THE INTERACTION BETWEEN ACCOUNTABILITY POLICIES FOR KINDERGARTEN AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES: KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS RESPONSES TO POLICIES IN FOUR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SUBSIDIZED SCHOOLS IN CHILE

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ABSTRACT

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN ACCOUNTABILITY POLICIES FOR KINDERGARTEN AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES: KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS RESPONSES TO POLICIES IN FOUR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SUBSIDIZED SCHOOLS IN CHILE

Victoria Parra Moreno

Similar to many other countries, over the past decade Chile has developed policies increasing accountability over schools and teachers working with young children, yet little is known about the impact of these policies on teachers and teaching practices.

This study contributes to the research on policy implementation by examining the interaction between accountability policies and institutional practices in kindergarten in the context of the Chilean school system. Specifically, this multiple-site case study explored the responses of kindergarten teachers and principals in different school contexts to policies driven by accountability principles. The study employs a critical approach mobilizing a blend of institutional theory and sense-making theory to examine schools’ macro and micro levels of policy implementation.
The results indicate that according to teachers there is a disjunction between the traditional aims of early childhood education, and the objectives of current policies that emphasize results over processes. The teachers interviewed in this study felt that accountability policies largely increase control and surveillance over their teaching and privilege standardized performance measures over holistic child development. However, these policies do provide teachers some opportunities to improve their professional legitimacy in an educational context that usually isolates them. The study also reveals a large gap between teachers’ and principals’ knowledge of early childhood education and their views of the impact of accountability policies.

One of the main implications of this study is that policy implementation should put in place supporting actions to help teachers implement accountability practices while acknowledging teachers’ expertise and fostering their agency.
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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the field of early childhood education has globally experienced new and renewed interest that emphasizes the relevance of early education for the well-being of both individuals and society. This study emerges from this burgeoning policy environment, which is very much oriented toward ensuring the provision of quality early education and expanding services for young children. Specifically, this study focuses on the policy efforts that have been devoted to kindergarten in public and private subsidized schools in Chile. This policy environment reflects global movements to improve education by increasing accountability, which in turn produces new practices and discourses in kindergarten connected to changes in the socioeconomic landscape.

This study sought to examine the interaction between accountability policies and institutional practices in kindergarten in the context of the Chilean school system. Specifically, this multiple-site case study explored the responses of kindergarten teachers and principals in different school contexts to policies that are designed to ensure that teachers and schools enable students to achieve high levels of performance.

Situating the Problem in the Larger Context

In order to frame the examination of the way in which schools and educators respond to the development of early childhood education accountability policies, it is necessary to understand the growing emphasis on accountability in early childhood in
Chile as reflecting historical, political, and economic developments of early childhood education in the United States and globally. This overview allows a broader perspective on the larger challenges and tensions existing in the field of early education and the advent of accountability policies to early childhood education as well as to education in Chile. In addition, situating the problem within the larger context in which it develops aims to “recognize the contextuality of the policy process” (Simons et al., 2009, p. 3). This means that, as researcher, I attempt to present the context of the problem in order to highlight ways in which accountability policies are connected to particular values and ideologies. Drawing from Ball (1990), this contextualization of the problem aims to recognize that “policies cannot be divorced from interests, from conflict, from domination or from justice” (p. 3). Hence, the contextualization of the problem is also a reflection on issues of power and knowledge that are part of the educational enterprise that influence developments in kindergarten classrooms.

**Growing Interest in Early Childhood Education Globally**

The recent increased interest in early childhood education is an outgrowth of the evidence from different fields asserting the positive impact of early education on not only children, but society in general (Zigler, Gilliam & Barnett, 2011). Neuroscience, molecular biology, and genetic studies indicate that early childhood experiences and parental education are significant for the healthy development of children due to these interventions targeting critical stages of child development (Hannon, 2003; Shonkoff, 2010). Furthermore, scholars in the field of human development strongly argue that early care and education are significantly correlated with positive developmental trajectories of children in various dimensions including cognitive, language development, and
emotional development (Barnett, 1995; Fantuzzo et al., 2007). Adding to these arguments, in recent decades economists have joined in highlighting the short- and long-term economic benefits, both individual and social, of quality early childhood education (Heckman & Masterov, 2007). Supported by cost-benefit analysis, economists claim that early education interventions can be shown to be adequate social investments that provide proven economic benefits by increasing future productivity and reducing risk factors associated with poverty and violence (Doyle, Harmon, Heckman & Tremblay, 2009; Engle et al., 2011). A children’s rights perspective has also played a substantial role in the argument for quality early childhood education and for stressing efforts to support children’s development (Smith, 2007).

As the support for early childhood education grows, discussions proliferate about the nature and aims of quality early education. Defining what constitutes educational quality at this stage of development is a complex task given the coexistence of definitions that highlight different dimensions and elements of early education services. Some definitions of early childhood education focus on dynamic direct experiences and relations between children and adults including sensitive care and teaching practices (Burchinal, 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008) Other definitions focus on the structural characteristics of programs and services that are often regulated such as the number of children per classroom, teacher qualifications, adult-children ratio, curriculum, materials and spatial arrangements (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald & Squires, 2012; Vandell, 2004). On the other hand, notions of early education quality have expanded to include organizational and institutional supporting services. Additionally, quality also includes
the institutional arrangements that provide structural support to implement quality services (Britto, Yoshikawa & Boller, 2011).

The above overview indicates the existence of various, presumably complementary, notions of quality in the field of early childhood education. The multiplicity of conceptualizations of quality early education also reveal the relevance that the field has acquired in recent decades for different stakeholders that seek to ensure particular results, both for individuals and society in general. Along with the increasing interest in and support for early education from particular groups, the field of early childhood education has experienced significant debates regarding its aims. I argue that the existence of new and renewed interest in early education has not only caused debates about the aims of early education but also brought new practices and technologies to ensure the provision of quality services under the current notion of early education. These elements are discussed in the following section.

**Debating the Aims of Early Education and Changes in the Landscape**

Bishop-Josef and Zigler (2011) summarize the historical debate that has produced tension in the field of early education. They remark that the aims of early childhood education oscillate between early education focusing on children’s cognitive and academic development versus early education that stresses a whole child or child-centered approach that considers physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development, as well as educational experiences and practices. The latter approach seeks to complicate notions of child development under regimes of social-efficiency (Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Mac Naughton, 2005). The discussion about the aims of education is not novel; however, it is important to highlight that this debate has been
strongly influenced and revamped by changes in the socioeconomic context and the 
increased institutionalization of childhood and standardization of early education 
suggestive example of the influence of the socioeconomic and political context on 
education. They argue that in the United States the launch of Sputnik had a significant 
impact not only on elementary and secondary education, but also on early education. 
Assertions such as Americans teach children finger-painting while Russian children learn 
mathematics, science, and engineering caused an intense focus on cognitive development 
in early education.

Movements supporting the constitution of early education as a means to secure 
predetermined outcomes have received pushback from critical educators who claim that 
early education that works with “fixed categories and classificatory systems to define, 
assess and normalise children…make the Other into the Same and remove the possibility 
of otherness, through the exercise of power and grasping the child” (Dahlberg & Moss, 
2005, pp. 95-96). Nevertheless, this challenging perspective that mobilizes a whole child 
or child-centered approach has lost prominence in recent years given salient research 
arguments that highlight the effectiveness of some early interventions in ensuring 
positive academic and personal outcomes for children from low-socioeconomic 
backgrounds (Gormley, Phillips & Gayer, 2008; Ramey et al., 2000). In addition, 
educational policies for early childhood have changed substantially requiring a stronger 
focus on the development of children’s cognitive, numeracy, and literacy skills. As an 
example, in the United States, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was a critical 
moment in boosting a focus on academics for early education. This particular policy
stressed the need to improve children’s literacy achievement, leading to emphasizing literacy training in early years (Bishop-Josef & Zigler, 2011). The White House Summit on Early Childhood Cognitive Development, “Ready to Read, Ready to Learn” held in 2001, is also considered a crucial event because the conference made a clear statement about the government focus on early education, stressing the need for and importance of preparing children to enter school ready to learn (Karch, 2013). The following year, president George W. Bush launched Good Start, Grow Smart. This initiative promoted the development of an accountability system for Head Start focusing on the development of children’s cognitive, numeracy, and literacy development. It also proposed improving states’ early childhood education through partnerships to develop standards aligning K-12 language and literacy development (Executive Office of the President, 2002).

As outlined above, and using the United States as an example, the debates regarding the aim of early education are greatly influenced by changes in the social, economic, and political context. These changes call for rethinking the goals of education in general, and the particular role that early childhood education plays by itself and in connection to elementary and secondary education. We can consider philosophies of early childhood education as arranged along a spectrum with the whole child approach at one end, to a strong focus on academic readiness at the other. The arguments for supporting different approaches vary depending on a series of elements including conceptions about the child and individuals’ professional experiences (Goldstein, 2008a), the policies that shape the landscape of early childhood education, and what is at stake and for whom. What is certain is that these debates are far from over, especially under
the current push to increase accountability technologies in early education and the alignment of early childhood education to elementary and secondary education.

**Debating the Role of Accountability and Standardization in Early Childhood Education**

The strong social and governmental support that early childhood education—especially pre-k and kindergarten under accountability premises—has experienced in the last decades in the international context could be explained to a great extent by the historical, political, and scientific elements described above. In the last decade, there has been a growth globally of policy initiatives to ensure that the social investment in early childhood warrants positive results for both individuals and society (Britto et al., 2013; UNESCO, 2006). This social interest is particularly intensified by the promise that early childhood programs can narrow the achievement gap between children from different socio-economic statuses and raise skills, ensuring a more productive and globally competitive work force. As an example of this movement, in the United States, the Report of the National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force (Schultz & Kagan, 2007) calls for the development of accountability systems in early education aimed at providing useful information to support the decision making of stakeholders. Among the recommendations of the task force regarding the designing of an Early Accountability and Improvement System are (a) the existence of a system of infrastructure to support the implementation of “high-quality assessments, timely, accurate reporting, and appropriate understanding and use of assessment data” (p. 6); (b) the assessment of programs oriented to their improvement; and (c) the alignment and integration of “standards and curricula from prekindergarten through grade 3, thereby fostering the continuity of instruction,
assessment, and program improvement efforts throughout children’s early years” (p. 6). Bruder (2010) emphasizes that the adoption of a “culture of accountability across all dimension of service provision” (p. 346) allows for measuring conditions, practices, results, and their relationship across settings and populations. These initiatives further seek to safeguard parents’ decisions to rely on childcare institutions and schools to promote the adequate development of children in a secure environment, ensuring positive outcomes for children (NAEYC, 2014) in accordance with predetermined standards. The creation and adoption of Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) have been among the most frequent actions taken in the last decade to assess and promote improvement and quality of early education, as well as to improve the public accountability of these initiatives.

As explained above, standards play a major role in shaping schools’ pedagogical decisions, regulating classroom experiences, and contributing to the enactment of a particular vision of public education. Early childhood purposes can be understood as an assemblage of discourses and visions of education and the child in neoliberal times that aim to produce certain educational spaces, relationships, and subjects. Kindergarten policies could be understood as a means of aligning the learning processes in kindergarten to those expected to happen in later grades in order to ensure a particular type of “growth” to make students ready for college or work. Kindergarten policies are not only tools to secure the accomplishments of broad aims of schooling, but also policing tools that standardize teaching and learning and produce a “particular childhood and roles for teachers and parents in service to the economic growth of the state” (Sherfinski, 2013, p. 1). As Foucault (2008) argues, societies employ “educational
investments” as means to control, monitor, and improve the human capital of their constituents. In that respect, he argues that, “the individual becomes governmentalizable, that power gets hold on him to the extent, and only to the extent, that he is a homo economicus” (p. 252). Subsequently, prescribing in high detail the technologies and aims of early childhood education contributes to both the prescription of particular content, knowledge, teaching and learning experiences, and the establishment of an assurance system to economic aims.

Kindergarten accountability policies impose accountability roles both on schools and on teachers. They can be used as strategies of “rationalization and procedures by which students are assigned to certain units of the system and moved from one unit of the system to another” (Beadie, 2004, p. 37). This is particularly significant for analyzing the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas present in official discourses about the role of education in preparing students to succeed in college and careers. Apple (2000) states that neoliberal reform operates by “providing the educational conditions believed necessary both for increasing international competitiveness, profit, and discipline” (p. 56). Thus, schools and teachers are framed as both makers and gatekeepers of students’ future success. Broadly speaking, accountability policy initiatives of the last decades have responded to social and economic pressures. In doing that, I claim these policies contribute to changing not only the way that early childhood education is conceptualized by different stakeholders, but also the way it is practiced and experienced inside of the classroom.
Educational Policy Context in Chile: Historical Overview and Current Situation

The Chilean education system is organized into a “mixed” system that encompasses public schools, private subsidized schools, and private schools. The public schools are directly administered by municipalities, the private subsidized are under the administration of private providers receiving funding from the state and consequently are subject to regulations and mandates from the Ministry of Education. The private subsidized schools are also known as voucher schools. Private schools can be owned and managed by individuals or organizations and families are responsible for paying tuition.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2014) Chile has one of the lowest proportions of 15-year-old students attending public schools (37%, in comparison to the OECD average (82%). Recent data indicates that 48% of students attend private subsidized schools. This percentage has increased substantially since 1981 when the primary enrollment was concentrated in public schools (78%), which shows a shift from a strong public system with private schools having a complementary role (Fundación Sol, 2011) to an education system with a larger presence of private providers.

In the 1980s –during the military regime– the municipalization of public education began, delegating greater political, administrative, and fiscal responsibilities to municipalities. Law No 18.695 designates municipalities as autonomous public corporations with their own resources and responsibilities. Municipalization of education translated into municipalities assuming responsibilities related to hiring school personnel, setting wages, and acquiring material resources (Larrañaga, 1995). As Larrañaga (1995) argues, these municipal agencies act as intermediaries between the central government
and schools, given their role in channeling the monetary resources of the State through municipal funding strategies. The significant heterogeneity among Chile’s 346 municipalities in terms of population, geographical location, economic resources, and human resources shaped their role and the actions that target schools under their jurisdiction. In addition, municipalities can allocate further resources to technical support, material resources, and professional development in accordance with their municipal education plans (Román & Carrasco, 2007). Meanwhile, the central government remained responsible for policy design by setting minimal universal requirements, providing technical supervision and oversight, and providing funding through territorially decentralized agencies (i.e. Regional Ministerial Secretariats – SEREMIS, and Provincial Departments - DEPROVs). Additionally, a new funding system was launched in which schools’ funding depended on the number of students attending. The Organic Constitutional Education Law (LOCE) enacted by the dictator Augusto Pinochet just one day before his ouster had a profound impact on the Chilean education landscape during the 1990’s by decentralizing education, reducing the role of the State, strengthening the freedom of teaching, and creating an education system mixed in nature (i.e. public, subsidized-private, and private schools) to assure parents the freedom to choose the educational setting for their children. During this period, the national expenditure on education decreased from 7.5% to 2.6% of the gross domestic product, and academic outcomes and social inequalities between socio-economic groups increased (Valenzuela, Labarrera & Rodriguez, 2008) as vouchers impacted the stratification of the school system (Arango, 2008).
The first three democratic governments after the return to democracy focused on increasing education coverage, implementing programs to support failing schools that received state funding, and introducing new educational reforms. Despite the criticism from teachers, students, and civil society against the education system and the efforts implemented towards improving students’ achievement, these governments did not address the structural issues underpinned by LOCE. By 2006, the social discontent towards the education system was widespread. High school students led the rise of public demonstrations claiming the right to a quality education for all. Significant protests were held a few days before the Presidential State of the Nation, along with the siege of emblematic public schools, forcing the president, Michelle Bachelet, to address the issue, which had gained significant media coverage. After strong social pressure and significant social debate, in March of 2009 the General Education Law (LGE) was approved. The LGE affirms the right to education. It also stresses the role of the State in ensuring access to education at all levels and in assuring quality education at all levels. Despite the enactment of LGE, and following legislation including the Education Quality Assurance Law in 2011, social discontent among civil society and some political sectors continues to impact the social agenda of the current government. The main demands have focused on free and equitable education for all students that could address the current socially and academically segregated school system. As of this writing, the executive and legislative branches have put efforts into discussing educational reform that calls for greater spending on education, regulating or ending state funding (subsidies) to private schools, and providing free education at the primary and secondary levels.
This overview of the current situation and the historical elements that shape the educational landscape in Chile highlight key features of the education system. The first element to stress is the existence of a context in which public and private schools co-exist. Second, the organization and administration of schools that receive state funding (municipal and private subsidized) are subject to greater regulations and mandates from the national government through the Ministry of Education and its territorially deconcentrated agencies (SEREMIS and DEPROVS). Nevertheless, schools under the administration of municipalities are subject to additional state regulations and local policies according to the particular guidelines of each municipality. In this regard, municipalities play an additional role in influencing the administration and organization of municipal schools. This influence operates through the allocation of additional resources, local regulations, hiring practices and other strategies such as monitoring/supervising tools and data platforms to inform schools. These elements could both bridge and buffer the implementation of ministerial policies as well impose additional requirements on the administration of municipal schools.

Private subsidized schools are also capable of bridging and buffering the implementation of national accountability policies through school network guidelines and support resources, or the particularities of the educational policies and administration of each school.

The above characterization of the Chilean educational context is key to understand the existence of multiple layers impacting the administration of schools that receive state funding (municipal and private subsidized). For instance, with regard to the implementation of the ministerial accountability policies that were explored in this study,
both municipal and private subsidized schools receive per student funding and the
priority schools subsidy (SEP law funding) if they serve students from disadvantaged
backgrounds. Both types of schools are also required to implement curricular and
assessment performance (SIMCE) policies. However, in the case of the National Teacher
Evaluation Policy that impacts the general evaluation performance of schools, this is only
mandatory for municipal schools despite the fact that private subsidized schools receive
state funding and are subject to other accountability policies mandated from the national
level. In addition, schools administered by municipalities are also subject to regulations
by their local authority that vary among municipalities depending on local resources and
plans.

All these factors create a context in which schools receiving state funding
(municipal and private subsidized) operate under fairly different conditions that must be
acknowledged in order to understand the role of the contextual factors in the way in
which schools located in the same municipal location respond to and reflect on
accountability policies for kindergarten.

**Early Childhood Education History in Chile and Current Situation**

Chile can be characterized as having a long-standing commitment to early
education dating from the early twentieth century with the establishment of the first
kindergarten education emphasized the relevance of education starting at birth, following
Froebel’s approach. In 1948, early childhood education was incorporated into the plans of
the Ministry of Education, with the aim of increasing enrollment rates and seeking an
“integrated development of the child’s personality and his/her intelligent adaptation to
local and natural environment” (Umayahara, 2006, p. 23). In the 1990’s, education in general, and early education in particular, captured the public’s attention and were prioritized on the public agenda after being significantly impacted by the policies of the military that had reduced funding, affected the teacher-student ratio (1:45) and reduced teacher qualification requirements in the two previous decades. Namely, in 1990, the government declared education as a priority for the decade, increasing the public investment in education to 4.0% of the gross domestic product, with a significant increase of public expenditure in early childhood education over the prior two decades (Ministerio de Educación, 2006; Rolla, Leal & Torres, 2011).

Signaling the relevance of early childhood education, in 1999 early childhood education was recognized as the first level of the Chilean national education system. Simultaneously, a specialized department of Early Childhood Curriculum and Evaluation was created within the Ministry of Education to lead the development of National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood, outlining the expected learning outcomes for children from 0 to 6 years of age. These guidelines were issued in 2001, followed by a considerable implementation plan that encompassed workshops adapted to the needs of each one of the major public providers of early childhood education. In 2008, the Ministry of Education issued the Learning Progress Maps for early childhood education to complement the curricular guidelines. These maps provide a comprehensive description of the expected learning for each developmental stage. All these policy initiatives increased accountability for early childhood education, particularly through the development of regulations and guidelines aimed at achieving national goals for early education.
The Education Quality Assurance Law of 2011 has also impacted the field of early education, especially contributing to increased accountability demands. The law stipulates the creation of the Superintendency of Education and defines its role in supervising early childhood centers. In addition, the law created the Quality Agency, which is responsible, among other things, for developing a system to assess the quality of learning and teaching in early education. More recently, by the end of 2013, Law No. 20.701 was approved establishing kindergarten as compulsory for 5-year-olds and a legal requirement preceding primary education.

By the end of December 2014 the Senate approved the most recent legislation directed at early childhood education in Chile. This legislation approves the creation of the Sub-secretariat for Early Childhood Education in the Ministry of Education and a specialized Superintendency of Early Childhood Education within the Superintendency of Education. The former agency is in charge of developing educational policy for children from 0 to 6, and the latter will be responsible for supervising nurseries, childcare centers, and schools providing early childhood education.

According to Pardo and Woodrow (2014) governmental initiatives in Chile in the last decades have been strongly influenced by “policy discourse across many countries” (p. 104) that stresses the role of early education in reducing education inequalities by positively impacting child development, offering economic benefits to society, and boosting female participation in the workforce. The authors stress that these rationales do not converge with the historical values and views in the field of early childhood education in Chile. In addition, Peralta (2012) argues that some emergent issues associated with having the curricular guidelines are the homogenization of the teaching
labor force given the narrowing of working alternatives, “schoolification” of early childhood education, and the loss of the main principles of early education. Early childhood teachers have also articulated their concerns regarding the excessive focus on schoolification of early childhood that confines early childhood education aims and children’s experiences (Romo, Simonstein, Peralta & Mayorga, 2009).

Pardo and Woodrow (2014) contend that some of the policies described above could be characterized by “the application of performance and accountability objectives to early childhood education by including it in other initiatives aimed at improving student achievement in the National System for Measuring the Quality of Education, SIMCE” (p. 105). Among the most significant accountability policies, of which pre-k and kindergarten are part, are performance-based monetary incentive initiatives, including the National Performance Evaluation System (SNED) and the Pedagogical Excellence Reward (AEP). The former encompasses a school evaluation system that economically rewards teachers in what are defined as the best performing schools. The latter refers to economic rewards for teachers that demonstrate high-quality teaching aimed at boosting the quality of the education system.

Furthermore, the Preferential School Subsidy (SEP) could be also framed as an accountability policy in the sense that schools that receive an additional public subsidy given their high-need population are mandated to implement a 4-year school improvement plan, aimed at achieving centrally defined objectives to increase educational quality. The subsidy is aimed at improving the quality of education through the allocation of additional financial resources directly to schools that receive state funding for each low-income student in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, primary and
secondary education. The objectives of the school improvement plan have to consider the areas of curriculum management, school leadership, school environment, and human resource management. Additionally, the plan has to include academic performance goals defined in terms of standards and education quality indicators like SIMCE scores. The schools can use the SEP resources to hire external agencies to provide advice and support services to develop, implement, and/or monitor the improvement plan. A central aspect of SEP is that schools failing to meet their commitments can be sanctioned through fines, ineligibility for SEP or even closure (Pardo & Woodrow, 2014, p. 106). This law links financial resources and the demand for quality education through the establishment of commitments and plans to strengthen school communities by addressing their particular teaching and learning needs (Raczynski, Muñoz, Weinstein & Pascual, 2013). In 2011, 99% of municipal schools and 73% of schools receiving state subsidies have received SEP funding. The law works as a mechanism of internal accountability for schools given the definition of clear and shared learning goals and academic achievements among teachers and administrators (CEPPE, 2012, as cited in Raczynski, Muñoz, Weinstein & Pascual, 2013).

The context described above highlights the arrival of accountability policies that target early childhood education with particular emphasis on pre-k and kindergarten levels. These policies aim to increase enrollment and improve the quality of these grades to better prepare students to navigate elementary education. This is illustrated in the significant growth in enrollment in early childhood education reaching 44%, tripling between 1990 and 2011 (Ministerio de Educación, 2012). Enrollment differs by age being higher for children between 5 and 6 (94%) (Ministerio de Educación, 2013).
It is also significant to stress the increase in the number of prekindergarten and kindergarten openings in the past decade in order to accommodate the demand. Between 2004-2012 the supply has grown largely in private subsidized schools (61%) while municipal schools have grown about 3% (Ministerio de Educación, 2013). Among the elements discussed during the legislation of compulsory kindergarten, members of parliament indicated that this law could increase the role of municipal schools in providing kindergarten because with more resources they could increase enrollment (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2014).

I argue it is relevant to examine these policies targeting early childhood education in order to understand the way educators and schools respond to and navigate the transformations in the early childhood education landscape. The study focused on kindergarten specifically, given the particular confluence of all policies aforementioned in this level of early childhood education. Further, kindergarten is a key level to study given its role under these accountability policies in connecting early education with elementary schooling. These connections are relevant in the implementation and sustainability of accountability polices in education in general, as they could constitute an ethos in the field.

Statement of the Problem

Recent decades have been particularly relevant to early education because of the occurrence of two important phenomena. On the one hand, the field has experienced renewed support from several groups in society (e.g. parents, educators, policymakers, advocates) advocating for public and private investment in early education, especially for children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds who, it is argued, benefit the most from
early interventions. On the other hand, historical debates about the aims of early education have been updated, with the policy context playing an important role in shaping their nature and imposing an economic framework for understanding and valuing early education.

Current policies stress the importance of securing the quality of early education to further ensure the achievement of expected results that are largely influenced by cost-benefit analyses and expectations. This policy environment has promoted the arrival of accountability policies to early childhood education including learning standards, quality rating systems, and children’s, early childhood teachers’ and preschool centers’ assessments. These policies might result in substantial changes to early childhood education’s definitions and practices in trying to align them to the standards and accountability practices that are largely regulating elementary and secondary education.

The interplay of the particularities of early childhood education aims and practices and the prominence of accountability policies in the field might impose new requirements on teachers and schools in order to respond to expectations and mandates, from both external and internal stakeholders. Given the growing prominence of accountability policies in the field of early childhood education in Chile and globally, it is relevant to understand the way in which early childhood educators and schools respond to these accountability requirements and to understand factors mediating these responses. Understanding the ways through which accountability policies become or do not become part of school and classroom practices and discourses is important to better comprehend the role of teachers and school leaders in adopting, translating, resisting, and transforming policies into practices as well as the nuances of these processes. Further,
analyzing how teachers come to understand these accountability policies for kindergarten is central to grasping the nuances of policy implementation and the active role of teachers and school leaders in making decisions regarding teaching and school organization.

**Rationale of the Study on Accountability Policies in Early Childhood Education**

In the midst of significant curricular and assessment changes and expectations framing early childhood education, in addition to important efforts to establish a culture of accountability practices in public schooling, it is important to understand institutional and individual responses to accountability policies. As Ball (2006) argues

We can see policies as representations, which are encoded in complex ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations) and decoded in complex ways (via actor’s interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context). A policy is both contested and changing, always in a state of “becoming”, of was and never was and not quite, for any text a plurality of readers must necessarily produce a plurality of readings. (p.44)

While exploring teachers’ and school leaders’ ways of interacting with accountability policies in a context in which different stakeholders have high expectations, it is relevant to examine processes through which these actors construct and reconstruct policy messages about early childhood education in the context of high-stakes and tightening coupling policies strategies. Additionally, examining the particular elements that shape institutional responses is relevant to understanding the influence of contextual and relational aspects on responding to accountability policies.

Knowing the experiences of those responsible for the enactment of accountability policies provide insight into the challenges of the implementation of new discourses and practices aimed at framing kindergarten as an educational period for college and career
preparedness rather than an exploratory period detached from primary and secondary education. Thus, this study sought to understand the interaction between accountability policies and institutional practices, looking particularly at how teachers and principals in different school contexts respond to policies designed to ensure improvements in early childhood education in Chile.

**Purposes of the Study and Research Questions**

This study had two main purposes. First, this study sought to examine educators’ and schools’ responses to and reflections on accountability policies in kindergarten in the context of the Chilean education system of public and private subsidized schooling. Secondly, the study also explored how, if at all, institutional and individual contexts and experiences influence the ways in which schools and educators respond to accountability policies for kindergarten. The underlying assumption of this study was that accountability policies are texts read and articulated by readers. This means that subjects’ responses to accountability policies for early education might differ depending on schools’ factors and context, as well on teachers’ experiences and beliefs.

Building off these ideas the study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are participants’ understandings of accountability policies targeting kindergarten?
2. How might accountability policies targeting kindergarten be affecting what is happening in schools and kindergarten classrooms?
3. What individual and institutional factors influence the way in which schools and educators respond to accountability policies?
Positionality

I argue that the introduction of accountability policies and practices to early childhood education poses important challenges to practitioners and school leaders as they are required to adapt teaching and organizational practices to make kindergarten accountable to the expectations and objectives set for elementary and secondary education. These challenges exist in a policy environment that has increased interest in investing in early education as a way to address social and economic issues. In addition, in this policy environment early childhood educators have not played a role in the definition of policies, leaving them isolated from relevant decisions about teaching and learning in early years. Thus, it is possible to reflect on accountability policies as elements influencing the production of subjects’ subjectivities and the exercise of power relationships. The production of accountability policies and their introduction to early childhood education need to be understood in relation to the social, economic, and political conditions of society that motivate the creation of particular ways of seeing and producing educational spaces for young students, as well as for defining the role of teachers in this process. As Dahlberg and Moss (2005) argue, the modernist project constitutes the teacher as:

someone who knows the one right answer to every question, as the privileged voice of authority with a privileged relation to the meaning of knowledge; and the complementary image of children as receptacles for the teacher’s explanation and transmission of preconstituted and unquestionable knowledge. (p. 95)

I argue that accountability polices work towards the production of the modernist project and that it is crucial to recognize these educational choices as creating particular ethics and politics for which early childhood education stakeholders should take responsibility.
Accountability policies function “as organizations of authority” (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 666) in that the standards set conditions that regulate and structure relationships between schools and governmental organizations as well as within schools. In recent years, the introduction of new accountability policies demands changes that can affect schools and teachers’ discourses, practices, beliefs, and values regarding the education of young children. Teaching kindergarten in a school environment directly linked to subsequent grades imposes new challenges on school leaders for creating a continuum of practices to reach the learning standards defined for the school system as a whole. I propose that listening to what practitioners have to say about the arrival of new ways to introduce accountability policies in early childhood education is significant for understanding the complexities and challenges that policies can create when they arrive in municipal and private subsidized schools. Furthermore, I consider this also allows challenging the peripheral role that early childhood teachers have had in the policy arena and in education in general, by introducing their perspectives, experiences, and reflections about teaching and learning under a high stakes regime in Chile. In accordance with my stance, I will introduce an overview of the theoretical sources that I used to examine the relationship between policies and schools’ and practitioners’ responses in the following section.

