contemplating the creation of universal prekindergarten programs in states across the country (Allen & Smith, 2009). The resulting growth in state-funded pre-K programs represented an effort to find the best way to start young children on a path school success (Phillips et al., 2009). Barnet (2011) reported that early intervention programs were intended to mitigate the effects of poverty and poor educational programs on young children's development and later school success. Such intervention accomplished meaningful, long-term improvements for children so that implementation of high quality early education increased through the developing world (Barnet, 2011b). Such findings helped to motivate the recent expansion of ECE programs in the United States (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). Multiple studies and researchers have documented and provide evidence of the positive effects of early learning programs.

State-funded preschool programs across the United States have grown. According to Hill, Gormley, and Adelstein (2015), enrollment in state-funded pre-K programs doubled from 2002 to 2012, with 40 states serving over 1.3 million children. Bassok, Fitzpatrick and Loeb (2014) reported that "in 2012 over 40 states had state-funded preschool programs and collectively these states spent over $5 billion on preschool programs" (p. 18). As part of this expansion, in the first decade of the new millennium,

other effective large-scale, state-funded programs such as the Tulsa public schools (Hill et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2009) and Boston public schools (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013) emerged and have been successful in their provision of preschool services.

The Tulsa and Boston public schools' preschool programs have been instrumental in the expansion of preschool education and subject of various scholar research studies (Hill et al., 2015; Phillips et al., 2009). Phillips, Gormley and Lowenstein (2009) conducted an observational study of 106 pre-K classrooms in Tulsa's public school system. These authors reported that the pre-K program in Tulsa's Public Schools also received extensive attention from researchers and decision makers because the program generated conclusive positive results for students' attainment (Phillips et al., 2009). The study provided extensive data describing children's preschool experiences, including analysis of the classroom climate and the level of academic instruction, and compared classrooms in Tulsa with a sample of similar pre-K and Head Start classrooms across several states and led by similarly educated teachers. Phillips et al., (2009) concluded that pre-K programs in Tulsa achieved more than similar programs in other states in terms of instructional quality and number of children served. They further added that the most policy-relevant conclusion from this study was its demonstration that a mixed-delivery system for pre-K that brings all programs under the same umbrella of high-quality standards can promote positive experiences for young children across programs (Phillips et al., 2009).

Weiland and Yoshikawa conducted a study in the Boston Public Schools (BPS) during the school year 2008-2009. The focus of the study was "to examine the impact of

the BPS preschool program on children's mathematics, language, literacy, executive functioning, and emotional skills. Distinctive of this preschool program was the implementation of a coaching system and consistent literacy, language and mathematical curricula" (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013, p. 2113). Similar to the public preschool program in Tulsa, the Boston preschool program was open to all applicants, was implemented on public school-based programs, provided relatively high teacher wages, and required stringent requirements for teacher qualifications and class size which applied to all participating programs (Phillips et al., 2009). The authors reported that their findings indicated that "the program had moderate-to-large impacts on children's language, literacy, numeracy and mathematics skills, and small impacts on children's executive functioning and a measure of emotion recognition" (Phillips et al., 2009, p. 2112). The authors also reported that in this study they found a larger impact on cognitive outcomes for Hispanic children from low income Spanish-speaking homes (Phillips et al., 2009). These findings are highly significant for the school district in which the RTL initiative is implemented because 86.02% of its student population are economically disadvantaged students and 45.6% are Hispanic students (CPS Stats and Facts, 2016). Fuller and Kim (2011) reported that at the national level Hispanic children continue to be underrepresented in preschool programs despite early gains in preschool access. Weiland and Yoshikawa (2013) suggested that efforts to increase the number of Hispanic children in BPS prekindergarten programs may require greater attention to program development and understanding of the benefits to the community of increased investment in prekindergarten.

Brook-Gunn et al. (2013) reported that these initiatives achieved positive outcomes in academic readiness of preschool children but more uneven results for children's socio-emotional development. These authors also reported that evidence from Tulsa and Boston prekindergarten programs demonstrated the feasibility of implementing high quality public pre-K programs even in across entire cities with diverse populations, and that doing so can create positive outcomes for children across multiple learning domains (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2013). These two remarkable programs in recent years and the well-known precursor programs described above set the foundations for a large-scale ECE reform.

Legislation, Policies and Funding Related to the RTL Initiative

The above described programs and initiatives were forerunners of a large reform in early childhood education in the United States. On February 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). The authors of the report stated that this new law set the foundation for educational reform by promoting investments in groundbreaking strategies. In 2010, ARRA provided $4.35 billion for the Race to The Top (RTT) education reform (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). A crucial component of the RTT program, in relation to ECE initiatives, was the Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC). The authors described it as a grant designed to motivate states to develop quality early learning statewide (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

As part of the education reform and to assist states in the development and implementation of effective early childhood programs, ARRA provided the funds for the

implementation of State Advisory Councils (SACs) (U.S. Administration for Children and Families, 2013). The SACs' status report of 2013 described the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, authorized the State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care grant. The report clarified that ARRA provided the states with a $100 million grant for three years (2010-2013). The report also explained that states used these funds to evaluate and advice on how to improve their ECE systems (U.S. Administration for Children and Families, 2013). According to this report, the state in which the RTL initiative is located received over 3.5 million dollars for the implementation of a State Advisory Council (U.S. Administration for Children and Families, 2013). In their final report in 2015, the authors reported that the SACs made a significant difference in the ECE systems of the involved states and that millions of children benefited from these councils. Among the benefits resulted from their interventions the authors reported a significant growth in the quantity and quality of the ECE programs and a greater alignment and collaboration among service providers (U.S. Administration for Children and Families, 2015). Nonetheless, the authors of the report also admitted that, although progress was made, there were still gaps in the evaluation of the programs. This last assertion coincides with my observation that there is a research gap in the evaluation of the programs, especially in that the experiences of the participant teachers were not included in the evaluative process of this initiative nor in the RTL initiative. The SACs set the foundations to build early childhood systems in most states but the Early Learning Challenge (ELC) grant provided the funds to start building state-

wide systems. The ELC and other programs that emerged as part of the reform will be described in the following paragraphs.

Creation and Implementation of RTL and Similar Programs

The focus of the RTT-ELC program is to improve learning and development programs for young children (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The program attempts to accomplish this objective by supporting states' efforts to augment the children enrolled in quality ECE programs and to implement an integrated system of EC programs and services (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). According to this report, from 2011 to 2013 more than $1 billion was awarded through this grant for projects in 20 states (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In 2012, the state in which the RTL initiative is implemented received more than 50 million dollars from the RTT-ELC to increase the quantity and quality of ECE programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

At the state level, many events occurred as a result of this nation-wide reform in ECE. The SACs' final report, on the state in which the RTL initiative is implemented, explained that "in 2003 the state's General Assembly established the Early Learning Council (ELC) to guide the development of a statewide early childhood education and care system" (U.S. Administration for Children and Families, 2015, p. 88). This report noted that in 2009 the governor of this state required the ELC to comply with the SACs' requests and created the Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) to provide leadership and guidance to the ELC. The report also noted that in 2012 the ELC accomplished a restructuring process that allowed it to maximize resources across various programs and services (U.S. Administration for Children and Families, 2015). In

conjunction with this expansion of the state's early childhood systems and funding, the state Board of Education (SBE) announced that it conferred $269.7 million in Early Childhood Block grants to fund 936 preschool programs in the year 2012 (State Board of Education, 2011). Griffith (2012) explained that this state provided funds for preschool services through the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG). According to SBE's website, ECBG is intended to support community efforts to provide high-quality education across a range of setting types, including public schools, private providers, and other agencies (State Board of Education, 2015).

The school district that is the focus of this research was awarded $ 100 million from the state's ECBG for preschool programs in 2012 (State Board of Education, 2012). In the same year, 2012, the state increased this pre-K funding to over $ 325 million (Griffith, 2013). In 2012 several EC initiatives were created in the state and the RTL initiative was one of them. With the financial assistance of the federal RTT-ELC grant, the DHHS-Head Start program, and the state's ECBG grant Preschool for All (PFA), and through a collaboration of the public school district with the local Department of Family and Support Services, the RTL initiative that is the subject of this research study was born in 2013 ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2014).

Complex collaborations and partnerships of agencies and funding sources are common in the state considered in this study. Beneke, Ruther and Fowler (2009) stated that "identifying and understanding the many components of early care and education in a state can be like putting together a jigsaw puzzle" (p. 1). These authors described a childhood center in the RTL's state that contained classrooms funded by Head Start, the

state's PFA, and Early Childhood Special Education agency, all located in the same building. Spielberger, Zanoni, and Barisik (2013) reported that in the state in which the RTL initiative is implemented a salient feature of the subsidized SECE system is collaboration among agencies that provide Head Start, PFA, and child care services. These authors further expressed that the state's leadership has regarded collaboration among ECEC programs as a way to give children a more enriched educational experience and that agencies now look to collaboration as the obvious remedy to support the teaming of SECE programs (Spielberger, Zanoni, & Barisik, 2013). This systemic complexity can be also perceived in the RTL initiative and the programs and agencies collaborating on its implementation.