**Epistemological Orientation and Theoretical Sources**

This section describes the main epistemological orientation that frames this study and theoretical sources that orient the examination of the ways in which early childhood accountability policies unfold in the context of schools that receive state funding. I
circumscribe the study within a critical orientation. Following Simons, Olsen and Peters (2009), a critical lens does not imply the specific adscription to theories and methods, but it is a particular ethos that draws attention to policies in relation to power and social control. This orientation stresses the need to examine the development of educational accountability policies and their consequences while considering the larger social context, power relationships, and politics in education. A critical orientation that examines the existence of accountability policies for kindergarten in relation to neoliberalism allows us to reflect on these policies as material and social possibilities that prescribe “a set of practices, relationships and forms of organizations that are discursively constituted as economic” (Clarke, 2008, as cited in Ball, 2012, p. 3). Then, the notion of standards and accountability reforms comprises both the prescription of particular content, knowledge, teaching and learning experiences, and the establishment of assurance arrangements for economic purposes. These policies can also be examined as double strategies of neoliberal objectives in that they are discourses and also material mechanisms that shape schools and teachers’ decisions and practices, as well the public’s ideas about the aims of public schooling. Thus, these policies operate as tools to disseminate particular notions of kindergarten education based on a set of expected learning standards; at the same time they help to reconstruct the common understanding about the aims of early education in terms of individual and collective interests. This means that these policies are directly serving economic aims “as a social practice pursuing particular purposes, defined by distinctive relationships and evaluative procedures” (Ranson, 2003, p. 462).
Drawing from this critical orientation, I chose to frame the study by employing three distinctive theoretical sources to examine the intersection between accountability policies and schools’ responses. In this sense, a critical poststructuralist approach, institutional theory, and sense-making theory are brought together as tools to understand policies as discourses and texts (Ball, 2006) capable of producing institutional conditions for school change. Furthermore, institutional responses are understood as rooted in the particular context of teaching kindergarten in schools that receive state funding under dominant logics of control and efficiency. Then, it is crucial to examine institutional organizational and professional practices that are constructed or expected from accountability policies in kindergarten. When based in these theoretical perspectives policy implementation is understood as a continual process of becoming that elapses between policy enactment and policy results.

Critical Poststructuralist Approach

I adopted a critical poststructuralist epistemology as a broad approach to understanding policies, accountability, and their interweaving in early childhood education. This translates into two important aspects of the study. First, the study puts emphasis on discourse as a constitutive practice. Following Foucault (1978), discourse practices “transmit and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes possible to thwart it” (p. 101). Consequently, accountabilities policies are examined not only as text but also as discursive formations that are made possible (or not) under particular circumstances. Accordingly, discourse has an important role in the production of knowledge and in the limits of knowledge as
well. In this sense, discourses need to be considered as not being mere claims or assertions, but as having effects and affecting subjects.

Secondly, a critical poststructuralist epistemology recognizes the centrality of discourse in evidencing the interplay between power and knowledge in constructing particular realities. Hence, this study stresses the fact that accountability policies for early childhood education come to existence in a context in which it is relevant to acknowledge power relationships among actors, entities, and policies. Further, what is understood as official knowledge through policy mandates reflects particular ways in which power circulates among actors and institutions.

In addition to employing a critical poststructuralist approach I draw analytical tools from institutional theory and sense-making theory. Drawing from the work of Stephen J. Ball (2006), I conceptualize the use of varied theoretical approaches as a toolbox that allows me to “bring together structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro level investigation, especially that which takes account of people’s perception and experiences” (Ozga, 1990, as cited in Ball, 2006, p. 43).

Institutional Theory

The selection of institutional theory as part of the theoretical sources that inform this study seeks to acknowledge the fact that schools are organizations immersed in contexts that shape the way in which they respond to policies. Meyer and Rowan (2006) state that the institutional perspective can be described as having two distinguishable moments: old and new institutionalism. The former is described as contributing to the notion that “organizations were built largely around a logic of institutional conformity
rather than a logic of technical efficiency and that they were characterized by a pattern of management in which the institutional and technical level of administration were only loosely coupled” (Rowan, 2006, p. 16). On the other hand, the new institutionalism is described as “emphasizing both institutional conformity and technical efficiency” (Rowan, 2006, p. 16) as organizations’ drivers. It also stresses the socially constructed nature of institutions and the role of the market and politics in shaping the institutional environment in which organizations thrive to reach efficiency and legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 2006). Institutionalism stresses different aspects of institutional environments and organizations. Overall, this perspective allows for understanding institutional arrangements and choices, “the trade-offs involved in using one form of institution to the exclusion of other possible ones,” and the identification of groups or members that benefit or are affected negatively by the prevailing organizational arrangements (Meyer & Rowan, 2006, p. 4). From this perspective, “formal organizational structures arise in highly institutionalized contexts…driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work…[to] increase their legitimacy and survival” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 340). By highlighting that the selection and prevalence of certain organizational features are oriented towards the maintenance and survival of the organization, this perspective is useful for analyzing the extent to which a school does or does not transform its arrangements to cope with the external demands imposed by the kindergarten accountability policies while securing its own survival in an accountability oriented educational environment.
**Sense-making Theory**

Drawing from a sociological orientation, sense-making theory focuses on identifying particular processes and factors involved in the relationship between policy implementation and teachers’ practices. Specifically, the sense-making approach proposes an explanation of how subjects and institutions make sense of their context. Further, sense-making can be defined as processes through which subjects and institutions organize their environments and allocate meanings to events “using the technology of language-processes of labeling and categorizing for instance-to identify, regularize and routinize memories into plausible explanations” (Brown, Stacey & Nandhakumar, 2008, p. 1055). In other words, sense-making theory discusses processes involved in both the interpretation and production of meaning by individuals and collectivities. Sense-making theory has been intensely used in exploring issues related to educational policy adoption and implementation, as well in school change processes (Coburn, 2001; Coldren & Spillane, 2007; Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Spillane, 1999). In doing that, sense-making theory allows for examining ways in which policy agents engage with policies through processes that acknowledge the subjective and inter-subjective elements.

Additionally, I employed sense-making theory given that it was valuable in exploring the different responses of schools and teachers to accountability policies despite their top-down orientation. This means that by acknowledging the individual and collective processes involved in the acts of organizing ideas regarding policies, this theory shed light on understanding distinctive ways that accountability policies are implemented in both public and private subsidized schools in Chile.
Significance of the Study

This study on the changes to the perceptions and experiences of teachers and school leaders regarding the establishment of kindergarten accountability policies has implications for both education theory and policy making fields alike. First, this study sought to contribute to the research on the impact of accountability-based reforms efforts in education, this time focusing on the personal experiences and institutional processes developed when early childhood education is made accountable for primary and secondary education. In that sense, this study sought to understand the relationship between accountability policies for early childhood and schools’ responses in a high-stakes context. Because of the widespread high-stakes discourses that have permeated different elements of early education, understanding the role of accountability policies for teachers and schools is significant for exploring the potential of these policies as restructuring factors of institutional discourses and practices.

In addition, this study also contributes to understanding the role of institutions’ practices and contexts in shaping the implementation and reading of mandated policies. This notion allows me to frame accountability policies not as immutable texts, but as discursive practices mediated by the context of implementation.

In exploring the intersection between accountability policies and institutional responses, this study is expected to be significant to both practitioners and policymakers in that it looks for the crossroads between policy decision making and teachers’ and school leaders’ actions. In doing that, this study seeks to highlight the active role of practitioners and the influence of the school context in the adoption of policies. This
aspect of the study relates to the stance of the researcher that understands teachers and school leaders as having an active role in shaping policies during their implementation processes, resulting possibly in different results from those expected by policymakers.
Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the literature on three theoretical sources that guide the exploration of the research questions. As introduced in the previous chapter, the selection of three bodies of literature including critical poststructuralist theories, institutional theory, and sensemaking theory, aimed to configure a set of “tools” (Ball, 2006) capable of highlighting distinctive elements of the intersection of accountability policies and responses to them in schools that receive state funding. These three distinctive bodies of literature are narrowed to underline the importance of examining the development of accountability educational policies for kindergarten and their consequences taking into account the larger social context and the interplay of power relationships. The first section of this chapter introduces the critical poststructuralist approach that contributes to my understanding of accountability and educational policies for kindergarten. My review includes definitions and representations of educational policies, approaches to framing the notion of accountability in public education, and a discussion of the role of accountability policies targeting kindergarten. In the second section, I reviewed the literature on institutional theory that helped me understand the interrelation of institutional responses and the institutional and technical environment in which kindergarten materializes. Lastly, I introduce a review of the literature on sensemaking theory that contributes by enabling me to appreciate organizational and individual factors influencing the “reading” of policies and responses to them.
The three bodies of literature constitute theoretical and analytical resources to examine the multiplicity of elements involved in the intersection of accountability policies and kindergarten education.

**A Critical Poststructuralist Approach of Accountability Policies and Early Education**

This section is structured in three parts. The first part reviews critical poststructuralist accounts of the notion of policy. Then I review literature on accountability policies problematizing different connotations of this notion as it evolves in the public school arena. In the last, part I review the theoretical and empirical literature on accountability policies in early childhood education.

**Educational Policies**

Drawing on the work of Stephen Ball, educational policies can be conceptualized as a process. This initial provocation seeks to challenge the notion of policies as a set of principles or guidelines that directs and controls actions. To the contrary, Ball and his colleagues (2011a) emphasize that policies develop in contexts; therefore, their enactment is inevitably subject to interpretation. This idea also implies that policies should not be considered as taken-for-granted ideas given that they cannot control all the possibilities for institutional and human action. Further, Ball (2006) proposes that we think of educational policies as both texts and discourses. These two characterizations of policies allow for a deeper understanding of the possibilities and consequences of policies in the field of education.
Following Ball (2006), understanding policies as texts entails unearthing several aspects of policies. First, this understanding signifies that policies are to be understood as products of political processes that exhibit compromises among stakeholders convening in particular texts. Hence, policy texts convey political compromises among actors, values, and beliefs, and are not to be understood as complete or flawless products.

Second, text policies are to be “decoded” by readers; consequently they “are represented differently by different actors” (p. 45) whose readings/interpretations are shaped by actors’ experiences, knowledge, and context. By embracing the idea that policies are texts, educational policies are to be understood as texts read within particular contexts. This means that school actors “read” policies in particular circumstances that enable conditions and mobilizes responses. Thus, policies could be framed as representations that are “always in a state of ‘becoming’” (p. 44).

Further, conceptualizing policies as discourses implies acknowledging policy as “an economy of power” (Ball, 1994, p. 10) that works, from a Foucauldian perspective, in the production of knowledge and truth. In this sense, policies create possibilities and “regimes of truth” signaling “what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority” (Ball, 2006, p. 48). What is key in this conception is the recognition of the role of power in producing particular frameworks within which policy ideas can be thought. Further, this notion recognizes the role and social positioning of subjects that read policies. For instance, accountability policies that focus on kindergarten should be examined as discourses that are read by kindergarten teachers from the authoritative power they hold in the particular contexts they inhabit.
Reflecting on educational policies from this perspective allows us to consider policies as evolving productions in which educational actors play central roles in (de)constructing and making sense of them with the discursive resources that are made accessible to them (Ball et al., 2011a). This perspective also highlights that policies, texts, and discourses carry different potential depending on their narratives about the role of teachers and teaching (Ball et al., 2011b). Thereon, these authors argue that two distinctive types of policies can be discerned depending on the kinds of power relationships they favor. On one side of the spectrum lie policies that promote an active participation of policy actors. These policies are called exhortative/developmental policies given that requires policy actors “to bring judgment, originality and passion” (Ball et al., 2011b, p. 615). At the other end of the spectrum, it is possible to find imperative/disciplinary policies, which according to the authors are more prevalent in the market/standards education policy agenda. These policies need little reflexivity from school actors who are required to follow prescriptive scripts that allow them to perform according to the policies. This characterization of policies allows me to reflect on the purposes of educational policies for early education, and on the role of school actors in interpreting and making sense of the aims of these policies. As Ball and his colleagues (2011b) propose the first set of policies could be understood as productions while disciplinary policies are closer to products coming from outside and requiring submissive compliance.

These ideas about educational policies are productive in signaling the purposes of policies from outside of the school environment while also stressing the role of schools and schools’ actors in producing these policies through their enactments. Braun and
colleagues, (2011) indicate that educational policies get enacted in particular material conditions and “are set against and alongside existing commitments, values and forms of experience” (p. 588). Further, these authors mention four different contexts that play roles in policy enactment: situated, material, professional, and external contexts. Elements of these contexts are described below. The situated context that influences policy enactment encompasses a school’s history, population, and locality. The material context refers to the school’s physical aspects (infrastructure and technology available), human resources, and fiscal capacity. Professional context signifies characteristics of teachers and other professionals working in schools, including experience, beliefs, values, and leadership. Lastly, the external context denotes elements of the external environment of schools that influence the school’s actions. These could include legal requirements, school rankings, and relationships with other schools.

From this perspective, accountability policies for kindergarten in schools that are funded by the state could be further understood as technologies aiming to change education through the introduction of discourses and technologies that shape the way schools and teachers are able to think about teaching and students. The intersection between policies and the enlarging logic of effectiveness in education is explored in the following section.

**Accountability**

Scholars recognize the notion of accountability in education as a prevalent feature of public education systems across the globe (Biesta, 2009; Cuban, 2004; Vidovich, 2009). Defining what accountability is and what it stands for involves acknowledging the existence of beliefs and values that tend to be aligned to notions of effectiveness and
performance. Hatch (2013) argues, “accountability systems refer to the mechanisms and instruments used to ensure that individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions meet their obligations” (p. 116). This definition stresses the instrumental dimension of accountability as a strategic means to secure particular outcomes. It is important to recognize that these mechanisms could be conceptualized as being stimulated by particular visions regarding the relationship between public education and society. These relationships may result in the pursuing of educational aims either aligned to economic principles or to ethics of social responsibility. It is important to distinguish between these dissimilar accounts of accountability given that they construct different relationships between policy and policy enactors, as well as different consequences and possibilities. Considine (2005) argues that accountability could be differentiated into vertical and horizontal. The former refers to a system that materializes as hierarchical and uni-dimensional power relationship, denoting clear authority. The latter signifies “multi-dimensional power relationships where different actors share responsibility for policy outcomes to create a culture of responsibility” (as cited in Vidovich, 2009, p. 555). This conceptualization is helpful for visualizing the disparities between these accounts of accountability and their consequences, recognizing, as Biesta (2009) argues, that the culture of accountabilities not only denotes what relationships are possible but also what “relationships are made difficult or even impossible as a result of the accountability regime” (p. 650).
Accountability as answerability or external accountability. This type of accountability stresses the idea that individuals’ and groups’ actions are circumscribed to the commands of external/central authorities who specify the goals or outcomes to be attained (Hatch, 2013; Vidovich, 2009). This accountability is largely associated with the notion of effectiveness prevailing in an audit culture (Taubman, 2009). This translates into the existence of a series of mechanisms and technologies that allow managing subjects and organizations through notions of performance and quality. Biesta (2009) defines this type of accountability as responding to a managerial perspective that frames organizations accountable by exhibiting them as “auditable”.

Brown (2007a) argues that the logic behind this type of accountability in education is that in order to improve students’ performance it is crucial to develop standards that define expected and unified levels of proficiency. Within this logic of accountability, students achievement evidenced through standardized testing, has become the main source for defining teachers’ and schools’ effectiveness (Lewis & Young, 2013). Further, this logic also largely shapes the purpose of schooling, understood as improving students’ outcomes (Hatch & Benner, 2010) through performance standards and incentives (Miller & Smith, 2011).

In addition to the creation of standards, this type of accountability relies on the premise that schools, teachers, and student performance might benefit from the existence of a system of sanctions and incentives. These sanctions or threats are placed assuming that school actors will be motivated and work harder given fears generated by negative consequences (Brown, 2007a; Hatch, 2002).
This logic of accountability is also conceptualized by its advocates as relevant in that it defines standards that guide schools’ and practitioners’ actions, making these actions aligned to what is “best” for students (Scott-Little, 2006), promoting effective educational systems, and enhancing public education.

In general, this technical-managerial approach (Biesta, 2009) is characterized and driven by particular logics of neoliberal discourses that generate disciplinary and regulatory practices for schools, teachers, and students. Through these practices, schools actors evaluate themselves and “construct a desire to be ‘good’, ‘normal’ or both” (Osgood, 2006, p. 5) that shapes their actions and self-evaluation.

Among the most studied effects of this type of accountability are those that directly and indirectly impact practitioners’ and students labor and well-being. As Meisels (2006) indicates, accountability that manifests in the prescription of standards impacts teaching through limiting the information that is supposed to be taught and learned. By defining what knowledge is counted as relevant for high-stakes testing, the curriculum is narrowed, and, consequently teaching runs the risk of equating with testing preparation (Hatch & Grieshaber, 2002) and learning becomes the acquisition of the set of content predetermined by the standards (Brown, 2007a). Wien and Dudley-Marling (1998) argue that frequent testing and standards-based curricula exert great control over teachers and students through the establishment of surveillance mechanisms that teach them that they do not have the final word upon their learning.

Further, scholars have exposed that accountability policies and practices that reduce professional autonomy can have negative consequences for teachers’ professional perception, confidence, and well-being (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Osgood, 2006).
Stoddard and Kuhn’s (2008) study reports that elementary teachers have experienced intensification of the work of teaching and the increase of working hours as new demands and expectations influence policies and practices. Bullough and colleagues, (2014) find similar effects among a sample of early childhood educators working in Head Start. The emphasis on students’ outcomes and teachers’ performance, which is directly entwined with program funding, is recognized as a driver of teachers’ exhaustion and feelings of lack of professional competence. Hatch and Grieshaber (2002) further argue that the definition of preset standards of performance has as a consequence the deprofessionalization of teaching; teaching gets reduced to a technical performance that does not require professional judgment.

As the above effects of accountability-as-answerability show, performance of subjects is emphasized over learning, and teachers’ and students’ motivation are highly driven by the idea of avoiding negative consequences or achieving extrinsic rewards (Hatch & Grieshaber, 2002).

**Accountability as responsibility.** In the last decades, scholars have called for the need to rethink accountability in terms of responsibility, circumventing neoliberal notions of efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Biesta, 2009; Sirotnick, 2004; Vidovich, 2009), and avoiding codifying morality by recognizing the complex nature of educational relationships and environments.

In general terms, Hatch (2013) states that understanding accountability-as-responsibility “reflects the belief that individuals and groups should be held accountable for living up to and upholding norms of conduct and higher purposes that are often ambiguous and difficult to define” (p. 114). This notion of accountability stresses a
different understanding of relationships that acknowledges everyone’s role in caring for and developing students while assuming teachers are trustworthy (Sirotnik, 2004).

Further, Vidovich (2009) proposes that this type of accountability rests on the premise of contextual accountability, and, as a consequence, accountability cannot be defined as a recipe or “one size fits all” policy. He offers the term “democratic network accountability” (p. 564) signaling that accountability may take on different forms depending on particular circumstances and guided by the questions “accountability for what? And in what ways?” (p. 564). This idea emphasizes negotiation among education stakeholders and the active role of school communities in defining their strategies to live up to their social responsibilities.

In order to understand the different ways in which accountability is conceptualized, as well as the implications of these different perspectives, it is relevant to explore how kindergarten teachers and school leaders reflect and make sense of kindergarten accountability policies and the nuances of the enactment of these policies. As Hatch (2013) indicates, answerability and responsibility are distinctive aspects of accountability that can be understood as overlapping depending on the technologies available in particular schooling contexts. This perspective is fruitful in pushing for a more multifaceted analysis and understanding of accountability that avoids dichotomous and reductionist views.

The following section takes a look at the field of early childhood education and the arrival of accountability policies, as well as exploring the challenges that accountability practices and discourses imposed on early education.
Accountability Policies in Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education scholars agree on the fact that early childhood education has entered into a period in which the notions of accountability, school readiness, and standardization are largely orienting education policies for young students (Brown, 2007a; Goldstein, 2008b; Graue, 2008; Hatch, 2002; Stipek, 2006a). This is seen as an extension of accountability policies and practices that are already in place for elementary and secondary education. Generally, discourses of accountability for early childhood education are intertwined with specialized discourses (e.g. neuroscience, molecular biology, human development, human rights) that support governmental actions to expand early education services in order to achieve larger positive impacts on children’s development (Fantuzzo et al., 2007; Hannon, 2003; Shonkoff, 2010). Economists have played an important role in claiming the importance of early education as a means to increase societal productivity and lessen risk factors associated with poverty and violence (Doyle, Harmon, Heckman, & Tremblay, 2009; Engle et al., 2011). The cost-benefit approach fundamentally argues that quality education services for children are one of the most effective types of social investment (Heckman & Masterov, 2007).

As Goldstein (2008b) indicates, early childhood teachers have experienced significant challenges in trying to accommodate the mandates from these expanding aims to increase access and improve the quality of early childhood services under the prevalence of discourses and practices based on standards and accountability. These premises are particularly problematic for early educators for two main reasons. First, as Brown (2007a) states “the early childhood community represents a fractured group of
practitioners that are loosely coupled by licensure requirements that emphasize health, safety, and teacher/staff issues rather than academic expectations” (p. 637). Imposing standardized approaches on teaching and learning could be perceived by teachers as being mandated to adopt linear and rigid guidelines that contradict empirical and professional knowledge and beliefs about children’s development and learning in early years (Brown, 2007b). According to Brown (2011), standards-based accountability reforms in early childhood education differ drastically from historical views of developmentally appropriate practices and the ongoing use of assessments to guide educators to pay attention across developmental domains. In requiring teachers to meet particular standards, these policies could be limiting their professional capabilities to meet the individual needs of children according to the way in which early development unfolds (Goldstein, 2008a; Goldstein & Baumi, 2012).

Second, critical researchers are cautious about the consequences of policies aligned to neoliberal aims that could radically transform early education and the image of young children (Brown, 2009; Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Swadener, 2006; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Osgood, 2006). According to these authors, these policies impact issues of power and knowledge given the introduction of new technologies to frame teaching and learning. Teachers’ performance is subordinated to students’ performance within narrowed conceptions of children’s knowledge and skills. Further, the emphasis on outcomes-based learning imposes the notion of one-size-fits-all education for young children and allows for the creation of children as deviants if they do not meet the standards and expectations (Wien & Dudley-Marling, 1998).
Among the predominant effects of the arrival of accountability policies to early education are the introduction of discourses and practices aligned with the logics of standards that describe what young children should be able to do and should know (Brown, 2011; Graue, 2008; Wien & Dudley-Marling, 2004); rigid, fragmented, and decontextualized instruction that does not meet the needs of individuals and diverse learners (Stipek 2006a; Stipek, 2006b); teachers’ discomfort in endorsing regulatory discourses and practices that are not aligned with previous tenets of early education (Brown, 2009), and feelings of intensification of teaching and being overwhelmed, as early educators see their responsibilities expanding given the emphasis on testing (Bullough et al., 2014).

The particularities of early education in regard to the way in which this educational phase encounters accountability logics are significant in guiding the exploration of this study. Understanding the ways in which educators read and negotiate these policies within public school regimes is key for acknowledging the way in which discourses of truth about early education do or do not change given the introduction of technologies “for ensuring social regulation and economic success, in which the young child is constructed as a redemptive agent who can be programmed to become the future solution to our current problems” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.7).

**Institutional Theory**

Institutional theory, or institutionalism, offers a fruitful lens for understanding the way in which schools and educators take on reforms. One of the premises of institutional theory is that complex institutions, like educational organizations and their performed
practices are “contingent and contested” (Meyer & Rowan, 2006, p. 3). Based on that, institutional theory seeks to understand why particular arrangements and organizational forms are selected, and the interests that are favored in taking up particular systems and practices. This perspective recognizes that institutions may adopt different features, yet their connections to the larger society impose particular restrictions or constraints upon them. This is generative for studying the particularities and similarities of schools’ arrangements in adopting kindergarten reforms, acknowledging that these reforms materialize within formal educational institutions.

Further, the New Institutionalism recognizes the strong influence of reform principles that emphasize the need for increasing performance and efficiency in the educational landscape in the last decades. As Meyer and Rowan (2006) argue, in the United States and abroad, the education field has undergone significant changes in the past two decades that are reflected in higher centralization and accountability demands oriented to increase educational efficiency. According to these authors, these demands shape the field of education given the “shift to more tightly coupled and narrowly controlled practices in organizations” (p.2) and by making schools have an essential role in society, which translates to the need to pay more attention to their performance. Recognizing the centrality of political, social, and economic changes that impact education, institutional theory pays particular attention to how the larger context prompts or inhibits organizational forms and practices. These analytic resources suggest examining the particular conditions under which accountability policies that are directly or indirectly oriented toward kindergarten impact educators’ and schools’ practices and discourses.
Schools as Institutionalized Organizations within an Institutional Environment

A significant characteristic of institutional theory, particularly the new institutionalism, is the acceptance of the prominence of economic markets and politics in influencing institutional choices, a phenomenon that is observed in the field of education (Rowan, 2006). In this regard, institutions are perceived as embedded in particular forms of relationships that accentuate economic costs and benefits (Meyer & Rowan, 2006). In this view, there is recognition of the key role played by power and conflict in the processes and outcomes involved in reform adoption and institutional choice making. Further, the growing organization of education in large bureaucracies has also been implicated in having a role in the increase of coordination across and control over schools (Meyer & Rowan, 1978), which takes the form of standardization of various elements of school including teacher training and credentials, curriculum, and assessments. This translates into the rise of a highly institutionalized educational context. The arrival of accountability policies for kindergarten, examined through the lens of institutionalism, could be understood as a mean to exert more control over early education, educators, and students given the role that this educational period plays as a consequence of the prevailing socio-economic expectations.

The above indicates the importance given by institutional theorists to the institutional environments of organizations. This perspective argues for a view of organizations as open systems continually interacting with the external environment, then as having inextricable relationship with it (Hanson, 2001). Further, the organizational field plays a critical role in schools’ organization. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) define the organizational field as “those institutions that, in aggregate, constitute a recognized area
of institutional life: key suppliers, resources and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (p. 148). Hanson (2001) argues that the organizational field of schools encompasses accreditation agencies, teacher training programs, parent groups, and textbook companies, among others. All these players, as well new actors that regularly emerge in the educational scene, form a set of formal and informal regulations and expectations that impact schools through interactions. These interactions can take the form of information sharing, and formal and informal meetings that “penetrate the organization, creating the lenses through which actors view the world and the very categories of structure, action, and thought” (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, p. 13).

The above circumstances highlight the relevance of the “institutionalized environment in legitimizing organizations and their structures” (DiMaggio, 1991, p. 103), which results in institutionalization as a process “that happens to the organization over time” (Selznick, 1957 as cited in Scott, 1987, p. 494). Institutional theorists stress the operation of two main environments influencing organizations in a particular field: technical and institutional. The former is defined as the environment “within which a product or service is exchanged in a market such that organizations are rewarded for effective and efficient control of the work process” (Scott, 1995, p. 46). This environment underscores the idea that “rational” organizations and structures are those that embrace effectiveness and efficiency to achieve the objectives of the organization, which translates into the creation and sustenance of structures to protect the organization from external forces and uncertainty (Meyer, Scott & Deal, 1980). The latter organizational environment stresses the importance of adhering to or producing
organizational structures or routines that evidence conformity and make the organization “understandable and acceptable” (Scott, 1995), so that the organization becomes legitimized (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1987).

**Drivers of Change in School Organization**

Acknowledging the fact that some organizations, such as schools, arise in highly institutionalized contexts, institutional theory proposes thinking about organizations as driven to “incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 340). This means that organizations within the same organizational field are likely to become similar to one another, given environmental forces.

Initially, institutional theorists stressed the fact that educational organizations arose in a structured field and are largely driven by the need to gain legitimacy rather than efficiency (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983), which, in turn, contributes to their survival. Here, institutionalized policies, programs, and structures that are prevalent in the organizational field operate as “rationalized myths” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) by specifying the “proper” way to accomplish the goals of the organization. Given that these myths are highly institutionalized, they are assumed to be legitimate. According to this institutional orientation, educational organizations’ actions and decisions follow institutionalized belief systems, norms, and values. As a consequence, the organization is constrained by the need to maintain social legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 2006). Moreover, the organization may face challenges in attending to the need to maintain legitimacy while addressing the mandates from the technical environment.
Institutional theorists argue that organizations could be loosely coupled with technical mandates, as long they appear legitimate to the institutional environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer, Scott & Deal, 1983). The adoption of early childhood policies is worthy of examination in light of these concepts as their implementation might reflect the schools’ struggles to navigate between the institutional and technical environments’ demands and expectations. Then, the adoption of certain policies and programs could be funneled by either the need to remain legitimate in regard to the official educational demands, or to boost efficiency and accountability. By acknowledging this possible tension, institutional theory can help to elucidate the extent to which schools change (or not), influenced by policies.

More recently, institutional theory has also reconsidered the increased role of accountability in education as a driver of institutional decision-making. Meyer and Rowan (2006) argue that accountability movements “have led to a shift to more tightly coupled and narrowly controlled practices” (p. 2); hence, the technical environment in education has augmented demands for technical efficiency under the premises of market-driven accountability. Consequently, educational organizations perform in a more tightly coupled system through top-down policies, mandates, and practices, which emphasize monitoring organizational performance (Fusarelli & Johnson, 2004; Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Further, Cohen and Spillane (1992) show that conformity of educational institutions to technical requirements is larger when mandates arise from highly centralized education systems. The emphasis on and growing incidence of technical efficiency within educational institutions and practices signals important drivers of schools’ and educators’ decisions and practices. Nevertheless, it is relevant to
acknowledge that, in considering both the institutional and the technical environments influencing schools’ and educators’ responses, institutional theory allows us to examine whether schools respond primarily to institutional or technical demands, or both. This means that schools and early childhood educators could assimilate kindergarten accountability policies either as they generate new technical responses (e.g. new teaching practices and assessments) or through the symbolic adoption of such policies into the existent organization of the schools and kindergarten classrooms. Complicating matters, Huerta and Zuckerman’s (2009) study contends that the increasing demand for technical efficiency in schools and the resulting shift to technical aspects of instruction could be also interpreted as new sources of legitimacy for schools. This perspective allows us to examine the blending of institutional and technical demands as technical efficiency is transmuted into an institutional myth.

The foregoing notions make it possible to frame schools as organizations whose structure is influenced and constrained by their external environment due the influence of different factors. These ideas provoke the examination of the drivers of schools’ and educators’ adoption of accountability policies within an organizational field. For instance, the organization and actions enacted in kindergarten could be understood as institutionalized practices in the early childhood education field, constituted by laws and regulations, guidelines, and social expectations. This means that kindergarten organizations and responses to accountability policies have to be studied acknowledging the influence of the organizational field in both influencing the existent norms and routines of early education, and the reception of the accountability policies oriented towards promoting new norms and routines. Building from DiMaggio and Powell’s
(1983) theory of the institutional field, discrete kindergarten responses to accountability policies should be understood as linked “to an environment that consist of organizations responding to their environment, which consists of organizations responding to an environment of organizations’ responses” (p. 149). It also has further consequences given that the institutional environment could influence the implementation of kindergarten accountability policies not because they are assumed internally as the most effective or taken-for-granted ways of organizing and teaching kindergarten according to previous norms and beliefs, but because school and kindergarten teachers might benefit from their adoption and gain more legitimacy, therefore securing their survival in a high-stakes policy environment.