Reports of the Initiative by Local Sources

In August of 2012, the mayor of the city that is the focus of this study announced the creation of the RTL initiative (School Readiness Plan, 2012). According to this report the goals of the Head Start and RTL were aligned to make sure that children and families in need of services have access to these programs (School Readiness Plan, 2012). Another school district's report stated that for several years the city's DFSS and the district's Office of Early Childhood Education worked together to aligned their services including the RTL initiative ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2012). This report also expressed that "the RTL initiative marked a significant leap forward toward the vision of a fully aligned, coordinated, and high quality system of early learning services across the city" ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2012, p. 1). The following year, in 2013, the city that is the focus of this study began the implementation of the RTL initiative, a $36

million investment for three years in the district's ECE system. Its objective was to expand and improve early learning opportunities citywide by bringing the public school district, OECE and DFSS together to manage resources cooperatively ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2014). This report explained that the initiative distributed funds through a coordinated application and review process and that the process was competitive and open to a wide range of groups: profit, non-profit, private, and public schools ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2015).

In January 2015, the mayor of the city in which the RTL initiative is implemented announced that the city was awarded $ 600 million for ECE programming over the next five years (City of [Redacted] website, 2015) The report also stated that with this investment the city would triple the number of full-day pre-Kindergarten programs from 100 in 2015 to 300 by 2019. Then on March 2016, the same mayor indicated that there are nearly 1,500 4-year old children in the city that qualify for the free or reduced lunch federal program, but do not attend at least a half-day of pre-Kindergarten. He declared that beginning in School Year 2015-2016 the school district would provide pre-K education for these students through capital investments from the city and the state as well as social impact bonds ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2015). The initiative continues to grow at a fast pace and in 2017 includes 368 schools with more than 1000 teachers serving thousands of children. One hundred twenty of these school-based programs are Head Start-RTL programs ([Redacted] Early Learning website, 2016).

This growing trend is likely to expand in the future. In the State of the Union address of 2013, President Obama called for an expansion of high-quality preschool

programs for all children (Hill, Gormley, & Adelstein, 2015). The following year, in the 2014 State of the Union address, Obama proposed a new a federal program named Preschool for All (PFA) to motivate the creation of state universal preschool programs (Bassok, Fitzpatrick & Loeb, 2014). Cascio and Schanzenbach (2013) suggested that this new initiative calls for a drastic increment in the quantity of preschoolers enrolled in public preschool programs and in the quality of these programs across the nation. These authors also noted that the new PFA program shares various features of the universal preschool programs implemented in Georgia and Oklahoma (Cascio & Schanzenbach, 2013). Barnett (2013) concluded that when the evidence is considered in its entirety, it is found that large-scale public programs are successful in achieving significant long-term gains for all students and not only for at-risk children. Barnett (2011a) further suggested that adopting successful preschool models, such as Georgia's and Oklahoma's public programs, could increase success of preschool programs in the future. This author also suggested that universal preschool such as the PFA proposed by President Obama could spread the benefits of the program to more children, including the preschoolers living with families with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty line and other children with inadequate access to high-quality preschool (Barnett, 2013).

The investment in early childhood programs continues to grow. On January of 2014, the Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 113-76) contributed $250 million for Preschool Development Grants (PDGs). Funds were available for two types of grants: Development Grants (for states with small pre-K programs or no state pre-K) and Expansion Grants for states already serving more than 10% of eligible children in the

state (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). On August 2014, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services posted the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) for the PDGs. In 2014, the state in which the RTL initiative was implemented received a $20 million four-year Expansion grant to continue expanding is ECE preschool programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). In response to this economic incentive, the state expanded its preschool programs to enroll 13,760 more children by the end of 2018 in a new "More at Four" option (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Then in January 2015 the mayor of the city in which the RTL initiative was implemented announced that the city was awarded $600 million for ECE programming to be used over the next five years (City of [Redacted] website, 2015). Finally, Obama's 2015 budget request included two proposals in regard to the expansion of preschool programs in the nation. The first one was an investment of 75 billion dollars, extended over a period of 10 years for the new PFA program. The second proposal was the provision of another 500 million dollars in discretionary investments in PDGs (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The evidence suggests that the expansion of the ECE programs will continue in the future through various reforms, programs, and initiatives. The United States is investing more and more in its ECE programs and these continue expanding rapidly across the nation. Addressing the systemic issues of these programs in the initial stages has the potential to maximize success and the efficient utilization of the funds.

Analysis of the Head Start Program in Relation to the Initiative

Brief History of Project Head Start

The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) launched in 1965 Project Head Start. Its objective was to help to break the cycle of poverty of low income families with a comprehensive preschool program ([Redacted] Head Start Association, 2016). In elucidating the reasons for its creation, the authors explained that the government's philosophy, at this historic time, was that each state had the responsibility to aid disadvantaged groups in order to compensate for socio-economic inequality. The authors added that, at the time, there was a new philosophy in federal government that economically disadvantaged people should assist to plan and run their own early childhood programs. These two changes in governmental thinking fostered the creation and implementation of the Head Start program ([Redacted] Head Start Association, 2016). Head Start grew from a small summer demonstration project to the largest, publicly-funded ECE program in the United States (Lee et al., 2014).

Head Start Updated

On December 12, 2007, President George W. Bush signed Public Law 110-134 reauthorizing the Head Start program. This law contained substantial revisions to the prior Head Start Act and authorized the Head Start program up to September 2012 (Head Start Act, 2007). Spielberger, Zanoni, and Barisik (2013) reported that the reauthorization of Head Start in 2007, consistent with the increased accountability of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act created in 2001, brought more strict expectations for students' achievement, program accountability, and learning standards. According to this study,

this reauthorization also stressed collaboration among Head Start and other ECE agencies as the central mechanism to increase the quality and access to Head Start programs (Spielberger, Zanoni, & Barisik, 2013). As a result of this mandated collaboration in the reauthorization of 2007, Head Start began in the late 2010s a significant expansion of collaborative arrangements with other agencies.

Allen and Smith (2009) reported that the state of Oregon defined the relationship between Head Start programs and universal prekindergarten systems through a pioneering collaboration between the two entities. These authors asserted that "Oregon provided a collaborative federal Head Start and state prekindergarten model for developing a universal prekindergarten system in each state" (Allen & Smith, 2009, p. 2). Indeed, the Head Start program continues to evolve into a blended-funding program across the nation. Duncan and Magnuson (2013) reported that in 2005 the large majority of Head Start programs were based in community centers. Then, according to these authors, in 2010 $7.2 billion dollars from the Head Start fund were distributed to private and public nonprofit grantees, which indicated a change in provision of services under the Head Start mantle.

In their *Status of the Head Start 2014* report, Allen and Smith (2014) noted that in 41 states with state-funded preschool programs Head Start programs were provided using a diversified delivery model. The authors explained that states allowed Head Start programs to braid their federal Head Start dollars with state-funded pre-K dollars in two major ways: Head Start programs apply directly to the State to access pre-K funding or Head Start programs contract with Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) to braid their

federal Head Start and state-funded pre-K dollars to provide state-funded pre-K (Allen & Smith, 2014). Allen and Smith (2014) further explained that in both of these ways, Head Start spends its braided funds using a variety of approaches to expand services and increase program quality for Head Start children, extend the program hours for Head Start enrolled children, or pay for teachers who are state qualified, or a combination of these (Allen & Smith, 2014). For example, I was informed by my principal that Head Start pays my salary and the salaries of the other educators working as part of the Head Start-RTL initiative.

The Head Start-RTL collaborative school-based preschool programs are rapidly expanding in the district that is the focus of this study. In the first year of the RTL initiative, school year 2013-2014, there were 34 Head Start-RTL school-based programs. In the second year of the initiative there were 67 and this school year there are 120 Head Start-RTL school-based programs.

Head Start has proposed drastic changes to its system. On June 2015, the DHHS issued a new proposal to update the Head Start Performance Standards. This is the first full revision of Head Start performance standards in 40 years. In essence, these proposals addressed several of the issues observed in this document: a need to reduce excessive bureaucratic burden, decrease the number of unnecessary administrators, improve deficient professional development, and increase quantity and quality of instruction and instructors (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). However, these system-wide administrative adjustments were made without teacher input. The teachers' experiences with and perspectives on this initiative may provide vital data and

information for this and future program improvement efforts. Additionally, the inclusion of teacher input could contribute to positive teacher motivation and result in a significant growth of instructional and interaction time with children and their families.

Teacher Participation on Systemic Change

Teacher participation is essential to the theory of educational systemic change (Fullan, 2006). It has also become an important topic for discussion on system change and educational reform. Authors such as Ho (2010), Honingh and Hooge (2014), Lai and Cheung (2014) and Webb (2005) also pointed to the need for the inclusion of teachers' perspectives in educational systemic change and advocated that teachers' insights be part of proposed changes. Many other researchers who elaborated on Fullan's theory of change expressed similar conclusions about the need for teachers' inclusion in systemic change (Avargil et al., 2012; Brooks & Gibson, 2012; Davis et.al, 2013; Kwok, 2014; and Scott, 2013). The teachers' experiences with and perspectives on this initiative are not included in the evaluative system of the initiative and they may provide vital data and information for this and future program improvement efforts.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature review revealed a connection between the RTL initiative and a nationwide reform to early childhood care and education. It also revealed a research gap about this type of programs and initiatives in general and a research gap about teachers' experiences and perceptions in particular.

The literature review supplied research about the effectiveness of ECE programs and effective practices. It also provided information about the history, legislation, and

programs affecting the RTL initiative. What is not yet completely known is how effective this and similar programs and initiatives are in achieving the proposed objectives outlined by the RTT-ELC. The evaluative system of the program does not include teachers' perspectives and experiences although a large number of researchers contend that these are essential in a positive system reform.