**Schools Responding to Environmental Forces**

Whether organizations, such as schools, are structuring their decisions influenced or constrained by institutional or technical forces, institutional theorists have proposed the concept of isomorphism to explain the tendency towards the homogenization of organizations in responding to their shared environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Rowan & Miskel, 1999). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify three mechanisms that may influence homogenization: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism “results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society” (p. 150). Mimetic isomorphism happens when educational institutions imitate others that are believed to be more “legitimate or successful” (p. 152). Finally, normative isomorphism results primarily from professionalization; this means that the values and codes imposed by accreditation and training organizations reinforce
particular structures and practices. These mechanisms underlying organizational responses to environmental forces are productive concepts for reflecting on the way in which schools react to and implement kindergarten accountability policies, as well as for understanding similarities and differences among schools in facing institutional and technical demands. An interesting element to explore in applying these theories is the intersection between the demands on kindergarten to remain legitimate to their stakeholders while having to respond to tight-coupling accountability requirements. It is important to highlight the role of accountability technologies on schools, such as control mechanisms of institutional processes that constrain schools through monitoring, evaluation, or sanction strategies.

As set forth above, institutional theory offers resources for examining the interaction between schools as organizations with an external environment that is highly driven by accountability premises that drive both its need to remain legitimate and efficient while also securing its survival in this environment. Kindergarten is an interesting grade to apply these notions to given the growing interest in and demand to implement these policies in various areas or aspects of this educational level.

In addition to the focus of this study in understanding the role of the context in schools’ responses to accountability process for kindergarten, I consider it relevant to elucidate the role of educators in the implementation of these policies. The following sections present the main tenets of sensemaking theory that were employed as analytical tools to explore these processes.
Sensemaking Theory

After considering the significance of institutional theory for providing insightful resources to reflect on the influence of the organizational environment in the responses of schools and practitioners to accountability policies, I would like to consider the contribution of sensemaking theory to the understanding of the relationship between policies and school and classroom practices. Drawing on Coburn (2001), I attempt “bridging” these two theories in order to gain a deeper insight into the macro and micro institutional elements that play a role in policy enactment under the regime of high-stakes policies.

Sensemaking theory has a longstanding history of use for understanding the processes involved in the implementation of policies. It can be particularly fruitful for exploring policy education implementation in elementary and secondary levels (Coburn, 2001; Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). Research has aimed to study the role of cognition in the implementation of diverse policies, especially instructional policies designed to change the technical core of schools. I will return shortly to the main learning and findings of sensemaking theory in the field of education; for the moment it is relevant to introduce the main tenets of this theoretical resource that was employed in the study.

In the seminal work of Weick (1995), the author defines sensemaking theory precisely as the process of people making sense of the world around them. This notion highlights the active role of subjects in constructing what is not known. Weick argues “How they construct what they construct, why, and with what effects are the central questions for people interested in sensemaking” (p. 4). Therefore, sensemaking
encompasses the processes of meaning production of individuals and groups when coping with unfamiliar circumstances or interpreting phenomena to produce inter-subjective meanings (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995). According to sensemaking theorists, sensemaking largely relies on subjects’ and groups’ preexisting beliefs to construct or modify mental models, to interpret ideas or events, and to guide further actions (Seligman, 2006).

Among the key elements underscored by sensemaking theory are the social dimension of these processes and the ongoing nature of them. The first element refers to the inherently social nature of sensemaking, given that it happens in a world constituted through common verbal arrangements that are in the constant processes of exchange and negotiation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Weick, 1995). This component also makes reference to the fact that sensemaking occurs within organizations that have particular ways of arranging, agreeing, and negotiating shared meanings, and consequently sensemaking is mediated by the context. Further, these organizational interactions involve hierarchical and asymmetrical power relationships. This circumstance has two main results. On the one hand, sensemaking recognizes that “some voices are more (and some less) privileged, and it may often be more appropriate to describe sense as a power effect rather than a negotiated consensus” (Brown, 2000, p. 46). On the other hand, given that meaning production happens in context, its products involve historical as well as political dimensions (Weick, 1995).

The ongoing nature of sensemaking could be conceptualized as the continual process in which sensemaking happens. As Weick (1995) indicates, “Sensemaking never starts…people are always in the middle of things, which become things, only when those same people focus on the past from some point beyond it” (p. 43). This feature of the
sensemaking process recognizes that individuals’ and groups’ understanding of policies could be provisional as it is subject to new external and internal inputs.

The elements above describing sensemaking theory are particularly relevant for this study given that they acknowledge the fact that responses to policies are to be framed as social processes in which the subject plays an active role. In this sense, the examination of the arrival of accountability policies in kindergarten, and the responses to these policies has to consider the strong ties of these responses to the macro and micro contexts in which these policies evolve. This also means that organizations could be examined as informing the shared understanding developed as it constitutes the context for further interpretation of new clues (Coburn & Talbert, 2006). In addition, this theory recognizes schools as open systems (Scott, 1987), in which the sensemaking process is a key mechanism of processing the environments’ demands and influences. Overall, sensemaking theory allows me to understand policy implementation as an evolving process and enactors as active actors that not only adopt or resist policies, but also negotiate meanings and responses.

It is relevant to mention that the process of meaning production could be exposed through a variety of means including “written or spoken descriptions of the world” (Brown, 2000, p.3), dialogues (Hill, 2001), and material and cultural artifacts and situations (Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2006). This translates into the possibility of revealing sensemaking in formal and informal conversations, as well through the consideration of organizational actions and institutional routines such as professional development or scheduling, and in the organization of space.
Factors Influencing Policy Sensemaking at Schools

Sensemaking theorists have hypothesized and studied several elements that play a role in the way that school actors make sense of reforms. These developments could be categorized in two main groups: factors that are unique to the subject and institutional factors that influence school actors’ understanding of policy.

Individual factors influencing school actors’ sensemaking. A great deal of sensemaking is built on individual activity. Although an actor’s perceptions and trajectories are grounded in social interactions, the personal experiences, background, beliefs, and values of each subject shape the way in which she or he interacts and copes with new situations or interruptions (Louis, 1980). This translates into the fact that two practitioners encountering the same policy might not have similar responses to and understandings of that policy.

Actors’ prior knowledge and experiences are among the elements that influence sensemaking process. Actors interpret new information based on their prior understanding, then prior knowledge and experiences “serve as a lens influencing what the individual notices in the environment and how the stimuli that are noticed are processed, encoded, organized, and subsequently interpreted” (Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2006, p. 49). In short, school actors interpret policies based on what they already know about how the world works and what they have done previously. The sensemaking process entails not simply incorporating new information but also sometimes modifying existing knowledge structures. Spillane and Burch (2006) argue that the connection of policies to schools’ practices, especially when policies are more abstract or less elaborated, are highly mediated by practitioners’ sensemaking. Consequently, different
understandings could be expected to arise among practitioners given the differences in enactors’ prior knowledge and expectations.

Among key elements of practitioners’ prior knowledge and experiences that influence sensemaking in relation to education policies are their knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning, beliefs about students, years of experience, pedagogical philosophy, and subject matter (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2006). Spillane (1998) adds that teachers’ understanding of and beliefs about standards, evidence, and valid research also play a role in sensemaking in relation to accountability policies in particular.

Another important element is teachers’ conception of subject matter. This is particularly relevant for policies oriented toward altering the technical core of schooling. Therefore, studies suggest that teachers’ conceptions of subject matter in relation to policy mandates, as well as teachers’ self conceptions of themselves as teacher and as learners of a particular subject (Spillane, 2000; Spillane & Burch, 2006). In addition, the role and location of the practitioners in the organization might influence the way in which each subject encounters policies (Burch & Spillane, 2005; Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Spillane, 1998).

These elements indicate the importance of paying attention to the aims of policies given that different factors might mediate practitioners’ responses depending on those aims. For example, in this study, it is relevant to explore how school actors understand both general policies and those aimed at specific curricular aspects, and to understand the different responses that could be enacted depending on the role and prior knowledge of each actor.
Institutional factors influencing school actors’ sensemaking. Sensemaking theory stresses the fact that making sense is deeply rooted in the social and organizational contexts (Spillane, 1998). This means that in order to understand the way school actors make sense of policies, it is important to explore the different factors that influence this process. In this regard, it could be possible to distinguish social factors that shape practitioners’ responses, which could be thought of as located in the external environment rather than internal to the organization.

Looking in detail at the external institutional factors influencing practitioners’ sensemaking, the professional affiliation of teachers seems significant for several reasons. First, as Spillane and Burch (2006) argue, sensemaking can be influenced by the disciplinary or professional associations of teachers given that they are based on and hold particular epistemological assumptions and practices in responding to societal demands and expectations. This also indicates the fact that these affiliations might represent distinctive relationships between school actors and the educational system. For example, the epistemological conceptions of early childhood teachers regarding students, learning, and teaching in early grades might differ from the conceptions of elementary teachers and school leaders given the distinctive linkages of these actors to the larger context.

Potential organizational factors include a school’s organizational structure (Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 1998), institutional culture, institutional norms and routines, collaborative work culture, formal and informal professional discussions (Coburn, 2001), and leadership actions to advance or resist policies through professional development, provision of resources, framing of policies, and structuring of collaboration (Coburn, 2001).
Schools’ organizational structures influence sensemaking by shaping practitioners beliefs and values through “patterns of social interaction” (Coburn & Talbert, 2006, p. 472). This particular element is important to examine in this study given the presumed existence of particular patterns of professional and social interaction of kindergarten teachers in the school in comparison to elementary teachers.

In addition, school culture, values, traditions, norms, and routines are argued to influence sensemaking as they offer practitioners viewpoints from which to grasp new situations. For example, the institutional culture and values may play a role in the way in which public schools encounter the implementation of accountability policies in kindergarten, offering teachers views to understand what accountability policies require them to do in comparison with previous mandates and expectations.

Among the most studied organizational elements is the collaborative work of practitioners either through formal and informal gatherings. In this respect, Coburn (2001) argues that teachers’ sensemaking happens within their working environment through conversations and interactions among coworkers. Coburn names these interactions as instances of “shared understandings” (p. 147). They are also linked to the cultural beliefs and values of the institution. Two aspects of these interactions are particularly relevant: 1) the patterns of these conversations, which encompass both the participants and the setting in which these interactions occur, and 2) the nature of these interactions. The author further details three sub-processes that influence sensemaking: 1) constructing understanding through practitioners’ interaction, 2) negotiating these understandings and the actions that they influence, and 3) setting limits to sensemaking. These ideas also connect to the fact that different school actors embody distinctive roles.
and legitimacy in these interactions. These encounters materialize power relationships within the organization.

A last important element is the role of leadership in shaping sensemaking. This refers to several aspects of leadership, including acting to allow particular discourses and policy messages be part of the school culture, creating instances for professional interaction and professional development in alignment with policies, and allocating resources to make certain policies to develop. The role of school leaders is a key aspect of this study because that role can be framed as a mediating process in the adoption and implementation of policies. In particular, the leaders of schools are asked to implement several policies simultaneously. This situation might influence the way in which school leaders makes sense of kindergarten accountability policies in particular given the larger policy context.

In closing, it is relevant to acknowledge the value of sensemaking theory as an analytical tool to examine kindergarten teachers’ and principals’ responses to accountability policies. This theory offers insightful and practical knowledge to envision the ways in which institutional environments influence sensemaking processes within schools. Further, drawing on Spillane and Burch (2006), it is possible to say that schools and instruction are multidimensional activities. Therefore, it is feasible to observe a range of responses, ranging from loosely coupled to tightly coupled to accountability policies.
Summary

As asserted in the introduction of the literature review section, the three distinctive bodies of literature that inform this study are set to highlight the relevance of examining the way in which accountability policies are taken up in kindergarten classrooms. Further, these three bodies of literature inform the study’s conceptual framework by providing analytical tools to guide the next steps of the study. By drawing on these three bodies of literature to create the conceptual framework of the study, I intend to draw distinctive elements from each of them in connection to the research questions. The use of a critical poststructuralist approach to conceptualize accountability policies in kindergarten is intended to approach the examination of these policies from a perspective that acknowledges the influence of the larger socioeconomic context in the definitions and practices of early education. Further, I expect this perspective will elucidate the distinctive roles of school actors in encountering these policies in a context that stresses notions of effectiveness and preparedness.

Institutional and sensemaking theories are conceptualized as analytical tools in that they both offer explicit accounts to guide the exploration and analysis of the intersection between policies and practices. This translates into the fact that both theories are helpful for operationalizing the research questions regarding how and why policies are mobilized from the top-down and adopted by educational institutions. In addition, these theories are fruitful for providing tools to understand the nuances of the implementation of policies given that they take into account both institutional and individual factors that mediate the implementation of accountability policies for kindergarten.
This conceptual framework also informed the definition of key elements of the methodology of the study. In stressing that policy implementation is a situated process, these theoretical resources largely suggest the selection of qualitative approach to explore the intersection of accountability policies in kindergarten classrooms in public and private subsidized schools in Chile. This idea is further described in Chapter III.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine educators’ and schools’ perceptions of and responses to accountability policies in kindergarten, as well as to explore the role of school context in mediating these reflections and actions. Building off the review of the literature and the conceptual framework of this study, the study methodology sought to explore the ways in which accountability policies generate particular conditions of incentives and sanctions that shape how kindergarten is organized and taught. This translated into the need to design a study capable of acknowledging the situated nature of the adoption of policies in kindergarten classrooms. Specifically, the theoretical tools described in the previous chapter draw attention to three specific areas that influenced the methodology I employed. First, school contexts and actors play important roles in reading, translating, and influencing the technical and/or symbolic adoption of policies. In this regard, the methodology employed acknowledged that the role of schools’ actors might differ depending on their professional position and the particular tasks associated with such positioning. Second, the review of the literature also highlights the need to understand the particular conditions under which policies unfold, and therefore the importance of deeply understanding the context and the individual factors intervening. Third, by acknowledging that policy implementation could be understood as a combination of dynamic processes, the methodology sought to account for and capture changes over time. To this end a qualitative methodology was selected to conduct the study since, as Bogdan and Biklen (2007) indicate, a qualitative approach focuses on
understanding how “people make sense of their lives” (p. 7). Accordingly, a qualitative approach allows for an exploration of the perceptions, emotions, and responses of participants directly impacted by educational policies. Specifically, I chose to conduct a multiple-site case study. Drawing from Stake (1995), the case study methodology allows for exploring “the detail of interaction with its contexts. Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). In this sense, this study sought to understand teachers’ and principals’ responses within the setting in which they occur, in order to get in touch with them and use “what we see as sources for interpretation and appraisal” (Eisner, 1998, p. 11).

This chapter provides a description of the qualitative approach employed to conduct the study and the research design of the study, including the selection of the sites and participants. In addition, I describe the methods used to collect and analyze the data. The above mentioned elements are oriented to naturalistically approach the research topic. That is, the proposed methodology sought to study the phenomena in the particular social conditions that (re)produce them. Further, the methodology was informed by the theoretical sources of the study. In particular, the selection of methods of data collection reflects the tenets and orientations of institutional theory and sensemaking discussed in the literature review.

**Research Approach**

The research design for this study pursued a naturalistic approach capable of elucidating processes rather than school results in exploring the way in which teachers and schools encounter current kindergarten accountability policies. Accordingly, the
approach of this research aimed to experience the particularities of multiple cases as they develop in specific contexts. Specifically, the study focused on seven kindergarten classrooms, located in four different schools. The complete description of the cases is defined in the research context. In brief, in three elementary schools two kindergarten classrooms constituted the cases of the study, while in the remaining school only one kindergarten classroom was part of the study. The cases in this study are defined as instrumental (Stake, 1995) given that the cases are studied “to provide insight into an issue” (p. 237) in order to facilitate the understanding of the intersection between kindergarten accountability policies and schools’ responses to them. This means that each case considers the contextual elements in which kindergarten develops including administrative and organizational characteristics of each one. Therefore, the study acknowledged the relevance and influence of the school administration and organization as part of the social and institutional context of kindergartens. Conducting a case study allowed me to explore a case “through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). The case study approach enabled me to conduct a detailed examination of each school’s setting while allowing me as researcher to initially explore the cases and then move towards more focused data collection and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Given that the study sought to understand the way in which educators respond to accountability policies, it is important to examine whether or not policy enactment differs in different settings. In order to accomplish that, this study was defined as multiple case research enabling the exploration of similarities and differences between schools and schools’ actors when encountering the enactment of accountability policies for
kindergarten. Nevertheless, this multiple case study was not intended to be a comparative study. To the contrary, including in the study two classrooms from most of the schools allowed me to examine the phenomena to provide an exploration of the contexts and processes (Hartley, 2004, as cited in Kohlbacher, 2006) and to elucidate the issues studied. In this sense, any comparison between cases was used to highlight the similarities and differences between cases and the particularities of each case context.

The selection of a multiple case study approach was informed both by the theoretical tools and my own epistemological stance. The multiple case study approach explores in depth through participants’ experiences the influence of kindergarten accountability policies on teaching and school context. In addition, I studied kindergartens in four different schools in order to explore particular relations of each case to the topic under examination in an attempt to acknowledge the situatedness of the policy implementation. As multiple case research, this study wanted to capture both participants’ own perceptions of the phenomena under examination and the particularities of the context, and my own reflections as a researcher immersed in the context of the study.

Further, the theoretical tools also informed the data collection process. This translated into the need to design and employ a data collection plan capable of acknowledging the dynamic nature of school life; the responses to accountability policies are examined as processes that may fluctuate over time, not as results. In this regard, the data captured different moments of the school year in each one of the cases.

In addition, the critical nature of this study stresses the exploration of participants’ understanding and discourses as an important element of the methodology. This
emphasis is sustained under the premise that discourses both represent and construct social processes (Fairclough, 1992).

Considering the above methodological framework, this study explored the following questions:

1. What are participants’ understandings of accountability policies targeting kindergarten?

2. How might accountability policies targeting kindergarten be affecting what is happening in schools and kindergarten classrooms?

3. What individual and institutional factors influence the way in which schools and educators respond to accountability policies?

**Research Context and Site Selection**

This multiple case study was conducted in two municipal schools and two private subsidized schools providing kindergarten. The schools were located in two different municipalities in Chile: municipality of Santiago and municipality of Cerro Navia. In each municipality I selected a municipal and a private subsidized school. The decision to focus on schools receiving state funding that are subject to ministerial policies needs to be understood within the larger context of education in Chile and the current political and contextual issues that have maintained education as a key issue in the public agenda in the last decade. These elements are described in detail in Chapter I.

In choosing to conduct the study in schools that receive state funding, I acknowledge the fact that the Chilean education system has been subject to drastic changes over the last 40 years, greatly influenced by political and economic beliefs and
values regarding the roles of the government, the market, and public schooling. Further, I approach schooling understanding the striking shrinkage of public provision and increase of private subsidized stakeholders, which has gone hand in hand with the introduction of accountability policies aimed at increasing efficiency and effectiveness “pursing particular purposes, defined by distinctive relationships and evaluative procedures” (Ranson, 2003, p. 462). Acknowledging the changes in the landscape allows a greater comprehension of the nuances of the policy processes in the larger context but also in the micro context as policies unfold in schools receiving state funding.

Four elementary schools located in Chile were selected to conduct the multiple case study of kindergartens. The schools were purposefully selected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) in order to have schools from two different municipalities and representing both municipal and private subsidized administrations. The decision to have schools selected from two different municipalities is informed by the theoretical sources and attempts to acknowledge the differences in terms of administrative, technical, and financial dimensions that influence schools’ operations. In this regard, institutional theory advises about the interrelation of the way institutions respond to policy mandates and the institutional and technical environments that surround them.

For this study, the selection of two public schools, whose administrations are in the hands of municipalities, signals various possibilities regarding the extent to which these schools respond to kindergarten accountability policies in institutional environments with different networks and resources. Further, the selection of two private subsidized schools located in the same municipalities as the municipal schools sought to explore the phenomena considering the particular conditions in which these schools
operate. In this sense, municipal and private subsidized schools are both located in similar social and geographical contexts, but their relationship with the local and ministerial agencies differs as was described previously. The purposeful selection of the schools participating in the study aimed to provide a sample of schools in Chile that receive state funding to show different contexts in which kindergarten accountability policies unfold.

Research Sites and Participants

The selection of the sites was done following a thorough examination of the national data available on schools in the metropolitan region of Chile, composed by 52 municipalities. I first examined the data looking for municipalities placed in urban locations, that also have both municipal and private subsidized schools. Then I examined demographic and socioeconomic information about municipalities and their schools, looking for municipalities with similar numbers of residents and schools. After these searches I had a total of 5 municipalities with similar demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. I then studied school data in each of these municipalities making sure each school had two kindergartens. I also examined enrollment information, number of practitioners, school vulnerability index (IVE is a national index indicating the percentage of students identified as part of a household living under the poverty threshold), and results on standardized tests. I finally identified schools in three municipalities that shared similar characteristics. In doing so, I was looking to minimize the differences among schools in term of resources, administration requirements, school makeup, and municipal resources. I visited several schools in these three municipalities.
to invite them to the study, and in some of them I noticed principals as well of teachers were hesitant about participating as the study related to capturing their experiences and opinions about policies. The final selection of cases was contingent on the researcher’s access identifying the schools in each municipality and dependency in which participants were more open on having me visiting the schools and their classrooms for a year. Once schools were identified, I sent them a formal written invitation, which included information about the study, and consent and participants’ right forms. These documents are included in Appendix A, B and C respectively.

**Settings**

As previously mentioned, in each municipality I included a municipal and a private subsidized school. In Cerro Navia, the municipal school had only one kindergarten instead of two. In this particular municipality the accountability regime has led the mayor to close schools with low performance and administrative difficulties. The municipal school included in this municipality lost a significant number of students after being invited to the study, so I faced the situation of having only one kindergarten instead of two as planned. I decided to include this school in the study because it could shed a light on the influence of the accountability environment and the consequences of administrators’ decision-making processes.

It is important to recognize that, despite the existence of similarities and differences between schools in population, geographic location, and neighborhood conditions, each school represents a unique school culture that is important to comprehend. Guided by the theoretical sources, I acknowledge that school socio-demographics, school administration dependency, and performance history play
significant roles in the way schools and school actors respond to kindergarten accountability policies. Below I provide an overview of the schools’ characteristics to highlight their similarities and differences.

The four schools participating in this study are all located in the metropolitan region of Chile, which is the capital of the country. Two schools are located in the municipality of Santiago, and the other two in the municipality of Cerro Navia. In each municipality I selected one municipal and one private subsidized school, which means that the municipal school is under the administration of the municipality, and the other is administered by a private owner who gets funding from the Ministry of Education.

**School A: Peumo school – Municipal school – Municipality of Santiago.** This municipal school, located in Santiago was created in 1978. The mission of this school emphasizes the socio-emotional dimension of the pedagogical relationship aiming to develop students’ academic and life skills. The philosophy behind the Peumo School is a reflection of the sociocultural context in which the school exists, significantly challenged by socioeconomic difficulties of families and the presence of multiple cultures. The school is located in a working-class neighborhood that has experienced the arrival of immigrants in the past few years, which is reflected in the school makeup.

The Peumo school had an enrollment of 523 students in 2015, in pre-k through eight grades. The school vulnerability index (IVE) is 58.3%. The school has 43 teachers and five members of the leadership team composed of the Principal, Vice-Principal, Head of the Pedagogical Unit, School Inspector, and Guidance Counselor. The Board of Education of the Municipality of Santiago is responsible for appointing the administrative organization of the school. During the study, the Education Department of the
Municipality removed the school Principal who had worked for twenty years in the school. The Municipality forgot to call for nominations to the office last year, so it had to appoint the Head of the Pedagogical Unit as interim Principal while performing a public tendering to fill the position. Due to this event, the Head of the Pedagogical Unit was included in the study.

In the preprimary level the school has three classes, one pre-k and two kindergartens. Three teachers and three assistant teachers work in the level. One kindergarten had twenty-four students, and the other had 26. The school does not have any particular member of the leadership team working specifically in this level. The school subscribed to the full school day policy a few years ago for the preprimary level, so students attend school from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. everyday.

School B: Lahuan School – Private subsidized school – Municipality of Santiago. This private subsidized school located in Santiago was founded in 1929 by the Sociedad de Instrucción Primaria (SIP) a non-profit national network of schools that administers a total of seventeen schools, mostly in the metropolitan region and all located in underserved areas. The mission of the network is to provide quality education to students from families with low socioeconomic status, in order to ensure the right to equal opportunities for all.

The Lahuan school culture stresses the importance of teachers’ effectiveness to develop students’ academic skills and obtain good results on standardized tests. The schools of the network receive professional development and assessment from professionals working in the network headquarters. All schools in the network are ranked based in the results in multiple assessments for both teachers and students.
In 2015, the Lahuan school had an enrollment of 884 students, in pre-k through eight grades. The school vulnerability index (IVE) is of 60.7%. The school has 37 teachers and three members of the leadership team composed of the Principal, Vice-Principal, and School Inspector.

In the preprimary level the school has four classes, two pre-k and two kindergartens. The level has to share two classrooms. To that end, during the morning shift (8:00 – 12:30) one pre-k and one kindergarten operate in each classroom. The same classrooms are used by the afternoon shift (2:00 – 6:30), so kindergarten teachers share the same classroom. Four teachers and four assistant teachers work in the level. Each kindergarten had an enrollment of 45 students.

**School C: Mañio School – Municipal school – Municipality of Cerro Navia.**

The municipal school located in Cerro Navia was founded in 1981. During the past few years the school has faced significant struggles, having administrative and finance problems, which significantly affected its enrollment. In 2015 the school had 326 students. The school is located in a working-class neighborhood with scarce resources. The school adjoins an avenue with high traffic, resulting in permanent high noise pollution at school. There are no parks or other community/local institutions near the school. The school vulnerability index (IVE) is 86.3%.

The principal and the Head of the Pedagogical Unit make up the leadership team. There are twenty-four teachers. The principal was appointed a year ago by municipal authorities. Previously he worked in another struggling school in the same municipality, and he mentioned he was offered the position in order to help the school to thrive and avoid being closed. The school emphasizes the importance of providing students
learning opportunities to develop behaviors, values, and knowledge, fostering a holistic
development of students.

In the preprimary level, there are three teachers and three assistant teachers. There are two pre-k classes and one kindergarten. The kindergarten operates in the afternoon shift (2:00 – 6:30), and shares the classroom with one pre-k that operates in the morning shift (8:00 – 12:30).

**School D: Tepa school – Private subsidized school – Municipality of Cerro Navia.** A religious congregation founded this private subsidized school located in Cerro Navia in 1967. The mission of the school declares the relevance of providing students opportunities to develop skills, attitudes, values, and ethical principles aligned to the spiritual legacy of its founder. It enrollment has grown in the last years, and in 2015 it had a total of 544 students. The school vulnerability index is 75%.

The principal, Head of the Pedagogical Unit, School Inspector, and a representative of the religious congregation compose the school leadership team. The congregation is responsible for all aspects of the administration of the school. There are 56 teachers.

In the preprimary level there are four teachers and four assistant teachers, and two pre-k and two kindergartens. There are two classrooms, so both kindergartens operate in the morning shift (8:00 – 12:30) and both pre-k during the afternoon shift (2:00 – 6:30).

**Participants**

I focused the study on capturing the experiences of two kindergarten teachers and the school principal at each site. I consider the participation of kindergarten teachers and the principal central to examining the particular experiences of these distinctive school
actors in relation to kindergarten accountability policies. Besides the participation of the kindergarten teachers as active actors in the implementation of accountability policies for kindergarten, the inclusion of the school principal as a key actor is informed by the research on sensemaking theory. Sensemaking theory highlights institutional factors such as organizational structure, institutional culture, norms, routines, and leadership actions that mediate the processes through which practitioners make sense of mandates. Therefore, the school principals are key actors to understand the responses to kindergarten policies as their actions influence teachers’ responses through the mediation of these policies.

In addition, by including the participation of teachers and school leaders as direct participants, I intended to explore the interplay of power in relationships between leadership and teaching that are influenced by policies. Focusing on these participants, I acknowledge the importance of understanding the particular factors that affect how individuals take up policies in great detail, a central premise of the conceptual framework of the study.

The selection of focal kindergarten teachers was discussed with the principal in each school. The aim was to have teachers that have some experience teaching kindergarten. The table below summarizes the main characteristics of participants.

**Data Collection and Data Sources**

Guided by the theoretical sources the data collection acknowledged the influence of social conditions in the production and interpretation of discourses. Thus, data collection
was done through different practices and in different moments of the school year in order to capture the nuances of the phenomena under study.

Table 1. *Participants Description*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Administration/ Location</th>
<th>Years of experience in education</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Peumo</td>
<td>Municipal / Santiago</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Bachelor Elementary Education Master in Educational administration and leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Peumo</td>
<td>Municipal/ Santiago</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Bachelor Early childhood Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Peumo</td>
<td>Municipal/ Santiago</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Bachelor Early childhood Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Lahuan</td>
<td>Private subsidized / Santiago</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Elementary education Master in Educational administration and leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Lahuan</td>
<td>Private subsidized / Santiago</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Early childhood education Master in Curriculum Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Lahuan</td>
<td>Private subsidized / Santiago</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bachelor Early childhood Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Mañio</td>
<td>Municipal / Cerro Navia</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Elementary education Master in educational leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Mañio</td>
<td>Municipal / Cerro Navia</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Bachelor Early childhood Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Tepa</td>
<td>Private subsidized / Cerro Navia</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Certificate in Educational Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Tepa</td>
<td>Private subsidized / Cerro Navia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Bachelor Early childhood Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Tepa</td>
<td>Private subsidized / Cerro Navia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bachelor Early childhood Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data was gathered through the following data collection procedures: in-depth interviews of teachers and principals, document collection of school and teachers’ materials, and observations of kindergarten classes and school activities that were described by participants as relevant to kindergarten accountability policies. The
collection of data through multiple procedures sought to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study in that it allowed me to triangulate data and inform the researcher’s reflexivity (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach & Richardson, 2005). The details of the relationship between data sources and research questions are show in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Main Objectives</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Explore participants’ views on accountability policies they encounter</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ2 &amp; RQ3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms Observations</td>
<td>Examine participants’ classroom practices as examples of policy implementation</td>
<td>RQ2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability-driven activity</td>
<td>Examine participants’ understanding and implementation of accountability policies</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Documents</td>
<td>Examine contextual factors framing policy implementation</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Documents</td>
<td>Examine participants’ rationale and policy implementation</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collection occurred throughout 2015 with greater emphasis on the last two trimesters. I conducted introductory interviews at the beginning of the first trimester in order to have relevant information about the school history, context and focal participants early in the school year. This gave me initial background to understand the distinctiveness of each case.

Figure 1 introduces the data collection timeline. This timeline describes the sequencing in which data collection was done. The data collection process sought to collect in-depth information and also to capture this information in a distinctive sequence such that data sources inform subsequent data collection.
As the diagram shows, interviews were conducted throughout the study. This decision was guided by the objective to use interviews as sources of information that allowed for both understanding participants’ perspectives and contextualizing the research questions, while also informing subsequent observations and document analysis. By alternating observation and document analysis with interviews, I used interviews as follow-up instances to clarify participants’ ideas, actions, and discourses, which I had identified beforehand.

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews with school principals and kindergarten teachers were conducted in conjunction with other data collection methods. These interviews allowed me to gather information “in the subjects’ own words so the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 96). I wanted to understand how the focal subjects interpret kindergarten accountability policies and leaders’ and teachers’ roles in relationship to these policies. Each participant was formally interviewed four times during the study. Appendices E and F detail teacher and principals interviews protocols respectively. By interviewing subjects at different moments of the study, I sought to accomplish diverse objectives such as building relationships, examining actors’ views regarding teaching and kindergarten policies, and
seeking clarification of classroom observations and analysis. Spacing the interviews also allowed me to capture different nuances of the institutional and practitioners’ responses to these policies, showing that different moments of the school year have differential influence on how accountability policies are experienced and enacted. The semi-structured nature of the interviews also helped me to collect common and basic information across settings.

The following table describes the interviews conducted identifying actors, main objectives, and topics.

Acknowledging that semi-structured interviews are highly framed from the interviewer’s perspective, I kept written records of informal conversations with participants that could add to the understanding of the research questions. This action allowed me to gain insight into how participants frame the issue from their own perspectives and positioning. These casual conversation records were considered part of the field notes.

**Observations**

**Accountability-driven activities.** As previously planned, I observed 2 activities per school that were described by focal participants as actions responding to kindergarten accountability policies. In conjunction with participants, I identified activities that were influenced by/derived from the kindergarten accountability policies. By having focal participants defining and selecting these observations I intended to further understand the way in which school actors engaged with policies at the level of implementation. Given that the theoretical tools stress the fact that several factors play a role in the implementation process, the activities took a wide variety of forms encompassing teacher
planning meetings, professional development activities, municipal early childhood committee meetings, and public accountability events.

Table 3. Interviews Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Sequence</th>
<th>First Interview</th>
<th>Second Interview</th>
<th>Third Interview</th>
<th>Fourth Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actors</strong></td>
<td>- School Principal - Teachers</td>
<td>- School Principal - Teachers</td>
<td>- Teachers</td>
<td>- School Principal - Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Objectives</strong></td>
<td>- Building relationships - Getting to know the focal participants - Gathering background information regarding school history and context</td>
<td>- Gathering information regarding policies and changes in kindergarten - Listening for prevalent discourses</td>
<td>Follow-up interview to seek clarification of observation and initial analysis</td>
<td>Follow-up interview and final questions in relation to observation and analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Main topics**

- This first interview was designed to get to know focal participants with regard to broad aspects including their teaching, leadership training and experiences, conceptions related to teaching kindergarten, perceptions of and reflections on the public school system, and their initial reflections on the arrival of accountability policies targeting kindergarten.
- The second interview sought to understand participants' understanding of and responses to accountability policies for kindergarten, and capture the ways in which participants describe changes influenced by these policies. It also assisted to identify school activities that were framed by focal participants as responding to kindergarten accountability policies. Lastly, this interview was also used to arrange classroom observations and to request materials.
- This interview was conducted after I had observed each classroom twice and I analyzed materials and documents provided by focal participants. This interview focused on deepening my understanding of participants' reflections and actions influenced by kindergarten accountability policies.
- This last interview was conducted at the end of the study to clarify aspects emerging from observations and documents, as well as to explore aspects of the analysis. This interview also intended to capture participants' impressions of the study.

**Classroom activities.** I conducted three observations of classroom activities with each of the focal kindergarten teachers. The decision about which lessons/activities were observed was made with teachers, in order to capture their teaching in a variety of subjects/activities to gain a deeper understanding of the occurrences in each classroom.
I also conducted brief informal conversations with teachers after each observation to gain deeper knowledge about the particular context in which the lesson/activity occurred, to understand the intended objectives of the activity, planning and evaluation practices, and teachers’ personal reflections that emerged after the lessons.

**Documents**

This study also included the review and analysis of documents, including 1) official policy documents issued by national agencies with regard to the policies studied, 2) school documents targeting kindergarten, including the institutional school project (PEI), and school’s strategic plan mandated by the SEP policy, and 3) kindergarten classroom documentation, which included teachers’ planning and materials used in the classes observed.

The inclusion of diverse documents sought to fulfill several objectives. First, the analysis of governmental and external agencies’ policy documentation assisted me in understanding the background context of these policies, as well as the strategies, plans, and regulations established to further the implementation of kindergarten policies in both public and private subsidized schools. Second, by including the analysis of formal documents (e.g. planning, organizational material, schedules) and materials (e.g. lesson materials, assessments) produced by the school, principals, and kindergarten teachers in responding to kindergarten policies, I gained insight into the responses of these actors to policies. The following table summarizes the data collected by school.
Table 4. Data Collection by School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Municipal School - Santiago</th>
<th>Private Subsidized School - Santiago</th>
<th>Municipal School – Cerro Navia</th>
<th>Private Subsidized School – Cerro Navia</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principals’ Interviews</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ interviews</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms Observations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability-driven activity Observations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom’s Documents</td>
<td>Lesson planning, curricular materials, textbooks</td>
<td>Lesson planning, curricular materials, textbooks</td>
<td>Lesson planning, curricular materials, textbooks</td>
<td>Lesson planning, curricular materials, textbooks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School documents</td>
<td>Institutional school project (PEI) School strategic SEP plan</td>
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**Interview Pilot**

A brief pilot of the interview protocols was conducted while defining the study methodology. This pilot aimed to assess the appropriateness of the interview protocols for the first and second interviews as outlined in the data collection plan. This pilot of the interviews consisted of two interviews with early childhood teachers from Chile who currently teach kindergarten. The pilot interviews were developed in English and then translated into Spanish. I conducted the interviews via Skype, and I recorded and transcribed them.
The participants for this pilot phase were contacted through colleagues. I had not met them before. I sent the participants an invitation to participate in the interview, explaining the purpose of it and the main objectives of the study. Each interview took about an hour, and was organized into two main parts. The first part was oriented toward getting to know the participants in terms of their teaching background (e.g. training, experience), conceptions of teaching, and their current roles and daily practices in schools. The second part focused on exploring participants’ experiences with and reflections on a series of national policies aimed directly at influencing practices in kindergarten, including the areas of planning, curriculum, student assessment, and teacher evaluation processes.

The interview pilot shed light on various issues. First, the initial translation and conducting the interviews in Spanish imposed significant challenges to adapt the interviews into a language that was familiar to the participants. While conducting the interviews, I was able to identify words or expressions that were not understood by the interviewees, and to try out expressions that elicited more productive and engaged participation. I modified the translated versions of the interviews in order to better adjust to the context.

Second, sharing the main purposes of the study was helpful for engaging teachers in conversation about their practices. Both teachers commented on how important it is to hear teachers’ own perceptions of and reflections on policies, given that most of the time they feel policies are too prescriptive and do not align with the way they understand the aims of early education. Nevertheless, teachers also referred to some of these policies as beneficial, as they gave them guidance and facilitated some aspects of teaching. These
different registers of the policies allowed me to notice that some questions were constructed assuming only negative consequences of these policies. This reflection influenced modifications of the protocols in order to have more exploratory questions that avoided imposing the researcher’s bias.

A third issue that arose through this piloting relates to the possibility of assessing the balance of the interview protocols in relation to the research questions. Despite the fact that the initial protocol contained questions focused on exploring aspects related to all research questions, in conducting the interviews I noticed that I had put larger emphasis on exploring participants’ understanding of how accountability policies shape their practices. This realization was helpful for developing a greater insight into the relevance of having a detailed and clear plan for the data collection process in order to guide the research process.

The experience of piloting the initial interview protocols gave me the opportunity to gain experience in conducting interviews with kindergarten teachers as well as the opportunity to learn the particular ways in which early childhood educators in Chile refer to their experiences of teaching kindergarten. This is very important given that I have been away from educational settings in Chile for the past four years, and I was able to notice and reflect upon existing and new discourses and practices.

**Data Management, Organization, and Analysis**

I used NVivo 11.4 to sort and organize the data. Initially, data sources were organized by school site and date of collection. All data sources were organized and referred to using pseudonyms for schools, principals, and teachers for confidentiality
purposes. All material including field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and memos was stored on a password-protected personal computer.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcription was uploaded to NVivo to facilitate the organization of each interview, the identification of information that was relevant to the research questions, and the retrieval of particular fragments during the study.

Fieldwork was documented through field notes. These notes intended to capture a description of the events, participants, settings, and conversations occurring in each visit. In addition, I included my emerging ideas and personal reflections in the field notes. Including these personal reflections helped both the data collection and analysis processes given that these reflections in some instances informed decisions regarding fieldwork. I wrote the field notes during and after each visit to record as much detail as possible about each school visit or fieldwork activity. In the notes I included paraphrasing of dialogues that happened during the visit and captured other elements of the contexts, such as spatial arrangements or aesthetic aspects.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was an ongoing process performed in parallel with data collection. The preliminary phase of data analysis involved reading school documents that I retrieved from ministerial and official school websites, and taking notes from the first visits to the schools. The notes included personal comments and questions I had during the visits, or themes that I was noticing. My goal during this initial period was to develop preliminary ideas about analytic categories for coding the data. However, I immersed
myself fully in data analysis after I had completed all data collection and transcribed all the interviews.

My approach to data analysis assisted by NVivo began with reading the fieldnotes, interview transcripts, classrooms observations, and documents produced by teachers. During this process I read all the data from the same school before moving on to the next, employing a coding strategy during this first reading oriented by the research questions. By reading data line-by-line I was able to identify common themes within and among school data, developing concepts inductively (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As I developed codes I wrote mini memos to annotate the code description to make sure that I was keeping track of the process and patterns in the data, but also to register how I was thinking about the constructs. The codes developed in this phase appear in Appendix F. As guided by the research questions, in this stage of the analysis the codes related to broad themes associated to them.

During the second phase of data analysis I employed a theoretical coding strategy seeking more detail in the analysis of data. To guide this process I developed theory-driven codes informed by the conceptual framework described in Chapter II, including the literature on accountability policies, institutional theory, and sensemaking theory. I organized these codes by research question. A conceptual map is provided in Chapter IV outlining the relationship between each research question, the conceptual framework, and the final coding scheme. This deductive phase of the analysis assisted me to code the data according to the research questions. In this second stage, I organize the coding work by question, rather than by schools. This meant that I first approached coding all data
from each school bearing in mind question one, moving to the next questions after finishing the analysis of the data of all four schools.

During the collection and analysis of the data I paid attention to discourse. Framing the exploration of policies from a poststructuralist perspective highlights the constructed nature of discourse; both policies and responses need to be understood as processes that are mediated and develop in contexts. Therefore, I approached discourses as actions in a continuous process of enactment and subject to interpretations. These premises were relevant to inform the collection and analysis of data as these tasks needed to address the fact that teachers and school leaders read and respond to policies in ways that reflect their social and professional positioning and particular social conditions. Following Fairclough (1992), the analysis of data considered discourse as a social practice that is manifested in the ways language and other symbolic interactions forms are enacted. According to Pini (2009), an analysis of discourse is valuable for acknowledging and examining discourse production as well as the social conditions of producing and interpreting discourse. In this sense, examining discourse allowed me to notice political, historical, and social factors involved in particular discursive practices. Drawing from Ball (2006) I argued that accountability policies need to be studied as “textual interventions into practice” (p. 46) that enter into particular school conditions that operate as mediators of these commands. As stressed in the background of the study, a significant number of accountability policies have arisen in the past few decades in Chile. Therefore, these policies needed to be studied in context, namely as social practices that “do not just involve language, but are constituted to a significant extent by changes in language practices” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 6). These ideas translate into the
analysis and reflection of the particular organizational and social conditions in which teachers’ and school leaders’ discourses regarding accountability policies for kindergarten emerge. Further, it also informed the importance of keeping track of changes on the prevalent knowledge and discourses as reflected in the ways in which language is employed (Fairclough, 1992).

The decision to approach the analysis of data stressing the importance of discourse is guided by both the poststructuralist perspective and my positionality with regard to accountability policies in education. I thereby recognize that accountability discourses in education derive from neoliberal economic practices and disciplines, and they are adopted/adapted into the education field enclosing particular logics of power relationships and modes of production. Then, I approached the analysis of data acknowledging discourse’s constructive potential in shaping both practitioners’ identities and practices, and in establishing particular ways of knowing and power relationships (Bourdieu, 2006). For instance, in the analysis of the documents, interviews, and classroom interactions I paid attention to the way in which discourses mediate and construct representations with regard to teachers and their practices, and how – if at all – these representations change over time.

Attention to discourse also translated into particular ways of analyzing the data. I paid special attention to teachers’ and principals’ discourses regarding notions of accountability, evaluation, effectiveness, and efficiency. For that, I explored their particular meanings and noted the particular moments in which they employed these concepts. Finally, by paying attention to discourse in the collection and analysis of data I sought to acknowledge that discourses not only reflect social realities but also have the
power to produce social practices, social relations, beliefs, and values; consequently discourse has a generative capacity that could influence future actions and reinforce or challenge current practices and beliefs.

**Study Trustworthiness**

The study of how schools and educators respond to accountability policies in kindergarten required special attention to ensure trustworthiness within and between the cases. This is particularly important given that I framed the study through the use of theoretical and methodological sources that stressed the social construction of knowledge and truth. In this sense, the trustworthiness of the study is constructed under the premise that the data collection and analysis processes were done through strategies that establish credibility. In particular, I addressed trustworthiness through the use of three means of demonstrating credibility (Brantlinger et al., 2005): data triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and prolonged field engagement. As indicated in the method section, the study employed varied data sources including interviews, observations, documents, field notes and memos. The triangulation of data sought to acknowledge the existence of a variety of discourses and perspectives in regard to the phenomena under study in order to account for the particularities of each case. Further, the data collection required a prolonged engagement with each of the case sites that made it possible to build relationships with the focal subjects who could bring into account different views and takeaways about the issue under study. The length of the data collection also took into account the nuances of the process of policy implementation and the need to document changes over time.
I introduced my positionality in regards to the arrival of accountability policies in early childhood, stressing the need for acknowledging that these policies might present significant challenges and changes in the way that practitioners and school leaders organize and teach kindergartners. Further, I recognize the relevance of understanding the experiences and perspectives of teachers in an education environment highly driven by accountability policies and structures. Recognizing my beliefs about accountability policies and their possible consequences for early childhood, I reflected on them during the process of data collection and analysis in order to understand the extent to which they play out in these phases of the study. Drawing from Peshkin (1988), in actively examining my subjectivity I worked to “attend to the orientations that will shape what I see and what I make of what I see” (p. 21).

**Limitations of the Study**

This study has several limitations significant to acknowledge, some of them particular to qualitative studies. First, the small sample of schools, and therefore of kindergarten teachers and principals was necessary to generate rich data about the situated responses to policies; however, this design does not allow generalization of the results to other school settings. In this sense, I was only able to explore the research questions from the perspectives and practices of those individuals in the study. Despite this limitation, this look at these four schools does suggest that context matters in how teachers and principals respond to policies. In particular, the administrative dependency of schools is a factor relevant to consider, for example whether schools are municipal or private subsidized, or whether the private subsidized school is part of a network.
Second, my sample was voluntary, so school and teachers may have self-selected to participate into this study. In the particular case of teachers, I found that they were very eager to share their reflections with someone from outside the school. Kindergarten teachers mentioned constantly that they felt isolated from school and policy decision-making, and also appreciated the opportunity to be asked about their practices and opinions. It is possible that they were particularly critical of policies and authorities when engaging with an external observer willing to hear and learn from them.

A third aspect relates to the observation of classrooms. Based on the study design I discussed with each teacher what activities to observe in their classrooms. As teachers knew in advance which day I was visiting them, some of them could have behaved in ways that were not typical. I mentioned earlier that the observational design resembles mechanisms used by national and school authorities to evaluate teachers, as typically performance evaluations rely on observations and reviews of teachers’ planning. Given that I employed these strategies to collect the data, the findings could also reflect the influence of my presence in classrooms employing logics of control and supervision. Adding to this is the factor that my professional background is in psychology, and I had experience working in schools but not teaching in classroom as I hold a different degree. In past working experiences, I have encountered resistance from teachers to my collaboration as I have a different background based on different conceptual and theoretical frameworks. I noticed at the beginning of the study some teachers were skeptical of what I was doing and asked me several times about my background in education. Despite the fact, at the end of the study they were very welcoming and open, and it is quite possible that having a different background might have played a role in
how they responded and acted during interviews and observations. I addressed this shortcoming during the study by sharing with them the transcription of interviews and observations, and tackling these issues during follow-up interviews.

Lastly, my own beliefs and assumptions introduce bias to my study design and analysis. I began my study having a strong and negative perspective of accountability as answerability policies, considering the negative consequences highlighted by previous studies. This might have informed the initial interviews and the initial coding of data. However, during the study the nuances of accountability became clearer, and how teachers themselves – despite acknowledging the negative effects of these policies – also saw them as opportunities to gain public recognition. Throughout the study my initial assumptions were constantly challenged by the experiences collected in the four schools, which forced me to read and code the data several times in order to gain deeper understanding of the intersections between conceptual models and to acknowledge the interplay of factors influencing the results.
This study explores educators and schools responses to and reflections on accountability policies in kindergarten in Chile, and how, if at all, institutional contexts and professional experiences influence those responses and reflections. In exploring these questions I draw upon multiple theoretical viewpoints, which result in several analytic lenses informing the way in which the findings section is organized.

This chapter presents a discussion of the data gathered and analyzed. The findings of this inquiry are organized in three sections, related to each of the research questions, respectively. The first section addresses the first research question and provides an overview of the key policies targeting kindergarten and the participants’ understanding of them. The second section addresses the second research question and takes a macro-institutional view of how kindergarten policies might be affecting what is happening in schools and kindergarten classrooms. The third section is devoted to the last research question and employs a micro-institutional lens to examine what individual and institutional factors might be influencing the way in which schools and educators respond to kindergarten accountability policies.

To support the organization of this chapter, each section begins by outlining the constructs employed to help make sense of the findings.
Findings Related to Research Question 1: Participants’ Understandings of Accountability Policies Targeting Kindergarten

The findings presented in this section are aligned with constructs outlined in the conceptual framework in the figure below. These constructs helped me to understand how participants of the study conceptualize policies targeting kindergarten.

As represented in above figure and stressed throughout the previous chapters, in this study I employ a conceptualization of accountability embedded in the current context of high-stakes accountability in education aimed at employ tight coupling policies in the Chilean education system. This translates into two key elements. On the one hand, building on Stephen Ball’s work (2006), I emphasize that policies are both texts and processes. From that perspective, policies are not just written discourses mandated to

Figure 2. Conceptual map relation research question 1 and coding scheme.
schools, but they are also discourses that are inevitably subject to interpretation within particular contexts. Following these ideas, accountability policies are those that arise in educational contexts with a prevalent logic of effectiveness and performance. This results in the emergence of instruments and mechanisms employed by authorities to control through hierarchical power relationships, holding actors accountable to aims largely shaped by economic principles.

Furthermore, as Ball (2006) discussed, as policies are read, decoded, and implemented by actors within particular contexts, school actors are the ones signifying policies through continual processes and practices, fashioned by their particular experiences and teaching environments. Consequently, perceiving and describing a policy as driven by accountability aims constitutes a situated discursive practice as actors engage with it.

Following the above theory of action of accountability policies, my approach aims to uncover how participants conceptualize current policies targeting kindergarten. I pay particular attention to which policies they identify as playing crucial roles in what is happening currently in kindergarten. I also explore how the consequences linked to policy implementation affect educators experience of governmental control.

Three particular actions were key in identifying the policies included in this study. First, in the pilot phase I identified preliminary policies that teachers acknowledged as having great impact in their teaching in the way above described. Second, the review of documents shared by schools and teachers underscored which policies were more pervasive in the official discourse. Lastly, through open-ended questions asked during different interview times, I invited teachers and principals to identify current policies that
align with the conceptualization described above. I also asked specific questions about the most common educational policies identified by the means aforementioned.

Despite working in different school settings, all teachers recognized a total of four national policies as accountability policies, including a) the National Curricular Guidelines, b) the Inclusion Law (PIE), c) the Priority School Subsidy Policy (SEP), and d) the National Teacher Evaluation Policy. The following table contains an overview of each policy.

Table 5. Overview of Policies

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Policy name</th>
<th>Enactment date</th>
<th>Policy overview</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood National Curricular Guidelines</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>This is a framework in place for children aged 0 to 6 years as one single level with two learning cycles, based on development stages (0-3 and 3-6). The components of the curriculum are based on three dimensions, with corresponding subareas and 232 learning expected outcomes with related pedagogical guidelines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion Law (PIE)</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>PIE is an inclusive strategy of the school system aimed at favoring the presence and participation in regular classrooms of students with special educational needs. The law provides additional human and material resources to provide support to these students to achieve educational parity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority School Subsidy Policy (SEP)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>The law provides schools enrolling socio-economically disadvantaged students with additional funding to support services. Schools are required to implement improvement plans, aimed at achieving centrally defined objectives. The school improvement plan considers the areas of curriculum management, school leadership, school environment, and human resource management. Additionally, the plan has to include academic performance goals defined in terms of standards and education quality indicators like SIMCE scores. The schools can use the SEP resources to hire external agencies to receive advice and support services to develop, implement, and/or monitor the improvement plan. Schools failing to meet their commitments can be sanctioned through fines, ineligibility for SEP or even closure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Teacher Evaluation Policy</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>This is a centralized system used both to evaluate teachers and for accountability. It is compulsory for municipal school, and voluntary for teachers working in private subsidized schools. The assessment is based on an established teaching framework and standards of practice, and relies on multiple sources of evidence, including a portfolio, classroom observation, interviews, and self-assessment.</td>
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In the findings below, I first describe the teachers’ and principals’ conceptualization of the policies. Then, in the second subsection, I address participants’ reflections on the extent to which the policies promote accountability or responsibility. In both subsections, I present first the findings related to teachers followed by those from principals. This exposes differences between different actors in each school, who are also subject to different expectations and mandates. It also acknowledges that differences between teachers’ and principals’ conceptualization of policies are a prominent finding of the study.

**Conceptualization of Kindergarten Policies**

Drawing from the idea that policies are evolving productions in which educational actors play significant roles in making sense and enacting them, Ball and his colleagues (2011) propose two distinctive type of policies defined by the power relationship they promote. On the one hand, *imperative policies* emphasize the prescription of guidelines removing as much as possible teachers’ judgment. On the other hand, *exhortative policies* favor an active participation of educational actors as they have a key role in contextualizing and implementing policies by employing their judgment.

Besides the different forms of relationships between school actors and policies, school actors might conceptualize policies as imperative or exhortative based on two influences. First, teachers and principals are not necessarily held accountable based on the same mechanisms even if they face similar accountability policies. Therefore, those mechanisms might play a role in the way these actors understand policies. Second, teachers’ and principles’ roles in schools differ, which leads to them having different
leverage over the school organization and decision-making, which in turn can bridge or buffer them from policy mandates. These differences shape teachers’ and principals’ conceptualizations of policies and accountability and lead to differences between them. Therefore, the findings are organized to highlight such distinctions.

**Teachers’ perceptions of policies.** The findings highlight that teachers primarily conceptualize the four key policies as imperative rather than exhortative. In general terms, the data from the interviews indicates that all kindergarten teachers from different schools and communities agreed that current policies require them to follow guidelines, in some cases very scripted. Besides the existence of detailed procedures, teachers mention that these four policies also utilize mechanisms to keep track of implementation and provide explicit guidelines that articulate the expected and/or prescribed goals. One teacher said,

> We work with learning guidelines handed out by the Ministry of Education. At the beginning of the year we have to apply a diagnostic tool, in the middle of the year we are required to apply an intermediate assessment, and at the end of the year we are mandated to apply a final assessment in order to see how much of the expected learning we did cover during the year as reflected in students’ learning. We have to submit all these assessments to the Ministry’s online platform. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, first interview, 2015)

Teachers’ conceptualizations of policies as imperative also remained very consistent during the school year of the study. I asked teachers their perceptions about these policies at different points, including periods when they might feel the effects of policies most directly: at the end of the semester, a period in which teachers were mandated to apply evaluation tools and to fill out documentation about the progress of their work, and at the end of year when they have to fill out evaluations and documentations required by authorities. By asking teachers their perceptions at different
points of the school year I draw on research that focuses on teachers’ practice (Coburn & Turner, 2011; Horn & Little, 2010) in seeking understanding of what actually happens when teachers engage with policies in the course of their usual work, exploring the role of context. In this study, regardless of the different moments in which data was gathered, teachers’ responses were the same over the course of the year.

While all teachers described policies as very prescriptive in general, there were some differences in how teachers described the intensity of control exerted by these policies. Also, teachers acknowledged that some aspects of these policies were seen as exhortative, despite describing them as imperative in general. Below I introduce teachers’ perceptions of each one of the policies studied, highlighting particular aspects that help to identify nuances of intensity and differences particular to each policy, particularly differences arising from school administration dependency.

**Teachers’ perceptions of policies as imperative.** The National Curricular Guidelines stood out as highly prescriptive for all teachers in different schools and communities. Teachers describe this policy as having the greatest influence over their teaching practices. When explaining the way in which the curricular guidelines are conceived as exerting more control over their work, teachers refer to two main aspects. First, teachers perceive curricular policies as very detailed; the policies specify not only the objectives but also the means through which these objectives are to be achieved. As one teacher explained,

To guide our work we first received the curricular guidelines, then the Ministry created the Progress Maps that describe the developmental path for each area of the curriculum, and now we also have a pedagogical program that indicates objectives for each area and even gives us examples of learning experiences. All these materials help us to plan our lessons in detail, so we make sure we are
accomplishing what is expected. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, first interview, 2015)

Second, teachers perceive curricular policies as imperative because despite the fact that they are responsible for scheduling/pacing the curriculum throughout the year, they have no final word in deciding whether or not to adopt the curricular guidelines or to narrow down or adjust the learning objectives based on the particular group of students they teach each year. One teacher recalled,

One of the things that affects me is the pressure from the Ministry of Education, they decide what I should teach and the curricular coverage I have to accomplish in a year. We have to do it anyways, but I believe there are areas that I should give more emphasis, but I don’t get to decide it, I have to teach content after content in a very fast fashion so I can cover the entire curriculum. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, first interview, 2015)

Therefore, teachers in general perceive the national curricular guidelines as imperative given the high prescription of its contents and practices, supported by the obligation to implement it.

This perception seems to be more intense for teachers working in private subsidized schools as a result of practices exerted by school authorities. In addition to acknowledging the imperative of curricular guidelines, the private school teachers mention experiencing extra control in implementing these policies. These controls include the provision of specific textbooks in addition to the textbooks provided by the Ministry, and ongoing supervision to monitor the use of these resources, in order to make sure they are working as expected by curricular guidelines. Teachers perceived these actions by authorities as a means through which private subsidized school authorities are putting more pressure on them to achieve expected outcomes, regulating their practices further. A teacher from a private subsidized school described her experience,
The school consortium and the education publisher Santillana developed special textbooks for pre-k and kindergarten, and we have to work with them because the supervisor checks students’ work on them. There is also a Unit at the consortium in charge of creating the lesson planning, which organize everything, activities, contents, methodology we have to implement to achieve particular results, it’s a thorough work, and I have to work to reach as far as possible what is defined by them. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, first interview, 2015)

None of the teachers working in municipal schools referred to practices or mechanisms exerted by school authorities as particularly targeting additional control over the implementation of curricular guidelines.

The Inclusion policy is also conceptualized as imperative given it is a mandatory policy for all schools. Even more so, teachers in all schools feel the policy has imposed more control over their practices in several ways. The policy mandates that kindergarten teachers collaborate with other special needs specialists (e.g. psychologists, speech therapists, special education teachers) to support student learning and development.

Teachers find this practice greatly impacts their work as they are mandated to accommodate the specialists’ recommendations during their classroom teaching time. This perception is significantly influenced by what the teachers perceive as a lack of support from others, such as school authorities and governmental agencies. Despite the fact that collaboration is described in the policy documents, in reality the teachers see this policy as arriving at the school with little support provided, as scarce or no time is allocated for collaborative work with specialists, and no opportunities are provided for professional development to make their teaching more inclusive to students with learning difficulties. In this sense, despite considering this particular policy potentially highly beneficial for students with special needs, in reality they perceive more obligations and regulations on their teaching. A teacher explained,
Some students have major difficulties, they need significant support, but their needs go against the imperative to cover all curriculum learning objectives, so sometimes I have to focus on teaching all content rather than making sure I am responding to the needs of all students, I have little help from the specialist, not because they are not concerned about students, but because they don’t have time either to work with us. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, second interview, 2015)

The National Teacher Evaluation Policy is also seen by teachers as imperative and as exerting great control over their practices. Teachers working in municipal schools placed particular emphasis on this issue given that they are mandated to abide by this policy enacted by the Ministry of Education, which affects teachers’ salary scale and incentives, professional development tracks, and eventually their ability to maintain their jobs. Besides the influence of the policy over their labor conditions, there are two particular aspects of the content and practices of the policy that municipal teachers considered imperative. First, they state that the National Evaluation Policy was primarily designed to evaluate teachers working in elementary and secondary levels; implementing a similar policy in early childhood has impacted their work by imposing actions and teaching practices foreign to early childhood education. Second, teachers mentioned that the way the evaluation is conducted is highly authoritative, as the policy requires several steps that have to be done in a particular way supervised by authorities throughout the process. Teachers in all municipal schools feel they are acting/performing for the evaluation rather than teaching as usual, as the evaluation system and content does not match the way they usually teach in kindergarten and the aims of that school level. As one teacher explained,

The teacher performance evaluation has not been adapted to the particularities of early childhood education, the system is created to measure effectiveness, but in our case we focus on developing children holistically and that cannot be subject to measurement; the evaluation is designed to measure results but that is something
that does not match with early education. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, second interview, 2015)

In the case of teachers working in private subsidized schools, they are not required to be assessed by the National Teacher Evaluation Policy, and if they decide to take the National Teacher Evaluation the results might not affect their work, as private subsidized school authorities have the final word on teachers’ salary scale and incentives, professional development tracks, and hiring practices. Nevertheless, teachers working in private subsidized schools perceived this policy as imperative for those teachers who work in municipal schools, as it demands extensive work from teachers and controls their actions without much support from the schools. As a result, though teachers who work in private subsidized schools can choose to be evaluated through the National Teacher Evaluation Policy, all of them mentioned avoiding it due to the high demands and control exercised by this policy.

Instead, teachers working in private subsidized schools are subject to internal evaluations. They perceived schools’ evaluations are imperative; school authorities dictate the supervision and evaluation practices, which in turn have consequences over their work. They feel they have to accommodate their teaching to the evaluation results of such practices in order to avoid consequences. As one teacher stated,

The teacher evaluation in this school is highly standardized, there is nothing specific to the way we work in kindergarten, for example, we guide our job based on the curricular guidelines but in the evaluation our work is evaluated using a document the network created from the Framework for Good Teaching that the Ministry designed for elementary and secondary schools, so we are evaluated based on standards that don’t apply to us. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, second interview, 2015)
However, all teachers from private subsidized schools consider the evaluation practices of their schools as not as intrusive as the National Teacher Evaluation Policy, which is seen as a very prescriptive and demanding policy with high stakes for educators.