Teachers' perspectives with programs experiencing changes like this have the potential to provide essential information for an improvement effort. I conducted personal interviews with participating Head Start-RTL teachers to gain insight into the teachers' experiences with the inclusion of Head Start preschool programs in a public school system and the impact these experiences might have on the initiative. This case study has the potential to extend our knowledge in regard to the inclusion of Head Start programs in public school systems and may fill a gap in the literature related to this topic. I will further elaborate about the methodology for this study in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In 2013, a school district in a major city in the Midwestern United States and the local office of DFSS launched the RTL initiative. The objectives of the initiative were to coordinate early learning programs across the city, expand access to pre-K education, and improve the quality of ECE programs by implementing modified preschool programs in various sites including public schools. Although soliciting the input of key stakeholders is an important part of educational change, according to Fullan (2006), teachers have not yet been asked to contribute their insights with regards to the collaborative program. Because the daily experience of teachers is important in the quality of instruction for children, discovering these insights adds a layer of information about the program's impact that is currently missing. Teachers' perspectives with this initiative could be used to assist planning, implementing change, improving the status quo, or guiding future research. The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perspectives of the RTL initiative regarding its impact on their daily practice affected by the inclusion of Head Start preschool programs in the public schools of a large urban school district.

In the next sections of this chapter, I describe the research design and rationale for its use. I also describe the role of the researcher and the methodology which includes the logic for participant selection, instrumentation, and procedures. The end of the chapter includes issues of trustworthiness and a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

One research question formed the basis for this study: *What are teachers' perspectives of the RTL initiative?* The research question is based on the work of Fullan

(2006) and his belief in the importance of soliciting participant opinions in evaluating educational change. Fullan and Langworthy (2013) suggested that determining participants' positive and negative perceptions, and requesting their suggestions, are essential steps in developing any new initiative.

Kincheloe (2012) suggested that teacher empowerment takes place when teachers actively participate in system development. Bogdan and Biklen (2007), Creswell (2012), Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), and Merriam and Tisdell (2015) provided research-based approaches for research methodology and design. I used these sources as a foundation for my own methodology and research design. In order to answer the study's research question, I used an instrumental case study approach. An instrumental case study is one that is focused on exploration of a system with the intention of explicating that system, in contrast to an intrinsic case study, which explores its subject without any intention of generalizing findings to other situations (Creswell, 2012). This case represents a bounded system comprising the Head Start/RTL collaboration initiative implemented within a school district in a single city, and specifically the experiences of teachers whose teaching may have been affected by this initiative. Because the purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perspectives of the RTL initiative with regard to its impact on their daily practice affected by the inclusion and expansion of Head Start preschool programs in public schools of a large urban school district, and therefore to explore a system that may have relevance beyond these individual teachers' classrooms, an instrumental case study is appropriate.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explained that in these types of studies interviews are used to gather data in the subjects' own words in order to develop insights on how subjects perceive a situation. Accordingly, I conducted personal interviews with nine teachers participating in the Head Start school-based preschool programs in order to gather first-hand data on the subject and answer the proposed research question.

Other qualitative designs were rejected. A qualitative longitudinal research design was rejected because most changes to the program already occurred and this study does not involve returning to interviewees to further measure changes. An ethnographic design was deemed inappropriate since my purpose is not to understand the cultural group represented by teachers in the Head Start/RTL program. A phenomenological design was also rejected, since this study focuses not on a single event or phenomenon but on an ongoing process of change.

Quantitative designs were also considered but found inappropriate to fulfill the purpose of this study. Survey research would enable me to solicit the opinions of more teachers than I can interview in this instrumental case study, but would not deliver the richness and detail that interviews can provide. A survey would limit the depth of teachers' input to what is asked in survey questions, and so fail to fulfill my purpose of learning as much as possible about the experience of teachers following the Head Start/RTL program collaboration. An experimental design was clearly not feasible, since the change was already in place and an attempt to compare teachers' opinions before the change with their current opinions after the change would be confounded by inaccurate recall and other similar factors.

Role of the Researcher

I have been employed as a preschool teacher in the Head Start-RTL program in the school district that is the focus of this study for 4 years. In this role, I have participated in the collaborative initiative described in this study, which prompts my interest in the perceptions of my fellow teachers.

I do not now hold nor ever have held a supervisory role in the district's Head Start or RTL programs. While I know teachers in my own school, I do not know teachers from other schools as more than casual acquaintances, if that. As described below, teachers from my own school and those I know quite well were excluded from this study.

Because I have experience with the collaborative initiative and with the daily work of a Head Start-RTL teacher, I anticipated being able to understand the perceptions expressed by the study participants and to ask questions that arise from our shared understanding better than someone with less knowledge might. At the same time, I took care to listen attentively and objectively to ensure what is understood and recorded were the perceptions of each participant and not projections of my own.

Methodology

Sample and Sampling

A purposeful sampling approach was used in that only teachers who have worked in the district as Head Start - RTL teachers were invited to participate. Creswell (2012) explained that purposeful sampling is a strategy in which the researcher intentionally selects individuals and sites with experience in the phenomenon to be studied. Also, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described purposeful sampling as a sampling method in which

the researcher selects specific individual because these are believed to facilitate the understanding of the issue. Possible participants were identified through publicly available information in the district's website and through LinkedIn (a professional networking website). A total of 20 teachers were personally invited to participate via their private or LinkedIn email accounts. Excluded from this list were teachers at my own school building and any other teachers with whom I have past or current personal or professional relationships. Of teachers who fit these criteria, a sample of 9 teachers who work full-time in the Head Start-RTL initiative volunteered to participate in this study. The minimum number of participants set at 8 is supported by Merriam and Tisdell (2015), who acknowledged that in qualitative research only sufficient participants needed to reach saturation of the information to be elicited are necessary. From the range of perceptions received, the point of saturation was reached at the seventh interview in which teachers' comments only repeated and reiterated comments of previous participants.

Instrumentation

The data collection instruments for this study were an interview protocol and an audio recorder. An interview protocol was used to ensure that the participants were asked the same questions in the same order and the audio recorder served as a means to record participants' words during the interview. Hand-written field notes were also made for further questioning and reflection. The interview protocol was a researcher-developed instrument designed after the model and suggestions provided by Creswell (2012) and it can be reviewed on Appendix B. Because interviews were open-ended conversations

designed to garner teachers' perspectives, a limited number of questions and follow-up prompts were necessary to engage teachers and to provide focus to answer the research questions about the advantages and disadvantages they perceive of the initiative and their suggestions for its future.

For audio recording, the Samsung voice recorder application for smart phones was used. As part of the audio-recording instrument, a multidirectional microphone was attached to the phone. This audio-recording system allowed me to upload the audio files and electronically send them to the professional transcriber company online for immediate transcription.

Interviews were open-ended conversations intended to collect teachers' perspectives on the collaborative initiative and its effects on daily teaching practice. Nine interview questions, designed from the original research question, about teachers' perceived advantages and disadvantages of the initiative plus suggestions for the initiative's improvement formed the basis of the interviews. As open-ended conversations and in keeping with the qualitative tradition, additional topics, ideas, or probing questions surfaced during the interviews, since the intention was to develop a complete and richly detailed picture of teachers' experience with the collaborative initiative. These basic interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

Procedures

Upon receipt of Walden's Institutional Review Board's (IRB's) approval, email invitations were sent to 20 purposefully selected Head Start/RTL teachers. The text of this invitation is included in Appendix A. A reminder email was sent to those who did not

respond 1 week after the first email was sent. As each participant agreed to participate, I emailed, texted, or called (depending on their preferred mode of communication) each volunteer to set up a specific date, time, and location for the interview. I met with each participant for the interview at a mutually convenient location, date, and time. Interviews occurred after school and on any other day in which teachers were not working, at various location such as restaurants, coffee shops, and a public library according to the convenience, privacy, safety, and preference of the participant. As anticipated in the proposal, no interview was conducted during school time nor on school grounds. Each participant was interviewed only once and was invited, through an email containing the transcription, to review the draft results.

At the beginning of each interview, I began by thanking the participant for meeting with me and I confirmed that she was a teacher in the Head Start-RTL program at the district and was employed there as preschool teacher. I then presented the consent form for the participant to read, answered any questions about the form or the study, and requested the participant's signature. All nine participants signed the form but two of them refused to be recorded. For these two interviews, no voice recorder was used so I took verbatim manual notes of their responses to the extent I was able without hindering the flow of the conversation. After each interview, I had the conversation transcribed by Same Day Transcriptions. This transcription was attached to a follow-up email to the participant as an Adobe pdf, since files in that format are openable by nearly all computer users. In this email, I thanked the participant for her contribution and requested that any

discrepancies in the draft results be reported to me; if no changes were made the draft was considered to be approved. None of the participants requested any changes.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis of interviews began with the transcription of the data from the interviews. The transcriptions were conducted by Same Day Transcriptions and these draft results were sent to participants for their review and approval within three days of the conversation, while it was still fresh in their minds.

Data analysis was done by hand in an effort to answer the interview questions with regard to the initiative's perceived advantages and disadvantages and participant suggestions for the initiative's improvement. I initiated the data analysis by using open coding. Creswell (2012) explains open coding as a process in which the researcher identifies initial categories and subcategories of data by segmenting information in order to reduce the amount of data. Data were then thematically coded for emergent themes across the interview questions with the intention of answering the main research question. As each interview was analyzed and the data aggregated, a picture of the perspectives surrounding the collaborative initiative emerged. Participants were sent a preliminary summary of the findings via email to check for the validity data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Cope (2014) asserted that the most common criteria used to evaluate and develop trustworthiness in qualitative research are credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability and that these terms were introduced by Lincoln and Guba in 1985. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explained that because the basis for qualitative research

includes diverse assumptions about the real world and individuals' worldviews, validity and reliability in qualitative research must be consistent with these constraints and that based on this premise Lincoln and Guba offered the terms credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability as substitutes for internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity to be used as a criteria for evaluating qualitative studies (p. 239). These four parameters of qualitative studies will be discussed, in relation to this study, in the next paragraphs.

Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) stated that credibility denotes the notion of whether the contributors' perceptions of the events match up with the researchers' interpretation of these events in the study. Credibility to the answers to the interview questions in this study depended on the truthfulness of the participants, their ability to know their own minds, and their ability to express what is in mind in a way that can be interpreted accurately. This subjectivity is a characteristic of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and embedded in it. I was responsible for ensuring that the transcribed results accurately reflected what was said, but participants were responsible for ensuring, through their check of the findings (member checking), my interpretations reflected what was said and what they really meant. There appears to be a discrepancy among qualitative researchers about the definition of the strategy of member-checking. Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) explained that member-checking involves allowing participants to read the findings to ensure that these have been accurately interpreted and are credible. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) expand this concept by stating that many researchers use member-checking to ensure that their biases do not influence

the portrayed perspectives and that this strategy includes sending the transcribed interviews or summaries of the researchers' conclusions to participants for review. I used both member-checking strategies to enhance credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Participants' review of the findings, according to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), contributes to the validity of the study. Other strategies used in this study that increased credibility were my prolonged experience as a Head Start preschool teacher in the district, my contact with each participant over the course of the interviews' questions, members' check in the form of what Merriam and Tisdell (2015) called "respondent validation," which involved soliciting feedback on my preliminary findings from the interviewed teachers, and also triangulation derived from using different informants from different sites.

Transferability (external validity) was enhanced, through the use of rich, thick, descriptions and triangulation. Transferability as defined by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) denotes the perceived similarity between the site of the current research and other sites as understood by the reader and can be assessed by analyzing the richness of the descriptions and the amount of detail provided regarding the context in which the research study happened. These authors, in their criteria for evaluating qualitative studies, suggested that qualitative studies should include rich descriptions of setting, participants, policies and detailed information on context and background. I have provided thick, detailed, descriptions of multiple aspects (setting, participants, context, background and policies) of the initiative being investigated that may allow the reader to obtain a fair understanding of the issue and make comparisons but, as Merriam and Tisdell (2015)

explained it, the ultimate judgment of transferability falls on the reader who determines, based on the descriptions, the levels of similarity and applicability of the findings.

Triangulation, in the form of corroborating evidence from different participants is another strategy that increased transferability by ensuring that multiple views were included in the study. Creswell (2012) explained that this method supports the accuracy of the study's outcomes because the results are drawn from a variety of sources of information. Furthermore, variation in participant selection was also attained through the purposeful selection of participants from different schools in the district. This strategy also prevented contamination of the findings by including perspectives of teachers sharing similar experiences in the same school.

Dependability in qualitative research parallels reliability and the term refers to whether one can track the procedures and processes used to collect and interpret the data (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) specified that strategies use in qualitative studies to ensure consistency and dependability are triangulation, peer examination and researcher's position or reflexivity. These authors further explained that although peer-review takes place when "peers" [sic] knowledgeable about the topic and methodology review the manuscript, such review can also be conducted by either a colleague familiar with the research or one new to the topic. In their criteria for evaluating qualitative studies, Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) cited detailed description of data collection and analysis procedures, use of audiotape, and data made available for review as effective methods to achieve dependability. Dependability of this study's results was supported through the strategies of triangulation

and member-checking. Triangulation was achieved via corroborating evidence from different individuals. Through member-checking I solicited feedback on my preliminary findings from participants with regard to my misinterpretations of what they said and the perspective they shared. Participant members were asked to check the draft results of the analysis through a summary of the findings.

Because of the subjectivity of qualitative research, it is possible that perceptions expressed on any given day are a factor of that day's events and may or may not be stable over time. This problem of dependability of the data is another characteristic of qualitative research. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), dependability is supported by the use of more than one or two reporters and by the process of member checking, so that participants who have changed their minds or who were influenced by ephemeral factors may adjust or amend what they said through their check of the preliminary findings. None of the interviewed teachers amended nor asked to adjust any of the preliminary findings.

Through my review of qualitative research literature, I found inconsistency in the use of confirmability as a criterion for evaluating qualitative studies. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) and Creswell (2012) did not include the term as a criterion for evaluating qualitative studies. Houghton et al. (2013) proposed the use of audit trails as an effective strategy to attain confirmability. Cope (2014) explained that confirmability is on the researcher's demonstration that the data are accurate reflections of participant responses and do not instead reflect the researcher's own point of view. Based on this notion, confirmability was enhanced in this study through the application of member-

checking and reflexivity strategies. I asked all the interviewed teachers to check he preliminary findings of the study, as described above. In regard to reflexivity, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) defined this as the researcher's position which according to these authors implies an understanding and description of how she or he affects and is affected by the research process. These authors suggested that the researchers need to reflect upon and explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions. For this purpose, I described in the study my dispositions, assumptions, experiences with the program and potential biases. Furthermore, Cope (2014) explained reflectivity as the researchers' awareness of how their values, background and previous experiences can affect the research process and to the strategies, such as taking notes and using a reflexive journal, they use to prevent bias. Consequently, I took notes during the interviews whenever I noticed something, such as facial expressions or comments, was influencing the interviewee and avoided doing it on the following interviews.

In my study's proposal, I included an external auditor as a potential strategy for confirmability in this study. Unfortunately, I could not find a qualified researcher in qualitative studies to complete the audits and so this strategy was deleted from the study.

Ethical Procedures

With the objective of ensuring ethical protection of the participants, I obtained consent to conduct this research study from Walden's IRB (#1116160400920). Before the interviews commenced each participant received an informed consent form that included a description of their right to voluntarily participate, ask questions, obtain the results, retain confidentiality, withdraw from the study; know the purpose and procedures for the

study; the potential risks and benefits of participation; and understand me and my role as an investigator. Because sharing of the consent form occurred prior to the start of the interview, the questions participants had were addressed in the moment.

The names of participants will be kept confidential. Only I and the transcriber have had access to the data and transcribed files along with audio files are kept in a locked drawer and in a password-protected folder on my computer. The transcription service is contractually bound to non-disclosure. Because participants were asked in the course of this study to provide their opinions about the program for which they work, it is possible that participants felt vulnerable to criticism from their superiors. In order to ease these feelings of vulnerability, at the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded that information shared during the interview will not be shared with anyone but myself and the transcriber and the transcriber will not have access to any names. I used codes, such as P1 for the first participant and P2 for the second participant, instead of names. Every effort was made to provide an opportunity for participants to express themselves freely and frankly, without fear of any sort of retribution or criticism. The accuracy of the transcription was verified by each participant. Electronic files from the interviews will be destroyed after 5 years (electronic files will be permanently deleted and any hard, paper, copies will be shredded).

Summary

A new initiative to coordinate early learning programs in a major city in the Midwestern United States, involving the school district and the local Department of Family and Support Services, was undertaken in 2013. Although city officials reported

positive effects of the initiative, the opinions of teachers with regard to the impact of the new initiative on instruction and children were not included in the evaluation of this program. However, several researchers have pointed to the benefits and the need to include teachers' perspectives in program evaluation and system-building.

Based on Fullan's work on systemic change, educational reform, and his belief in the importance of including participants' perspectives in evaluating educational change, this instrumental case study proposes to help to fill the gap on teachers' input by conducting interviews with experienced teachers working in the program. Individual interviews with 9 teachers, who had work in Head Start-RTL initiative, were used to collect data. Nine open-ended questions of teachers' positive and negative perceptions plus their suggestions for improvement of the initiative formed the basis of this inquiry. The collected data were hand analyzed for emergent themes and the results of this study are presented in Chapter 4. The implications of these results are presented in Chapter 5 along with recommendations and implications for social change.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perspectives of the RTL initiative with regard to its impact on their daily practice affected by the inclusion and expansion of Head Start preschool programs in public schools of a large urban school district. Nine interview questions about teachers' perceived advantages and disadvantages of the initiative plus solicitation of suggestions for the initiative's improvement formed the basis of the interviews. These questions were designed from the original research question and are discussed in detail in the Results section of this chapter. In the next sections, I describe the setting, demographics, data collection, and data analysis. Furthermore, I discuss evidence of trustworthiness, present the results of the study, and conclude the chapter with a summary.

Setting

This study was conducted during the large-scale inclusion of Head Start preschool programs in an urban public school district in a major city in the Midwestern United States. The initiative's objectives were to coordinate early learning programs across the city, expand access to pre-K education, and improve the quality of ECE programs by implementing modified preschool programs in various sites including public schools ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2014). District officials reported that there were positive effects in terms of a coordinated application and review process, improved distribution of funds, and an increase in the quantity and quality of the programs (City of [Redacted] website, 2015). However, teachers' perspectives on the program were not included in district implementation plans or evaluation reports. This study

presents the results of nine interviews with teachers working in the district's Head Start preschool program about their perceived advantages and disadvantages of the initiative plus suggestions for the initiative's improvement.

Demographics

A sample of 20 preschool teachers, 18 females and two males, working full-time in Head Start public preschools in the district were selected using purposeful sampling and invited to participate in the study. Nine female teachers from nine different schools, scattered through the district, accepted the invitation and were interviewed. Each teacher was interviewed once for approximately 40 minutes. Seven interviews were conducted in Starbucks coffee shops and two in restaurants. All the sites for the interviews were selected by the teachers, at their convenience, and always after school. Five of these teachers hold bachelor's degrees, four have master's degrees, three are National Board Certified teachers, and all of them are state-certified educators. Their teaching experience ranged from 3.5 to 34 years. They serve children in a variety of Head Start preschool programs: seven teachers work in half-day inclusive preschool programs serving two groups with 17 children each for a total of 34 children per classroom; two teachers serve children in full-day programs with 20 children total for a full day (one of these full-day classrooms is a blended program classroom serving children with special needs and there are two teachers and one assistant in the classroom); two of these teachers serve monolingual (English only) classrooms; and seven teachers serve ESL/Bilingual classrooms. Two teachers reported serving a majority of middle-income children in their classes while seven reported serving a majority of low-income, disadvantaged students.