Lastly, in relation to the Priority School Subsidy Policy (SEP), when the school prioritizes kindergarten as the target for ministerial funding both municipal and private school teachers find this policy to be imperative. If this happens, teachers are required by the school leaders to both incorporate particular practices, content, or materials in their teaching; and to collect evidence (pictures, budgets, planning lessons) to demonstrate the use of funding. The teachers working in private subsidized schools gave an example of this pressure. They are told at the beginning of the year which actions, programs, or practices particular to kindergarten were included in the Educational Improvement Plan (PME), which is the SEP plan submitted to the Ministry of Education. In consequence, throughout the year they have to provide evidence of their work in such areas. In one municipal school, teachers also mentioned the prioritized areas were included in the teacher evaluation to make sure they were addressing them. One municipal school teacher recalled,

> Each year the school establishes a Plan for School Improvement, which is part of SEP. The plan includes actions in four areas; leadership, curricular management, resources, and school environment. Based on this plan we are required to establish goals for our level, stating objectives, actions and means of verification to accomplish the goals. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, second interview, 2015)

In conclusion, the Priority School Subsidy Policy is seen by teachers as imperative. When kindergarten is included in the school improvement plan, teachers must accommodate it in their practices with little input in the decision-making process, and are
required to expend great energy collecting evidence to demonstrate that the objectives of
the plan have been met.

Overall, teachers state all four policies could be described as imperative. First, policies clearly outline objectives and mechanisms to ensure teacher compliance. Second, teachers acknowledged they focus on making sure they have performed all required programs to some extent, which does not ensure they have performed any area in depth, but they do so primarily in order to avoid consequences. Lastly, teachers complain there is little consideration in these policies for providing teachers time to plan or work collaboratively, so in consequence prescriptive responses are almost the only way to deal with mandates. These findings relate to Ball et al. (2011a) description of imperative/disciplinary policies, that indicates these policies require little reflexivity from teachers, who have to follow prescriptive scripts to make sure they perform accordingly. In addition, the findings highlight the relevance of the external context (Braun et al., 2011) in influencing teachers’ perceptions of policies. In this sense, the external requirements and consequences imposed by national policies on teachers’ work significantly influence teachers’ perceptions of these policies.

**Teachers’ perception of some aspects of policies as exhortative.** Despite the fact that teachers perceive policies as largely favoring unquestioning compliance to meet expected goals, some aspects of the policies were conceptualized as exhortative. Teachers see some possibilities for active participation, at least in regards to the ways in which policy objectives are met. However, this was only perceived by teachers working in municipal schools.
In relation to the National Curricular Guidelines, teachers working in municipal schools mentioned that despite the concrete definition of learning objectives, they feel this policy leaves them some space for independent decision-making, as they describe some of the objectives of this policy as very broad and ambiguous. Therefore, teachers find in this ambiguity an opportunity to make decisions about how to narrow down the objectives and approach them. As one teacher puts it,

I find the curricula too broad, too generalized, that is its negative side, but it also allows me as a teacher to put into practice what is most useful to me, to accommodate or modify, adapting it to the number of children I have in the classroom, adapting it to the context where we teach. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, third interview, 2015)

Teachers also saw some aspects of the Inclusion Law as exhortative policy. Teachers from municipal schools mentioned the policy provided them possibilities to engage in active decision-making as they have to work with other specialists, and sometimes this work allows the teachers to influence the specialists’ practices and conceptions instead of the opposite, which in turn means kindergarten teachers can exercise some control over the objectives defined for the work with students with special needs.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that some teachers participating in this study acknowledge some policies provide them opportunities to actively participate in decision making, they describe these opportunities as unintended characteristics of these policies. This means, teachers consider these opportunities as consequences of the lack of clarity or definition of certain aspects of policies. They recognize these opportunities are not something explicitly planned out in policy documents, which suggests were not created to
ensure teachers are capable of contextualizing the policies, based on their experiences and particular knowledge about teaching kindergarten.

**Principals’ perceptions of policies.** Unlike the conceptualization of teachers, principals in all four schools feel that kindergarten teachers enjoy great autonomy in their teaching because teachers need to adapt the aforementioned policies to the diverse learning styles and needs of students.

Based on this idea, principals often mentioned that current policies always require teachers’ input, therefore they consider policies are exhortative, not imperative in nature. However, when asked to describe specific ways in which policies promote the active participation of teachers, principals could not find any examples. Interestingly, in exploring principals’ understanding of policies targeting kindergarten, 3 out of 4 of them declared they have no significant knowledge about the specific policies that are currently being implemented in kindergarten. Consequently, they said that they are not aware if kindergarten teachers are subject to particular expectations that are different from those applicable to all teachers in the school.

When asked about the work of teachers in general, not kindergarten teachers in particular, principals see the work of all teachers and principals as highly standardized because school wide policies prescribe guidelines for teaching practices, and create assorted mechanisms to control their implementation. Based on the shared expectations for school performance, principals see kindergarten teachers as required to work towards accomplishing goals that will further improve student performance during elementary school. In this sense, as principals see it, the expectations for kindergarten teachers
comes from school wide policies rather than emerging from particular national kindergarten policies.

I do not have such a good relationship to kindergarten education, for a very simple reason, I do not master the content of this area, I do not know their routines, so I cannot tell if they are properly teaching their class. However, kindergarten teachers are the first to blame when the school is failing, it's like a chain, elementary teachers always complain about the type of students they receive from kindergarten, so early childhood teachers have to do something to meet the school goals. (Principal, municipal school, personal communication, first interview, 2015)

Despite these commonalities, the views of one principal working in a private subsidized school stood out. She mentioned the school network authorities play a key role in controlling teachers’ work. She indicates the network has put more pressure on early childhood in order to increase the school performance results. Kindergarten teachers are now required to follow scripted curricular guidelines that are provided by the schools, where they must keep accurate track of their work. This is an interesting case because the pressure is considered to come from local authorities rather from national policies. In this case, the school network acts as the organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) establishing formal mechanisms and expectations that impact teachers’ practices and school actors’ interactions.

**Conceptualization of Accountability Derived from Existing Policies Targeting Kindergarten**

As I addressed in Chapter II, the notion of accountability in education is a complex concept as its definition relates to particular visions regarding the relationship between public education and society. Scholars (Biesta, 2009; Hatch, 2013, Vidovich, 2009) have identified two main perspectives that drive accountability systems, which
influence the creation of mechanisms to hold people and schools accountable. These views differ from each other in regards to the educational aims they pursue. On the one hand, there are policies driven by economic principles (accountability as answerability) associated with the notion of effectiveness prevailing in an audit culture (Taubman, 2009), while on the other hand there are policies more aligned to ethics of social responsibility (accountability as responsibility) (Hatch, 2013). As Sirotnik (2004) and Vidovich (2009) indicate, these different drivers shape different understandings of the aims of policies and their effects on teachers’ practices. I interpret the way in which teachers and principals conceptualize accountability in relation to the policies aimed at kindergarten through the lens of these different models of accountability systems.

**Teachers’ perceptions of accountability.** Teachers’ understanding of accountability policies was different at different moments of the year. Significantly, the idea of responsibility was only evident in the data gathered at the beginning of the study, perhaps because at that point in the year teachers were not focusing on assessing students and providing evidence of their work. The teachers working in private subsidized schools were more likely to understand accountability as answerability. This finding indicates a difference in how teachers from different types of schools conceptualize accountability. The data shows that primarily teachers from private subsidized schools see the effects of kindergarten policies as supporting answerability rather than responsibility, while teachers working in municipal schools employ both conceptualizations of accountability to describe early childhood policies.

When describing policies from an answerability perspective, teachers indicate that current policies in kindergarten are significantly driven by a type of accountability that
derives from notions of performance and control and places teachers’ actions under constant scrutiny. Particularly, teachers refer to the way in which policies are designed and unfold in schools, including mandates to spend significant time and effort collecting evidence of their work. As one teacher explains,

Most of the policies I mentioned earlier include guidelines requiring teachers to show that we are effectively working according to them, not only indicating whether you have taught the content, but rather gathering proof of how, when, where, and what strategies you applied, that’s called evidence. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, second interview, 2015)

Another element that influences teachers’ opinion of accountability as answerability is the fact that they perceive that ministerial policies in general are more oriented to mandate and control teachers’ work rather than provide guidelines or encourage their active participation. These opinions are based on the lack of supporting actions and tools to support their individual and collective work. As teachers state, control is exerted through various mechanisms, such as prescriptive curriculum and programs, yet policies fail to allocate time for planning. Teachers feel they have to constantly report their enactment of policies to authorities. One teacher said,

The central office keeps designing new programs and policies, and authorities are only interested in making sure we are implementing them in the classroom, but there is no monitoring on the value of these policies. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, third interview, 2015)

Besides policies exerting more control in general, teachers feel that curricular policies in particular strongly emphasize quantity of teaching over quality of learning. In their view, the National Curricular Guidelines define expected learning outcomes, and teachers get evaluated based on the number of learning objectives they were able to tackle, rather than focusing on support and assessing the appropriateness and depth of their work. This emphasis on quantity is tied to evaluating the effectiveness of teaching
only by quantifiable elements. According to these teachers this was not something customary to early childhood education, which previously was focused on a whole-child approach, rather than quantifying teachers’ and students’ performance. A teacher stated,

I don’t know if covering all these objectives will improve students’ learning, especially with the characteristics of the children we have now, some of them need significant support, for example the ones integrated by the Inclusion law. So suddenly it’s so much, we are asked to fulfill that curriculum 100%, but perhaps from all those learning objectives there are some of them more relevant to our students, yet we have to focus on all of them. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, third interview, 2015)

Two teachers, one from a private and the other from a municipal school, point out that their actions center on answering to mandates as if there were only one possible right answer. These policies are written in a way that ignores students’ diverse abilities and learning styles. Kindergarten teachers feel these practices are being inappropriately introduced into the daily routines of kindergarten classrooms. As one teacher argues,

Policies now mandate you to ‘schoolify’ your students by instructing you to achieve specific goals and results, to apply more evaluation, and work with students using more textbooks and work templates. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, third interview, 2015)

As mentioned earlier, teachers working in municipal schools also conceptualize accountability policies under frameworks of responsibility. Interestingly, in one municipal school the teachers mentioned the existence of local accountability. They acknowledged that the school culture promotes and encourages teachers’ responsibility in the implementation of policies. The mission of the school declares teaching as a contextualized practice, pushing teachers to adapt all policies and programs to the needs and rights of children.

Despite seeing curricular policies as pushing them to focus on a narrow group of learning objectives under frameworks of answerability, three teachers from municipal
schools also indicated that they still perceive opportunities to negotiate these objectives and exercise social responsibility. They describe these opportunities as based on the fact that early education has a particular stance about the importance of focusing on the child as a whole rather than approaching students through different disciplines. As one teacher puts it,

There is still room for implementing learning experiences aimed at the holistic development of children. We as early childhood educators are accountable for that. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, fourth interview, 2015)

The above examples show that there were a few instances in which teachers from municipal schools referred to accountability as contextualized practices to hold them responsible to the aims of early childhood education, while none of the teachers from private subsidized schools describe their work in this way. Importantly, the role and place early childhood teachers have in schools, and the conditions of their work are key factors in explaining why teachers perceive policies pervasively through answerability lenses. These factors are addressed in following sections.

**Principals’ perceptions of accountability.** As was stated earlier, the majority of principals declared they have no significant knowledge about the specific policies implemented in kindergarten. Principals acknowledge that national educational policies like SEP and Inclusion law explicitly reference the importance of early education for improving student results in later years, highlighting kindergarten as a pivotal grade for the performance of students.

All four principals understand kindergarten policies as supporting answerability because early education plays such an important role in achieving national educational aims. This translates to increase monitoring or supervision in kindergarten based on
general policies instructing more control over teaching. The actions implemented by
principals align to a paradigm of accountability that focuses on surveillance of teachers’
work. One teacher recalled,

Even the classroom now is organized for the purposes of supervision, the
technical panel by the door has all the planning in detail, pictures of activities, and
information only useful for our supervisors, so we can demonstrate we are doing
things. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, third
interview, 2015)

What is interesting is the combination of control exerted by principals without having
specific knowledge about the particularities of early education. Therefore, it is possible
to argue that principals conceptualize accountability in early childhood as a task
committed to the form of teaching rather to the content of teachers’ work, with these
actions of control seen as carrying a promise of future success.

Summary of Findings Research Question 1

In addressing the first question of the study, the analysis of the data sheds light on
understanding how each school actor conceptualizes current kindergarten policies. One
important finding is the significant differences in how teachers and principals understand
different policies impact kindergarten. Even though both actors perceive policies as
playing a substantial role in organizing and controlling teachers’ work through various
means, principals felt that teachers enjoy more freedom for decision-making than what is
actually perceived by kindergarten teachers. This relates to the notion of policies as
process proposed by Ball and his colleagues (2011b). According to these scholars,
policies develop in context and are inevitably subject to interpretation by school actors.
In this sense, policies could be viewed differently by different school actors (Ball, 2006), as discussed above.

Additionally, during the study, principals recognized their own lack of knowledge about early childhood education. This could be a factor in the principals’ difficulties in fully acknowledging and comprehending the context in which these teachers’ work unfolds. It also could be a factor in explaining the differences between teachers’ and principals’ conceptualization of policies, as each actor read policies conveying a different set of experiences, values and beliefs (Ball, 2006) about early childhood education.

The findings of this section show that to a large extent teachers, especially private subsidized school teachers, see policies targeting kindergarten as driven by principles of effectiveness and performance. Teachers’ understanding of policies are rooted in policy objectives, the way policies are supported by school leaders, and the practices of control these policies implement in the classroom over teachers’ work. In the case of teachers working in private subsidized schools, they mentioned schools have put in place mechanisms to make sure they are implementing the policies, providing them with additional textbooks, ongoing supervision, and control mechanisms to make sure they achieve expected outcomes. This may explain why these teachers are more likely to understand accountability as answerability. As suggested by Brown (2007a), this type of accountability sets a system of sanctions and incentives, in this case control and resources, to guide practitioners to effective teaching according to defined standards and policy objectives.

Early childhood teachers see the National Curricular Guidelines as strongly exerting surveillance and control over teaching practices and students’ learning. Scripted
curricular materials and assessment tools mandated by the Ministry of Education and local authorities are viewed as the means through which this control operates.

Despite the pervasiveness of logics of accountability as answerability and policies conceptualized as imperative to practitioners, teachers did acknowledge they still exercise some decision-making. However, the teachers see this as an unintended consequence of the ambiguity of certain aspects of the policies rather than being a deliberate part of the design of these policies. In this sense, at least some teachers working in municipal schools felt the policies support responsibility.

Findings Related to Research Question 2: How Accountability Policies Targeting Kindergarten Affect What is Happening in Schools and Kindergarten Classrooms

The findings presented in this section are aligned to constructs outlined in the conceptual framework in the figure below.

![Figure 3. Conceptual map relation research question 2 and coding scheme.](image-url)
After exploring the different ways in which participants conceptualized both accountability policies targeting kindergarten and the forms of accountability through which these policies are perceived as shaping their work, the following stage is to examine the degree to which, if at all, these policies affect school and kindergarten practices and discourses. In order to accomplish this task, drawing on the theories introduced in Chapter II, I first focus on studying the influence of the organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) through its environments in the adoption and implementation of the policies aforementioned. Thereafter, the data were examined to identify how policy adoption happens in kindergarten. Lastly, question 2 required understanding what are the main effects these policies are creating in kindergartens in particular, and schools in general.

According to the institutional theory outlined previously, schools are institutions whose organization is strongly influenced by the contexts in which they thrive and evolve (Hanson, 2001; Meyer & Rowan, 1978). The specialized literature has identified two main environments within the organizational field of schools that influence schools and practitioners’ decision-making, the institutional and technical environment. The institutional environment highlights the relevance of adhering to or producing organizational structures or routines demonstrating conformity and making the organization understandable (Scott, 1995) within the organizational field, which in turn provide legitimacy (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The technical environment stresses the importance of organizations performing rationally by creating structures to achieve their objectives effectively and efficiently, which provides protection to organizations from
external forces and uncertainty (Meyer, Scott & Deal, 1980). Employing these concepts, I coded the interviews, school documents, and observations. In the next section I present the influence of these environments on the implementation of accountability policies and its derived practices and discourses.

How is the Organizational Field Affecting What is Happening in Kindergarten

The influence of the technical environment. Both kindergarten teachers and principals from all four schools agree that their institutions operate in an organizational field characterized by the strong influence of a technical environment, which translates into school actors adhering to formalized and rationalized structures and procedures, in order to produce particular outcomes.

The influence of the technical environment on the adoption and implementation of accountability policies in kindergarten is explained by school actors as responses to a context that stresses the need to follow certain procedures and attain specific results. The technical environment translates into the existence of practices and discourses that are pervasive in all four schools.

Among the most mentioned elements of the technical environment is the widespread expectation that the implementation of policies will improve teaching and learning. In the case of teachers, they feel the aforementioned policies can lead improvements in teaching and learning by describing with high precision what to teach, how to teach, and how to assess learning. Teachers describe that throughout the last decades they have seen many different policies come to their classroom, some of which have been implemented for a couple of years only to be replaced after. Even though in some schools policies come and go for kindergartens, teachers still describe them as
resources to improve teaching and learning as they are mandated by national or local education agencies. In the case of principals, kindergarten policies’ adoption and implementation is viewed as a resource to align early childhood education objectives and instruction. What is interesting in this case, is that most of the principals indicate their limited pedagogical knowledge and understanding of early childhood education in comparison to their experience and professional development in elementary and secondary levels. Their limited knowledge and expertise in early childhood could be seen as influencing their reliance on policies as a way to make sure they are working as expected by authorities. In this sense, kindergarten policies are school leaders’ navigational chart in early childhood education.

Operating within a technical environment influences these schools to create practices aimed at producing the outcomes described by these policies, including particular learning results, inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms, and high performance in the national teacher evaluation. Teachers describe that focusing on these results is a consequence of the implementation of certain structures or procedures within the school organization. Teachers in three out of four schools agree that schools have strengthened the technical supervision conducted by the Head of the Pedagogical Unit, which translates into more frequent classroom observations, and requests to submit the lesson plans for revision, even though they might not be reviewed. These teachers perceive that technical supervision has increased as a consequence of the overreliance on assessment information derived from external sources, so schools react by creating an organizational structure that makes sure actions are put in place to secure results demanded by external agencies. This external element places pressure on
supervisors and teachers, as both actors have to align their actions to norms, transforming the supervisor-teacher relationships, which previously were based in trust and support, to relations where control is paramount. As one teacher puts it,

Prior to these policies we were happy to attend meetings with our supervisor and other educators in the municipal committee, because we felt it was a good place to share positive experiences, to learn from each other, and to know about recent innovations in ECE. Now, supervisors focus their work on demanding particular outcomes, and the committee rather than empathize with our work is pushing us to meet expectations. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, third interview, 2015)

Additionally, principals in three out of four schools indicate they have increased control and supervision in kindergartens as a result of changes in societal expectations about early childhood education, reflected in the broader educational policies not exclusive to kindergarten. These principals agree that the strong focus of education on standardized tests in elementary and secondary levels, has led to increased pressure in early education, which is conceptualized as a key level to prepare students to perform academically as high stakes policies command.

Another significant element that demonstrates how kindergarten teachers and school principals work in a technical environment is the increased use of prescriptive tools in kindergarten classrooms, including scripted curriculum and planning, and standardized assessment to evidence progression and/or development. Teachers in all four schools indicate the use of these tools is highly associated with the idea that teaching needs to be driven by technical devices and procedures in order to ensure expected objectives are met. Further, they also stress these tools allow them to demonstrate performance to school leaders and parents, and also to navigate a work environment that places increased demands on them. As one teacher working in a municipal school puts it,
This year we did a great job because we accomplished all requirements, the Ministry supervisor came to do a checkup the other day and everything went good, everything went well, we did not miss any indicator, we did not miss any evaluation on paper, we had all the evidence, we had the planning of the entire year in front of that person. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, fourth interview, 2015)

The evidence presented above helps to highlight the extent to which kindergarten classrooms operate in an organizational field highly influenced by a technical environment, which support schools’ actors response to accountability policies by providing them rationalized procedures and structures to achieve expected mandates.

**The influence of the institutional environment.** Despite the fact that the technical environment strongly influences what is happening in these schools, the institutional environment also plays a role in the decision-making of teachers and principals.

As Meyer, Scott and Deal (1983) argue, organizations operating within an institutionalized environment make efforts to align their structures and operations with frameworks established by larger structures, in order to conform to what education looks like or should do, and in consequence creating legitimacy for the organization based on shared assumptions. The data shows that in some cases schools adhere to institutional norms in order to provide legitimacy rather than focusing on the technical aspect of these actions, as some practices and processes are implemented initially but without follow through.

One of the most cited examples of the influence of the institutional environment on the implementation of early childhood education policies is the failure to create structural conditions to support their implementation. In terms of the Inclusion law, Teacher Evaluation, and initiatives related to the National Curricular Guidelines, teachers
in all four schools indicate that they do not have time allocated – individually and/or collectively – to specifically work on implementing these policies. All the teachers commented on the fact that although the Teacher Evaluation and National Curricular Guidelines are largely seen as technical policies in that they require teachers to follow precise and detailed procedures to achieve expected goals, the lack of support to implement them ends up limiting the real impact that these policies have at the classroom level. One teacher stressed this idea indicating,

Sometimes the lack of support takes a heavy toll on us. On paper policies can say many things, but in practice these things don’t happen. The time for planning is never enough, because none of these policies consider particular time for accomplishing what they mandate; its frustrating. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, second interview, 2015)

Additionally, teachers agree that policies most of the time do not include professional development, so they recognize they are not prepared to fully understand and implement all aspect of policies. Further, the National Curricular Guidelines are described as incomplete because some of the materials provided by the Ministry or external agencies fail to cover all expected learning objectives. Therefore, although schools might welcome the implementation of policies believing they could improve teaching by providing technical advice, in reality policy implementation ends up being a process of symbolic posturing as a consequence of the way in which these policies are supported by authorities. A teacher sharing her experience illustrated the above idea,

I believe that we all understand Decree 83 (Inclusion law), what we have to do, where we should go, we understand the national and educational aims, but we do not have the tools for doing it. We have not been trained, so we are acting relying on intuition, based on what we have done previously. Also, we are not paid for extra hours to work with the special educators from the program, and in our schedule we do not have time allocated to interact with them and set common objectives. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, second interview, 2015)
All teachers also questioned if the policies could reflect a technical view, given that they appear to have been created without ensuring support for implementation, and authorities have turned a blind eye to the great amount of mandates and the work derived from them. Teachers agreed that if the policies were really motivated by technical objectives, authorities should have done better in supporting t implementation. Consequently, they consider that the aim of the policies is to make early childhood education legitimate according to the prevailing norms and assumptions of schools rather than to affect the technical core and improve effectiveness.

Another example of the influence of the institutional environment is the recognition of teachers that they rely on different assessment tools to drive their teaching instead of using solely the ones mandated by authorities. Teachers indicate they have to perform mandated assessment according to implemented policies, however, they acknowledge the implementation of their own assessment practices to inform their teaching, signaling the latter as the legitimate ones for them. This instance shows that the implementation of policies could be a form of external posturing rather than changing the technical aspects of teaching.

How Does Isomorphism Explain What is Happening in Kindergarten

Institutional theorists (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) studied how organizations that operate within an organizational environment tend to parallel similar organizations in order to be seen as legitimate. Huerta and Zuckerman (2009) underline that the current context of high-stakes in education increases demands for technical efficiency. Policy adoption and implementation could be both a shift to
intensify technical aspects of teaching, but also a means to reach legitimacy within the organizational environment. After examining the data from the four schools, it is palpable that principals and kindergarten teachers work in an environment that has increased demands of efficiency and legitimacy. These actors’ actions and discourses evidence the presence of isomorphism, which is the existence of similar characteristics and actions among schools, which paves the way for implementation of accountability policies in kindergartens.

Coercive isomorphism in schools. The data shows the existence of a variety of agencies, including the Ministry of Education, municipalities, and the external support providers, who are all creating requirements and engaging in activities that reinforce schools’ compliance to policies in both technical and symbolic ways.

Principals and teachers in all four schools describe several instances in which pressure is exerted on their schools and classrooms by another organization on which they depend or are accountable to. The Ministry of Education is mentioned as the main organization pressuring school’s actors to act as mandated through various mechanisms, including centralized policies governing curricular decision-making, the existence of ongoing assessments to control teaching and learning, the existence of norms that regulate other aspects of schooling such as the organization of classrooms and the time allocated for particular subjects, and the Ministry supervision visits held several times a year that is associated to sanctions or rewards. Principals also note that the Ministry exerts high pressure and control on schools via the Improvement Plan each school has to define at the beginning of the year, which specifies all the actions the school will conduct during the year by which they are held accountable. As a result of this, the review of
schools’ documentation evidences a high degree of isomorphism. Schools tend to mirror each other in the actions they include in the improvement plans. Further, classroom observations supported the thesis that teachers tend to organize and teach their lessons in similar ways, having a similar organization of learning objectives, teaching strategies, and instructional times, despite the different schools and contexts in which they are located.

In the case of the two municipal schools, teachers and principals identified municipalities as influencing school decision-making and practices. Teachers in these schools refer to two main ways in which municipalities exert control. First, municipalities usually set learning priorities and select programs to be implemented by schools accordingly to these priorities. Teachers in both municipal schools criticize that each year the municipal administration decides on new programs that are imposed on them without discussion. To this issue a teacher added,

We have to accept and implement all the programs and projects that appear each year. Years ago, we had the PAC (shared support program) here in this school, and we also had the OPTIMIST. What I do not like is that programs change according to who is in charge of the Board of Education, suddenly someone new arrives and decides what program gets cut and they change to another project. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, third interview, 2015)

A second way through which municipalities exert pressure is by directly influencing teaching. One of the ways to accomplish this is through the influence of the early childhood education committee constituted by all ECE teachers working in the same municipality. Teachers in one municipal school argue that in recent years the committee has shifted from a safe space to share ideas and reflect on teaching issues to controlling teachers’ planning and teaching in a direct way. This shift from promoting
professional responsibility to answerability is explained by one teacher as a result of policies, particularly to the requirements of the Ministry of Education. She asserted,

> The committee used to be a great place to share positive experiences and practices, we used to work on findings agreements among us to solve challenges in our classrooms, we self trained ourselves, but now we mostly receive mandates coming from authorities, similar to the ones from the Ministry. Now everything is aligned to it, we all to answer to these mandates, us, the schools, and the municipality. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, third interview, 2015)

Further, Municipal agencies also exert pressure through external advisory agencies (ATE) that work in schools helping them to accomplish the actions described in their improvement plans. In the municipal schools of this study ATEs influence schools in general by administering performance assessment to students to inform municipalities’ decision-making. In one municipality, the ATE exercised direct influence in kindergarten, as its role was to implement a literacy program via teacher training, organization of classroom materials, and providing the planning for each lesson.

In the specific case of teachers from the private subsidized school that is part of a national network, they indicate that pressure comes from the network central bureau, as this organization employs regular assessments to control the efficiency of its schools and rank them according to their proficiency level, and designates the visits of early childhood education supervisors to oversee the implementation of the network planning material in classrooms.

The data gathered shows the variety of agencies that create pressures for compliance which contributes to a high degree of isomorphism in kindergarten classrooms within the same school, and high similarity among all schools in the study.
**Normative isomorphism in schools.** Although coercive isomorphism is pervasive in all four schools, there is also evidence of normative isomorphism, meaning the creation of shared understanding about early childhood education and teaching. Normative isomorphism works to both enable and hinder the implementation of accountability policies in kindergarten.

All teachers in the study conceptualize the professional environment of early childhood teachers as sending contradictory messages to them about the aims of ECE and the role of teachers. On the one hand, teachers signal that the principles of early childhood education transmitted through professional training constitute a key roadmap that guides their teaching, which helps them to dispute some of the policies that work against the idea of a holistic education for youngsters, while supporting the notion of accountability as responsibility.

However, on the other hand, teachers recognize that municipal and network agencies are generating new professional standards of what they need to know and what they should do in kindergarten classrooms. These standards operate through various mechanisms such as professional development, provision of planning and teaching materials, and the imposition of programs. While teachers are required to follow these new standards, they do not necessarily align to ECE principles.

Despite the conflict arising from the contradictions of aims regarding early childhood education, there is evidence of normative isomorphism operating in schools influencing actions and discourses.
Mimetic isomorphism in schools. As proposed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), mimetic isomorphism is likely to arise when there is uncertainty about the goals of the organizational environment. The data from the schools in this study shows that principals provide examples of mimetic isomorphism as a way to lead an educational level that is largely unknown or foreign to them. Principals in private subsidized schools adopt a similar strategy by contracting external agencies that provide lesson plans and assessments for kindergarten. These principals explain that they asked other principals about experiences that have worked in their school to improve results in early childhood.

In the case of one municipal school, the principal indicated he hired an ATE to lead professional development, planning, and classroom supervision. He based his choice of ATE on the similarity of procedures of the agency to the way in which professional development and supervision occurs in elementary and secondary education.

Effects Accountability Policies are Having in Kindergarten

The previous sections provide evidence on why and how adoption and implementation of the studied kindergarten policies happen. This section presents the main effects of the implementation of these policies. Guided by the conceptual framework of the study, I discuss first the effects related to policies when they are conceptualized as driven by logics of accountability as control.
Effects of accountability as answerability policies. The data shows the existence of several effects associated with an accountability that stresses the notion that the actions of individuals or groups are limited by the mandates of authorities. The effects are palpable in participants’ practices, beliefs, perceptions and discourses. It is noteworthy that kindergarten teachers are the ones identifying these effects of the policies, as only one principal mentioned any effects of policies as oriented to exert control over teachers.

In relation to the effects on teachers’ practices, teachers in all four schools argue that the prescription of standards and the imposition of teaching strategies and materials impacts teaching, producing a mechanization of their teaching as they have to follow predesigned goals and a narrower curriculum. As one teacher puts it,

For some time now we are required to behave as a primary school teacher, I don’t know if you noticed when you came to our classrooms but children now sit individually. We are required to work individually with them, to focus on language, reading, and mathematics, and forget about other domains. This is a consequence of standards and the objectives of the curricular guidelines. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, third interview, 2015)

This mechanization and standardization is also observed in classroom practices, as teachers in all four schools tend to do their lessons in a prearranged manner by following a script that indicates how much time they should allocate for each activity, and the different moments in a lesson they have to go through. This effect is also seen in the way in which teachers organize their classrooms to meet the mandates, which translates into a highly prescribed organization of areas and materials. In all seven classrooms of the study it was possible to observe a similar arrangement of the different areas such as literacy, numeracy, science, and art, and the planning panel. When asked
why they organized their classrooms in this way, teachers explained there were official documents describing which areas they have to set in classrooms. In addition, all teachers indicated that during supervision the classroom organization is assessed. One teacher also added,

There are some decrees that indicate which materials should be set in our classrooms; there are specific materials for working on motor skills, language, logical relationship, and science, so the school has to spend the money to buy these materials in particular, and we have to set them in areas. Sometimes I would prefer it to be otherwise. I feel policies restrict us in terms of resources and how to use them. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, fourth interview, 2015)

The standardization and mechanization of practices could further impact the way in which teachers are capable of responding to student needs. All teachers in different moments of the study complained about how limited they felt in their ability to meet children’s individual needs and to accommodate diverse learners in their classroom. They argued this is a consequence of the existence of rigid and decontextualized instructional norms. As one teacher explained,

One of the things that upset me the most is that we are losing sight of the aims of early education, I feel that we are mortgaging the most important goal of education, because when we are asked to teach and evaluate all the learning prescribed by curricular guidelines in the scarce time we have, we inevitably give up things. In these conditions, we are not able to teach all the objectives to students, especially because there is diversity in our classrooms. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, fourth interview, 2015)

The increase of control over teaching and learning is also an effect identified by all kindergarten teachers. They indicate that through various surveillance mechanisms school, municipal, and ministerial authorities are constantly scrutinizing their practices and the outcomes of their teaching. As one teacher puts it,

Since the beginning of the year, the Improvement Plan establishes the goals we have to meet, and then the rest of the year the school monitors and evaluates us
comparing our practices to these goals, and sometimes this is overwhelming because teaching is not a linear practice, it is more complex. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, second interview, 2015)

Related to the comment above, two of the teachers working in a private subsidized school claimed that the increase in control has escalated to the point that school leaders are using the results of control mechanisms to establish rankings between teachers, comparing them in terms of students’ performance despite the fact students are different in each classroom. The principal also commented on the use of students’ performance tests to evaluate teachers, referring to them as the “excellent” and the “regular” teacher according to the results.