Data Collection

Nine participants were interviewed over a period of 2 months using an interview protocol. Each participant was interviewed once for about 40 minutes. Data were recorded using the Samsung voice-recorder application for smart phones. As part of the audio-recording instrument, a multidirectional microphone was attached to the phone during the interviews. This audio-recording system allowed me to upload the audio files and electronically sent them to Same Day Transcriptions, the professional transcriber, for immediate transcription.

A variation in the data collection protocol occurred when two participants did not want their interviews to be recorded, although they agreed to participate in the interview and signed the informed consent forms. In response, I asked for their authorization to take notes of their responses to the questions and they verbally agreed. Accordingly, I took notes and at the end of the interview I showed them my notes for any corrections and approvals. I used the approved notes and transcriptions for data analysis. This process was later confirmed as acceptable to the Walden University IRB to "ensure the voluntary nature of the study and increase protection of participants" (Personal Communication, IRB Research Ethics Support Specialist, September 15, 2017). This decision of continue with the interviews despite of the interviewees' refusal to be audio-recorded, allowed me to reach an optimal number of interviews for saturation while respecting participants' will.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done by hand following an inductive analysis process. Responses to interview questions were first coded for emergent themes, using a process of open coding. This initial coding process produced an average of 30 responses per interview question. Further refinement of the data, following a secondary analysis of thematic coding to combine and eliminate redundant codes, reduced the number of codes to an average of 15 responses per question, and revealed patterns in the data. The themes that emerged were programs and services, initiative administration and processes, and initiative resources. In making coding decisions, I relied on the theme that seemed most salient for each interview response despite possible alternative theme assignments.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

For credibility, as specified in Chapter 3, I used member-checking of draft findings to enhance credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Other strategies used in this study that increased credibility were my prolonged experience as a Head Start preschool teacher in the district, my contact with each participant over the course of the interviews' questions, and triangulation derived from using different informants from different sites.

Transferability was enhanced using rich, thick, descriptions and triangulation. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), in their description of effective criteria for evaluating qualitative studies, acknowledged that transferability should include rich descriptions of setting, policies, participants, and detailed information on context and background. I provided thick, detailed, descriptions of multiple aspects such as the

setting, participants, context, background, and policies of the initiative that may permit the reader to obtain a reasonable understanding of the subject and make comparisons with their own situation. Triangulation, in the form of corroborating evidence through multiple accounts from different participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), is another strategy that increased transferability by ensuring that multiple views were included in the study.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stated that strategies used in qualitative studies to ensure consistency and dependability are triangulation, peer examination, and researcher's position or reflexivity. Dependability of this study's results was supported through the strategies of triangulation and member checking. Triangulation was achieved via corroborating evidence from nine different individuals working at different schools throughout the district. Through member checking, I solicited feedback on my preliminary findings from participants regarding misinterpretations on my side of what they said and the perspective they shared before final approval and dissemination. None of the participating teachers asked for any corrections nor modifications of the preliminary findings.

Confirmability, as explained in Chapter 3, was enhanced in this study through the application of the member-checking and reflexivity strategies. Cope (2014) explained that confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the data represent the participant responses and not the researcher biases or viewpoints. Based on this notion of confirmability, I asked the participants to review the draft findings and make any needed corrections to more accurately represent their perceptions. No corrections were received.

Cope (2014) referred to reflexivity as the researchers' awareness of how their values, background, and previous experiences can affect the research process. In order to achieve confirmability in this study, I took reflexive notes during the interviews when I noticed something influencing the interviewee in a specific direction and avoided doing it on the next interviews. I also analyzed every recorded interview and removed segments in which my comments may have influenced a participant's response.

Results

Nine interview questions about teachers' perceived advantages and disadvantages of the initiative plus suggestions for the initiative's improvement formed the basis of the interviews. Responses to these nine questions provided teachers' perspectives of the RTL initiative with regard to the initiative's effect on teachers' daily practice. These responses create a portrait of what happened to teachers' daily practice as a result of adding Head Start, including the perceived benefits and challenges teachers observed and experienced. The results described here illustrate perceived effects of the inclusion and expansion of Head Start preschool programs in the public schools of a large urban school district, organized by themes of programs and services, initiative administration and processes, and initiative resources. Within each theme, benefits, challenges, and ideas for improvement were offered by the participants.

Theme 1. Programs and Services

The addition of Head Start to the RTL program was a step forward in the education of the children served, according to at least one participant, who said, "Head Start brought a structured preschool program with a comprehensive curriculum and a

holistic provision of services." Participants expressed satisfaction with their ability using the Head Start-RTF curriculum to prepare children for kindergarten in a range of developmental domains, including socioemotional skills and academic achievements. Participant P2 said, "Students learn a large number of socioemotional and academic skills that prepare them for kindergarten," and P8 added, "They get ready for kindergarten; we have seen the difference in the improved scores of our children when they enter kinder[garten]." P3 added, "These students are receiving a free, high quality, very supportive preschool program with certified teachers." The positive benefits described by the teachers in this section were found in similar preschool programs described in chapter 1.

Being part of the elementary school was an added benefit, according to these teachers. Children were able to engage in the rich environment of the school, as noted by P9, who said, "They [students] participate in various events in the school, and they like to be part of it," and P6, who agreed: "Students experience being part of a school community." In addition, teachers felt connected to the early childhood effort of the public school system, in that the initiative "helped with curricular alignment through collaboration with kindergarten teachers and facilitated the transition to kindergarten with well-prepared children" (P6). The seamless transition from preschool to kindergarten was suggested by P4, who observed that, "children know the school staff, are familiar with the curriculum and routines, and know the kindergarten teachers, which facilitates their transition to kindergarten." Most of the interviewed teachers described the inclusion of

these preschool classrooms as a positive strategy to facilitate children's transition into the school system.

The inclusion of Head Start contributed social services as well. P7 noted that, because of the social service components of Head Start, "They [students] receive health support and comprehensive services for them and their families." P2 echoed this thought by saying, "Head Start brought a structured preschool program with a comprehensive curriculum and a holistic provision of services." In addition, because of federal funding for the Head Start program, "Head Start gives the opportunity to attend preschool to those children that wouldn't be able to pay for a preschool experience," according to P1.

In general, participants were supportive of the Head Start curriculum and social services in this initiative. P7 summed up this support in saying, "There is a huge growth, providing them [the children] a socio-academic advantage."

However, the promises of the program often were perceived to be incompletely realized. Challenges presented by the curriculum and services were suggested by one of the veteran teachers, who contrasted what she remembered of Head Start in the past with the present-day reality. This teacher, P7, said

> They used to provide the classroom with tons of materials, handouts, family workshops. We had the nurse, the nutritionist and the social worker coming to the school. They used to come to the school once a month and provide services to the families.

P7 also said, "We used to have a week before school started for enrollment and families' interviews, we had Fridays off for paperwork and home visiting."

Another veteran teacher, P4, offered similar sentiments. She said, "We had abundant assistance, great PDs [professional development workshops] once a month with experienced mentors, multiple resources, time for clerical work and a more hands-on curriculum." P4 said, "Head Start used to be a holistic, comprehensive preschool program that provided many services for children and families," implying that the program is no longer what it once was. She added, "The assistance has been drastically decreasing since 2007." These veteran teachers provided a divergent perspective of the Head Start programs in relation to the quantity and quality of the assistance provided to teachers and families before the initiative.

In addition, teachers expressed concern with features of the Head Start curriculum that limited their ability to individualize instruction but these concerns were expressed as suggestions for the program's improvement. One teacher (P1) suggested administrators "provide more flexibility to the teachers to modify their curriculum according to their students' needs." Other teachers suggested administrators "revise the curriculum's books for developmental and cultural appropriateness" (P3), and "provide instructional materials for bilingual-Spanish and multicultural programs" (P4). In general, these teachers supported the Head Start curriculum and its social service programs. No one expressed a desire to end the initiative altogether or even modify it greatly.

Theme 2. Initiative Administration and Processes

The Head Start-RTL initiative was created as a collaboration between two agencies, the federal office of Head Start and the local public school system, which in turn reported to city and state government, as described previously. This duality was felt

by participating teachers, who identified many challenges and few benefits of the initiative's reporting structure and clerical demands.

One issue was the apparent unfamiliarity of elementary school administrators about early childhood education. P4 noted that, "most administrators at local schools do not have knowledge of ECE or Head Start, which is very complex and demanding." This lack of understanding of early childhood requirements was demonstrated for P7 by levels of cleanliness and meal preparation that matched elementary school practice but not levels standard in early childhood practice. She said, "Now days, we [teachers] are serving 68 meals a day and cleaning our own classrooms because the cleaning company contracted by the district only mops the floors once a week." According to the state child care licensing body ([Redacted] State Department of Children and Family Services, 2014), daily cleaning of early childhood classrooms and meal preparation by a person holding a food handler's certificate are required. The difference between early childhood and elementary school practice was illustrated by P5, who said, "Head Start has over 3,000 standards and rules. Principals and teachers are unfamiliar with them." Participant P1 suggested, "Hire people with ECE background that understand the needs of young learners and their families and educate principals and administrators in ECE and Head Start programs." In general, teachers reported that the inclusion of Head Start programs into the public school system brings positive effects, but there is still a gap in the awareness of schools' administrators in regard to the demands and needs of these programs.

In addition to their belief that district and building administrators did not understand early childhood education or Head Start, participants stated they felt the two programs were not well coordinated at the administrative level. P5 stated, "Multiple administrators from different entities imposing their own agendas on teachers cause mixed messages." P3 agreed, saying, "We ended up having much more work with several bosses and redundancy of work that can be done more effectively." Part of this disconnect was attributed to Head Start, by P5, who asserted that, "Head Start needs to improve communication with teachers, principals, evaluators, and mentors about curricular expectations." Part of this was attributed to the school district, by P4, when she said, "There are multiple systems (IMPACT, GOLD, COPA) requiring the same data and creating multiple repetitive processes." The impact of dual administrative systems was expressed by P9, who said, "The program is aimed to do good but with all the bureaucratic things that they impose on you, they are taking a lot of teaching time."

The effort to provide two different administrative bodies, Head Start and the school district, with the data they required imposed clerical demands on these teachers, according to their statements. Participant P4 said, "The amount of work is brutal compared to my previous work as a kindergarten teacher." P5 referenced multiple assessments when she said, "I have to do the Reach, the ESI, the ASQ, the LPT, the registration and the Medical History individually for each student," a theme echoed by P1: "The first 45 days, I have to do a lot of the paper work that takes time away from my students." P6 acknowledged that "There always has been a lot of paperwork" but continued by saying "teachers used to have more time and people helping." According to

these teachers, the described decrease of resources is adding pressure to their practice by requiring more time on clerical activities.

The program requirements of Head Start were singled out by P1, who said, “Too many requirements of Head Start prevent me from teaching more effectively,” and also by P8: “They [Head Start] want me to do home visits and all these individualized assessments but they do not give me the time to do it.” In short, according to P2 “there is a lot of red tape and paper work,” and, from P7, “I spend too much time doing clerical work that has nothing to do with teaching.”

As P7 suggested, administrative and clerical issues directly affected children and families. P2 noted that, “registration online was chaotic and ineffective, numbers dropped and disadvantaged families were the most affected.” P7 said, “the new centralized online enrollment system is not friendly for low income families, which are the main target of the Head Start program. It has caused a drop on enrollment.” On a more positive note, P4 said that “full-day programs are more popular [with parents], stable, with much less paper work and more instructional time.” P4 also noted that the increased clerical work provided her with “more access to data to make informed decisions.”

These teachers had suggestions for improvement of administration and clerical processes, in addition to greater coordination between the two agencies. P4 suggested administrators “create a single system or program that coordinates all systems, aligned with the school district, or let local schools run the preschool like another grade and release the funds to local schools.” P7 focused on local control of registration, suggesting administrators “return registration to local schools and provide time and resources to do

it." P3 also was concerned about student registration, when she suggested, "send Parent Resource Assistants to assist with registration in local schools at the end and beginning of the school-year," as was P4, who suggested, "The registering teams visiting local schools were very effective with registration in previous years, bring them back." P7 suggested administrators "acknowledge the importance of preschool programs in building the foundational skills of young learners and include the preschool program in the fabric of the school." In general, teachers advocated for the development and implementation of a coordinated and integrated system.

Theme 3. Initiative Resources

The third theme that emerged from the data included access to resources, including materials, time, professional support, and teacher training. Comments in this theme were almost entirely negative, though some suggestions for improvement were offered by the participants. Participant P3 said, "There is a lack of resources: time, paper, copies, and money to run the program effectively."

With regard to material resources needed to conduct the program, participants largely agreed with P2, who said, "we receive some resources but not what the curriculum requires." P8 added, "the curriculum does not include teaching materials and teachers do not get enough money to buy them." P7 agreed, saying, "teachers are spending significant amounts of their money in providing basic supplies for their classrooms." P9 said there were "scarce resources for folders, no copies, no paper, too many forms requiring the same information." P5 blamed Head Start, saying, "we are filling up 60 forms for each student and Head Start is not giving us even the paper!"

while P1 blamed the school district: “Local schools have been depleted of their funds by city officials claiming a crisis and schools do not provide extra money nor resources for preschool classrooms.”

Lack of time was another issue for these teachers, primarily linked to clerical demands of the initiative described earlier. Duplicate systems demanded increased time from teachers to complete paperwork; P8 said, “multiple systems requiring repetitive processes is time consuming.” This issue seemed to be felt especially at the start of the school year, when new students joined the initiative. P1 said there was “excessive amount of clerical work, especially during the first 45 days of school,” a belief supported by P2, who suggested the district to “provide time and resources at the beginning of school for enrollment, assessment, and documentation.”

Teachers indicated lack of time needed to complete required student assessments. P1 said,

> the GOLD assessment takes too much time. It is impossible to complete it the first quarter in addition to all the individualized assessments which provide a comprehensive battery of evaluations in all areas of development. Consider waiting until the second quarter to input students’ observations.

P8 concurred, saying, “The GOLD assessment takes too much time, more than 200 entries per student.” P6 suggested the district “provide time for enrollment and substitutes to complete the mandated individualized assessments and standardized tests.”

Lack of time to complete required non-teaching work affected teachers' instructional time. P2 said, "we have to do everything in our own time. Sometimes we have to decide between teaching and complying with the paperwork." P9 linked lack of time to her struggle to provide quality for children, saying "I wanted to keep quality and sacrificed my own time. I take home hours of work but it is too much. I am not even taking my prep." This lack of preparation time was confirmed by P5, who suggested the district "provide teachers with their contractual preparation [prep] time. This time can be used to complete clerical work and to collaborate with other teachers in alignment and participation." P2 said she was "taking home long hours of work in order to comply." In general, the amount of work exceeded the available time in teachers' workday. P7 noted she was required to complete "double amount of work compared to PFA and tuition-based programs." P4 noted this increase as well, saying the initiative required "significant percentage of time used in administrative requirements, from 20% to 40%."

Lack of time was compounded for these teachers by lack of scheduling options and professional services. P5 said,

> First the other professionals stopped coming and we had to do the work ourselves. Then, they took half-Friday away and decreased the funds for supplies. Then they took away the week for registration before school started. Then, they took the whole Friday away and the PDs on school days.

P2 said she was given "no time, nor resources provided to comply with the enrollment, family interviews, home visits, and testing requirements." P7 agreed, saying, "in the past,

there was abundant help but every year there is less and less." P9 noted there were "so many mandates and requirements and much less time and resources to complete them."

Lack of time during the workday for professional development (PD) and the quality of professional development were other issues raised by these participants. P1 said, "professional development is on your own time, after work and weekends." P5 said that "training is horrible, extremely long, and mostly done through webinars on our own time." Webinar-based training was an issue for P3 also, who said, "webinars do not work for everyone due to time and technology constraints. Experienced trainers are more effective for many educators than webinars." Professional development was particularly needed because of some teachers' unfamiliarity with Head Start. P8 noted that "erratic top-down communication with and from central office causing a lack of clarity on Head Start requirements." P6 said that "some administrators are aware of the Head Start demands but do not have the resources to help," and she suggested a fix outside the initiative entirely: "include Creative Curriculum training in the local universities as part of the ECE teachers' training programs." As P9 noted, these teachers seemed to want the district to "re-establish PD days providing effective training and time for collaboration."

There were some advantages to teachers with regard to resources as a result of the initiative. P7 said, "technology has improved because everything was done by hand," and she noted that "a centralized system and central office [is] helping with data entry." P6 said, "the initiative brought additional support in funds, training and collaboration with outside agencies and social services for students." However, P9 said there was a need for the district to "include preschool programs in the local budgets to cover at least the basic

needs of the program such as copies and consumables." P4 noted that "schools do not receive funds for services provided to preschool students," and that "preschool is mostly not considered as part of schools. Preschool is included in school events but not for participation in alignment." Lack of time and essential resources were some of the most recurrent themes during the interviews. However, teachers offered multiple suggestions which are discussed in chapter 5.

Additional Findings

One unexpected finding in the research was to discover that there had been Head Start preschool programs in public schools in the district for over 20 years. Nothing in the literature review revealed the existence of these programs in this public school system prior to the Head Start- RTL initiative. P9 reported being working for Head Start in her public school for over 20 years and two other teachers (P4 and P7) reported working for the same program for more than 15 years. P9 stated that "it was a very small program in the city with over a dozen of schools participating at a time." These teachers' accounts provided an historical perspective of the Head Start program that emerged in each of the themes, as teachers compared the current program to the program they had experienced in the past. It was surprising to find that there were Head Start programs thriving in this public school system before the RTL initiative. Equally surprising was the level of support and resources that these veteran teachers claimed to have received from the program before the initiative.

Summary

Three themes emerged from interviews with teachers who were asked about their perceptions of the Head Start- RTL initiative and about their suggestions for the initiative's improvement. Themes emerged in areas programs and services, initiative administration and processes, and initiative resources.

Among the advantages reported by participants were the opportunity to attend preschool extended to those children that would not be able to pay for a preschool experience otherwise; the inclusion through the initiative of a structured preschool program with a comprehensive curriculum and holistic provision of services; support for the program in the form of funds, training, collaboration with outside agencies, and social services for students; curricular alignment in some cases through collaboration with kindergarten teachers; and facilitation of the transition from Head Start to kindergarten with children well-prepared for the kindergarten year. These advantages validate the initiative's mission to provide high quality preschool preparation for students who might not otherwise be able to attend such a program. The expansion of a full-day preschool option was also cited as a benefit of the initiative.