Influenced by the prominence of control on teaching, a few teachers in both school systems suggest governmental and school authorities tend to emphasize teachers’ performance over students’ learning when teaching in front of supervisors or presenting planning materials to them. In the observations, it is clear that the classroom organization and some rituals of teaching, such as posting the lesson plans in a visible board or writing on the whiteboard the lesson objective for each activity even though the children can’t read, are actions intended to demonstrate compliance rather than having a direct impact on students learning.

Besides having effects on practices, accountability policies impact teachers’ beliefs and perceptions, particularly for teachers working in private subsidized schools. The most prominent effect stated by teachers is the perception that their work has intensified. They report having to accomplish so much more in the same working hours with little support, which leads to feeling overwhelmed.
The last aspect in which effects of accountability as answerability policies manifest, is in the discourses related to proficiency and results employed by kindergarten teachers. The examination of materials prepared by teachers and school authorities, and the discourses captured during classroom observations show that teachers are often employing concepts based in an understanding of accountability as answerability, such as evidence, outcomes and alignment to standards. Consequently, this lead to actions aligned to the logics of standards and outcomes.

Summary of Findings Research Question 2

The analysis of the data shows the influence of the organizational field in the adoption and implementation of policies aimed at kindergarten in all four schools, which supports the idea that schools are open systems continually interacting with the external environment (Hanson, 2001). The influence of the larger field of education is fashioned by both the technical and the institutional environments, which contribute to create complex contexts in which teachers and principals respond to policies.

With respect to the technical environment, the findings indicate that schools function in a highly formalized and rationalized organizational environment, translating into the existence of scripted procedures aimed at producing particular results. For teachers, adapting to these structures and following procedures offers the possibility to improve teaching and obtain expected results. For principals, the adoption of these policies is seen as a technical solution to their lack of deep knowledge about early childhood education and the need to respond to educational mandates. As a result, school
leaders have increased the implementation of actions to guide, supervise, and control kindergarten teachers’ actions in regards to policy adoption.

In relation to the influence of the institutional environment, findings suggest the implementation of policies is not only a result of the technical aspect of policies, but rather they are adopted and implemented to provide legitimacy to schools in general, and to kindergarten teachers in particular. Even though school leaders have increased actions to control the implementation of policies, there is no strong presence of actions aimed at influencing the technical core of teaching such as supporting teachers’ collaborative work, providing technical guidance on specific policies, or supporting professional development. Besides the weak structural conditions at schools to support policy implementation, teachers acknowledge they perform some actions as expected yet they also implemented parallel actions that are more meaningful for them. These findings offer a more complex scenario of policy implementation. These policies may be intended as a form of external posturing to gain legitimacy rather than a means to change the technical aspects of teaching in kindergarten. These findings align with Huerta and Zuckerman’s (2009) study that contends that the increasing demand for technical efficiency in schools and the efforts to control the technical aspects of teaching could be also interpreted as new sources of legitimacy.

In exploring how policy adoption and implementation happens, isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) offers a helpful tool to elucidate the means through which these schools cope in an environment that has increased demands for efficiency and legitimacy. Coercive isomorphism tends to be more pervasive as a means to influence policy implementation, which mostly translates to different organizations and agencies
external to schools exerting pressure and control over them. Mimetic and normative isomorphism are also identified, though they play a minor role in policy implementation.

The arrival of accountability policies in the particular environment above outlined is associated to particular effects. The analysis of data helped me to identify that teachers perceived themselves as affected by accountability policies, largely, from a high-stakes paradigm that tries to controls numerous aspects of their teaching. This paradigm leads to feelings of loss of professional autonomy, increase of external control, and intensification of their work. Meyer and Rowen (2006) described the role of accountability in education as a driver of institutional decision-making. These authors argue that accountability institutions in the field of education are increasingly performing under a more tightly coupled system with increased demands for technical efficiency. In this study, accountability policies are described as drivers of both technical and symbolic responses, as teachers and principals strive to accomplish efficiency and legitimacy.

**Findings Related to Research Question 3: Individual and Institutional Factors**

**Influence on the Way in Which Schools and Educators Respond to Accountability Policies**

![Conceptual tools](#)

![Theoretical constructs](#)

![Codes](#)

Figure 4. Conceptual map 4 relation 4 research question 3 and coding scheme.
After exploring the macro level influencing the implementation of accountability policies in question 2, and guided by above conceptual framework, this section examines the micro level processes involved in teachers’ and principals’ responses to these accountability policies in the four schools of the study. Elucidating what factors play a role in teachers’ and school leaders’ responses to policies allows a deeper understanding of the processes involved in policy implementation (Coburn, 2001), recognizing the complexities of this issue at the micro level. Sensemaking theory was employed to guide this inquiry, which highlights the existence of both individual and institutional factors (Louis, 1980; Spillane & Burch, 2006; Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2006) involved in the way in which individuals and groups make sense of policies, subsequently influencing how they act towards these policies. Sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) recognizes that educators are active actors in signifying policies, a process that is notably shaped by their own experiences and the teaching environments in which they work. Further, this theoretical perspective stresses that sensemaking is provisional as educators’ understanding of policies varies as new demands, incentives, sanctions and educational paradigms emerge in the field (Seligman, 2006; Weick, 1995).

Before describing the factors identified in the analysis of data, I think it is relevant to recognize that given this question’s focus on the micro level the data tends to be more nuanced, as teachers’ and schools’ distinctive characteristics are the pivotal elements under examination. Another important issue to mention is that the study examined a series of policies under the umbrella of accountability; however, a teacher can recognize different factors operating in how they conceptualize one policy versus another policy. This aligns with the ongoing nature of sensemaking recognizing that school actors’
accounts of policies could be provisional as they are subject to continuous inputs. Therefore, the data are complex and multi-layered. Considering this complexity, I organize the findings to highlight the factors most involved in sensemaking, regardless of the policy to which they referred. In a few cases I added additional information about particular policies, which participants felt a greater pressure to implement.

Institutional Factors Influencing Educators’ Responses to Policies

Through the application of sensemaking theory, researchers have identified a series of social factors that shape practitioners’ responses to policies and programs. These factors are to be understood as enabling and supporting patterns of social interaction among practitioners, which contribute to the formation, dissemination, and challenge of viewpoints. In all four schools of the study, kindergarten is separated from the rest of the school in various ways, which translates into physical and professional disconnection between kindergartens and the rest of the school grades. Due to this distance kindergarten teachers interpret accountability policies differently from their colleagues in other grades. First, in all four schools early childhood classrooms are in a separate location from the rest of the school, which affects the quality and quantity of interactions among practitioners of different levels. Second, early childhood teachers mostly interact among themselves when addressing pedagogical issues, having little to no formal interaction with teachers from elementary and secondary levels. In three out of four schools of the study, early childhood teachers do not participate in formal ‘school-wide’ teacher meetings. The reasoning behind this decision is that early childhood education is based in a different education paradigm and its ethos, practices, and discourses differ. Third, the time allocated for kindergarten teachers in all four schools to
participate in meetings and collective planning is far less than the rest of the practitioners. Kindergarten teachers are expected to spend more time with their students in the classroom because these children are less autonomous than older students.

The particular relationship between early childhood education and elementary and secondary levels — which is promoted and supported by the schools’ organizational structures — influences not only how early childhood teachers understand and respond to policies, but also how they think of themselves and their work as part of the school’s culture.

Looking at the social interaction happening in kindergarten, there are distinctive factors that could be conceptualized as playing a role in the way in which teachers respond to accountability policies, either favoring or not contributing to their implementation.

**Leaders’ actions.** Practitioners and school leaders mention that both leaders’ practices and discourses play a role in the way teachers respond to accountability policies. Most of the actions identified in the data relate to exerting pressure or creating conditions to advance the implementation of policies, with greater emphasis on some of the policies.

The most common action named by teachers as influencing how they understood and answered to policies, was the selection and later imposition of pedagogical materials and learning objectives. This was the case of three schools, in which teachers recognized principals have had an active role in deciding which curricular materials kindergarten teachers should use to guide their teaching, including curricular teaching books, predefined planning lessons, and assessments. Unfortunately, teachers indicate that the
principals make this decision without consulting them, yet their work is evaluated according to the use of and results obtained from the implementation of these resources. One of the principals asserted that by choosing the pedagogical materials, she knows she is dictating teaching in the area of language. She explained her decision stating,

The acquisition of material has certainly improved, particularly pedagogical materials for reading (…) I recognize that this supports the area of language, which is based on neurosciences, intended to strengthen children’s phonological awareness. (Principal, private subsidized school, personal communication, third interview, 2015)

Linked to the above, teachers and principals mentioned supporting policy implementation by providing teachers professional development related to particular policies or hiring a consultant to train teachers to accomplish specific tasks.

What is interesting about the actions aforementioned is that in general principals acknowledged their scarce knowledge of early childhood education, yet they are actively involved in shaping practitioners’ actions in the classroom. This is a clear example of how principals exert their power to advance policy implementation regardless of their poor technical understanding.

Another frequent action identified by teachers is the supervision process happening in schools. According to the teachers, observations are often conducted using predefined assessment tools that focus on aspects stressed by accountability policies. These include performing teaching in particular ways, having students demonstrate their learning in predetermined ways, and obtaining intended results. The Chief of the Pedagogical Unit of the School often conducts observations, and in one of the schools the external consultant hired by the principal visited a kindergarten classroom weekly to
assess the implementation of the new curriculum. In an observation conducted in a professional development session, the consultant indicated while showing a document,

When I visit your classroom next week I'm going to use this checklist, which is well detailed. I'm going to look if the wall of words is ready, if the children are sitting on the carpet or somewhere special looking towards the writing area. I'll also look if you explain to them what the life journal is about, if you give children time to ask questions, if you write the date on the board. (External consultant, observation professional development session, 2015)

This quote shows how observations serve to compel teachers to use the pedagogical resources selected by their principals.

As the data show, there is a strong push from principals related to the implementation of the national curriculum guidelines, establishing tools to influence teachers’ planning, teaching, and assessment actions. As suggested by three teachers and principals in all four schools, placing the focus on curriculum relates to other accountability pressures that schools face. Every year, students from some elementary and secondary grades are tested in the areas of language, math, and science. The scores are later used by the Ministry of Education to allocate proficiency levels to students and a performance score to schools, based on which punishment and rewards are distributed. Therefore, under the paradigm of accountability as answerability there are clear incentives for principals to focus on curriculum rather than other policies.

School culture, norms, and routines. As described in the first part of this section, kindergartens, unlike other educational levels, have a distinctive place and social interactions within each school based on the culture of each school. These relationships enable the creation and maintenance of school norms and routines.

As suggested by sensemaking theory, school culture, values, traditions, norms, and routines influence practitioners’ sensemaking by implying particular viewpoints from
which to analyze a phenomenon. Teachers and principals identify three distinctive aspects of the schools’ culture and routines that shape kindergarten practitioners’ actions and discourses about accountability policies.

The first element identified by both actors is the high value that schools put on structuring every aspect of what is happening in kindergarten, regardless of the particular pedagogical ethos of the level. Actors indicate that kindergarten functions in a highly structured environment that regulates the timing, pacing, and sequence of activities. According to teachers, these regulations are defined and imposed by school leaders, largely resembling elementary and secondary levels’ practices. As one teacher in the study puts it,

As requested by the principal, my planning and teaching has to meet a particular organization, for example each class has to have three distinctive moments, beginning, development, and closing, and I cannot skip it. If you are observing my class you should notice the difference between one moment and another, this is required. The problem with this organization is that sometimes it does not fit the development of particular topics and learning objectives. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, third interview, 2015)

This emphasis on rigid structure in kindergarten is a result of accountability policies such as teacher evaluation and curriculum guidelines that have pushed for prescribed practices aimed at certain results.

All the principals also recognized that since the implementation of the Priority School Subsidy Policy they have pushed for greater structure in all grades, including kindergarten. The Priority School Subsidy Policy requires all schools at the beginning of the school year to establish improvement plans. Then the schools are monitored and evaluated based on these plans. School principals need to make sure that all teachers work toward accomplishing the specific improvement plan in order to receive necessary
funding. Consequently, the culture of defining and detailing pedagogical practices in kindergarten follows a school approach aligned to accountability principles of answerability.

**Schools’ organizational structure.** The way in which schools are organized could either promote or constrain practices and discourses related to accountability policies. The data gathered indicates that teachers and principals acknowledge that the most prominent aspect of the school organizational structure, which influences the relationship between teachers and policies is the way in which teachers’ work day is scheduled. In particular, all principals and teachers concede that teachers have little to no time allocated to reflect, discuss, and plan how to tackle policy requirements. Further, teachers in all four schools often do not participate in school-wide meetings, as their workday does not include those tasks. One principal exemplified this situation stating,

> They don’t have time to go to the meetings we have every week. One of the reasons is that the economic administrator of the school cut the funding for them to attend, so they don’t have formal time to participate in the organization of the school. (Principal, municipal school, personal communication, second interview, 2015)

The school organization influences teachers’ relationship with policies, either by imposing actions when no time is assigned to develop other plans, or by structuring teacher time and setting priorities about other policies.
**Collaborative work.** Sensemaking theory recognizes that a culture of collaboration helps teachers create understanding of new phenomena, as teachers challenge each other, negotiate ideas, and develop common viewpoints. These processes must be facilitated by schools conditions that allow practitioners’ interaction, which as was described previously is largely lacking in the schools in this study.

However, teachers in two schools, one municipal and one private subsidized, indicate they have some time allocated to work and collaborate with the other kindergarten teacher. When describing what activities they often engage in, teachers mostly mention the creation of assessment tools, preparing materials for the teacher evaluation portfolio, or providing administrative information. Following the framework employed in this study, these activities could be framed as actions intended to respond to policies that demand control. These teachers emphasize that having time to work with their peers provides them security as they both work in similar ways, and are able to produce evidence to show they are working as expected.

**Individual Factors Influencing Educators’ Responses to Policies**

Individual characteristics are another key set of factors influencing sensemaking and responses to policies. As proposed by Spillane, Reiser and Gomez (2006), particular factors such as prior knowledge and experience work as lenses through which people perceive and process information. The analysis of the data tells an interesting story about the existence of individual factors either supporting or challenging the implementation of accountability policies.
**Teachers’ philosophies on teaching.** Teachers and principals largely guide their actions and teaching based on their beliefs and aims about their pedagogical work. The data of this study allows me to identify three distinctive elements within this dimension.

The first one refers to beliefs about what informs teaching to young students. Within this group, all teachers in the study often mentioned the distinctive characteristics of early childhood education as it focuses on the holistic development of students. This translates into a focus on children’s cognitive, emotional, social, and physical areas rather than concentrating solely on their cognitive development.

These ideas about teaching young children are contradictory to many of the mandates of national accountability policies. For example, curricular initiatives in kindergarten emphasize some cognitive objectives as more relevant than others, as communicated via assessment tools or professional development initiatives. In this sense, the beliefs of teachers about how teaching to young students should look like runs counter to actions promoted by accountability policies. As one educator puts it,

> My role is to form the whole child, provide quality education that means I have to cover all areas of child development including the emotional, motor, cognitive, and social dimensions. I believe the main goal is contributing to the child being a complete person in all areas of his/her life, which is what we try to do everyday despite the great pressure to focus on results, because at the end we have a strong commitment to our role as early educators. (Teacher, municipal school, personal communication, first interview, 2015)

There is a significant difference, however between some principals’ and teachers’ beliefs about early childhood education. Principals in two of the schools, one municipal and one private subsidized, argue on the goal of early childhood education is school readiness, meaning having students ready to participate and perform in an elementary level with high emphasis on literacy and numeracy test results. Teachers in all four
schools resist this idea, criticizing the notion of school readiness as this works against their belief in the value of child holistic development. This disparity of viewpoints signals the relevance of individuals’ beliefs in the adoption and implementation of policies, as teachers struggle with some policies that narrow down their teaching. A teacher reflecting on this issue indicates,

I believe policies want me to focus on what students must learn to perform well on a standardized test, which does not align to my premise as an educator, which is a greater good, this is how I was trained. I feel that by losing the focus of early education, we are not benefiting students, there is too much cognitive learning, and we are losing the north of our role, we are forfeiting the most important objective of early education. (Teacher, private subsidized school, personal communication, first interview, 2015)

The second relevant element identified with regards to teachers’ philosophies relates to ideas and beliefs about teaching in general. Teachers in all four schools agreed that teaching is fundamentally based on affective pedagogy. This means teachers have a special role in supporting students’ emotional development and stability, by establishing a close relationship with students. Teachers stressed that an affective pedagogy sometimes challenges some of the policies, that are more focused on obtaining measurable results in the cognitive realm instead of being concerned with students’ emotional and social development. Teachers explained that an affective pedagogy moves them to respect students’ own trajectories, motivations, and contextual conditions, recognizing that each student is unique and cannot be forced to meet standardized expectations.

The last element in this dimension relates strictly to principals’ philosophies on teaching kindergarten. In the majority of schools, principals employed the expression “professionalism” when referring to their expectations for teaching in kindergarten.
According to them, professionalism means that “good” kindergarten teachers not only attend to student needs but also serve as good workers accomplishing administrative and pedagogical tasks demanded by school authorities. These tasks included having planning, evaluations, and other materials on time, implementing mandated policies, and teaching in a sequence that allows for structured assessment. In stating this vision of professionalism, principals stress the importance of teachers’ compliance to policies and programs, both in terms of their teaching actions and students’ results.

This last element is relevant to the aims of this study, as it underlines how different beliefs and ideas about teaching in kindergarten works for or against the implementation of policies. The different elements identified in the study related to teachers’ philosophies on teaching indicate the coexistence of differing beliefs among teachers and principals that inform how they respond to policies.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 3

After exploring the macro level influencing the implementation of accountability policies in question 2, the third question of the study aimed at identifying the micro level processes involved in teachers’ and principals’ responses to these policies.

Employing sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995), the findings indicate that both institutional and individual factors play a role in the way in which teachers and principals make sense of and respond to policies. Interestingly, there were periods during the study in which particular factors and perceptions intensified, which signals that making sense of policy actions and discourses is a situated practice and practitioners actively participate in this process. This is a central idea of sensemaking theory, which stresses sensemaking
as mediated by organizations, as they constitute the context for interpreting and developing understanding (Coburn & Talbert, 2006).

Among the most pervasive institutional factors identified in the analysis are the control exerted by school leaders through supervision, selection of pedagogical resources, and the provision of specific professional development opportunities. The findings relate to previous studies in the field (Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 1998), that identified leadership is a strong institutional factor in advancing policies through the actions aforementioned. Interestingly, these factors are mostly linked to advancing the implementation of curricular guidelines, the policy that has the greatest consequences for the evaluation of school-wide performance. These actions can be understood as consequences of the influence of the organizational field.

Other institutional factors identified are the school organizational structure and school culture, and collaboration among kindergarten teachers (Coburn, 2001; Coburn & Talbert, 2006). It is relevant to highlight the particular relationship between early childhood education and the rest of the school, which undoubtedly influences the way in which kindergarten teachers interact with other practitioners and school leaders. This influences the way teachers understand and implement policies.

Lastly, as previously identified in the sensemaking field (Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2006; Spillane & Burch, 2006), this study also recognized factors related to individual characteristics of practitioners shape how they make sense of policies. At this level, the findings show these factors work in two ways, either supporting or challenging the implementation of accountability policies. Teachers’ philosophies on teaching are greatly identified as influencing their stance about policies. Kindergarten teachers
stressed that their knowledge and beliefs about teaching young students greatly challenge some of the requirements imposed by accountability policies. On the contrary, principals lack in-depth knowledge of early childhood education, and view the same policies from a different perspective, with a stronger focus on efficiency than whole child development.

**Closing Thoughts**

Each one of the research questions was designed to explore distinctive aspects of teachers’ and principals’ responses to accountability policies for kindergarten in four schools in Santiago, Chile. The chapter was organized to show the policy conceptualizations held by schools’ actors, how these conceptualizations are shaped by multiple factors, and the consequences of these policies over teachers’ work and schools organizations. Moving forward, in the following Chapter I engage in exploring in an integrated way the intersections of the findings, pointing out the nuances of policy adoption and implementation in a multilayered education context.
Chapter V
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter I present my analysis and interpretations of the findings across the three research questions, guided by the analytical tools described in the conceptual framework of the study. This section aims to acknowledge the complexities of the issue under study, highlighting distinctive aspects of the schools and practitioners relevant to understanding the nuances of the implementation of accountability policies in the Chilean educational context.

Throughout the study I employed varied theoretical approaches to allow me to analyze the macro and micro level of education and polices, employing theories as what Ball (2006) calls a toolbox. In this chapter I return to the conceptual framework of the study to guide the analysis. This is described in the following figure.

*Figure 5. Conceptual framework of the study*
Accountability Policies in Kindergarten and the Circulation of Power Relationships

Throughout the chapters, I have emphasized the idea proposed by Ball (2006) that policies in general are not straightforward mandates for school and practitioners, but instead they need to be examined as representations constructed and fashioned by school actors in complex ways. The findings of this study support this notion and also illuminate multiple factors at both the micro and macro levels that play a role in how policies are conceptualized, negotiated, implemented, or disregarded by practitioners.

One of the most noticeable findings in relation to teachers’ and principals’ conceptualization of accountability policies was the influence of the role and position of school actors in shaping the way in which policies are understood and engaged with. In this sense, as Ball (2006) suggests, the policies examined in the study are described and experienced by participants through their individual lenses, highly interconnected to the particular contexts in which these practitioners work. Before examining the interplay of different factors in influencing the way in which educators respond to accountability policies, I would like to reflect on the relationship between policies and the existing power relations among school actors.

Both teachers and principals acknowledge that policies aimed at kindergarten are strongly conceptualized as disciplinary policies (Ball et al, 2011a) as those policies require school actors to follow prescriptive scripts and devote little or limited professional judgment. Nonetheless, the stakes and consequences of these disciplinary policies are different for different school actors. Following a Foucauldian approach, these policies could be hypothesized as a means of controlling of individuals, transmitting and
producing power relationships through discourses and practices. Therefore, the opinions of teachers and principals are not mere claims about a group of policies; instead these conceptualizations have effects and an impact on school actors (Foucault, 1978).

Teachers describe accountability policies as highly organized by principles of efficiency and performance, particularly those dictating what needs to be taught and learned in kindergarten. Policy mechanisms arrive in kindergarten exerting high control over planning and teaching materials, teaching timing and pacing, and teaching supervision and evaluation. Principals also see these policies, including those affecting kindergarten, as largely oriented to exert control over practices in schools in order to achieve effectiveness, expressed in outcomes in standardized tests and performance management indicators stated in improvement plans. Both actors stressed the high orientation of policies in wielding control over teaching and management practices, and demanding certain type of results. However, teachers see policies as more related to legitimacy and control, while principals also recognize policies as a technical means to demonstrate and achieve the effectiveness demanded by these policies. Therefore, any analysis should not overlook the fact that these policies are enacted in a context in which principals and teachers are held to different expectations and have different levels of power that impact how they engage with policies. Accountability policies help to create and distribute power and knowledge among these actors, while also maintaining power relationships among school actors, relationships in which principals have greater access to control while teachers have to obey mandates. This finding is also relevant considering the peripheral role kindergarten teachers have played in school decisions-making, and also the difficulties early childhood teachers face in an educational system that positions
them differentially when compared to other teachers. Often ECE teachers have lower salaries, work more hours in classrooms, and are less represented in school management positions in comparison with elementary and secondary teachers. Therefore, accountability policies reinforce existent power relationships that positions ECE teachers as having little control over their teaching, while strengthening principals’ pivotal role in school decision-making.

A clear example of the differential power relationships that are reinforced by policies is the lack of knowledge the majority of principals have in relationship to the particularities of early childhood education. Although the principals acknowledged little comprehension about the aims, principles, and suitable teaching practices that contribute to the development and learning of young children, they do not see this as a problem. They do not express a need to reflect on a given policy’s aims and consequences, a commitment to learn more about early childhood education, or a desire to dialogue with kindergarten teachers to know their experiences in implementing these policies. Drawing from Foucault (1978), both the school context and accountability policies work to establish an official knowledge about policies and proper teaching and managing practices for kindergarten, supported by and supporting particular ways in which power circulates among actors and institutions and reinforcing a teaching context in which teachers’ opinions and reflections about policies for kindergarten remain largely silenced.
Policies Discourses and Operationalization Mobilize Opposing Conceptualizations
of Accountability

Based on the current literature, I set out to explore the most prominent conceptualizations of accountability, which can be located on opposite sides of a continuum. On the one hand, accountability can be conceptualized as answerability, associated with principles and mechanisms supporting the notions of effectiveness, control from external authorities, and the requirement of specific goals (Taubman, 2009; Vidovich, 2009). On the other hand, accountability understood as responsibility relates to contextual accountability, in which teachers are conceived as trustworthy and responsible in negotiating and defining mechanisms that live up to the social responsibilities of education (Hatch, 2013; Sirotnik, 2004). The findings of this study reveal there is no absolute division between the two models of accountability, but rather interpretations of policies vary and combine in complex ways.

One of the commonalities among participants is the understanding that the majority of policies in kindergarten operate under logics of answerability, as both teachers and principals recognized that policies mobilize notions of performance and control that drive their actions. However, in exploring the conceptualization these actors have in regard to particular policies, I notice the coexistence of ideas associated with accountability as responsibility. The findings expressed in chapter IV exposed interesting aspects of the nuances of policy conceptualization worthy of further consideration.

First, teachers primarily conceptualized curricular policies as oriented by principles of answerability. However, they also expressed that these policies could be understood as informed by notions of responsibility. In several interviews, teachers
acknowledge that policies are written in a way that discursively could be understood as aiming to hold teachers responsible in contextualized manners. For example, the definition of multiple assessments throughout the year to evaluate students is rationalized as a mechanism to help teachers better appreciate the nuances of child development and learning, so they can adapt their teaching to the needs of students. Nonetheless, the same policy is exerted in a way that emphasizes control instead of providing professionals opportunities to reflect about their teaching practices. So, teachers indicate that the operationalization of this particular policy in schools aims to make sure teachers are teaching content for the purpose of teacher evaluation, rather than paying attention to students’ trajectories. Another example mentioned by two teachers relates to the SEP law. These teachers explained that initially they welcomed the law as new resources and support were promised to assist teaching and learning for vulnerable students. Yet, in implementing the law some schools decided to hire a teacher assistant to support teachers, a decision associated with the arrival of new mandates in kindergarten. As teachers said, having a teacher assistant instead of creating opportunities for expanding teaching and learning practices meant reducing their hours of planning. Teachers are also asked to get all students reading by the end of the school year even though this had not previously been an objective of kindergarten. In these two examples, is palpable how policies are largely driven by logics of ECE that highlight the preeminence of a cognitive and academic objectives, which is arguably a consequence of visions and discourses of ECE derived from a market driven perspective (Sherfinski, 2013). These examples also allow appreciating how the conceptualization of policies gets constructed in complex ways, influenced by both the discourse of policy documents, as well by the logics and
concrete practices these policies implement or cause to be implemented in schools. As Hatch (2013) indicates, answerability and responsibility are aspects of accountability that could be understood as intersecting depending on the school context. In the examples above, it is possible to identify that teachers differentiate between the aims and implementation of policies as two distinctive components, and these components relate distinctively to the notions of accountability. The aims of policies are often associated with notions of responsibility as policies’ discourses outline the active and prominent role of teachers in improving learning opportunities for students. Drawing on Sirotnik (2004), the discourse of these policies recognizes teachers’ role in supporting student learning and development and treats teachers as trustworthy. In contrast, in describing the implementation of policies, teachers perceived them as driven by answerability notions as they experience increased control and demands in order to accomplish policy objectives. In this case, during the implementation of policies at the school and classroom levels, teachers see policies as part of a managerial perspective (Biesta, 2009) that makes them more accountable and “auditable” through supervision and evaluation.

Second, as the analysis shows teachers are more likely to see policies as framed within logics of responsibility when they include both mandates and support to help meet the mandates. Professional development, time for planning and meeting with other practitioners, and the provision of material resources are means through which policies support the work of teachers as well the implementation of new mandates. But, when policies fail to provide support for implementing changes or new practices in the classroom, teachers see these polices as only demanding more work from them without acknowledging the significant workload they have. In these cases, policies are often
conceptualized as promoting legitimacy and control over quality and contextualized teaching.

These findings highlight that the extent of regulation or monitoring is not the only factor in whether or not policies are seen as promoting answerability or responsibility. The literature exploring accountability as responsibility (Biesta, 2009; Hatch, 2013; Sirotnik, 2004; Vidovich, 2009) highlights that this paradigm arises in professional contexts in which teachers are considered trustworthy and have leverage to exercise local accountability while developing practices to respond to their local needs. This study shows, however, that even when policies imply some trust in teachers or provide some opportunities for professional decision-making they may be seen as promoting answerability if there is not proper support for implementation. Therefore, the declaration of responsibility alone is not enough to give teachers ownership of their actions and support their teaching.

A last noteworthy finding arises when examining the conditions in which kindergarten teachers reflect on the policies targeting the level they teach. Chapter IV describes the particular relationship that exists between kindergarten and the rest of the school. In all four schools, kindergartens operate almost in isolation from the rest of the school, as their working hours sometimes differ from the rest of the teachers, and the classrooms are located in a separate section of the school, the majority of which have an exclusive entrance for kindergarteners. The isolation is not only clear in the structural organization of schools, but most importantly in the interactions promoted among teachers of different levels. Teachers and principals often mentioned that kindergarten teachers do not participate in meetings and decision-making processes regarding school-
wide issues. Importantly, teachers indicate that they do not have much leverage in making decisions about what policies to implement and how to implement them, which, added to the above, sets an environment in which kindergarten is an afterthought.

Furthermore, despite the significant role of ECE teachers in educating young students, there is no strong societal recognition on their labor as their salaries are often lower than other teachers and have little participation in leadership positions in schools. It is possible to argue that this particular characteristic of both the educational system and school culture plays a relevant role in the conceptualization teachers have about policies. As Vidovich (2009) stresses, the notion of accountability as responsibility emphasizes that teachers have an active role in school communities and engage with others in reflection and negotiation in order to create strategies to meet their social responsibilities. This study shows that the lack of participation and involvement in decisions relevant to teaching positions kindergarten teachers as passive recipients of external mandates. This in turn could contribute to their perception of policies as a means to control and oversee their teaching practice.