However, teachers reported many more disadvantages than advantages. Among the reported disadvantages were excessive amounts of clerical work, especially during the first 45 days of school; no time or resources provided to meet demands of enrollment or to comply with Head Start requirements for family interviews, home visits, and testing; too many forms requiring the same information; and multiple systems requiring repetitive processes, including the same data entry in various systems. In addition, teachers

described erratic top-down communication with and from the district central office that caused a lack of clarity on Head Start requirements; multiple administrators from different entities with conflicting agendas that resulted in teachers receiving mixed messages; and the fact that no time was provided for professional development, requiring teachers to complete this on their own time, after work and on weekends. In addition, teachers reported that the initiative's centralized online enrollment system is not friendly for low income families and caused a drop in Head Start enrollment. I confirmed this claim by searching for the preschool total enrollment in the district's website which shows a decrease in preschool students' enrollment from 23,671 in 2013 to 19,441 in the fall of 2017 ([Redacted] Stats and Facts, 2017).

The teachers' suggestions for improving the Head Start- RTL program included creating a single program that coordinates all systems or let local schools run the preschool like another grade and release the funds to local schools; re-establishing PD days providing effective training and time for collaboration; providing time and resources at the beginning of school for enrollment, assessment, and documentation; and increase overall funding levels. To better serve small children and the community, teachers suggested bringing back the enrolling visiting teams to the local schools or return registration to local schools and provide time and resources to do it; sending Parent Resource Assistants to assist with registration in local schools at the end and beginning of the school-year; hiring people with ECE backgrounds that understand the needs of young learners and their families; and educating principals and administrators in ECE and Head Start programs. Teachers also recommended expansion of the full-day program, since

that program incurs less paperwork (for fewer students per teacher) and is more popular with parents, leading to more stable enrollment.

Unexpectedly, the research revealed that there had been Head Start preschool programs in public schools in the district for over 20 years. According to veteran teachers' accounts the district's Head Start program once was a holistic, comprehensive preschool program that provided many services for children and families with abundant assistance, great PDs with experienced mentors, multiple resources, time for clerical work, and a more hands-on curriculum. However, according to these accounts, since 2007 the program has drastically decreased its resources and support. In the next chapter, I will share the interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, plus recommendations and implications of the results.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In 2013, a large public school district in the Midwestern United States launched an initiative to coordinate early learning programs across the city ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2014). Although city officials reported positive effects of the initiative, the opinions of teachers regarding effects on instruction and children were not included in the evaluation of this program. However, various scholars and researchers have pointed to the positive benefits and the need to include teachers' perspectives in program evaluation and system building (Avargil, Herscovitz, & Dori 2012; Brooks & Gibson 2012; Davis, Eickelmann, & Zaka 2013; Fullan 2014; Kimonen & Nevalainen 2014; Moolenaar 2012). The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perspectives of the RTL initiative with regard to its impact on their daily practice affected by the inclusion of Head Start preschool programs in the public schools of this urban school district. Teachers' experiences and perspectives with this initiative could be used to assist planning, implementing change, improving the status quo, or guiding future research.

Key findings of the study are summarized into reported advantages and reported disadvantages with respect to three themes of programs and services, initiative administration and processes, and initiative resources. Among the advantages, the interviewed teachers reported that the Head Start- RTL program provides an opportunity to attend preschool to children whose parents otherwise would not be able to pay for a high-quality preschool experience. According to the teachers' accounts, students enrolled in this program receive a free, high quality, highly supportive preschool experience with certified teachers. The teachers also reported that the initiative brought additional support

in funds, training and collaboration with outside agencies, social services for students, and a structured preschool program with a comprehensive curriculum and a holistic provision of services. Two veteran teachers reported that technology had improved significantly because of the initiative because they used to do everything by hand. Teachers reported that the initiative has helped with curricular alignment by promoting collaboration between preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers. Several teachers reported that in these programs students learn socioemotional and academic skills that prepare them for kindergarten and that there has been an improvement in readiness scores of children when they enter kindergarten. Teachers reported that the initiative facilitated the transition to kindergarten with well-prepared children from these Head Start programs. Interviewed teachers reported that the initiative benefited preschoolers by introducing them to the elementary school community. Two teachers working in full-day classrooms reported that full-day programs are more popular with parents, enjoy more stable enrollments, incur much less paper work, and offer more instructional time than do half-day programs.

However, the initiative also brought with it disadvantages, according to the interviewed teachers. These teachers felt a significant increase in work requirements and in the number of supervisors with the RTL-Head Start initiative in comparison with previous assignments. These teachers reported a redundancy of tasks with many systems that do not communicate with each other and that ask for similar data. Teachers reported nonteaching, clerical work to be excessive, particularly in the first 45 days of school in which they are required to also promote their programs, complete registration, set-up

their classrooms, take mandated professional development, and conduct multiple required individualized assessments. Teachers also said they take home hours of work in order to comply with all the requirements. All teachers reported a lack of resources (time, paper, copies, and money) to run the program effectively. Professional development is expected to be completed mostly on teachers' own time, after work and on weekends. Teachers also said that the new centralized online enrollment system is not friendly for low income families, which are the main target of the Head Start program. This issue, according to their accounts, has caused a decrease in students' enrollment. Some teachers also felt the new Head Start program is too academic and potentially developmentally inappropriate. None of the interviewed teachers reported being asked to contribute their insights to the evaluation of the system.

Interpretation of the Findings

This section describes in what ways the findings reported in this research confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the discipline. These descriptions were completed by comparing these findings with what was founded in the literature review described in Chapter 2. The section also includes an analysis and interpretation of the findings in the context of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2.

The literature review revealed a connection between the RTL initiative and a nationwide reform and expansion to early childhood care and education. The findings of this research confirmed this connection to reform and expansion of early childhood care and education ([Redacted] Public Schools website, 2014). Veteran teachers reported significant reforms and expansion of the local Head Start programs in the past 4 years.

Head Start programs in local public schools increased from 34 in 2013 to 120 in 2017 ([Redacted] Stats and Facts, 2017) and have been the subject of various systemic reforms already described in Chapter 2.

The literature review supplied abundant academic research about the effectiveness of ECE programs, especially in programs such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool (Schweinhart et al. 2011), the Chicago Child Parent Centers (Greenberg, 2013; PPN, 2014), and the Carolina Abecedarian Project (Barnet, 2011a). This study confirms these findings and adds the positive experiences of teachers working in this ECE initiative. In addition, most teachers reported that in these programs students learn socioemotional and academic skills that prepare them for kindergarten and that there is a significant improvement in readiness scores, learning attitude, and aptitude of these children when they enter kindergarten compared to children enrolled prior to the initiative.

The literature review disclosed that city officials reported positive effects of the initiative such as a coordinated application and review process, improved distribution of funds, and an increase in the quantity and quality of the programs (City of [Redacted] website, 2015). This study confirmed an increase in the quantity of Head Start programs changing from 34 in 2013 to 120 in 2017 ([Redacted] Stats and Facts, 2017). However, my study, which is based on teachers' perceptions and experiences with the program, was unable to confirm the officials' claims about the positive effects of the initiative such as a coordinated application and review process, improved distribution of funds, and an increase in the quantity and quality of the programs. The study revealed a decrease in preschool students' enrollment from 23,671 in 2013 to 19,441 ([Redacted] Stats and

Facts, 2017). Furthermore, all the teachers interviewed reported that the large quantity of nonteaching requirements of the Head Start- RTL program diminished its quality by significantly reducing instructional and interaction time with students, families, and colleagues. Brown and Gasko (2012) reported comparable claims by teachers of doing "twice the work" following a similar preschool reform in Texas (p. 282). Most interviewed teachers reported that, despite the creation of a coordinated application and review process, enrollment was more complicated and difficult for disadvantaged families to enroll their children in the preschool programs, which negatively affected enrollment. Also, all the interviewed teachers reported receiving insufficient funds to run their programs adequately.

The literature review revealed that the Head Start program appears to be evolving into a blended-funding program across the nation. Duncan and Magnuson (2013) reported that in 2005 most Head Start programs were based in community centers. Then, in 2010, according to these authors $7.2 billion dollars from the Head Start fund was redistributed to private and public nonprofit grantees. This research confirmed this tendency, because the number of public schools offering Head Start preschool programs in the district increased over 250% in 4 years with a projected increment to 300 full-day pre-kindergarten programs by 2019 (City of [Redacted] website, 2015).

Fullan (2014) proposed that system change must include the participation of all members. In the case of education reform, he emphasized that system change must include the active participation of teachers in the reform. Fullan emphasized that the effectiveness of school communities depends on whether they involve their teachers to

make advances in learning or whether these communities emphasize methods that do not attain results. He wrote that efforts to find solutions to current problems must include those people who are most closely involved in the problem and whose efforts will be needed to affect the solution (Fullan 2014). Fullan and Langworthy (2013) affirmed that determining participants' positive and negative perceptions, and requesting their suggestions, are essential steps in system building. The authors recommend examining the learning conditions and the impact of those conditions related to the change process(Fullan & Langworthy, 2013). They affirmed that this information will provide evidence based data to inform system-level policies (Fullan, M., & Langworthy, M., 2013). Recent literature confirms a tendency to discount teacher participation in planning educational change (Barnett, 2013; Brown & Gasko, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2011a). The research findings confirmed this tendency, in that none of the teachers interviewed reported being asked to contribute their insights to the evaluation of the Head Start- RTL system.