**The Multifaceted Construction of Accountability Policies in Kindergarten:**

**Negotiating Legitimacy and Efficiency**

The previous sections highlighted the relevance of the institutional context in making possible, or not, discourses and practices of accountability policies in kindergarten. In this sense, context matters in shaping conditions and relations among school actors to negotiate, challenge, or enact policies and programs.
Importantly, the current educational context globally and in Chile, is experiencing the implementation of “tightly coupled and narrowly controlled practices” (Meyer & Rowan, 2006, p. 2), which is palpable in the schools participating in this study. Yet, the evidence indicates that schools and practitioners still have opportunities to challenge or adapt policies. Therefore, I think it is critical to understand the reasoning behind the particular arrangements and organizational forms chosen by schools to respond to accountability policies. In this sense, school actors’ decisions regarding policies need to be examined as active practices in favoring particular systems and practices, while supporting certain types of management and teaching contexts.

Participants’ discourses and practices illuminate the coexistence of two distinctive drivers of change that influence the ways in which schools and kindergartens are organized to respond to policies. Addressed in Chapter II, institutional theory argues that schools work in highly institutionalized contexts that influence change, which results in schools resembling each other in order to achieve either efficiency or legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983). Findings in Chapter IV suggest schools and kindergartens largely embark in practices and engage in discourses that aim to improve both efficiency or legitimacy in ways that are difficult to separate. The relationship between these two drivers is complex, as different policies’ responses from different actors intermingle. For instance, both principals and teachers indicate that they operate in an organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) highly influenced by a technical environment, which translates to following formalized and rationalized structures and procedures in order to attain expected outcomes. However, teachers mention that the technical environment often fails to ensure that technical
mandates can be implemented in a sustainable way, leaving room for processes of symbolic posturing. This means, as explained by teachers, that their engagement with accountability policies aims to demonstrate their adherence to certain programs and structures, assumed to be legitimate by authorities, but in practice their actions are guided by their need to maintain legitimacy rather than seeking efficiency.

Interestingly, the evidence suggests symbolic posturing is a consequence of the way in which policies arrive in schools rather than as an active response of teachers and principals to challenging policy aims. This is most palpable in the case of kindergarten teachers. As mentioned earlier, initially teachers perceive these policies as an opportunity to improve their practices and boost efficiency, which, in consequence, assists schools in showing results in a high-stakes environment. Despite this initial relationship with policies, as these initiatives fail to provide resources and support to promote professional responsibility, practitioners recognize that they often engage in some practices in order to demonstrate compliance with official educational mandates. These mandates exert control and limit professional decision making, rather than serving as a catalyst to change teaching. This finding is relevant to consider in light of the existence of “schoolification” processes impacting ECE. As mentioned in Chapter I, early childhood educators in Chile (Pardo & Woodrow, 2014; Peralta, 2012) have raised their concerns in regards policies that mobilize rationales that do not converge with historical principles and views of early childhood education from a whole-child perspective. As teachers in this study stressed policies fail to promote responsibility, as teachers do not perceive them as providing resources to meet students needs and accomplish ECE aims. However, as was mentioned above, teachers engage in symbolic posturing mainly as a consequence of policy
implementation rather than policy aims. This underlines and contributes to understand
that symbolic posturing is not an active response of teachers in opposing policies but
rather a consequence of how policies unfolds in schools.

Principals’ actions also contribute to orienting teachers’ practices towards
legitimacy rather than efficiency. The principals’ lack of deep understanding of the
particularities of early childhood education combined with a strong focus on supervision
and control, send a signal to teachers that they have to perform as expected. However,
there is still room to maneuver as teachers remain the experts about early childhood
education content and practices, upholding some control over their practices. Teacher
evaluation is a very illustrative policy in this regard. Teachers argue that authorities with
little understanding of kindergarten practices designed the evaluation, so every time
external specialists evaluated them, they felt like performing according to what was
expected rather than engaging in their usual practices with their students. The teachers
also recognize that being rated as “good” in these evaluations helps them to remain
legitimate while preserving some control over their classroom practices.

In the case of principals, efficiency and legitimacy drivers are also bonded in
particular ways. The majority of principals describe kindergartens as a level having a
pivotal role in schools. I argue their discourses framed kindergarten as a solution to
different school difficulties. For example, in one school, the principal argued that
kindergarten performance was key in ensuring good educational outcomes in primary and
secondary levels, arguing that a good learning foundation will mean better results in
standardized tests in the future. In another school, the principal mentioned that the school
was having problems with its enrollment, which could have led to the closure of the
school as a consequence. As a result, his expectations with kindergarten centered on having good results, which could encourage the retention of families, preventing larger consequences.

The above examples illustrate the critical role that kindergartens play in a school’s survival within an organizational environment highly driven by logics of accountability and performance. This critical role encourages principals to put more effort toward controlling teachers’ implementation of policies. Intriguingly, these efforts seem to be oriented toward making sure teachers are performing as expected rather than truly affecting the core and effectiveness of teaching. As long as teachers demonstrate they are doing what the policies say they are supposed to be doing, there is no further questioning and monitoring of the effectiveness of such actions. For example, teachers often displayed planning sheets in visible bulletin boards in classrooms and got good results in teachers’ evaluation; yet practitioners recognized these actions as mere compliance rather than affecting their teaching practices in meaningful ways. The lack of deeper knowledge of principals about early childhood education also constrains their ability to technically engage with kindergarten teachers. In consequence, principals’ actions seem to be driven by a complicated mixture of technical and legitimate aims, which is influenced by both the pervasiveness of high-stakes policies and the historical relationship schools have with kindergarten.

The circumstances exposed above indicate that the structures and practices implemented by principals and teachers are both loosely and tightly coupled to policies. This means that, on the one hand, some practices accomplish a symbolic objective in providing legitimacy to schools and practitioners by evidencing compliance to
institutional myths (Meyer & Rowen, 1977). On the other hand, other practices are more closely coupled to policies, as these policies hold a promise of effectiveness or assistance in demonstrating performance. Hallet (2010) explored related processes, in his seminal work *The Myth Incarnate: Recoupling Processes, Turmoil, and Inhabited Institutions in an Urban Elementary School*. In this work, the author examined how institutional myths become incarnate, by more tightly connecting myths and organizational practices that once were loosely connected. Following his arguments, accountability could be seen as a myth to avoid loose coupling or decoupling, by boosting standards, monitoring, and efficiency, while making difficult the enactment of ceremonial compliance. Despite the existence of actions in schools and kindergartens that evidence loose coupling to policy mandates, there is also evidence that school actors understood policies as reasonable managerial guides if properly implemented. This translates into actions that demonstrate recoupling of practices with accountability policies, that is to say, some practices become tightly coupled to policies as these offer a promise to boost teaching and learning under dominant logics of accountability, while exerting stronger mechanisms of control. For example, teachers often described curricular policies as exercising more control over their teaching by prescribing learning objectives, curricular materials, and assessment tools to keep track of student learning. Despite criticizing the strong focus of the National Curricular Policy on narrow aspects of children’s learning and development (mostly literacy and numeracy), teachers also acknowledge that by conforming to these mandates they are more likely to reach results measured by these policies, and demonstrate effectiveness as assessed by teacher evaluation tools. In these sense, policies create
mechanisms and aims to ensure teachers’ practices move from loosely to tightly coupled policy responses.

What is different from Hallet’s study is the fact that accountability is still a myth not totally integrated in kindergartens as there are still possibilities to disregard or negotiate it. This seems to be a consequence of how policies arrive at schools. For instance, teachers recognize that some policies are defined as technical initiatives (e.g. inclusion law), yet they do not provide real technical assistance, which allows practitioners to engage with them in a symbolic rather than technical way.

By acknowledging the existence of both loosely and tightly coupled practices and also processes of recoupling, this study assists in understanding the situated implementation of policies, highlighting the existence of competitive pressures imposed by policies, while also recognizing the active role of practitioners in responding to accountability. It also supports Huerta and Zuckerman’s (2009) argument about the role of high-stakes in increasing demands for technical efficiency. This influences efforts placed on the technical aspects of teaching and management that could be also interpreted as a source of legitimacy, transmuting technical efficiency into an institutional myth.

The Role of Isomorphism in Responding to Policies: Intersections among High-Stakes Environments, Schools’ Administrative Dependency, and Professional Knowledge

The examination of the second research question highlighted findings suggesting isomorphism plays an important role in explaining changes related to policy adoption and implementation, showing the predominant forces shaping the ways in which schools and
teachers respond to accountability policies. As I explained in Chapter II, isomorphism is a concept that explains the tendency towards the homogenization of organizations in responding to a communal environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Rowan & Miskel, 1999). Findings in this study shed light on the existence of the three types of isomorphism described in the literature: coercive, normative, and mimetic. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describes coercive isomorphism happening when there is “both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society” (p. 150). Mimetic isomorphism happens when institutions face uncertainty or goals are ambiguous, then they imitate others that are believed to be more legitimate or successful. Finally, normative isomorphism results primarily from professionalization by creating shared knowledge, values, and codes about the teaching profession, reinforcing particular structures and practices.

**Coercive Isomorphism in a High-Stakes Environment**

Of the three types of isomorphism, coercive isomorphism is most often identified by participants as influencing teachers’ responses to policies, as they acknowledged pressure is being exerted on them by organizations on which they are dependent (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Based on the analysis, I argue that coercive isomorphism should be expected when a high-stakes educational environment sets regulatory mechanisms to control institutional processes. Monitoring and evaluation are common strategies exerted by central organizations to shape what happens at the school and kindergarten levels. Teachers often described school and educational authorities as having increased supervision and monitoring of their practices by visiting classrooms.
reviewing their planning, and evaluating their practices through assessment processes. Principals also described national and municipal authorities as exerting control on how they implement policies and how they run schools, all of which is measured by the results of students on standardized tests.

Schools’ administrative dependency also plays a role in which actors get involved in exerting control. At both municipal and private subsidized schools, coercive isomorphism mechanisms are commonly wielded by the Ministry of Education, which employs direct supervision of schools and kindergartens at different moments of the year to assess the extent to which policies are being implemented. For municipal schools, municipal agencies and external consultant agencies hired via governmental bids are part of coercive isomorphism. These agencies often decide on supporting programs and learning priorities for kindergarten without consulting teachers. These agencies also implement external assessments to measure results aligned to their pedagogical decisions. In the case of the private subsidized school part of a national network, the network central bureau not only designated programs, planning, and supervision, but it also employed public ranking to exert control and compliance among the schools of the network. Additionally, its principal and teachers often employed discourses stressing the relevance of efficiency and performance in responding to the network policies. The further pressure experienced in this school and its kindergartens from the network can understood as a consequence of high stakes.

Based on these examples, it is clear that the institutional environment in which practitioners work greatly influences their responses by creating mechanisms that ensure particular actions. In general, by exercising more control over teachers’ work via
supervision and monitoring while also defining pedagogical resources and professional
development opportunities, authorities and agencies put pressure on teachers and schools,
limiting teachers’ decision-making.

**Normative and Mimetic Isomorphism Assisting Sensemaking in Times of Uncertainty**

Besides evidence of coercive isomorphism in shaping schools’ and teachers’ responses to accountability, normative and mimetic isomorphism also play a role, although to a lesser extent. These types of isomorphism are relevant to exploring how teachers and principals act when facing uncertainty about the technical core of teaching kindergarten. Normative isomorphism relates to the pressure exerted from professionalization, expressed in the codes and values of the teaching profession (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In the study, teachers mentioned the role of professional organizations in both disputing and supporting accountability policies. Organizations often were in charge of providing some type of professional development, or organizing meetings to reflect on teaching in early childhood. Teachers have mixed feelings about meetings instances as they see them as opportunities to reinforce their knowledge and values about early childhood education as committed to the holistic development of children. Yet, these gatherings were also described as moments in which authorities pushed forward perspectives and practices more aligned to efficiency and performance, narrowing or contradicting early childhood education principles. In this sense, normative isomorphism as experienced by kindergarten teachers reflects current debates about the aims of ECE. On the one hand, professional meetings and professional development could work supporting a whole-child approach. On the other hand, these instances could
also encourage practices that focus on the cognitive and academic development of students. The evidence of the study assist to underscore the existing debate about the aims of ECE in the field.

Mimetic isomorphism helped principals to offset their lack of deep understanding about early childhood education. In these cases, as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue, mimicry occurs when institutions face uncertainty about goals or aims of the institutional environment, so they imitate others that are believed to be more legitimate or successful. In this study, principals relied on external agencies to assist teachers via planning or professional development in order to align with policies and reach expected mandates. Principals’ decisions also work to provide legitimacy to their work in kindergarten. Thus, via imitation, principals push teachers to align with accountability policies, which in consequence functions as coercive isomorphism as teachers are mandated to adapt resources provided by external agencies.

In summary, the evidence from this study suggests the pervasiveness of coercive isomorphism expressed predominantly via mandates and imposition of curricular and teaching practices. There is also evidence that isomorphism not only supports the implementation of accountability policies, but also provides opportunities to challenge them. Significantly, the analysis of data supports the argument of institutional theory (Hanson, 2001) in regards to the interdependency of organizations within the same institutional environment, and how they exert similar efforts to reduce uncertainty, which, in consequence, contributes to the presence of similarities among schools and kindergartens.
Making Sense of Accountability Policies

After acknowledging the influence of the organizational environment on how schools and kindergarten teachers respond to accountability policies in kindergarten, assisted by sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) I explored the existence of social and individual factors enabling either the formation, propagation, or challenge of viewpoints in regard to the policies considered in this study. The study of the micro processes at the organizational level shed light on the different factors and how they shape practitioners’ responses to policies. Despite the existence of some differences among schools and teachers, in this section I want to analyze the commonalities shown by the data to examine the issue under study.

Institutional Factors Influencing Teachers’ Practices

As discussed in the introductory section of this chapter, kindergartens in all four schools tend to be physically and professionally disconnected from the rest of the school life. Spillane (1998) stresses that making sense is deeply rooted in the social and organizational contexts, therefore, the particular way in which a school positions kindergarten serves as another relevant factor in influencing how kindergarten teachers make sense of their role in the schools and make sense of the policies. The “kindergarten as afterthought” arrangement constitutes a particular working environment that reduces opportunities for kindergarten teachers to interact with other professionals and students in the school. Adding to this is the fact that principals and school leaders in general know little about early childhood education and kindergartens are often described by school actors as isolated from school-wide discussion and decision-making processes. However,
this also could constitute opportunities for kindergarten teachers to exert more authority and control over their work.

There is evidence of institutional factors influencing kindergarten teachers’ sensemaking of accountability policies as impositions and norms rather than influencing their technical opinions and beliefs about teaching. In practice, leadership actions such as supervision, requiring specific teaching resources, and imposition of external assisting agencies, influence teachers’ sense of policies as highly focused on exerting control. As identified by Coburn (2001), the actions of school leaders in allocating resources and forms of professional collaboration have a significant impact on teachers’ sensemaking. In this study, the data shows that principals fail to engage teachers in actively reflecting on policies or making decisions about their implementation, which could contribute to teachers’ sensemaking of policies as mandates aimed at wielding control with little possibility of negotiation.

In this study, other factors identified previously such as school routines and the schools’ organization structure (Coburn, 2001; Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Spillane, 1998) also influence teachers’ sensemaking of accountability policies as exercising control over performance. The way in which the schools organizes the routines for kindergarten operation (e.g. hours of operation, timing and pace of teaching lessons), and the organizational structure of schools (e.g. scarce hours allocated for kindergarten teachers to plan collaboratively) could be seen as influencing teachers’ sensemaking, as these factors demand that teachers act in particular ways to meet expectations.

In general terms, institutional factors actualize control mechanisms from authorities to teachers. The teachers are required to implement policies with little room
for negotiation and reflection, even though these policies challenge the principles and
particularities of early childhood education.

**Individual Factors as Space of Resistance**

The analysis of individual factors is suggestive of the nuances of sensemaking.
Despite the strong focus of institutional factors in shaping practitioners’ responses to
support accountability policies, individual factors also support or challenge them.

In particular, beliefs and ideas about teaching in kindergarten stand out as a factor
influencing how principals and teachers make sense of policies. In the case of
kindergarten teachers, their beliefs and knowledge about early childhood education and
child development wield a strong force to challenge accountability policies’ principles of
performance and efficiency. According to the teachers, the narrow focus of the majority
of policies on particular aspects of students’ development and learning greatly constrains
the principles and aims of early childhood education. Teachers argued that the scripted
nature of accountability policies does not fit children’s developmental characteristics.
They underscore the relevance of their role in supporting students’ emotional
development and stability based on affective pedagogy, which has to be respectful of
students’ own needs, abilities, and motivations.

To the contrary, principals held beliefs about teaching kindergarten related to
what they identify as “professionalism.” All principals explained they acknowledge
teachers as professionals when they perform policies as demanded, demonstrating
compliance with bureaucratic mandates. These ideas about what teaching kindergarten
means impact how principals make sense of policies, supporting a view of policies as
tools to demonstrate effectiveness and legitimacy.
In this study, teachers’ beliefs and ideas about teaching kindergarten tend to challenge the implementation of accountability policies, while principals’ beliefs support the implementation of the policies. In this sense, this finding both supports and challenges findings in previous studies (Spillane, 2000; Spillane & Burch, 2006). These authors highlight that practitioners’ conceptions of subject matter influence teachers’ sensemaking, which is the case of teachers in this study. However, in the case of principals, there is no evidence on the need to master content knowledge particular to early childhood to make sense of policies for kindergarten.

Is There Compliance Behind Closed Doors?

Despite the pervasiveness of mechanisms of control and the imposition of scripted materials, teachers still have degrees of freedom in their classrooms to negotiate policies. As some teachers mentioned, principals know little about early childhood education, which affects what policies are to be implemented in schools. However, this is also seen as an opportunity to challenge compliance in the classroom. While kindergarten teachers are capable of acting in some ways to show compliance, they also have freedom to enact practices they consider more aligned to the principles of early childhood. I observed in the majority of kindergarten classrooms a display of plans and schedules in a visible place, yet I also noticed in the majority of classrooms these documents were posted at the beginning of the year and never updated. Another example noticed in the observations related to the structure and pace of teaching. Teachers in all four schools engage in a ritual of teaching, following a very scripted timeline for a class: first mentioning the objective of the activity, then giving background information, then guiding an activity, then assessing it, and after 45 minutes to an hour, they moved to another activity.
Despite the rigid structure and the teachers’ acknowledgement of the influence of teacher evaluation in following this structure, I observed that in some classroom while objectives were described mostly in cognitive ways, some activities never matched them, promoting play and providing students opportunities to select what to work on and what materials to use.

The evidence indicates that the way in which practitioners respond to policies is influenced by a myriad of factors that combine in particular ways depending on the context in which these educators work. There is the strong focus of policies and school regulations to adopt practices that might contradict kindergarten teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about early childhood education. Nevertheless, behind closed doors teachers still negotiate practices according to their beliefs while appearing legitimate to authorities.

**Consequences of Implementation of Accountability Policies**

I introduced in Chapter IV the effects of the implementation of accountability policies, highlighting how the conceptualizations of policies play a role in promoting certain types of consequences. This means that understanding policies as promoting responsibility generates different consequences from understanding them as driven by logics of control. In this section, I analyze further elements that arise from also acknowledging teacher and principal actions are not mere passive responses to policies, but also active actions that have both collective and individual consequences.
The Benefits and Costs of Compliance

Principals and teachers, according to their particular roles and responsibilities in the organization, engage differently with policy implementation. While principals focus primarily on ensuring compliance, teachers often perform compliance while striving to protect affective pedagogy. I argue both actors benefit from their actions, but these are decisions that also come with a high cost.

In the case of principals, exercising control to ensure teachers’ compliance enhances school legitimacy in the eyes of authorities. As described in a previous section, compliance in kindergarten means stability and a promise of good performance for schools.

In the case of teachers, the study highlights several consequences of policies’ implementation over teachers’ work, wellbeing, and beliefs. Teachers realized the imposition of these policies has had several effects on their professional development and autonomy, as prescription and monitoring has become more pervasive in controlling their practices. Moreover, they feel work has intensified, as more and more and indicators have to be met in order to perform according to expectations, and teachers have to invest important time in performing in certain ways based on policies. Further, the contradiction between policies and the ethos of early childhood constantly challenges teachers’ desire to focus on student wellbeing over narrow educational goals. These findings are aligned to the elements identified in previous studies of accountability policies (Bullough et al., 2014; Goldstein & Baumi, 2012; Stipek 2006b).

However, by acting in ways that appear responsive to policies, teachers are also gaining something. Principals’ lack of knowledge of early childhood education, added to
an appropriate performance of kindergarten teachers assessed by monitoring mechanisms provides teachers legitimacy in an environment in which kindergarten is often marginalized. Teachers showed that because of these policies they have received more materials and resources than previously, and now principals and other schools leaders are forced to visit them. Compliance also benefits teachers’ recognition in schools, particularly when kindergarten is regarded as a key element of school sustainability.

The Arrival of Accountability Driven Practices to Kindergarten

As supported by teachers’ narratives as well by my own observations of classrooms and materials produced by teachers, there is evidence of the influence of accountability as answerability policies in kindergarten. On the one hand, teachers’ practices are being significantly shaped by the notions and mechanisms of performance and control, aiming to produce a particular type of student aligned to neoliberal expectations and principles (Sherfinski, 2013). The data from all four schools shows that teachers engage in particular actions to seek legitimacy rather than to accomplish the aims of early childhood education. Legitimacy is gained by adopting practices and discourses previously implemented in elementary and secondary levels. Nowadays, it is not unusual to observe kindergarten teachers mimicking actions such as the structure and pacing of lessons that use planning structure of the elementary level despite having a different curriculum. As teachers mentioned, some practices have little to no pedagogical value for them, for example saying out loud the activity objective at the beginning of the lesson, as there is no evidence from either their experience or the research that this foster learning or engagement. This finding is relevant to examine considering existing concerns of ECE teachers about the “schoolification” of kindergarten. From the analysis
of data it is possible to reflect on the “schoolification” as mimicking practices of other educational levels allowing ECE teachers to gain acknowledgment from authorities as they act in ways that are legitimate and familiar to authorities.

In addition, as teachers complain, the actions demanded by policy, such as the scripted lessons, are more oriented to work with an average student, failing to meet the needs of all students in all developmental areas relevant to early childhood education. A few teachers indicated they felt disappointed about the current state of teaching, as they felt they were failing to accomplish the aims of early education.

Another consequence of accountability policies is the naturalization of external practitioners or authorities in making pedagogical decisions about teaching and learning in kindergarten. There was no evidence in schools of promoting shared responsibility and collaborative work to support teaching and learning in a contextualized manner.

**The Arrival of Accountability Discourses to Kindergarten**

As I emphasized in previous chapters, policies are to be understood as social practices, which involves examining them in relation to the extent to which they introduce changes in language practices (Fairclough, 1992), particularly relevant when acknowledging the prominence of discursive practices in data collection and its constructed nature. Considering the focus of this study on accountability policies, I paid attention to discursive practices throughout the study that could be related to assumptions and beliefs about effective teaching according to the high-stakes policy environment. Drawing from Pini (2009) I also considered the social conditions of discourse production and interpretation recognizing that contextual circumstances play a role in shaping this practice.
In the beginning of the study, I began talking with practitioners about the notion of accountability, and both teachers and principals mentioned in the past few years the term accountability has become more present in the education policy discourse. They mentioned they have heard and read about it, especially in terms of information regarding student test results (SIMCE) and data use in schools. Interestingly, their familiarity with the concept is attached to mechanisms that have been used by authorities to exert control and provide evidence about schools’ performance to the public. Despite the fact that kindergarten is not tested as part of standardized evaluation, teachers acknowledge there is a larger opposition of the teaching profession to the idea that education is a mere result of standardized tests. Principals also mentioned their disagreement with being assessed and controlled in this way, as testing does not take into account the context of each school, yet they know they cannot oppose the system as funding and support programs are linked to test results. Therefore, the data illustrate that the notion of accountability arrives in schools embedded with logics and practices of control, surveillance, and high-stakes.

Throughout the study I observed both principals and teachers employing verbally and in writing language associated with the notion of accountability as answerability. In the case of principals, during the interviews when asked about the aims and expectations of kindergarten teaching, they often employed language such as “evidence of appropriate teaching” and “good results in tests”, which is in accordance with the high-stakes environment in which they work. Teachers displayed a very interesting use of accountability-related expressions. As expected, they tend to use language such as “good results on tests, “evidence of performance and implementation of policies”, “evaluation
of results”, and “effectiveness” in situations in which they are being assessed or are writing documentation for authorities. This is evidenced in the planning materials they shared with me and in verbal interactions they had with school authorities during my visits. Kindergarten teachers not only used this language when they need to show performance in front of authorities, but they also employed these terms in moments away from the school authorities’ gaze. I observed teachers often employ the term evidence in classrooms, especially when finalizing an activity and asking students to finish a project. I consulted with them in the second and third interview about the use of these terms in classrooms and documents. In most instances, the teachers acknowledge using this language with little awareness even though the discourse of accountability does not match the philosophies and aims of early childhood education. When invited to reflect about the use of these terms, and also the possible influence of my presence in classrooms as an instance of observation that resembles an external gaze, teachers recognized that accountability-influenced expressions such as evidence and results were first introduced by the teacher evaluation policy, which brought practices and discourses commonly employed in elementary and secondary levels to early education.

Paying attention to the circulation of discourses of accountability as answerability underscores the fact that these discourses circulate in schools and kindergartens even though practitioners often criticize or negotiate the implementation of policies driven by accountability. Notably, the circulation of these discourses gives substance to mechanisms of performance and control, which can further shape the dissemination of practices, conceptualizations, and the construction of professional identities. Discourses of accountability shape teachers’ professional identities by emphasizing demonstrable
outcomes over affective dimensions of learning (Bourdieu, 2006). For example, by constantly employing the notion of evidence of teaching, teachers provide support for several practices and power relationships in schools and classrooms. This focus on the production of evidence concedes the need for an external evaluator who can examine the evidence and declare it legitimate. This example illuminates the extent to which the term evidence not only assists the circulation of particular notions in regard to teaching and learning, but also supports the production and reproduction of particular power relationships among school actors and authorities.

**Summary of Findings and Discussion**

In this chapter, assisted by the findings outlined in Chapter IV and the conceptual framework, I explored the data in ways that could assist me to identify the emergent story, at both the macro and micro levels of policy implementation in all four schools of the study. The examination of the data allows me to understand the nuances of policy implementation in kindergarten, how the conceptualizations of accountability play out in particular contexts in which practitioners and policies relate, and the influence of the accountability movement and marketization in shaping policies and practices in kindergarten.

Related to the first research question about how participants understand accountability policies targeting kindergarten, the findings revealed a mix of accountability conceptualizations that emerge and coexist in the relationship between practitioners and policy adoption and implementation. This finding enables me to explore the processes by which teachers negotiate and engage with policies in a high-
stake environment. Teachers’ and principals’ representations of policies get constructed in complex ways as different institutional and individual factors mediate their understanding, negotiation, and implementation of policies.

Positionality of practitioners in terms of the power relationships they held in institutions matter in how they experience and conceptualize policies. According to this study, teachers and principals’ conceptualizations of policies differ as they are subject to different expectations, results, and also have different power in decision-making to leverage policy implementation.

Interestingly, in exploring accountability conceptualizations of policies employing the notions of answerability vs. responsibility, I noticed there is no absolute division on how teachers and principals understand accountability promoted by these policies. Despite the fact that policies are largely seen as driven by the logic of answerability and control, practitioners also recognize instances in which policies mobilize ideas related to responsibility. Nonetheless, responsibility is mostly seen present in the discourses of the aims of policies, while their implementation influences teachers and principals to see policies as driven by answerability. This is a consequence of the way in which they perceive the execution of policies. When practitioners lack support and opportunities to exercise an active role in decision-making, they tend to see policies in terms of answerability.

The organizational environment shapes practitioners’ responses to policies, which was explored in the second research question aimed at understanding from a macro institutional view how policies might be affecting what is happening in school and kindergarten classrooms. Institutional theory highlights the strong influence of the
technical environment on teachers’ and principals’ actions. This influence largely operates through the existence of formalized and rationalized structures and procedures practitioners have to follow thoroughly. The organizational environment is particularly influential for principals to achieve both effectiveness and legitimacy. Principals rely on what is being done in other places to guide their actions in support of the implementation of accountability policies in their own schools, as they declare little understanding of kindergarten teaching. Teachers, in particular, engage in symbolic posturing to demonstrate adherence to policies and to look legitimate. In addition, the prevalent educational environment driven by logics of accountability and performance, through the actions of ministerial and municipal agencies, imposes on teachers and schools control and regulation of practices and results, which influence both loosely and tightly coupled practices to policies.

Lastly, in addressing the third research question about what factors might be influencing the way in which teachers respond to policies, the findings exposed the interplay of institutional and individual factors in influencing practitioners’ discourses and practices related to policies. Institutional factors mostly foster policy implementation, while individual factors play a more nuanced role in enabling teachers to negotiate implementation, fostering both legitimacy and fulfillment of early childhood education principles.

By weaving in theoretical constructs, I sought to understand both processes related to policy implementation and consequences experienced by kindergarten practitioners and schools in advancing the operation of policies driven by logics of performance and results. By engaging in these analyses, I was able to notice the
assemblage of discourses and practices of education in early childhood that coexist in schools in a high-stakes environment, and how teachers and principals are active agents in the production, reproduction, and/or change of policies.

**Implications**

This study was designed to examine how principals and kindergarten teachers responded to and reflected on accountability policies in kindergarten in the context of the Chilean education system which is experiencing strong influences to focus on children’s cognitive and academic development. It also explored how, if at all, institutional and individual factors influence sensemaking processes and practitioners’ practices in responding to these policies. Based on the findings and analysis of the study, I discuss the implications for policy, practice, and future research.

**Implications for Policy**

The study builds on existing research on educational accountability in contexts that frame early childhood education as a societal investment and push for practices aligned to those in primary and secondary levels. In focusing on the implementation of top-down policies, educational authorities attempt to manage and control teachers’ practices, aiming at improving students’ results as measured by standardized performance tests. Top-down policies with great emphasis on control and surveillance have been common in primary school in the past few decades, but in recent years early childhood education is undergoing changes in what is taught, how teaching is done, and how practitioners are held accountable to expected results. These changes are often conceptualized as the “schoolification” of early childhood education, as early grades
engage in practices commonly seen in upper grades. The arrival of accountability as answerability policies to kindergarten, as explored in this study, encounters a teaching paradigm that challenges the notion of scripted teaching and pervasive control, yet provides opportunities to improve kindergarten teachers’ legitimacy in an educational context that usually isolates them. This double-movement of accountability policies calls for policymakers to address several issues related to kindergarten policies and acknowledge the relevance of this educational level beyond economy-driven principles.

**Sheltering the aims of early childhood policies in a high-stakes environment.**

An overall issue that arises in this study, as a consequence of the high-stakes driven education system in Chile, is the pervasiveness of discourses of control and performance in policies and kindergarten teachers’ understanding of these policies.

This pervasiveness creates a working environment in which leaders and practitioners position themselves in roles of exercising control and being controlled, which in turn strengthens particular relationship among teachers affecting trust and professional autonomy. The findings from the exploration of how kindergarten teachers reflect upon and respond to accountability policies suggest teachers often conceptualize policies as external obligations when policies stress the relevance of particular outcomes and mandate the implementation of scripted guidelines. Teachers see these policies as failing to acknowledge the particular principles of early childhood education, which also aligns with previous concerns raised by practitioners about the schoolification of ECE. Throughout the study teachers stated that early education goes beyond the instruction of particular learning objectives, as it involves the holistic development of children. As learning and development are complexly interrelated, by pushing teachers to focus on
particular areas despite children’s holistic development, policies place a burden on them, as they continually have to negotiate their practices. This translates into teachers performing to external audiences as expected while also shielding some practices thanks to loopholes in policy implementation.

This finding has implications for policymakers in the Chilean educational system who are struggling to find a common ground between logics of efficiency and performance and logics of social responsibility and quality education for all. Importantly, this tension has consequences for teachers, as they experience feelings of loss of professional autonomy, intensification of their work, and increase of external control. Addressing this tension is crucial for the policy-making realm in order to avoid consequences affecting teaching and learning in early childhood education.

Given the role of national and municipal education authorities in defining policies, funding mechanisms, and evaluation processes, the above finding from this study has further implications for policymaking. A fundamental issue to be addressed by policymakers is the existent tension between the aims of ECE and the practices imposed that are largely drawn from elementary and secondary levels. This phenomenon of schoolification of ECE is already a concern for practitioners in Chile, as evidenced in previous studies (Pardo & Woodrow, 2014; Peralta, 2012). In defining policies for ECE, policymakers at the national and local levels need to bear in mind the negative consequences schoolification processes in undermining the principles and values of early education. In addressing this issue, policymaking processes should include the active participation of early childhood teachers in order to reconcile efforts to advance efficiency while also protecting the aims of ECE. By engaging practitioners in
policymaking, authorities could also foster both greater appropriation of policies by ECE teachers, in addition to strengthening the relevance of programs and practices accordingly to the principles of ECE.

In addition, the Ministry of Education could make efforts to enact policy implementation in early childhood education, through the provision of a system to support teachers’ work. As the study highlights, teachers often feel policies fail to deliver mechanisms and resources to make sure teachers can implement them while guaranteeing the aims of early childhood education. Special efforts could be taken to consider time for planning and collaboration among kindergarten teachers as well with teachers of other levels. This could be done via policy funding efforts to allocate more in non-teaching time in teachers work schedule, so teachers can exercise policy implementation with greater support and autonomy.

Further, the Ministry of Education and municipal authorities could equip principals and school leaders with deeper knowledge about early childhood education. Providing school leaders with professional development opportunities could benefit schools and teachers, as the appropriate knowledge about early education could translate to school leaders enacting suitable actions to support the work of early childhood educators in schools. This is also relevant to prevent the phenomenon of schoolification of kindergarten, as having proper knowledge about the aims and principles of ECE could assist school leaders to make more appropriate and relevant decisions avoiding the imposition of practices foreign to ECE. In addition, fostering a deeper knowledge of schools leaders about ECE could translate into promoting the creation of structural organizations capable of involving kindergarten teachers in the decision-making
processes of the larger school. This in consequence could assist to the creation of schools communities that share visions and principles about appropriate practices, while also fostering coherence among levels.

With these actions policymakers could strive to foster conditions and expectations among practitioners that strengthen understanding and collaboration and position kindergarten teachers as active agents in the daily operations of their classrooms. Policy should also promote the development of school leaders as pedagogical leaders for all levels of schooling. It also could promote a better understanding of the logics of early childhood education among practitioners of other levels, while also supporting the collaborative work of teachers. These actions might work to disrupt the existing isolation of kindergarten teachers and promote interdependency among levels.

**Policy implementation.** Despite the fact teachers conceptualized some policies as relevant for their teaching because of the extra resources for attending students with difficulties, and the policies are written with a discourse that encourages some responsibility rather than control, the implementation of policies is done in a context that is more concerned with monitoring and results. The educational system has put in place control mechanisms at the national, municipal, and school levels intended to gather information about quantity over quality of teaching, failing further in their role to create support mechanisms for teachers to exert more control over their practices in a legitimized way.

Therefore, authorities designing policies need to take into consideration the implementation of mechanisms that support teachers and learners, while also supporting practitioners’ autonomy. This study showed that when policies fail to provide technical
support valued by teachers and to promote teachers’ active decision-making, teachers engage in symbolic posturing, as policies do not permeate the core of teaching. The Ministry of Education and municipal authorities could consider two strategies. The first one requires the implementation of accountability systems allowing teachers and schools to develop mechanisms to implement, monitor, and evaluate policies, considering the particularities of their teaching contexts. This idea is aligned with the notion of accountability as responsibility, working towards the establishment of actions ensuring teachers are held accountable to the aims of education while also promoting autonomy.

Another strategy is to promote collaboration among schools to support the work of teachers. The study stressed the significant role of the institutional environment in shaping practitioners’ conceptualizations and responses to policies, signaling the significant role of isomorphism in influencing teachers’ practices. Redirecting the role of the institutional environment from a focus on monitoring and results to promoting collaboration and exchange of practices among teachers could be a fruitful way to support teachers and schools without making larger investments of resources, but utilizing the forces already existent in the system.
Implications for Practice

Fostering active decision-making and professional autonomy. In exploring the way teachers and principals reflect upon and respond to policies highly oriented by principles and logics of effectiveness and control, the study underscores the enactment of practices that aim to demonstrate performance and results. In doing that, practitioners, particularly kindergarten teachers, resent the pressure that they see as making it more difficult for them to meet the needs of students and follow appropriate teaching principles.

The implication of this finding is that practitioners are in need of opportunities at the school and policy-making levels to leverage what they see as “good” teaching and carry out their professional responsibilities. In regards to this, schools need to develop mechanisms to promote the participation of kindergarten teachers in decision-making in relation to the policies and resource allocations for their level. In addition, schools need to acknowledge the importance of teacher’s work in planning, collaboration, and evaluation of their practices. In doing so, schools need to consider providing teachers time to conduct this work as part of their daily professional activities. Supporting collaboration between teachers could foster greater autonomy and impact teachers’ practices and students’ results and development.
Creating supporting mechanisms to foster accountability as responsibility.

Professional development and resources provided to teachers are largely perceived by teachers as put in place to exert control and narrow down learning objectives to show performance. As teachers indicate, despite the fact that some policy discourses emphasize the relevance of additional support for teachers in order to meet students’ needs, these policies fail to set in place a system oriented to support teaching at large. On the one hand, this means that at the municipal, network, and school levels there is a need to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to reflect on policies and programs plan their teaching, and decide on the resources that are more appropriate to teach in a contextualized manner.

On the other hand, in order to provide this kind of support schools are required to rethink their organizational culture in order to integrate kindergarten teachers into the larger school community, in order to avoid segregation and passive involvement in decision-making. This is not only helpful to foster integration and understanding among levels, but also crucial to foster collective responsibility in addressing the aims of policies. However, fostering integration among levels should not translate into making kindergarten more aligned to primary education, but rather allow other levels to understand and learn from early education. This is key to avoid the schoolification of kindergarten, a phenomenon that contradicts the aims of early education and has shown having negative consequences for practitioners. Schools require building capacity for collaboration not only for kindergarten teachers but also for teachers in other levels. This would promote an understanding of early childhood education throughout the school. By increasing professional understanding among practitioners, schools could scaffold
productive collaboration, and also promote the creation of accountability systems based on contextualized responsibility.

**Addressing the growing emphasis of parents aligned to effectiveness.** The discourses that circulate in kindergarten about effective teaching and learning can have important consequences on how parents conceptualize the aims of ECE. As mentioned by half of teachers in this study, in the past few years they have experienced increased pressure from parents to exert practices aligned to actions primarily employed in upper grades, such as grading evaluations and providing evidence of learning. In two schools teachers also mentioned parents are constantly asking them when students will attain particular learning, including reading and writing. Despite these learning are the only expected results of kindergarten, circulating discourses have impregnated parents’ expectations about kindergarten, and focus their attention to this area rather than placing efforts towards an holistic development. The disconnection between ECE aims and parents expectations is an important issue to consider in order to fostering active participation of families in the learning experiences of students.

One possible line of work is to invite parents more often to participate in classrooms activities to experience firsthand the different aspects involved in a holistic approach of child development. During the study, I never saw parents visiting classrooms neither heard teachers talking about practices enacted to foster collaboration with parents. Allowing parents to understand ECE from within could broaden their perspectives about early education.

Current teachers’ practices and discourses in regards family participation is another element relevant to analyze in order to make changes. During the observations,
teachers often mentioned they have developed practices to communicate with families, for example the creation of portfolios and notebooks sent daily to home. Most teachers described these practices as a way to “show” parents students learning. These practices work do contribute to the dissemination of ideas aligned to effectiveness, as teachers feel they have to demonstrate grow and improvement to parents. Changing the nature of these practices is relevant to disrupt the pervasive emphasis on cognitive and academic development. In other to do so, teachers need to implement practices to foster collaboration rather than seeking demonstrates efficiency. There is significant evidence in the field of family participation in education that could assist teachers to create contextualized practices to get parents involved in their children’s learning while promoting discourses aligned to a whole-child development approach.

**Implications for Research**

This study explored the role of teachers and principals in responding to policies in a high-stakes policy environment and the processes involved in such practices. I examined the intersection between the macro and micro level of policy implementation, and also gathered teachers’ perceptions in order to understand their practices in a more contextualized way. This inquiry left me with reflections and new questions that could be explored in future research.
Policies for quality education for all young children. Throughout the study, practitioners stressed the fact that current policies and programs when implemented are failing to provide learning opportunities to children that acknowledge the characteristics of human development in early years. This leads to the question: what are the conditions that are required to be met in kindergarten in order to promote the holistic development of children while also acknowledging the socioeconomic conditions of the educational system in a developing country?

The literature provides several examples of appropriate practices for early education, often created in highly-developed countries, whose contexts differ from the Chilean one. In Chile teachers often lack appropriate time for planning and collaboration, and have very large class sizes. This suggests two lines of inquiry. On the one hand, it is relevant to study the implementation and consequences of current policies throughout the country. A longitudinal study with a national representative sample of pre-K and kindergarten classrooms from municipal, private subsidized, and private schools would be appropriate to collect information over time about the practices and results of policy implementation. Having a sample of schools from all administrative dependencies is important to better understand how contextual factors - such as allocation of resources, administrative decisions, and school culture among others - influence policy implementation. This could provide important information about the conditions in which teachers develop their work, the resources in place to support them, and the effects of policies on students’ learning and development. This could further help policymakers design policies and programs that acknowledge the particularities of the Chilean context and allocate resources in ways that support teachers.
On the other hand, it would also be fruitful to develop a line of inquiry about teachers’ practices that promote both learning and holistic development of children in different contexts. This type of study is also relevant under the current high-stakes environment that has influenced the inclusion of practices foreign to ECE to the level, challenging its aims. In order to accomplish this, it would be appropriate to support teachers to conduct action research. This type of research could be relevant to both learning about practices in particular contexts and understanding teachers’ decision-making processes. In addition, supporting teachers to conduct action research would assist in improving teachers’ actions and knowledge of their practices. This could be very useful to inform the design and implementation of policies and programs in different settings (e.g. urban, rural, schools with immigrant children, schools with students with special needs), and to support professional development and the suitable allocation of resources.

**Policy implementation and closed doors.** Another interesting element to explore further in the implementation of policies at the classroom level, is trying to elucidate the interplay between what things are done and why. As the study findings indicate, implementation of policies sometimes meant performance to gain legitimacy rather than altering the core of teaching. At the same time, observing classrooms allowed me to notice how teachers negotiate policies behind closed doors and how they perform when being monitored.

In this study, I look at schools having similar economic conditions considering the characterization made by national authorities based on students’ socioeconomic status. However, the study findings illuminate the relevance of other aspects of the community –
immigration, community structural conditions and resources, – that impacts teachers’ and schools’ opportunities and actions. It would be helpful to conduct studies that take into account the role of these factors in teaching. In order to do that, case studies would be productive to better understand the challenges of teaching under these conditions, how teachers negotiate policies when facing scarce resources, and how these factors impact students’ trajectories in early education. This could provide insightful information for policy design and support of teaching.

Another interesting possible line of inquiry would look at accountability in private schools implementing kindergarten. In comparison to municipal and private subsidized schools, private schools are not subject to national policies, yet they are largely considered to perform efficiently and prepare kindergarten students for primary education. Knowing the institutional factors influencing teacher and school decisions in the private setting in regards to kindergarten would provide a deeper understanding of how teaching in preschool unfolds in different administrative and sociocultural settings in a high-stakes educational environment.

A possible variation on this research would consider the participation of parents in future research. There is still a great deal to be learned about the role of families in influencing teachers’ and schools’ responses to policies. Additionally, as the societal expectation that preschool should ensure positive social and individual outcomes has grown in the last decade, it would be interesting to see how parental expectations play out in the development and implementation of policies.

Lastly, this study could have benefited from exploring the conceptualizations of accountability and expectations regarded by policymakers, at the national, municipal, and
school network level. Adding these additional participants could extend the scope of the study, and add another layer of relevant actors with power to leverage teachers’ and schools’ opportunities and resources for policy implementation.

Concluding Remarks

Embedding myself for a year in the school life of these seven kindergarten classrooms, and having the opportunity to know the experiences, struggles, and motivations of kindergarten teachers and the challenges faced by them and school principals in navigating a high-stakes environment, has been a compelling and rewarding experience. The experience extended not only to my weekly visits to schools in different communities, but it also relates to experiencing the neighborhoods and their inhabitants, in relation to which these schools develop. As I described in Chapter III, I chose schools located in two communities that share similar socioeconomic conditions, characterized by having a high proportion of low-income residents. Despite these similarities, in one of these communities – the one more distant from downtown – scarcity of resources was evident in every corner. The community suffers from transportation problems, higher rates of pollution in winter, and poor conditions of hygiene and infrastructure. The other community was experiencing a significant increase of enrollment of migrant students, from different countries in Latin America. This added new challenges to school administration and teaching, as accommodating new cultures and languages is something relatively new in the Chilean educational context. These elements of schooling are often ignored in some of the policies that emphasize results and reduce educational quality to achieving particular outcomes. Yet, these elements are a crucial part of teachers’ daily
life in schools, as these conditions impact their students’ lives in several ways (health, security, opportunities for learning). Therefore, there is a pressing need for the study and implementation of accountability logics and mechanisms taking into account the precarious contexts in which some teachers work.

This study also let me realize that responding to policies is a complex process that cannot be reduced to a binary phenomenon of adopting or rejecting them, particularly relevant in early childhood education as policy adoption intermingles with issues of professional recognition. Despite the fact that teachers might feel some policies and programs undermine their professional autonomy, they acknowledge the value of policymakers paying attention to early education. Kindergarten is now part of the societal agenda, which in consequence provides early educators social legitimacy. I saw the significance of social recognition for teachers, an element often acknowledged as relevant for improving teachers’ well-being. Yet, the implementation of policies could also be used as a means to mobilize ideas and practices that might not be beneficial. As evidenced by this study, legitimacy is obtained at the expense of professional autonomy.

I also learned that teachers are constantly bombarded by external policies and programs, which creates complex environments and a state of “permanent change” in schools and classrooms. Policy adoption of one initiative interferes with others (Hatch, 2001), a situation that is often overlooked by authorities and policymakers, but burdens principals in trying to respond to external mandates leaving them scarce time to work on pedagogical issues within their school communities.

These experiences and reflections add to what I learned in exploring the questions of this study and strengthen my commitment to critically examining schooling by
mobilizing a framework that explores policies and practices beyond the discourses imposed by authorities. Understanding how policies and practices are negotiated under an environment that stresses performance and accountability assisted me to experience firsthand the consequences of teachers’ actions for both practitioners and students. The Chilean education system, highly driven by market and school choice forces, places significant pressures on educators. However, this experience also showed me the active role teachers have in negotiating policies, creating opportunities to challenge the system. This helped me to think of ways in which accountability can be fostered at the local level promoting the active participation of teachers. In this sense, this has been an inspirational and illuminating experience, learning from and with practitioners, and also challenging my beliefs, knowledge, and assumptions.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A

Invitation Letter to Principal and Teachers

Dear _________________________,

Thank you for taking the time to read this. My name is Victoria Parra and I am currently in pursuit of my Doctorate of Education in the Curriculum and Teaching Department at Teachers College, Columbia University. As you may be aware, part of the requirements of this degree is the writing of a dissertation, and I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the interaction between accountability policies for kindergarten and institutional practices, in particular how kindergarten teachers and principals respond to policies in four public and private subsidized schools in Chile. This will be a multi-case field study that encompasses four schools (two municipal and two private subsidized) in the Metropolitan Region of Chile. Two kindergarten teachers and the principal from each of the four schools will be the participants in the study.

Should you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in individual interviews, classroom observations, and provide planning materials and curriculum documents.

The interviews and observations will be transcribed and recorded for research purposes and may be used in academic papers, publications, and presentations at conferences. However, your name and personal information will be not used and you will be given a pseudonym in this research to provide confidentiality.

Thank you very much for your consideration, I hope you will participate in this study. If you have any questions or would like more information, please feel free to contact me by telephone or email, as indicated below.

Victoria Parra, Doctoral Student, Dept. of Curriculum and Teaching Teachers College, Columbia University, cell phone 42571843; Email: vmp2117@tc.columbia.edu
Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000
www.tc.edu

Dear [participant]:

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH: You are invited to participate in a research study about the way in which early childhood teachers and schools respond to accountability policies for kindergarten in the Chilean context. I, Victoria Parra will serve as the only investigator for this research. This will be a multi-case field study that encompasses 4 schools in the Metropolitan Region of Chile. The investigator will make regular visits to the schools participating in the study. I will collect data through qualitative methods including interviews with kindergarten teachers and school leaders, observations of classrooms practices, and document review of school materials linked to the study objectives. I will also have informal conversations with kindergarten teachers and school leaders.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA STORAGE: Confidentiality of participants will be maintained throughout the study and following the writing of this study. To this end a series of procedures will be used including a) use of pseudonyms instead of real schools’ and participants’ names in all collection, data analysis, and research reports and documentation. I will be the only person able to link pseudonyms and participants identities. The researcher will protect the confidentiality of information within the school community, for this purpose the information obtained from each actor will only be shared with that person for subsequent reflections.

I will store all data records, interview transcripts, audio recordings from formal interviews, and documents from which individuals could be identified in a secure file on my computer and a locked file cabinet only accessible to me. If you do not wish to be audio-taped, I will take notes on our interview.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The possible risks associated with this study are minimal and similar to the risks or discomforts experienced as part of educators’ regular professional work. Participants may experience some unease when talking with the researcher or being observed. There is some risk that the research will take time and delay your attending to your own professional responsibilities. I will not ask you to participate in research activities when you are required to be doing something else at the school. If you experience distress during a research activity, I will end the interview.
Given that identifying information will be removed and you will be given a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality of all information and data records, it is unlikely that this data could be used to prejudice against you. There are no direct benefits from participating in this study. However, teachers and administrators may potentially benefit from reflecting and discussing of specific aspects of school life in regards the implementation of policies in kindergarten that may not be evident but may have significance in their professional work.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Most of the data collection will be done through formal interviews over the time period of the research project (August to December 2015). Each interview will last about 60 to 90 minutes. Only formal interviews will be audio recorded. Occasional informal conversations will be done (5 – 10 minutes) over the same time period. In addition, unobtrusive observations of classroom and school activities will be conducted that will not require extra attention from your side.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You will receive no payments or other forms of compensation for participation in this study.

HOW WILL RESULTS BE USED: The results of the study will be used primarily for the writing of my dissertation.

By signing below, you agree to be a participant in my research for the purposes noted above and understand that this data will be used for potential publication in a journal, and as part of presentations at conferences and meetings. Thank you for considering participating in this research.

Victoria Parra
Appendix C

Participants’ Rights Form

Principal Investigator: Victoria Parra
Research Title: The interaction between accountability policies for kindergarten and institutional practices: kindergarten teachers and principals responses to policies in four public and private subsidized schools in Chile

• I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
• My participation in research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status or other entitlements.
• The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his/her professional discretion.
• If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
• Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
• If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. The investigator's phone number is 42571843.
• If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board /IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.
• I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.
• If audio taping is part of this research,
  o I ( ) consent to be audio taped
  o I ( ) do NOT consent to be audio taped.
My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.
Participant's signature: ________________________________ Date:____/____/____
Name: ________________________________
Appendix D

Interview Protocol – Teachers

Interview # 1 Questions

Teacher Background and Experience
1. How many years have you been teaching? How many of those years have you taught kindergarten? How many in public schools? How many years in this school?
2. Could you tell me why did you become an early childhood teacher?
3. Where were you trained? Are there any aspects of your teaching preparation program (i.e. classes, activities, internships) that have influenced/informed your teaching philosophies and practices?
4. How would you describe yourself as a teacher? For instance, what elements of your teaching do you think are outstanding? What aspects need improvement? How would you describe your relationship with your students? With parents/guardians?

Current Teaching Role and Position
5. Could you walk me through a usual day for you at the school? What activities does the administration expect you to do on daily basis/weekly? For what reasons?
6. What are the most rewarding activities of your job?
7. What are the activities that you would prefer not having to do? For what reasons?
8. Could you tell me how much time of the day you teach? How much time do you have assigned for planning instruction? How much time do you actually spend planning?
9. Are there other activities besides instruction that you have to do on regular basis? Are they part of your role as a kindergarten teacher in the school? How much time do you invest in these activities?
10. In the last years, has your role as kindergarten/early childhood teacher changed? What aspects do you think have changed greatly? What do you think are the reasons for these changes?
11. Do you work with other kindergarten/early childhood teachers? What are the most common activities that do you do with other kindergarten/early childhood teachers? Is this mandated? If so, who mandates it?

Assumptions of Kindergarten and Teaching (Views of teaching)
12. What do you think are the main purposes of early childhood education? Has your vision changed over the years? What do you think has influenced these changes?
13. Do you think your colleagues share your vision? If not, how is your vision different from others?
14. How would you describe a good kindergarten teacher? What are the teaching practices that make a kindergarten teacher a great teacher? Have these ideas changed in the past few years? What do you think influence these changes?
15. How would you describe a kindergarten teacher that needs to improve her teaching?
16. Do you think the Principal shares your vision about what a good teacher is? Why, and how can you tell?
17. Do you think the Principal may share your vision about what a teacher that needs to develop is? Why, and how can you tell?

Teacher’s views of locus of control on teaching kindergarten

18. What curricula do you use this year? Is this curricula mandated or you have autonomy for choosing it? Is this the same curricula from last year? If not, what influenced this change?

19. Do you plan your teaching in advance? In general, how do you do that? Are there guidelines that guide the planning? If so, are they mandatory? What other resources do you use for planning your lessons or units?

20. Do you have goals for your students this year? How do you set these goals? Are these goals prescribed, do you set them depending on each individual student or both?

21. What type of assessment practices do you use in your practice? What are the purposes of these assessments? Do you design the assessments? If not, who makes them?

22. What do these assessments mean in your work as a kindergarten teacher?

23. Who do you answer to for your teaching practices and decisions? How are you evaluated as a teacher? Who designs and implements this evaluation? Do you think this is fair?

Closing

24. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about you and your experiences teaching kindergarten?

Interview # 2 Questions

1. Over the last few years kindergarten has experienced the advent of educational public policies, such as curricular guidelines, teacher evaluation, and mandatory kindergarten to name a few. I would like to know a bit about the policies that you guide/inform your work. Could you tell me about educational public policies that you consider important for kindergarten teachers? Why?

2. In specific, what policies do you find influence the work of early childhood teachers in kindergarten? I will ask you some aspects of these policies to complete the table below. Could you give me some examples of how these policies influence teachers’ work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Declared objectives</th>
<th>What is your opinion of this policy?</th>
<th>Actions required from kindergarten teachers</th>
<th>Actions implemented at the school level</th>
<th>What aspects of this policy do you consider valuable? Why?</th>
<th>What aspects of this policy you have trouble with? Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. Choose 1 or 2 policies from the aforementioned that you think are the ones that have the greatest influence on your teaching work. Based on these policies, how would you describe the importance of this policy for the school? Why? How would you describe the importance of these policies for the principal? Please explain what the principal has done or said that informs your response.
4. In what ways has the principal facilitated the implementation of these policies? (i.e. professional development, resources, time).

Closing
5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about you and your experiences teaching kindergarten?

Interview # 3 Questions

Warm up questions
1. What is your impression of these interviews? Is there any question that caught your attention? Why? Is there any answer that called your attention? Why?
2. What are your thoughts about having me in the classroom observing or taking notes? How do you feel about it? Do you have any thoughts about me asking you to share your plans and / or materials?

Public Policies and Teaching
3. If there were two different representations of public policies, 1) one linked to guidelines and orientations, b) and the other related to mandates and duties, what is the dominant representation of the public policies that we discussed before?
4. What do you consider the dominant principle of these policies, a) early school effectiveness, or b) principles of social responsibility?
5. What is your perception about the impact these policies are having in your classroom? How would you assess this impact?
6. Who mostly benefits from these policies?
7. Do you think the curriculum you implement has reduced? Do any of the policies contradict your beliefs about education and child development? How does this affect your professional autonomy and your professional confidence?
8. What are the challenges these policies create for you as an educator?
9. Are there any actions you take on a regular basis that are more of a ritual to prove you're a good teacher than a practice that contributes to the learning of children?
10. In addition to the management team of the school, is there any organization / agency that you feel has control over your job? How do you feel about that?
11. What do you think would be the consequences for you because of bad results?

Interview # 4 Questions

1. To what extent have these education policies influenced the way the classroom is organized? For example, organization of classroom, way of grouping children, display of materials on the walls.
2. To what extent have these education policies influenced the materials available in the classroom? Are there materials you used previously which have been withdrawn by order of educational policies?
3. To what extent have these educational policies influenced teaching strategies that you use with your current course?
4. To what extent have these educational policies influenced the assessment strategies you use with your course?
5. To what extent have these educational policies influenced the work you do with the families of your students?
6. To what extent have these educational policies influenced the way your students participate in educational activities?
7. Do you feel satisfied with your work? To what do you attribute your answer?
8. What elements of this school differentiate it from other schools?
9. How would you characterize the leadership of the school principal?
10. How would you characterize your teaching practice?
11. What conditions or sanctions have been generated in the school in recent years to encourage certain practices in the classroom?
12. Do you think that your role in the organization of the school has changed in recent years? To what do you attribute the change?
13. When you think about your work this year, what emotions are evoked? What elements are associated with these emotions?
14. Do you think you'll do something different next year than what you did this year? What? Why?
Appendix E
Interview Protocol – Principals

Interview # 1 Questions

A. Professional Background and Experience
   1. Could you tell me a bit about your career? How many years have you worked in education? Where have you worked, and why?
   2. Where were you trained as a teacher? Do you have any specialization in school administration?
   3. Please describe your role in the school. What is expected of you?
      a. What led you to this position?
      b. How long have you had this position?
      c. When and why did you decide to move to this position? Were you trained for it? If so, how?
      d. What is your opinion/evaluation of your current role? Is that what you expected?
      e. Has your role changed over time? If so, in what ways?
      f. What other educational experience did you have before this? Where?

B. Working with early childhood teachers
   4. Could you tell me about your specific work with early childhood teachers?
      a. Could you give some examples of it?
      b. Is your work with early childhood teachers different from your work with elementary teachers? If so, how? What are the similarities?
      c. Has your role and actions in relation to the work of early childhood teachers changed in the past years? If so, how?
      d. What is expected from you in relation to the work of the early childhood teachers?
      e. Do you think your vision of this position is the same as that held by your superiors (school owner or municipality education department)?
      f. How would you describe a good kindergarten teacher? What are the teaching practices that make a kindergarten teacher a great teacher? Have these ideas changed in the past few years? What do you think influenced these changes?
      g. How would you describe a kindergarten teacher that needs to improve her teaching?
      h. Do you think the kindergarten teachers in this school share your vision about what a good teacher is? Why, and how can you tell?
      i. How do you promote early childhood teachers’ professional development and support their work?
      j. Do early childhood teachers work individually or collaboratively? What is your opinion on that? Why?
   5. How do you evaluate early childhood teachers’ work?
      a. Could you give some examples?
      b. Has the way you evaluate early childhood teachers changed over time? If so, how?
      c. How do you provide feedback to early childhood teachers? (Strategies employed, frequency)
d. Is the performance evaluation of early childhood teachers part of a national or municipal policy? If so, how does teachers’ performance results impact your administration?

e. What is your general evaluation of the work of the kindergarten teachers? How would you describe the quality of their instruction? What are their main strengths? What should they improve?

6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interview # 2 Questions

1. What national/municipal policies do you consider guide/inform your work and the work of kindergarten teachers? In what ways do these policies influence you and the teachers? Examples.

   a. In general, could you let me know what is your perception of the actions these policies trigger at the school level? Are they useful for the school? In which ways? Are they pertinent to the school? Why?

   b. Has your vision and actions linked to kindergarten changed in the past years? If so, how? Why? What is your evaluation of these changes?

   c. How do you define what actions or strategies kindergarten should engage in?

2. How is this school doing? What indicators do you use to make this claim?

3. Currently there is great emphasis on defining school improvement plans oriented by accountability policies; do you think the accountability logic influences your work? If so, how? What is expected of you and kindergarten teachers in terms of accountability policies?

Interview # 3 Questions

1. What elements of this school differentiate it from other schools?

2. To what extent have these education policies influenced the way in which you understand the role of kindergarten within the school? Could you give me examples?

3. According to your expectations, what should have happened in kindergarten this year? Do you think your expectations were met? Why or why not?

4. To what extent have education policies influenced teachers’ practices and materials available in the classroom?

5. Could you describe how kindergarten teachers participate in decision making related to kindergarten policies at the school level?

6. Could you describe how kindergarten teachers participate in decision making related to the school? Are there instances in which they interact and collaborate with teachers from other levels?

7. How would you characterize your leadership in relation to the work done by kindergarten teachers?
8. Were there specific ways in which you or the schools supported kindergarten teachers this year to meet the mandates of policies (for example professional development, allocating resources, etc.)?
9. How would you characterize the work of kindergarten teachers?
10. Do you feel satisfied with their work? To what do you attribute your answer?
11. When you think about your work this year, what emotions are evoked? What elements are associated with these emotions?
12. What are your expectations for kindergarten next year?
13. Do you think you'll do something different in relation to kindergarten next year? What? Why?
Appendix F

Codes Phase 1

What are participants’ understandings of accountability policies targeting kindergarten?

- Policy value

How might accountability policies targeting kindergarten be affecting what is happening in schools and kindergarten classrooms?

- Institutional environment
- Responding to policies
- Teaching practices

What individual and institutional factors influence the way in which schools and educators respond to accountability policies?

- Experience in kindergarten
- Institutional Environment
- Teachers' philosophies
- Teachers' work and working conditions
- Teaching practices