Limitations of the Study

General limitations of the study described in Chapter 1 were the small sample size, the focus on a single school system, and the use of an instrumental case study model which depended on the veracity of participants. A further limitation was that, as a teacher in the Head Start-RTL program, I had formed my own ideas about the impact of the initiative in my teaching practice. However, reasonable measures were taken to address some of these limitations. These included invitations to the participants to review the transcriptions of the interviews to avoid misrepresentations or omissions; reviewing the

interview transcripts and checking for any biased interactions (biased segments were excluded from data analysis); and controlling for bias and potential problems due to previous or actual relationships with teachers by excluding teachers with whom I talked about this research project.

Credibility of the answers to interview questions depended on the truthfulness of the participants and their ability to express what was in mind in a way that could be interpreted accurately. I was responsible for ensuring that the transcribed answers accurately reflected what was said, but participants were responsible for ensuring, through their review of the transcripts, that what was said and transcribed is what they really meant. No participants requested any amendment or adjustment to their responses. This member checking of the data contributed to the validity of the study. Other strategies that may have increased credibility were my prolonged contact with each participant over the course of the interviews' questions and triangulation derived by using nine different informants from different sites.

Transferability (external validity) was enhanced through the use of thick descriptions and variation in participant selection. I have provided thick, detailed, descriptions of the initiative being investigated that may allow the reader to obtain a fair understanding of the issue, make comparisons, and transfer this information to similar contexts. Variation in participant selection was another strategy that may have increased transferability by ensuring that multiple views are included in the study.

The dependability of this study's results was supported through triangulation via corroborating evidence from different individuals and member checking. All the

interviewed teachers were asked to review the results of the analysis through a summary of the findings before final approval and dissemination. Because of the subjectivity of qualitative research, it is possible that perceptions expressed on any given day are a factor of that day's events and may or may not be stable over time. This problem of dependability of the data is another characteristic of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Dependability was supported by the use of more than one or two reporters. This study included interviews from nine participants which may increase dependability. Dependability is also supported by the process of member checking, so that participants who have changed their minds or who were influenced by ephemeral factors may adjust or amend what they said through their review of the transcribed interview's answers. Furthermore, participants were asked to review the results of the analysis through a summary of the findings before final approval and dissemination.

Confirmability in this study was supported through the use of reflexivity, triangulation, and external audit strategies. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) asserted that these are strategies that qualitative researchers can use to ensure consistency, reliability, and dependability. Creswell (2012) described reflexivity as the researchers' awareness and open disclosure of his or her role, potential biases, and assumptions in the study. I made a full and open disclosure in the informed consent form of my role, potential biases, and assumptions in the study. For external audit of confirmability, I asked for volunteer peer reviewers from my current Walden University course to provide feedback on potential signs of subjectivity in the study. Two of them volunteered, signed a confidentiality

agreement, and assisted with their review. Modification of the study were made based on their feedback and suggestions.

Recommendations

Multiple researchers in educational reform (Avargil, Herscovitz & Dori, 2012; Brooks & Gibson, 2012; Davis, Eickelmann, & Zaka, 2013; Kimonen & Nevalainen, 2014; Kwok, 2014; and Moolenaar, 2012) have pointed to the necessity to include teachers' perspectives in systemic change. Yet, the literature review revealed a gap in regard to the inclusion of the experiences and perspectives of participant teachers. Scholarly literature confirms a tendency to discount teacher inclusion in planning educational change (Barnett, 2013; Brown & Gasko, 2012; Reynolds et al., 2011a). This study was designed to collect the experiences, perspectives, and recommendations for systemic change of Head Start preschool teachers in the public schools of a large urban school district. The perspectives of the interviewed teachers significantly differed from the official narrative. Nonetheless, the findings in this study are very similar to the findings by Brown and Gasko (2012) who reported comparable claims by teachers in a similar preschool reform in Texas. However, the small sample of teachers does not provide enough data to generate generalizable findings. Further research is necessary to corroborate and expand the limited findings in this study.

This study may be replicated in other areas with similar conditions, such as the precedent study in Texas by Brown and Gasko (2012) mentioned above. Future research studies may also focus on the use of a larger sample of participants even in the same district. Research focused in the factors that inhibit school districts from involving

teachers in reform initiatives is another suggestion that may foster further research and further our understanding of this type of programs.

Implications

Despite of the limitations of this study, the experiences, perspectives and recommendations of these educators have the potential to create a positive impact at various levels. The implications for a positive social change at the policy level include the acknowledgment that quality preschool programs make a significant difference in the development and progress of children, especially the most disadvantaged children. This study, along with many other studies, reinforces the notion that ECE works but that it is necessary to include teachers in systemic change and educational reform in order to maximize initiative effectiveness.

At the organizational level, this study brings into perspective the voices and experiences of the people affected by institutional change. It provides recommendations and suggestions for improvement of the system with the ultimate goal of improving the delivery of services for the children and families in the program. The teachers who participated in this study recommended the streamlining of the system to avoid repetitive processes and tasks; such streamlining may restore teaching hours and interaction time teachers reported were reduced by the need to fulfill duplicated administrative demands. This change by itself may represent financial savings that can be used to expand the quantity and quality of the program.

The implications for a positive social change for the families are also significant. The teachers recommended a parent-centered enrollment process targeting disadvantaged

families and children. They also recommended the expansion and improvement of comprehensive services for the families of the children enrolled in preschool. However, the highest implication for positive social change is for the children. The interviewed teachers recommended the restoring of a child-centered practice guided by the Head Start vision of serving and advocating for the whole child, the family and the community and to ensure that all vulnerable children and families [and teachers] have what they need to succeed (Head Start, 2017).

Conclusion

A large body of academic research has demonstrated that early childhood education provides multiple benefits to children and society. The United States is investing more and more in its ECE programs and these continue expanding rapidly across the nation. The evidence suggests that the expansion and improvement of the ECE programs will continue in the future through various reforms, programs, and initiatives. As these programs grow, adapt, and change it is necessary to include teachers' perspectives in program evaluation and system-building. Teachers' experiences with programs undergoing changes can provide essential information to maximize the effectiveness of the program and lead to benefits to instruction and interaction for children and their families.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate

Dear Teacher,

You are invited to take part in a research study about the impact of the inclusion of Head Start preschool classrooms in the Chicago Public School (CPS) system. The researcher is inviting experienced teachers who have worked in the district as RTL-Head Start or Early Childhood teachers for four or more years to be in the study. I obtained your name/ contact information through publicly available information.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named *Salvador Perez*, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You might already know the researcher as a CPS teacher and/or as a member of the Early Childhood Committee, but this study is separate from these roles.

The purpose of this study is to collect the experiences and perspectives of CPS-Head Start preschool teachers about the impact of the Head Start preschool program in their teaching practice. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate on an individual interview at the time and location of your preference. The interview will last approximately 40 minutes.

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project and will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports.

The study is voluntary and there is no monetary compensation for participation. Individual teachers may be benefited by the satisfaction of providing their input in the expansion of our understanding of these types of programs. Nonetheless, the benefits of this study will be most likely for the community at large because the teachers' experiences and input will help to understand what is working and what needs work in the inclusion of Head Start preschool programs in CPS.

Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Head Start nor CPS will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later.

We hope you can join us in this collaborative effort to improve our practice through your input and perspectives. To join the study or if you have any further questions please respond to this missive within 7 days of received.

Thank you for your time and attention!

Appendix B

Interview Protocol Form

Study: Teacher Perceptions of Head Start Preschool Programs in an Urban Public School

Date _____ Time _____ Location _____

Interviewer _____ Interviewee _____

Release form reviewed and signed? _____ Audio recorder working? _____

Notes to interviewee:
Thank you for your participation. I believe your input will be valuable to this research and in helping grow all of our professional practice.

Confidentiality of responses is guaranteed

Approximate length of interview: 40 minutes,

There are 9 major open-ended questions to be discussed during the individual interview. These may be followed by short clarifying or elaborating questions. Are you ready? Do you have any questions or concerns? Should we start now?

1. The school district embarked on a collaborative initiative with Head Start and implemented Head Start preschool classrooms in public schools. In your experience as a Head Start-RTL teacher what are the advantages this collaboration has brought to your students and teaching practice?
Response from Interviewee: Probing Questions?

2. What advantages have you found in the Head Start-RTL system with regard to basic processes, like communication with your supervisors, data entry, record keeping, clerical work, student enrollment, and so on?
Response from Interviewee: Probing Questions?

3. What is working in regard to the citywide-implemented curriculum, like instructional (materials, training, resources, developmental appropriateness, and so on?
Response from Interviewee: Probing Questions?

4. What is working in regard to the local school support, like resources, curricular alignment, inclusion of the preschool program, and so on?
Response from Interviewee: Probing Questions?

5. Now I want to switch to talking about any disadvantages you've experienced. In your work as a Head Start-RTL teacher have you found any disadvantages this collaboration has brought to your students and teaching practice?
Response from Interviewee: Probing Questions?

6. What disadvantages have you found in the Head Start-RTL system with regard to basic processes, like communication with your supervisors, data entry, record keeping, clerical work, student enrollment, and so on?
Response from Interviewee: Probing Questions?

7. What needs work in regard to the citywide-implemented curriculum, like instructional (materials, training, resources, developmental appropriateness, and so on? Response from Interviewee: Probing Questions?

8. What needs work in regard to the local school support like resources, curricular alignment, inclusion of the preschool program, and so on?
Response from Interviewee: Probing Questions?

9. What are your suggestions for improvement of the school district's collaboration with Head Start and for the Head Start-RTL initiative?
Response from Interviewee: Probing Questions?

Closure:
Thank you to interviewee…Reassure confidentiality...Remind of pending transcription.

Reflection by Interviewer: